

LOBBYING OPPORTUNITIES, CONFUSIONS AND MISREPRESENTATIONS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Abstract. Lobby activities are often likened to the misuse of authority and bad practices. Such parallels generate problems that easily spiral down into crises and conflicts, and the symbiosis of politics and business turns into an ambiguous platform. Why should we look into the core of the suspicions regarding the intertwining and overlapping interests of political and business communities? The answer: because in Romania public interest is often defined in a private or personal framework, whereas private interests are defined in markedly public terms. Confusion sets us clearly apart from the effective Israeli, American, British, Czech, Polish or Magyar lobbyists. The same confusion has a damaging effect: we are unable to efficiently handle institutional relations and public-private relations, be they national or international, that is, European. To what extent is the politics-business relationship deemed appropriate in US and EU? Which are its constraints, prerequisites and possible sanctions? These are the questions which accompany our dilemmas that we clarify in this paper. We conclude with proposals on what can be done in promoting efficiently the Romanian private interests within the European institutions.

Key words: interest groups, NGOs, lobbying pressures, advocacy, EU public-policy making
JEL classification: H10, L31, L38

Public policy making would be very poor without the contribution of the directly interested parties who own the necessary expertise and practical experience. The lobbyists working practices call to disclose their fees and their names on a mandatory public list. In US this is a compulsory rule for years, but the debates in EU have developed towards these targets only very recently. The intelligence of interest and pressure groups requires compliance with ethical and transparent rules to avoid hypocrisy,

populism, electoral frenzy, smart guys and tricksters. Otherwise, their influence over the decision-making process may quickly translate into bias and infringement upon democratic principles.

Lobby and advocacy versus misuse of authority

Jack Abramoff, a famous leader of a lobby group close to the Republicans and a former director of a *think-tank*¹, was a central figure in a high-profile political scandal in 2005, when he was accused of having defrauded his customers and having bribed US officials. One year later, he received an almost six-year sentence for three counts of fraud, for favours granted by politicians to third parties in

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exchange for electoral campaign funds. He was ordered to repay USD 21.7 million. A large-scale anti-corruption investigation also resulted in the sentencing of former Republican group leader in the Chamber of Representatives, Tom DeLay and of his fellow party member and Representative Bob Ney, alongside two White House officials and nine other lobbyists.

The example is quite relevant. The misuse of authority involves making a request, a promise or acceptance of an offer conditional on some remuneration. Whether influence is actually exerted or not, and whether or not it yields the desired result, the misuse of authority or manipulation is subject to criminal prosecution². But lobby should not be mistaken for such activities. As such, it ought not to be downplayed in public information or awareness-raising campaigns. Lobbying involves a lot more. Its ethical code requires proficiency in the **legitimate pursuit of a private interest**. The very core of professionally communicating this interest is related to a refined legislative and technical expertise, to rhetorical strategies and abilities focusing on decision-makers.

Hence, the misuse of authority, lobby and advocacy are three distinct activities. Confusions are frequent as regards the latter concepts. Any *awareness-raising activity* addressing the public or decision-makers, and regarding actions or decisions that directly affect people's lives or the society as a whole, may be defined as *advocacy*. Lobby practices are aimed at actually influencing the governmental decision-making, rather than simply at raising awareness. Therefore, advocacy is a constant component of lobbying, but the former does not necessarily imply lobbying.

² *Criminal Law Convention on Corruption, Strasbourg, 1999 – ratified in Romania under Law No. 27/2002.*

Lobbying in USA and EU

So far the EU has not experienced similar scandals. The reason is quite simple. The host of European pressure groups, unlike the American ones, thrive in the absence of information on clients, revenues and fees charged. The fragmented nature of European institutions, but also their sharing responsibilities with Member States, makes the European lobby arena less transparent, ampler, more intricate and subtle.

