

New Kids on the Democracy Block: Europeanisation of Interest Groups in Central and Eastern Europe

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Abstract

The 2004 EU enlargement and related Europeanisation processes supported the development of stagnated interest group systems in many ways, including with respect to the professionalisation of mainly voluntary-based organisations in Central and Eastern Europe. In the pre-membership period and initial years after joining the EU, national interest groups from Central and Eastern Europe chiefly relied on EU-level interest groups for important information, knowledge, and know-how concerning EU policymaking, whereas 20 years of membership has today established them as equal partners and co-decision-makers. The article elaborates on the Europeanisation of interest groups in the Central and Eastern Europe region from the start of the process of accession to the EU, with three case studies in focus: Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia. The main research question is: In which different ways has the Europeanisation process influenced interest groups in the region? To address it, the article builds on Johansson and Jacobsson’s (2016) typology of the Europeanisation of interest groups. Six exploratory factors were examined in this regard: (a) contacts with EU policymakers and institutions, (b) interest in EU policymaking, (c) funding received from EU projects and programmes, (d) networking with EU umbrella organisations, (e) participation in open consultations, and (f) the relationship of the group with members. To study the effects of Europeanisation processes in selected countries, web survey data gathered from national interest groups as part of the Comparative Interest Groups Survey project were used. Our results show that interest groups from Central and Eastern Europe have become “European” in a range of ways. Regulatory and discursive Europeanisation is most typical for Polish interest groups, identity Europeanisation for Lithuanian interest groups, and financial and participatory Europeanisation for Lithuanian and Polish interest groups, while organisational Europeanisation has the strongest effect on interest groups in Slovenia.

Keywords

Central and Eastern Europe; European Union; Europeanisation; interest groups; Lithuania; Poland; policymaking; Slovenia

1. Introduction

The process of Europeanisation is responsible for important changes in politics, institutions, administration, political culture, and actors in states that join the EU. This effect has gradually been strengthening as the EU acquires more competencies and influence in relation to various policy areas and as it further enlarges. For newer member states that have approached the EU since 2004, the mentioned effect was more intense since in a relatively short time period they needed to adapt to the membership as well as adopt the *acquis*. Another characteristic of the Europeanisation of newer member states is that they are largely new democracies with a socialist past, which also had to adapt to a democratic way of making policy.

The processes associated with Europeanisation have emerged as an important research area in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE; Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). The effects of Europeanisation on the executive (Fink-Hafner, 2005; Zubek, 2008), party systems (Fink-Hafner, 2007b, 2008; Lewis & Mansfeldová, 2007), administration (Ágh, 2013; Fink-Hafner, 2007a), and political parties (Fink-Hafner, 2004; Hafner-Fink et al., 2011; von dem Berge & Poguntke, 2013) have already been addressed. To a large extent, research focused also on the Europeanisation of interest groups (e.g., Czarnecki & Riedel, 2021a, 2021b; Jankauskaitė, 2017).

The focus of this article concerns the different types of Europeanisation of interest groups from CEE. We understand interest groups in a broad sense as organised groups that have some sort of constituency. These groups are either politically active or their political activity is latent. They have the interest and capacity to be active but most of the time their activity is not political (Beyers et al., 2020). A comparative approach is adopted with interest group populations from three post-socialist regions being analysed to ensure a good representation of CEE. Three case studies were performed, namely Lithuania from the Baltic states, Poland from the Visegrád countries, and Slovenia from the former republics of Yugoslavia. All three countries underwent a similar democratic transition and changes to their political systems in the 1980s. Lithuania and Slovenia also had to establish themselves anew as an independent state by additionally establishing new political institutions and expanding their administrations. This process took place alongside the processes involved in Europeanisation and with the opening of borders and setting up a market economy. The individual impact of Europeanisation on these countries is thus unknown and difficult to measure. Besides being new democracies their interest group systems are young (Hanegraaff et al., 2020), were established and developed quickly in the 1990s, and played an important role during the transition. At the same time, the three selected cases demonstrate differences in the region. Slovenia has a neocorporatist system, Poland incorporates neocorporatist tradition in a pluralist approach, while Lithuania predominantly has a pluralist model (Rozbicka et al., 2021). In the last years Poland and Slovenia (for the later, between 2020 and 2022) were confronted by democratic backsliding (Labanino & Dobbins, 2023a, 2023b; Pospieszna & Vetulani-Cęgiel, 2021).

