EFFECTIVENESS OF EUROPEAN LOBBYING FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CROATIAN MEMBERS OF EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

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Summary
The accession of Croatia to the European Union has opened up a completely new environment for lobbying for a large number of interested stakeholders from civil society and the business sector, requiring proactive action in a multi-level, dynamic process of creating European public policies. Due to its indispensable role in the legislative process at the EU level, the European Parliament has been continuously exposed to high interest and pressure of lobbyists from almost all spheres of socio-economic life of the Member States of the EU and beyond. In view of insufficient representation of this topic in the academic literature in Croatia, this paper aims to provide insight into the most commonly used methods of lobbying in the European Parliament and the perception of the effectiveness of these methods from the perspective of Croatian Members of European Parliament (MEPs). The research conducted for the purpose of this paper has shown that the effectiveness of lobbying methods depends on many factors, but primarily on the type of interests represented and the personal skills of
lobbyists. Croatian lobbyists compared to other European lobbyists are generally considered to be less proactive. From the response of interviewed MEPs, it can be concluded that the contribution of lobbyists is significant in terms of providing timely information on the situation on the ground and the possible impact of new legislation on individual sectors, which contributes to improving the quality of European policies.

**Keywords**: lobbying, European Parliament, Croatia, MEPs, interest groups

1. **Introduction**

In modern democracies, lobbying is considered a legitimate advocacy of interests and an attempt to influence the policy-making procedures. It is generally considered that lobbying helps to raise awareness of decision-makers, which ultimately leads to better and more practicable decisions and regulations and more effective public policies. For different interest groups, lobbying is a very important tool in achieving their interests, and there is often not enough clarity in the public between what is allowed and what is not allowed, legal and illegal. With the accession of Croatia to the European Union, a whole new lobbying environment opened up for a large number of stakeholders from the civil society and the business sector, which requires a proactive action in a multilevel, dynamic process of shaping the European public policies.

There are two main channels of influence on decision making processes at the EU level – national and European, both of which involve interaction with a multitude of institutional and political actors. Lobbying of interest groups through national channels of influence depends on the importance of the role of the member state’s institutions in the decision-making process in the EU. Although it is usually difficult to track the influence of organized interests, preferences of strong interest groups are often reflected in the formal positions of representatives of government bodies in the EU policy making arenas. With the deepening of the process of European integration, the decision-making and interest advocacy processes are becoming much more complex, which requires the interest groups to have a multi-dimensional strategy of simultaneous action at several political levels, or through several channels of influence.
As the only institution whose members are directly chosen by EU citizens, the European Parliament is considered to represent the voice of the people and to advocate their interests. Without the consent of the European Parliament, no European regulation concerning the internal market, agriculture, transport, consumer protection, energy, environmental protection, civil rights and a number of other areas where the co-decision procedure is established can be accepted. Due to the highly important role of the European Parliament, there are an increasing number of accredited lobbyists who seek to establish communication with Parliament members.

In view of Croatia’s recent entry into the EU, there is still a general lack of research of Croatian MEPs’ views on the EU policy making environment and dynamics of interactions of the European Parliament and different interest groups. Our initial assumption is that, in line with the results of the earlier work in this field, lobbyists use effective methods and channels of influence on European parliamentarians, which contributes to the better formulation of European public policies. The purpose of the article is to enable better understanding of relations between lobbyists and Croatian MEPs and to present their perspective on the effectiveness of lobbying efforts in the European Parliament. Consequently, in this article we will seek to address the following questions: What are the main channels of influence on the members of the European Parliament? What are the most commonly used and most effective methods of lobbying in the European Parliament? To what extent do lobbyists contribute to better quality of European policy making? In which sectors are the lobbying activities most effective? What are the greatest benefits of lobbying for the work of members of the European Parliament?

Given the nature of the research problem, the purpose of the research, and the limitations related to the size and the homogeneity of the sample (11 Croatian MEPs), we decided on a qualitative research and the method of semi-structured interviews, which gave us more flexibility in collecting the data that is delicate by its nature, and the research itself involved actors who can be reserved when it comes to revealing relations with lobbyists.

Although the question of influence of interest groups and effectiveness of lobbying is essential for better understanding of policy making processes, the conceptualization and measurement of influence has been one of the most serious challenges to empirical studies of interest groups. For the purpose of this paper, measuring the lobbying effectiveness or
influence in European Parliament means the degree to which lobbyists are successful in achieving the control over policy outputs, such as legislative initiatives, amendments or parliamentary debates. Due to its relative simplicity and ability of covering various channels of influence, we rely on the “attributed influence” method, despite a number of limitations related to the empirical study of the perception of influence of lobbyists, such as possible bias of respondents and tendency to exaggerate or minimize influence of lobbyists from different sectors (Dür, 2008).

Since there have been no similar studies in Croatia, we hope that, despite the mentioned limitations, this qualitative pilot research will provide a useful basis for possible wider surveys among a larger circle of interest groups from Croatia, which communicate with the European Parliament.