Corporate giants like Boeing and Airbus, DuPont and Dow Chemical or newcomers British Petroleum and Philip Morris have their own lobby offices in Brussels' Rond-Point Schuman. The paths of many other employers' associations and federations, trade companies and PR firms, think-tanks and NGOs meet in this junction with Rue de la Loi, which hosts the European Commission and European Council "fortresses". Opening into the same Brussels junction is also Avenue de Cortenbergh, with the head offices of multinationals in the foodstuff industry - Unilever, the German chemicals industry - BASF, the French weapon and electronics manufacturer - Thales or of the energy giant E.ON, famous law firms Hill & Knowlton and the controversial Burson-Marsteller, or AmCham itself³.

The American society sees things differently. The key axiom in the theory and practice of American pluralism, as phrased by Robert Dahl, says that *"there is no one centre of sovereign power, but multiple centres of power, none of which is or can be fully sovereign."*⁴ The first attempts to regulate

³ Corporate Europe Observatory, *Brussels - the EU quarter. Explore the corporate lobbying paradise*, July 2005.

⁴ Robert Dahl is a Professor emeritus of political science at the Yale University and a former president of the American Political Science Association. Regarded as one

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lobbying in the USA were made in the early 20th Century. In 1946, the first normative act was endorsed⁵, modified half a century later in the “*Lobbying Disclosure Act*” (1995). The Law defines lobbying as ***any oral or written communication addressing any official in the legislative or executive powers***. It must be done on behalf of a client and seeks the drawing up, modification or enactment of a particular federal legislation or regulation, executive order, political programme or position of the US Government⁶. But first of all, lobbyists must be registered with the Senate and Chamber of Representatives administrative offices, and are to submit activity reports every six months.

The American lobby market was officially put at USD 1.5 billion in 2000, picking up to 2.6 billion in 2006. Patton Boggs LLP, Cassidy & Assoc and Akin, Gump et al. are the most powerful groups which have been influencing decisions relevant to the business environment for the past ten years. Major clients include the American Chamber of Commerce (which spent USD 338 million in 1998 – 2007), followed by General Electric (USD 161 million) and American Medical Assn (USD 157 million). By economic sectors, the market is primarily supported by pharmaceutical holdings, financial groups and IT&C corporations. There are no corresponding data for the European market.

of the most distinguished political scientists, his seminal works: *Who Governs? Democracy and Power in an American City* – published in 1961, *Democracy and Its Critics* – published in 1989, *How Democratic is the American Constitution?* – published in 2002 or *On Political Equality* – published in 2006, were harshly criticised by C. Wright Mills, G. William Domhoff or Charles Blattberg.

⁵ *Federal Regulation of Lobbying Act, 1946*

⁶ It may also be aimed at the implementation or completion of a federal policy or programme, or at the nomination or confirmation of an individual to a position that requires Senate endorsement.

Unlike the Anglo-Saxon space, in continental Europe the modern political thought developed in a different vein. The European—particularly French—theory and practice has regarded interest groups and their lobby practice in a rather negative manner. It was only in 1989, when a MEP disclosed instances of abuse by such groups, that some light was shed on the multiple problems related to the growing number of interest groups and lobbyists around European Union decision-making structures. A number of MEP reports followed (Galle – 1992, Ford or Nordmann – 1994) as well as monitoring measures by the European Commission. For instance, in January 1997, European Commission (EC) first published a catalogue of the groups of interests operating at a European level, after defining guidelines for EU lobbying in 1996⁷. In exchange for the Parliament access permit, lobbyists are bound to register and sign a code of conduct⁸ similar to the American one.

But there is no telling exactly how many lobby companies operate in Brussels. There are roughly 3,000 groups registered with the European Parliament and headquartered in Brussels. The European decision-making system comes under the pressure of over 15,000 voices hired by lobby groups to promote private interests.

The strongest lobby firms seem to be: WeberShandwick, APCO Europe, Hill & Knowlton International Belgium, GPC

⁷ The main European regulations include the following: MEPs are required to submit statements regarding their professional and other paid activities; relevant gifts must be declared before debates take place; MEPs are bound to turn down financial or other support which is conditional on the outcome of a lobby activity.

⁸ In order to avoid discriminating against European citizens who support a cause, but do not come in touch with Parliament on a regular basis, the “*frequent contact*” was defined (more than 5 days a year) as distinct from “*occasional contact*” (which does not require registration).

*International – Government Policy Consultant, Burson-Marsteller and Blueprint Partners*⁹.

Unsurprisingly, their distribution favours economic themes (98%) at the expense of social ones (2%). The interests promoted are primarily related to the European trade federations (35%), trade consultants (15%), private companies (13%), NGOs in areas such as healthcare, environment or human rights (13%), private business and trade union sectors (10%), regional representatives (8%), international organisations (5%) and think-tanks (1%). Adding to these are the official delegations of another 150 national governments, plus national lobby platforms (e.g. *Dutch European Affairs Platform* or the recently launched *Czech House*).

A recent national lobby hub initiative was the launch on October 11, 2007 of a centre named the Czech House, which hosts employers' organisations and specialised interest groups (CzechTrade, CzechTourism or Czech Business Representation), as well as companies (Czech Airlines or power company ČEZ). It obviously precedes the Czech Republic Presidency of the European Union in 2009. The Prague Post (17.10.2007) described the scope of the event which coagulates the interests of a majority of Czech groups in Brussels. Exceptions include, for instance, the groups of interests of the 8 (out of 14) development regions which chose to retain their original offices in Brussels. This is also the case with the representatives of the Central Bohemian Region, famous for their successful capitalisation of interests in the 2007-2013 Regional Development Programme.

⁹ V. Marziali, "Lobbying in Brussels Interest Representation and Need for Information", Center for European Integration Studies, Discussion Paper C155, 2006.

Machiavelli in Brussels

As mentioned above, the European institutional structure is fragmented and it encompasses multiple channels for influencing decisions, through the European Commission, Council and Parliament. The former has a monopoly on legislative initiatives, and as such it is the primary target of pressure groups. The Council arena is slightly more complex. *First of all*, lobbyists indirectly pursue national delegations in Brussels; *secondly*, they target the host of expert working groups; *thirdly*, direct influence may be wielded through national governments themselves.

The European Parliament (EP) is another level that pressure groups target. The co-decision procedure, which brings together the EP and the European Council, defines the development of European policies. The first specific objectives of lobbying are to contact committee chairs and the appointed rapporteurs. The latter draw up the answers to the legislative proposals made by the Commission, as well as the EP amendments. Consequently, the arguments put forth by the groups of interests may accompany the comments and proposals made by the EP on the European Commission draft legislation, during plenary committee meetings. Then, the major part played by the EP in drawing up and endorsing the EU budget lends special undertones to the lobby activity. Not least, parliamentary group leaders often instruct group members on how to vote, both at an expert committee level and in parliamentary meetings.

European public policies swing between two poles of interest: **national versus European** and **public versus private**. Decision-making vectors may therefore emerge from specific national public or private interests which may be broadened to a European public or private level, or the other

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way round. Breaking down the eight influence vectors seems easy to do. But in fact they become a lot more volatile, as lobby groups may form hybrid bodies¹⁰.

This is how new types of actors emerge, which pursue particular interests, under the form of public-private agencies known under the acronym **GONGO** (*governmental organised NGOs*) or **GINGO** (*governmental interested NGOs*). The European Commission spends over EUR 1 billion a year on developing the expertise of non-governmental organisations and on encouraging them to participate in the European decision-making (e.g. in the healthcare or environment sector) to make up for the much discussed **information shortage** in the European decision-making process.

One of the most "grotesque" examples of such funding was the allocation of over half of the European Commission budget for Friends of the Earth Europe, which purportedly promotes European interests in ending the global warming.

At the opposite pole there are the **BONGO** (*business organised NGOs*) and **BINGO** (*business interested NGOs*) actors. The combination of multiple influence vectors by a sophisticated lobby group will depend on the awareness of the respective topic, on the timing of the information campaign, on the debate medium, on the particular political and economic risks and opportunities. Experts view this art as coming down to the "*interplay of the three P's*": people, positions and influencing procedures.