2. Interest Groups and Channels of Lobbying Influence on the European Parliament

The number of lobbyists and lobby offices in Brussels started to grow exponentially in the late eighties and early nineties of the last century with the adoptions of the Single European Act and Maastricht Treaty, which represented the beginning of stronger political and economic integration of Europe. The establishment of a single European market in 1987 marked the beginning of the weakening of diplomatic lobbying at the EU level, which was dominant until then, and the gradual development of strategic lobbying and the development of new advanced lobbying techniques (Guéguen, 2007). Parallel to that, there was an increasing worry in the public due to a growing perception of susceptibility of European public policies to an increasing influence of special interest groups. The European Parliament was the first to react by introducing a mandatory Lobbyist Registry in 1996, which included a low degree of regulation, with just the name of the company and the name of the lobbyist, without the additional information on clients and financial indicators. In 2005, the Commissioner Siim Kallas presented European Transparency Initiative (ETI), which was followed by the introduction of voluntary lobbyists register in 2008, the so-called Registry of Interest Representatives. Following much criticism from non-governmental sector and the
public, the Register of European Parliament and Commission combined to Transparency Register in 2011, while the EU Council continues to refuse to participate in this process\(^1\).

European Parliament is usually considered to be the second most important lobbying address within the institutional framework of the EU, which meant that parallel with the increase in the authority of the Parliament, there was an increase of the circle of lobbyists who tried to achieve their influence through this institution. This interaction usually takes place during informal conversations, where members of the Parliament or staff employed in the services meet with the representatives of interests, who have access to the buildings of the European Parliament thanks to their accreditations. In these interactions, those lobbyists who have been interacting with the European Commission since the beginning of the legislative path of a legal act are always in a privileged position. Since they are often called upon as experts or the representatives of a sector to express their opinion in the European Commission in the process of drafting a law, they are also desirable interlocutors in the European Parliament (EP), where they can better assess the political climate for adopting new legislation (Krsmanović, 2013, 32-33).

The research by Earnshaw and Judge (2004) demonstrates that lobbying in the European Parliament is very uncertain and depends on a number of factors, and that the outcome of lobbying greatly depends on the dynamics of inter-institution interactions, national interests, public policies, types of legislations, as well as the style of lobbying, strength of the coalitions which form around specific legislative proposals and the resources used by the lobbyists themselves (Earnshaw, Judge, 2004).

The research on corporate lobbying in the European Parliament shows that national business/trade associations have almost the same degree of access to the Parliament as the European associations (Bouwen, 2003, 11). Furthermore, Bouwen (2003) points out that the degree of collective access through European and national associations is much greater than the individual access of corporations and consultants. This shows that the European parliamentarians are more inclined to communicate with lobbyists who are members of associations than with individual corporations and consultants. In addition, Bouwen’s theory of access goods describes exchange (supply and demand) model between interest groups and

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\(^1\) More information on goals, content, and mode of functioning of the Transparency Register is available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/about-european-union/principles-and-values/transparency/transparency-register_hr
EU institutions implying that interest representation groups can only gain access under the condition that the EU institutions have a demand for access goods, which consist of expert knowledge, information about European encompassing interest and domestic encompassing interest (Bouwen, 2002, 369).

Among the main channels of influence on the European Parliament are permanent parliamentary committees, which are the first to consider the legislative proposal of the Commission, i.e. all the initiatives of the Parliament itself. Along with the president of the committee and the secretary office of the committee, which is in constant communication with various interest groups, the most relevant person for the lobbyists is the rapporteur, who is preparing the draft of the report on the proposed initiative of the Commission. Marshall points out that in the EP committees informal rules supersede formal procedures to favour the influence of policy-oriented MEPs (Marshall, 2010, 557).

In addition, political groups are another important subject of parliamentary lobbying, especially since the vote on a certain question usually depends on the prior agreement of the political groups, but also because of the fact that political groups have an important role in the functioning of the Parliament, since the composition of every committee and body, as well as the president of the Parliament himself, depend on the strength and number of political groups. However, previous research (De Fouloy, 2001) shows that parliamentary lobbying is much more focused on the staff close to the rapporteur and committee secretariat, than to the secretariat of a political group. In the analysis of his approach to effective lobbying in the EU, known as “triple P”, Van Schendelen puts an emphasis on positional and personal aspects of lobbying, pointing to the choice of rapporteurs in parliamentary committees as one of the important steps in lobbying efforts of interest groups (Van Schendelen, 2010).

EP inter-groups, composed of MEPs concerned about particular issue from at least three different European party groups, are considered by Van Schendelen as perfect access points for lobbyists – first, because their meetings are open, and second, because the goals of their meetings is to create European-minded legislation which often results in pushing for common resolutions on plenary sessions or exerting pressure on the European Commission to draft legislation on particular issue (Van Schendelen, 2010, 87).
In a research published in 2015, Transparency International introduced a new tool for control of lobbying in Brussels, which is claimed to show that the meetings between lobbyists and policy-makers of the EU are dominated by corporate interests\(^2\).