Reality unveils combination patterns that work on the assumption of a Brussels which "governs." A lot more important for us, as a new Member State, is to identify means to

influence the EU decision-making from a national level. The most difficult part seems to be to coordinate the national private sector influence on the European public sector. This is where private lobby firms come into play most often, alongside private sectoral representatives in specialised European committees.

The symphony of private lobby firms, which are nonetheless at odds with each other in many cases, is tough and truly pan-European. For instance, in 1986 Philips obtained protection of its compact disks by putting forth the "young industry" principle; pharmaceutical companies managed to get the EU Directive on cigarettes enacted in 2001, at the expense of the tobacco industry; oil giant ExxonMobile is a skilled promoter of Euro-pessimism in drawing up European policies on the climate change, and a fierce opponent of the endorsement of the Kyoto Protocol by the USA¹¹.

Research on EU interest intermediation still lacks analysis of what kind of influence and under which conditions interest groups actually exert influence. Michalowitz (2007) addresses this question concentrating on the degree of conflict, structural conditions of interest exertion and the type of interest pursued, as main conditions for the degree to which interest groups manage to change legislative acts. Three case studies of decision-making in the fields of IT and transport in the EU justify her conclusion that the technical influence is dominating over directional influence. More than that she highlights the crucial role of the decision-makers' initial interests¹².

¹¹ Corporate Europe Observatory - CEO, 2006.

¹² I. Michalowitz, *What determines influence? Assessing conditions for decision-making influence of interest groups in the EU*, Journal of European Public Policy 14:1, January 2007, p. 132–151.

¹⁰ Rinus van Schendelen, *Machiavelli in Brussels. The Art of Lobbying the EU*, Amsterdam University Press, 2005.

The black box of European lobbying: misrepresentations

The recent exposure of suspicious agreements between chemical or energy industry lobbyists raised new questions in Brussels. More often than not, “key groups” claiming to represent citizens proved to be funded by the consulting agencies of corporations with precise interests. Many other risks associated to lobbyocracy have recently emerged in the European space¹³:

- **Privileged access** – this refers particularly to corporate giants or employer associations represented in expert groups. The European Commission policy on biofuel innovation is the outcome of recommendations drawn up by BIOFRAC (*Biofuels Research Advisory Council*). Its membership soon proved to favour the four oil companies and another four biofuel companies, at the expense of only one representative for the foodstuff industry, one for the wood industry, one for the energy sector, one farmer, eight academics (most of them working closely with oil companies and biotech companies) and, not least, for EuropaBio, the largest lobby association representing biotechnology producers. The absence of at least one representative of the environment pressure groups reflected in
- the contents of the BIOFRAC report: “*Biofuels in the European Union – A Vision for 2030 and beyond*,” published in June 2006, and which became an official EC document. The fact is that all European legislation is based on the work of approximately 1,350 expert groups, organised similarly to BIOFRAC.
- **Revolving doors** – personal contacts and inside information are vital ingredients of efficient lobbying. Their intensity increases with the speed of revolving doors between European institutions and interest groups. Jean-Paul Mingasson, former Director General of *DG Enterprise and Industry* (2002 – 2004) and *DG Budget* (1989 – 2002), left the European Commission in 2004 to become General Adviser for BusinessEurope (the confederation of European business - former UNICE). Thus, prior to 2004, he had personally taken part in drawing up European regulations on the chemical industry, and after 2004 he set out to challenge them. Similar examples can be found with most European public policies (e.g. incumbent non-executive director of British Nuclear Fuels, James Currie, a former head of *DG Environment* and in charge with *Nuclear Safety and Civil Protection* in 1997-2001).
 - **Dubious methods and the pretence of independence** – the actual agenda of interest groups is often hidden, as lobbyists claim to represent not-for-profit organisations or “independent experts.” In 2005 the world was yet to learn that an organisation that had launched the “*Campaign for Creativity*” (C4C), allegedly representing artists, musicians, designers, software developers and other creative professionals, was actually coordinated by a PR company, Campbell

¹³ ALTER-EU Brochure, Brussels, 23 May 2006, http://www.alter-eu.org/en/system/files/publications/COE_Broschure_07-WEB.pdf.

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation is a coalition of over 140 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms concerned with the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe, the resulting loss of democracy in EU decision-making and the postponement, weakening, or blockage even, of urgently needed progress on social, environmental and consumer-protection reforms.

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Gentry. An active lobbyist with the European Parliament, it encouraged the endorsement of tight protection measures for software patents, which obviously worked to the benefit of relevant multinationals. The campaign, apparently backed by creatives, was actually financed by Microsoft, SAP and industry association CompTIA. The issue has never been settled. Indeed, the direct request for clarifications by C4C as regards funding and true clients failed to yield clear results.

The regulation of this “black box” of the European lobby market, starting with the voluntary or compulsory registration in an interest group registry to moving on to revenue transparency, still sparks fiery disputes. The public affairs management that tries to untangle this web revolves around three major poles: *The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation* (ALTER EU), *the Society of European Affairs Professionals* (SEAP) and *the European Public Affairs Consultancies Association* (EPACA). While the former campaigns for the compulsory monitoring of pressure groups, the latter associations stubbornly defend the privilege of secrecy and self-regulation.

European transparency initiative

The European Parliament acknowledges groups of interests as a positive fact in itself, and generally supports appeals to bind such groups to make public data on their activity. But certain voices in Parliament complain over the weakness generated by the heavy dependence on lobby group recommendations, and support, on the contrary, the employment of additional staff in expert committees. Alexander Stubb, the author of a recent EP report on the topic, stated convincingly, “*European Deputies are*

smart enough to realise that the information they get is subjective.”

A concrete initiative was only launched in late 2006, when EC vice-president Siim Kallas proposed the publication of a European registry of lobby groups. SEAP members were no late in upholding the voluntary registration procedure. But many others believe that a voluntary registration system cannot work efficiently: it is precisely the controversial groups and people which will avoid this option. This is exactly why the idea was put forth of introducing clear benefits and advantages for those who choose to register.

Thus, on 21 March 2007 the Commission adopted the Communication “*Follow-up to the Green Paper ‘European Transparency Initiative’*”¹⁴ that includes the decision to establish a framework for its relations with interest representatives. Four steps were drafted and accepted:

- Create and launch a new voluntary Register for interest representatives in spring 2008;
- Draft a Code of Conduct. Respect for the Code will be a requirement for entry in the Register and will be monitored by the Commission;
- Establish a monitoring and enforcement mechanism for the Code and the Register;
- Increase transparency through reinforced application of the Commission’s consultation standards based, in particular, on a standard website for internet consultations.

Debates further heated up as the European Commission proposed that financial information be made public, in an October 8, 2007 seminar organised by the *Constitutional Affairs Committee*. But the supporters of this initiative make it conditional on its application

¹⁴ COM(2007) 127 final

to all groups of interests. As long as registration is voluntary, the result can only be a distortion of competition. Its most fierce opponents claim, on the other hand, that the disclosure of customers comes against confidentiality rules and may entail criminal penalties.

In spite of such initiatives, transparency is still a goal. Only in the spring of 2008 groups of interests are able to voluntarily enter their data in an official European registry. On March 2008, further clarifications about the transparency measures progress have been provided by the Commission, as well as a *Code of Conduct* established following a public consultation¹⁵.

- *On one hand* more information is needed on the activities and operators included in the definitions of “interest representation” - activities for which registration is expected, and “interest representative” - entities which are expected to register.
- *On the other hand*, given the number of groups which threaten to boycott the registration, a compulsory registration system is likely to be introduced in the near future. After all, chances are the disclosure of details regarding specific interest carriers, the funds allocated, the revenues and expenditure of lobby companies will not become compulsory sooner than in 2009.