This tool combines the information on meetings with lobbyists provided by the European Commission and the data from the EU Lobbyist Registry in one place. The results of the research indicate that there are a large number of lobbyists who are still not registered in the European Parliament Registry, even though they have registered offices in Brussels. Those include 14-20 of the world’s largest law firms. Likewise, it is interesting that 11 out of 14 of these law firms are registered in Washington DC, where registration is legally required. As for the Croatian lobbying actors in the European Parliament, there are a total of 54 organizations registered in the Registry, with non-government organizations dominating, followed by corporations, consultants and think tanks and national structures.

With the expansion of the EU to 28 members, lobbying in the European Parliament has become extremely demanding. After the public scandal known as “cash for amendments”\(^3\), which brought into light the insufficient transparency of relations between the interest groups and Members of the European Parliament, the MEPs’ code of conduct got much stricter, especially regarding their communications with representatives of the interest groups.


The analysis of the parameters of the interest groups’ influence in the EU shows that the stronger and more effective interest groups share one of the following features: economic and political importance, large membership, adequate human and material resources, internal cohesion and organization, expertise and awareness etc. It is undisputed that decision-makers in the EU must take into account the views of economically important interest groups,

\(^2\) All information is published on www.integritiwatch.eu, which can be used to monitor integrity of members of the European Parliament. For more information, see Transparency International (2015), Lobbying in Europe: hidden influence, privileged access, http://www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/lobbying_in_europe.

\(^3\) More information on the “cash for amendments” case, which resulted in criminal proceedings against several members of the European Parliament, is available at: https://corporateeurope.org/2011/03/cash-amendments-scandal-tip-iceberg.
primarily because their co-operation is often necessary for the implementation of particular policies, for example for encouraging investment across the EU or employment growth in less developed regions. In that context, it is almost unnecessary to point out that the impact of interest groups on the decision-making process in the EU directly depends on the strength of the sector in which they operate (Sidjanski, 1995; Vidačak, 2007). Strong material and human resources are undoubtedly an important factor, which was confirmed by some of the earlier studies of cases of European trade associations’ lobbying (Kohler-Koch, Quittkat, 1999). Findings from those studies point to the direct link between the material, financial strength of the interest groups on the one hand and the frequency of their contacts and the level of interaction with the EU institutions on the other. In addition, trade organizations with high budgets can hire more staff and improve their lobbying strategies. Given the increased significance of high information and communication technologies, a specific knowledge, expertise and information are becoming an important factor of influence (Van Schendelen, 2003).

The issue of measuring the influence of interest groups on the EU institutions is greatly important for better understanding of the EU policy making processes, but also in the context of discussions on the democratic legitimacy of the EU. Among a relatively small number of researches on the issue, the study by Dür is especially relevant. It differentiates between the three general approaches to measuring the interest groups: the monitoring of key steps in the lobbying process (process-tracing), “attributed influence” assessment and gauging the degree of preference attainment, warning that due to the weaknesses of each of the methodological approaches, the only way to further knowledge in this area is to combine them (Dür, 2008).

Measuring the influence of lobbying through tracking various stages in the EU policy making process is additionally complicated due to the existence of a large number of possible channels of influence, the involvement of lobbyists in different stages of decision making, as well as parallel lobbying from opposite sides.

In relation to the “attributed influence” method, which is based on the respondents’ perception of the influence of particular interest groups, and which is especially relevant in the context of this paper, it should be noted that one of its major advantages is its relative simplicity, as well as its ability to encompass all the channels of influence. On the other hand, the disadvantages of this method lie in the possible bias in assessment, where there is often a tendency to
minimize or exaggerate the influence of particular groups, but also in the difficulty in formulating a response due to the lack of information and analytical capacities. A number of authors points out that maybe the greatest weakness of this method of measuring the influence is that it measures the perception of influence, and not the influence itself (Polsby, 1960 as cited in Dür, 2008). In addition, the surveys and interviews conducted in this method generally do not reveal substantive information about the content or type of influence of interest groups, that is, what they have changed in the real world. Additionally, with questions about the general influence of specific categories of interest groups, it was often required from the subjects to evaluate the average influence in specific sectors (or to rank it numerically on a predetermined scale), where the memory of the subject, researcher’s bias and the subjects’ tendency to avoid extreme grades, while neglecting potential specific differences from one sector to the other or categories of interest groups working within those sectors, all play significant role. Among the recent studies on civil servants and officials of the EU institutions perceptions of lobbyists, the research conducted by one of the largest lobbying agencies in Brussels, Burson-Marsteller, should be mentioned. It brought to light a number of interesting findings on transparency and effectiveness of lobbying, but it also confirmed the prevailing attitude of the EU institutions that lobbying is a useful and necessary part of open and democratic process (Burson-Marsteller, 2013).