Nevertheless, the European inter-institutional approach is fragmented. Thus, the invitation to register and to accept the Code of Conduct will apply for interest representatives in their dealings with the European

Commission only. The voice of any group of interests should however be channeled in EU through an inter-institutional one-stop-shop register and code. A closer cooperation in this area is expected from the Commission, the European Parliament, the Committee of the Regions and the Economic and Social Committee.

Lobbying in Romania: what may be done?

Lobbyocracy is yet to be clearly regulated in Romania as well. Professionalisation of interest groups on the basis of best practice codes, as a form of self-regulation, must be followed by the recognition of the lobbyist profession, i.e. its introduction in the *National Occupations Classification List*¹⁶. And, why not, regulations of the field should result in a distinct law, as only Georgia (1998), Lithuania (2001) and Poland (2005) have in Central and Eastern Europe.

Some civil society members criticised a prospective lobby act, on grounds such as: the emergence of a privileged class (the lobbyists); generation of unilateral benefits for the better informed groups of interests; hindering citizens' access to elected representatives or public institution officials; discouraging citizens' direct participation in decision making; the existence of laws which already include provisions likely to facilitate civil participation etc.

We should keep in mind however that the lobby regulation is both a normative, and an institutional matter. At a normative level, we may choose between legislating on lobbying activities and registration of interest groups. But, as mentioned from the very beginning, a

¹⁵ COM(2008) 323 final, Communication from the Commission European Transparency Initiative: A framework for relations with interest representatives (Register and Code of Conduct) {SEC(2008) 1926}, Brussels, 27.5.2008, http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/323_en.pdf

¹⁶ The current CAEN Code 7414 (*Business and management consulting activities*), although rather vague, seems acceptable for professional lobbying.

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clear-cut distinction must be made between advocacy and lobbying. At an institutional level, the monitoring of actors in the lobby arena may be entrusted to a self-regulation committee (an ethics committee, as requested by certain civil society organisations). The committee activity should be regulated so as to clarify aspects related to the registration, investigation and disciplinary procedures available to the committee, to ensure its financial autonomy, its independence and objectivity etc.

But drawing up a basic code of conduct, comprising the central principles that guide lobby activities, is without doubt the first necessary step. It is aimed at ensuring the transparency and legitimacy of lobbying, based on the constitutional rights to petition, to freedom of opinion and of association; the non-exclusive nature of lobbying; the responsibility of all stakeholders; the fair competition between interests supported by various groups, and so on.

The Romanian lobby market certainly has huge development potential, although active players are less visible. *Central Europe Consulting Government Relations* is the first Romanian private lobby company¹⁷. It looks like obvious that the strong multinational companies do have their own lobbying departments, but the SMEs need this kind of assistance. We still lack a *Romanian Business Centre* in Brussels that should provide professional consultancy services in the field of European affairs. No active voice is heard within the European institutions. No team to offer Romanian clients consultancy services by using theoretical knowledge in different

areas of community policies and practical experience in the field of EU institutions. The number of Romanian experts working within the European Council, the Commission and the Parliament is to increase from 150 to 1500 persons. Ireland, Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Sweden, Spain, Croatia or even Malta has this kind of business offices.

Relations with the European partners take place rather on a sectoral or association basis. It is the case, for example, of UNPR's affiliation to the *European Builders Confederation*¹⁸ and to the *SME Union of EPP*¹⁹ or that of PFR (*Romanian Pharmacists Patronage*) to PGEU²⁰ (*The Pharmaceutical Group of the European Union*). On the contrary, the *National Wine Association* (*Patronatului National al Vinului - PNV*) is not yet promoting their interests at the EU level and lost relevant shares on these markets.