4. Results of Research on the Views of Croatian MEPs on the Effectiveness of Lobbying in the European Parliament

In the research on the views of Croatian MPs, the focus was on six topics: (1) the effectiveness of individual categories of lobbyists; (2) the effectiveness of lobbyists in individual sectors; (3) the main channels of lobbying influence; (4) lobbying methods; (5) differences between European and Croatian lobbyists; and (6) the contribution of lobbyists in shaping the European public policies. Out of eleven MPs, ten agreed to participate in the study. Since the survey was anonymous, the MPs were marked with numbers from 1 to 10 in the result analysis. When analysing the collected data, we used qualitative content analysis, where the interview was the unit of analysis. Besides deepening our understanding of the subject, the qualitative analysis can also indicate and refer to that which is hidden by subjective experiences and inaccessible by other means (Milas, 2005). For the purpose of organizing the collected data, we used the coding procedure that entailed three different
procedures, which were preceded by familiarization with the data and transcript creation: a) attribution of codes (importance) to empirical material; b) associating related codes into categories; and c) terms and categories meaning analysis. When organizing the collected data according to the above procedure, every interviewed MEP was associated with the number representing him/her, and which will be marked in the brackets when showing the obtained results. During the qualitative data analysis, quantitative indicators were also observed, so they were collected and presented. When it was concluded that the data was fully used, its interpretation followed.

4.1. The Perception of Croatian MEPs on the Effectiveness of Lobbying by Interest Groups in the European Parliament

The analysis of the responses given by Croatian MEPs shows that the effectiveness of lobbying in the EU parliament greatly depends on two factors: the type of interests represented by lobbyists and the skills of the lobbyists themselves.

Three MEPs (1, 6, 8) say that the lobbyists will be successful in their endeavours if the ideas and interests they represent are the same as the interests and the work of the members of parliament themselves. MEPs are elected on the basis of their programs which are usually based on working for the benefit of certain interest groups, economic activities etc. This is why they often take the time to talk to lobbyists which might help the member fulfil the goals which they promised their voters. Lobbyists whose interests do not match the MEP’s most likely won’t even get a chance to talk to the member or be effective in their actions. This finding corresponds with results of an earlier research conducted by Michalowitz who point out that “lobbying actors are only likely to score if they are in line with politicians and institutions driving the issue” (Michalowitz, 2004, 270).

The next three MEPs (5, 6, 7), stressed the importance of the lobbyists’ skills when it comes to their effectiveness. They say that lobbyists who can present their arguments well are more successful. The arguments have to be well-thought out and convincing enough to help change a law, part of a law or achieve another similar goal. They also mention the lobbyists’ ability to express themselves, the way they formulate their requests, even the way they compose their speech in terms of using punctuation.
The responses of the MEPs show that the effectiveness of lobbying is also greatly influenced by the topic of the lobbying (2, 7). A lobbyist has a greater chance of succeeding if the topic he is representing is currently being discussed in the Parliament and if it is a popular topic among EU Parliament members and matches their preferences. This finding confirms arguments of some authors emphasizing that interest representatives are most successful when they know the policy preferences of members of various EP committees (Marshall, 2010, 557).

Some other factors for which members said influence how successful the lobbyists will be are the lobbyists’ good organization skills, their involvement in the process, how informed they are on the topic they are advocating and the value systems they represent.

With the topic of the factors which influence the effectiveness of the lobbying by interest groups explained, we reach the second category which appeared in the answers of the members and it is the legal framework which plays a significant role in the act of lobbying. MEP 4 says that a grey zone exists in which it’s hard to tell whether an action is transferring interest or manipulation. New regulations are constantly being worked on with the goal of making the lobbying process more transparent and controlled in order to avoid this grey zone.

MEPs 1, 9 and 10 only expressed their own judgement of the effectiveness of lobbying, which gave us three different opinions – not very effective, relatively effective and very effective. Although all members were told to base their responses on their own experiences, the answers seem to be a result of the personality of the member. The member who said that lobbying in the EU Parliament was “not very effective” explained it by saying that he makes decisions based on his own experience and does not take the lobbyists and their actions into consideration. He listens to them, but their arguments are not what determine his own actions and speeches. The member who said the lobbying was “very effective” didn’t have much contact with the lobbyists, but speaks from their own experience and says that lobbyists are primarily focused on higher instances and only go to parliament members if they are unsuccessful there. The opinion of lobbying being “relatively effective” was also based on the general experience of the member and not on any personal contact with lobbyists.

After the presented analysis of the answers to the question of how effective lobbyists are, it can be concluded that, alongside a few key factors such as the types of interests represented and the skills of the lobbyists, there are many more factors which may determine how
successful a lobbyist will be in achieving their goals. A lobbyist has to be very informed on the topic they are advocating and prepare it well, but it is also very important that they are familiar with the programs and activities of all members of the Parliament in order to approach the right MEP who will take interest in hearing what the lobbyist is saying and take their arguments into consideration when it comes to discussions in the Parliament.

The legal framework also plays a major role. It is becoming more concrete and it aims to lessen the chances of lobbying in so called grey zones which may lead to manipulation. The analysed responses show that MEPs are sometimes not willing to even meet with or listen to the lobbyists at all. The reason for this reluctance is that “they would rather trust their own experience and judgement than possibly enter an unknown grey zone”. This can also be seen as a result of the recent EP lobbying scandals, rising awareness on the strict reporting and transparency rules (including list of MEPs meetings with lobbyists), but also feeling a certain responsibility towards their voters and safeguarding their reputation.

4.1.1. The Effectiveness of Lobbyists

![Graph 1. The effectiveness of lobbyists](image-url)
The members graded the effectiveness of the lobbyists stated in the graph above. The grades ranged from 1 to 5, 1 being “not effective” and 5 being “extremely effective”. The graph shows the average grade of effectiveness of each interest group. The highest grade, 3.9, went to non-governmental organizations. Three MEPs said that these lobbyists were extremely effective (the grade they gave these lobbyists was a 5). They are followed by trade and business associations, regional and local government and embassies, all of which have the average grade of 3.5. The least effective lobbyists according to this survey were law firms (1.8) and PR agencies (1.9). These findings are somewhat different from results of Burson-Marsteller research on effectiveness of lobbying which generally perceive trade associations as the most effective lobbyists (62% of MEPs, national MPs and senior officials from national government and EU institutions across Europe perceive them effective of very effective), followed by professional organisations on second (51%), and NGOs on third place (46%). The same research also places law firms as the least effective, while PR agencies are better placed than think-tanks and embassies (Burson-Marsteller, 2013, 71) which are perceived by Croatian MEPs as some of the most effective lobbying actors.

4.1.2. Most Effective Sectors for Lobbying
The purpose of the second question was to find out which sectors are perceived by MEPs as being the most frequently represented in the process of lobbying in the EU and producing the most active and effective lobbyists. Quite a variety of answers was gathered under this topic that will be summarized in the following paragraphs.

Out of the 10 sectors the MEPs mentioned, six of them were mentioned by two members, while the rest were mentioned by one member. MEPs 1 and 4 mentioned the tobacco industry as having extremely active lobbyists who have managed to affect some changes in regulations regarding producing, selling and using tobacco products, which were very strict at first. The same members also stated that the pharmaceutical industry had some very effective lobbyists who have proven to be very active and very capable in discussions. Furthermore, two votes went to the sector of agriculture and the sector of ecology and energetics each (members 3 and 7). The responses from these members show that they answered the question according to their own experience and specialization in those sectors and that they had no experience with lobbyists from other sectors so they could not rate their effectiveness. Two votes also went to
the sector of automotive industry (members 4 and 7) and the law firms (members 5 and 10). Other MEPs also mentioned the food industry sector, consumer protection, human rights and non-governmental organizations.

MEPs 2, 8 and 9 did not mention any specific sectors and say that there isn’t a single sector which has the most effective lobbyists, but that their effectiveness depends on three factors: the sector specialization of the MEP and the topics they are interested in (2), the limited action of the EU (8) and the theme factor (whether the topic is being discussed in the Parliament or not (9).

The analysis shows us that the most effective, or at least the most active, lobbyists come from those sectors which are financially the most powerful (the tobacco industry, the pharmaceutical industry, the automotive industry). This opens a number of dilemmas often highlighted by European civil society actors: to what extent the grey lobbying zone is being adequately controlled; would compulsory registration and stricter regulation make lobbying more transparent; and whether the amount of money in a certain sector will remain essential factor of the success of lobbyists’ efforts.

4.1.3. The Effectiveness of Lobbyists from Certain Sectors

Graph 2. The effectiveness of lobbyists from certain sectors
The members rated the effectiveness of certain sectors in the process of lobbying with grades ranging from 1 to 5, 1 being “not effective” and 5 being “extremely effective”. The graph is a result of all the MEPs’ responses and it shows the average grade of effectiveness of each sector. The results differ slightly from the results shown in section 4.1.2, where MEPs gave their own answers while in this case they were given sectors to rate. MEPs said that the tobacco industry and the pharmaceutical industry were the most successful and the most active in the process of lobbying, but they also gave high grades to the sectors of ecology, energetics and agriculture. The highest average grade, 3.7, went to the sectors of ecology and consumer protection, followed by agriculture, which got the grade of 3.4. The lowest grade went to the sectors of defence and sports, which were both rated 1.8.

When comparing these findings with large Burson-Marsteller survey among MEPs, national MPs and representatives of national governments and EU institutions, the biggest difference lies in the perception of consumer protection lobbyists which were ranked as the least effective in Burson-Marsteller survey, while Croatian MEPs consider them as the most effective. This difference may be related to the predominant focus of several Croatian MEPs on consumer protection issues in previous years. On the other hand, environmental lobbyists are also perceived by Burson-Marsteller as the most effective NGO lobbying sector, along with energy and health care sector which are perceived to have most effective corporate and NGO lobbyists (Burson-Marsteller, 2013, 71).