Let's call for a particular case relevance. The European Commission has set up a "*High Level Expert Group on Administrative Burdens*". There are no real entrepreneurs in this expert group and no representatives from the new member countries from Eastern Europe. In response, the *SME Union of EPP* decided to set up a "low" level group to fight administrative burdens comprised of small and medium entrepreneurs who have suffered from bureaucratic obstacles first-hand. Their group will present the results after 6 months and will not spend millions of Euros for consultants. They will be able to speak from their own experience. Still, good contacts to the European Commission and to the European Parliament members help to shape the EU policy and legislation in a more friendly way.

Another example from the civil society is

¹⁷ Since May 2007 it has been operating under a new name, *Candole Partners*, based in Prague. The EU accession offered the company a wider consulting area, targeting clients from all the six EU Member States in Central and South-Eastern Europe.

¹⁸ <http://www.eubuilders.org/>

¹⁹ <http://www.sme-union.org/>

²⁰ <http://www.pgeu.eu/>

"EUROLINK" *House of Europe*, which launched a government-supported integrated information, training and consulting project, offering free of charge services to the business community and the local communities which are to contract local/regional projects financed by EU funds²¹.

A Bruxelloise Romanian diaspora initiative materialized into the "*Romanian-EU Club*"²², a non-political, non-governmental and self-sustained financially think-tank. Its main goal is the promotion of the Romanian image in the European environment and the dissemination of the European principles and values in Romania.

Regional lobbying is still at an early, amateur stage in Romania. Since January 1, 2007, Romanian local and county authorities have had the unique opportunity to take part in EU consultation mechanisms and to promote their interests in the European arena. But this unfamiliar situation for us requires the existence of specialised structures to facilitate the access to the European decision making as efficiently as possible. Representatives of Romanian counties and cities are thus seeking ways to promote their projects, using their own means or jointly with other agencies. However, while the representation of sub-national interests is entrusted to county authorities, most large-scale projects as well as the EU regional policy strategy focus on the eight development regions. In Romania's case, the eight development regions currently lack legal personality and, as such, international representation rights. Notwithstanding this

particular situation, counties have learned that they must work together, both as regards the contact with European authorities, and in accessing major project funding.

To enhance the consistency and improve the management of lobby and information activities, Romanian officials either work together in the Capital of Europe, within the *Office of the National Union of the Romanian County Councils*, or have set up their own information and lobby offices. The most important structure which fosters the interests of Romanian local authorities is the *National Union of Romanian County Councils* (UNCJR), established in 2004²³. Precisely, in order to better cover as wide areas as possible, in both geographic and thematic terms, County Councils are organised within the Union both on an individual basis, and as associations, by regions or common interests.

At the launch of the new Office formula, in October 2005, UNCJR president Liviu Dragnea (Teleorman County Council), presented the goal and importance of the bureau: "We compete with dozens of other European regions, which have a tradition in accessing structural funds. This is why we need experts who are thoroughly familiar with the problems in the county that they represent and who can present projects in Brussels which may be financed. It will be tough, but not impossible, because we have already made the first step towards this money: we are here. Unless you are in Brussels, you don't exist."

But before having strong institutions, what we need above all is clearly defined rules and procedures. We are yet to develop a framework to enable political players and institutions to relate, and, when necessary, to

²¹ A second component of the EUROLINK *lobbying* is aimed at enhancing the competition discipline in the Romanian market, at the rapid management adjustment of companies before or after mergers/acquisitions, as well as at streamlining the European fund absorption.

²² <http://www.euro-club.org/despre-noi.html>, established in 2003

²³ UNCJR is registered as a non-governmental organisation, which brings together, on a voluntary consent basis, the 41 County Councils in Romania, as legal entities.

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apply sanctions. The tardy or inadequate reactions of institutions to various crises are sound proof of these flaws, inadequacies and failures to adjust.

Paradoxically, while there is an overabundance of normative acts in Romania, procedures come in short supply - particularly when it comes to institutional relations. There

are forms without a substance, we set up new bodies but we are hardly concerned with the causes of and solutions to the problems that we discuss. Becoming aware of our own interest and pursuing it with the help of specialised lobby companies is a necessary solution: a new principle, a new value, a compromise accepted in order to move on.