4.1.4. The Main Channels of Influence on Members of the European Parliament

By analysing the answers to the question which channels lobbyists use, we can divide all of the members’ responses into two categories. These categories refer to two types of channels: indirect channels, which are more commonly used, and direct channels.

MEP 2 mentioned the following indirect channels: representatives of diplomatic missions, representatives of various State authorities and other organizations or associations from the country the MEP is coming from. MEP 5 makes a similar statement, saying that one of the most important targets of lobbying are the member state institutions themselves, which fall under the category of national, indirect channels used to achieve lobbyists’ goals and interests.
Other MEPs’ answers are all very similar seeing as they mostly refer to direct lobbying techniques and channels of influence. Lobbyists, according to the responses received in the survey, mostly decide to get in touch with the MEPs themselves, or perhaps their assistants as well as rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs.

MEP 2 stresses that assistants are the first “obstacle” in a lobbyist’s way to the member of Parliament. They also say that lobbyists, other than contacting the MEPs themselves, often contact their employees as well as their political groups. Four MEPs said that rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs are the key components to the lobbyists’ plan to achieve their goals. Other targets of direct lobbying include presidents or coordinators of committees, the European Commission and different councils.

4.1.5. The Most Important Targets of Lobbying

Out of the seven targets provided, the MEPs said that rapporteurs (4.9) and shadow rapporteurs (4.5) were the most important targets of lobbying. This is in line with many authors that stress the importance of early access to the process of drafting the rapporteur’s report that first defines EP’s negotiating position. Van Schendelen emphasizes that for lobbyists interested in particular dossier there are usually ten relevant MEPs and their
assistants, including the rapporteur, the MEP responsible for leading a dossier, the shadow rapporteur and appointed overseers from other political groups (Van Schendelen, 2010, 86). On the other hand, Marshall points out that influential MEPs committee members can often pose a significant counterweight to the acknowledged power of a rapporteur (Marshall 2010, 572).

By studying this graph, we can conclude that lobbyists mostly aim at higher and more powerful positions at the European Parliament first, as they seem to allow them to reach a larger number of MEPs. If they do not succeed, they go to the members of Parliament themselves, who are in third place with the average grade of 3.9. The least important target according to Croatian MEPs are policy advisors with the average grade of 2.4., as well as inter-groups (2.8). The perception of inter-groups as not effective may also be related to a rather short experience of Croatian MEPs and not enough opportunities for networking with members of other political groups within inter-groups.

4.1.6. Methods of Lobbying in the European Parliament

The answers to the question of which methods are used by lobbyists are almost identical. This helps us determine the two main methods of lobbying – the method of personal approach and the method of informing.

The method of personal approach is the most common one and was named first by every MEP. This method primarily includes meeting with the MEPs, who the lobbyists reach by calling the MEP themselves or their assistant. MEP 4 explains that lobbyists who use this kind of approach are “very familiar with the work of MEPs and the topics they’re working on”, which helps them leave a good impression and shows that they want to talk to that specific member of Parliament. Some MEPs say that lobbyists sometimes walk up to them directly in the Parliament hallways to tell them what they’re advocating in order to affect the MEP’s final opinion during the vote. Meetings are usually held at the office of the MEP or, if the MEP agrees, the topics are discussed over lunch or dinner. Some members of Parliament say that they’ve had offers to go on trips, which they mostly rejected so that they would not enter the “grey zone”. MEP 8 agreed to the trip, but paid all the expenses himself in order to avoid any problems with the Ethics committee. The method of personal approach also includes taking part in conferences, public discussions and round table discussions.
The second method is the method of informing or providing information to policy makers. It is somewhat less effective, but present in lobbying nonetheless. This includes the lobbyists’ communicating their message through email by sending the MEP different materials and analyses in order to influence their decisions, but also mailing flyers, publications and similar printed materials to their office. MEP 3 says that they witness the use of this method daily. Since MEPs mostly mentioned it as one of the methods without including any examples or explanations, it can be concluded that this method is mostly used by lobbyists as a way to inform MEPs and that they put more effort and hopes into personal contact with members of Parliament. This is because it is very possible that some materials will not even reach the MEP or that the MEP won’t understand the message fully, so the method of personal approach is much more common and more effective.

4.1.7. The Most Effective Methods of Lobbying in the European Parliament

![Graph 4. The most effective methods of lobbying in the European Parliament](image)

This graph shows the methods of lobbying with the corresponding grades of effectiveness, as rated by the MEPs. The most effective method is the method of meeting the lobbyists in...
person. Even MEPs said that this method is the most used because the lobbyist can be sure that they have gotten their message across to the MEP. This puts additional emphasis on individual qualities of lobbyists, especially their communication, networking and negotiation skills, as confirmed by a number of authors (Michalowitz, 2004; Van Schendelen, 2010).

The method of sending printed materials and analyses is the second most successful one, with the average grade of 4. This method helps the lobbyists cover more MEPs in a shorter period of time, but some MEPs do not have the time to read the materials or they simply do not want to. The method of conferences and public discussions also got a high grade (3.6), while the method of public Internet consultations got the lowest grade (1.8) and was determined to be least effective.

4.1.8. Differences in Lobbying between European and Croatian Lobbyists

The analysis of interviewees’ responses to the question on differences between European and Croatian lobbyists leads to the conclusion about the non-existent legal framework for lobbying in Croatia, as the main source of differences. In addition to establishing the legal framework, all deputies consider it necessary to introduce the register of lobbyists, which would pave the way to increasing the transparency of the process and informing the public about who is advocating which interests and trying to influence the policy-making process. The next difference pointed out by MEP 9 refers to the institutionalization of lobbying at the EU level, which is still not the case in Croatia, and also points out that “... in Europe, lobbying is being studied at many academic institutions and represents a recognized form of political action. It is normal to meet lobbyist in Europe, while in Croatia is still perceived as activity close to some kind of corruption or bribe”. Better regulation would contribute to professionalization of lobbying, according to all interviewed MEPs.

MEP 3 is of opinion that Croatian lobbyists are more open, but face challenges related to the lack of regulatory framework. Croatian MEP 5 considers the method of approaching the MEPs as the biggest difference. In his opinion, European lobbyists tend to use more institutional channels and former ambassadors with huge network of contacts in institutions and corporations, Croatian lobbyists rather use personal contacts to reach MEPs. Similar replies were given by MEPs 6 and 7 who emphasize that Croatian lobbyists generally do not rely on networks and associations which could add to the success of their efforts. Joining the Europe
an sectoral lobbying associations requires adhering to goals of European policies and demonstrating more advanced strategic approach to European policy processes, which is still not the case.

Some MEPs are of opinion that Croatian lobbyists rely predominantly on national channels of influence and focus primarily on domestic interests. This limited focus on specific national interests sometimes enables easier communication with MEPs that mostly prefer communicating with Croatian interest groups as a way of strengthening links with their constituencies.

Although MEPs are elected through national party lists and their constituencies do not hold them directly accountable, the willingness of majority of Croatian MEPs to communicate more readily with national interest groups is in line with results of Michalowitz’ research stressing that there is a higher probability that MEPs will interact with lobbyists from their home countries and even be more willing to listen and accept their arguments (Michalowitz, 2004, 67). Besides, Hooghe also points out that sharing nationality and mutual culture is important basis for building informal networks in the EU institutions due to the ease of establishing a connection (Hooghe, 2001, 169).

Finally, Croatian MEPs generally expect more advanced interaction with lobbyists and receiving more frequent information on changes in sectors they operate and impact of legislative dynamics on their businesses or interests they represent. European lobbyists tend to share this sort of information more regularly and strategically than their Croatian counterparts.

In short, Croatian lobbyists would, without any doubt, benefit from clear legal framework for lobbying and register of lobbyists, more advanced lobbying education and training opportunities, as well as from adapting to European trends in advocating interests in policy making, including more proactive use of umbrella networks and associations as strategic channels of influence.

4.1.9. To What Extent Do Lobbyists Assist the European Parliament in Shaping Better European Public Policies?

One of the rare research studies on lobbying coverage in Croatian media show that activities of lobbyists at the EU level are generally covered in a positive or neutral way, which
demonstrate a certain awareness and recognition of potential contribution of lobbying as integral part of European policy making processes (Sinčić Ćorić, Vuković, 2011, 560).

The analysis of responses of Croatian MEPs highlights at least three main categories of lobbyists’ positive contribution. The first category relates to the analytical aspect of lobbyists work. Since they are fully dedicated to their narrow area of interest and spend most of the time to the monitoring and analysing the situation and changes in the field, including the analysis of implementation and impact of existing legislation on their sectors, they are able to identify more easily certain legislative deficiencies. Detailed and timely analysis of legislative initiatives also enables more proactive and strategic approach of lobbyists to MEPs in order to have their interest clearly articulated in the European Parliament. The second category relates to the provision of information. Almost all interviewed MEPs point out that lobbyists save a lot of their time and resources by providing them with information that help them better prepare for various items on the Parliament agenda. MEP 6 states that due to the “substantial scope of work, I cannot always adequately prepare for every topic and therefore tailor-made briefings of lobbyists serve as useful assistance for confirming or reconsidering my own attitudes on the topic”. Another MEP (7) points out that “lobbyists inputs are highly valued because some legislative acts would not be feasible in practice if they are shaped solely by MEPs who are not in direct touch with situation in the field and impact of practical implementation of legislation”. These findings are in line with results of previous research studies (Bouwen, 2002; Eising, 2007) which describe information as the main “access good” for MEPs, considered as highly valuable for policy-making process. The third category directly follows up on the previous two and deals with assistance to MEPs in shaping decisions, based on analytical inputs and information provided by lobbyists. By taking part in various expert groups, committees and debates, but also through direct communication, lobbyists facilitate decision-making in the Parliament.

The perception of Croatian MEPs on main functions and contributions of lobbyists follow the similar logic presented in the study commissioned by the European Parliament in 2003, which stress four functions that lobbyists can perform in the EP. The first is service function which relates to interest group’s engagement for specific, exclusive use of their services. Through lobbying functions, interest groups push their own stance to influence the EU policy making process. The decision-making functions allow interest representatives to take part in working
groups for selecting policy options and formulating new policy proposals. Finally, for implementation functions, interest groups take over management functions in programme implementation or contribute to implementing policies and provide feedback on how they fit their needs. While first two tasks are considered to serve primarily organisations’ memberships or clients, the latter two are perceived as contributing “in some way or other – to public policy making and the governance of a specific policy sector” (European Parliament, 2003, 5).

Only MEP 10 provided a different, rather negative perspective on the contribution of lobbyists, by emphasizing that they primarily work in the interests of their companies or organisations they represent, and not in the interest of the European Union. This view may be related to increasing concerns raised by a number of civil society organisations on predominant influence of powerful corporate interests groups in the EU and calls for further improving the overall openness, transparency and inclusiveness of the EU policy processes.

5. Conclusion

The analysis of views of Croatian MEPs has confirmed the strong presence of lobbyists in the everyday activities of the European Parliament and provided some basic insights into the factors determining lobbyists’ effectiveness. In general, there are two main factors that affect the success of lobbying in the European Parliament: the type of interests represented and personal skills and competences of lobbyists. In case the interests advocated by lobbyists match the preferences, interests and ideas of MEPs, there is high probability their proposals and arguments will fall on fertile ground. Otherwise, most probably lobbyists will not even receive an opportunity to present their views to the MEP. As regards lobbying skills, these are primarily related to the level of information, knowledge and expertise possessed by lobbyists, which increase the potential for achieving their goals. In this supply/demand process, MEPs obtain useful information and inputs that would otherwise take them much more time to gather by themselves, but are crucial for shaping their own opinions on the topics.

Regarding the sectors in which lobbyists are perceived as the most effective, it is no surprise that the traditionally strongest financial and economic power players are mentioned, such as tobacco, pharmaceutical and car industries. In this context, a clear and rigorous legal
framework for lobbying is pointed out by lobbyists as crucial for ensuring adequate balance among the most powerful corporate lobbying actors and other interest groups, including civil society organisations.

As for the channels of lobbying influence on MEPs are concerned, different direct and indirect channels of influence are pointed out, with indirect channels being more pronounced in the experience of Croatian MEPs.

The main lobbying targets are usually top officials, highly positioned in the decision-making hierarchy. In case the most frequent top-down political lobbying approach is not successful, technical lobbying focusing on lower, expert levels gains importance. MEPs-Rapporteurs tend to attract the biggest lobbying efforts, while EP inter-groups/clubs and policy advisors are at the very end of channels used by lobbyists in Parliament.

Personal contacts and regular provision of tailor-made information, policy analysis and other expert inputs are among the most commonly used methods of lobbying. Personal, direct, face-to-face communication with MEPs in presenting arguments is still predominant, while email or regular post are still used as a supplement or substitute if personal contact is not possible.

The main difference among European and Croatian lobbyists seems to be the lack of a proactive approach by Croatian lobbyists and failure to provide relevant information in time to be able to articulate their concerns early in the policy making process, when there is higher possibility for influence. In addition, Croatian lobbyists are reluctant to use larger European umbrella associations and networks for promoting their interests, and developing a multi-level strategic approach to influencing EU decision-making. In order to improve the professionalization of lobbying in Croatia, all interviewed MEPs agree that it is necessary to adopt the Law on lobbying and to introduce a more transparent framework for lobbying.

Finally, the analysis of views of Croatian MEPs has shown that they do perceive lobbyists as important actors that substantially assist the Parliament in its work and increase the quality of policies co-shaped by that EU institution. Their positive contribution is visible especially in the supply of detailed and relevant information on the current situation in the field in certain sectors, as well as the potential impact of implementation of the proposed legislation on the specific interests they represent. By ensuring an early warning of potential obstacles in
implementing new policies, lobbyists largely assist MEPs in formulating their own positions on items on the parliamentary agenda.

Our initial assumption that lobbyists use effective methods and channels of influencing the MEPs and contribute to the better formulation of European public policies has proved to be largely valid. In general, responses of Croatian MEPs show a predominantly positive and modern attitude on lobbying and added values that communication of EP and interest groups can potentially bring for the quality, legitimacy and acceptance of European public policies.

6. Reference List