The interest group system began to develop in Lithuania between 1918 and 1940. This has hitherto entailed several stages: the interwar period, the Soviet era, and the era of liberal democracy. The Soviet regime was the most difficult period for interest groups since although some professional associations, creative societies, and trade unions did exist, they enjoyed little autonomy and were largely controlled by the state. During the transition period, certain organisations like environmental, human rights, and equal opportunities groups became more autonomous (Rozbicka et al., 2021, pp. 29–30). Upon independence, interest groups remained on the periphery of the political process. In 2005, interest groups in Lithuania were still seen as

underdeveloped, with little professionalisation, relying on personal connections, a weak trade union lobby, and a negative image often associated with corruption (Hrebenar et al., 2008). However, while the interest group system remains weak and poorly developed, it has started to Europeanise, develop, and become more engaged with the EU level (Jankauskaitė, 2017).

In Poland, the interest group system began to develop during the democratic transition of the 1980s and 1990s with the social movement Solidarity. Later, despite the neocorporatist tradition, disagreement between the elites and workers caused the number of trade union members to drop and the rise in employers' associations and business organisations to stagnate, while the number of new associations (especially issue-oriented ones) started to grow rapidly also due to the process of joining the EU (Rozbicka et al., 2021, pp. 30–31). The decade between 2010 and 2020 was marked by democratic regression and showed the inefficiency of post-enlargement conditionality (Riedel et al., 2022). The democratic backsliding has seen already established interest groups face new challenges, while groups reliant on governmental funding have become more vulnerable (Pospieszna & Vetulani-Cęgiel, 2021).

The interest group system in Slovenia initially developed with the March Revolution in the 19th century. It reached the level seen in Western European countries before the Second World War (Kolarič et al., 2002). Nevertheless, following the change in the political system and the introduction of the socialist system during the time of Yugoslavia, any further interest group development was frozen for some decades. New social movements developed in the 1980s concerned with the peace movement, feminists, anti-psychiatry, LGBT rights, and the environment that were able to place fresh issues on the political agenda and apply pressure on the government in the direction of becoming democratic (Fink-Hafner, 1992). During the transition period and after the country attained independence, the number of interest groups escalated (Črnak-Meglič & Rakar, 2009; Fink-Hafner, 1998). Organisations based on almost voluntary bases commenced networking and cooperating with similar and umbrella organisations from Europe and elsewhere with the goal of acquiring relevant information and skills (Fink-Hafner, 2007c).

The focus of this article is on the influence of Europeanisation on interest groups following the process of joining the EU engaged in by selected countries from CEE. Our main research question is: In which different ways have Europeanisation processes influenced interest groups from CEE? To answer this question, we build on the typology of Europeanisation of interest groups theoretically developed by Johansson and Jacobsson (2016) and concentrate on six factors explaining the Europeanisation of interest groups: (a) contacts with EU policymakers and institutions, (b) interest in EU policymaking, (c) funding received from EU projects and programmes, (d) networking with EU-level umbrella organisations, (e) participation in open consultations, and (f) relationship of a group with its members. Each Europeanisation type is analysed separately and the correlation between different interest group types is examined. The comparative approach is useful for determining country differences in CEE. In our analysis, we concentrate on the influence of Europeanisation after more than 10 years of membership (we use data collected from 2016 until 2018).

The article continues by defining the processes of Europeanisation as they concern interest groups. The next section explains the role played by interest groups in EU policymaking during the accession stage and membership period. A description of the methodology and data is followed by the empirical analysis and the main conclusions of the article where the possible effects of the Europeanisation of interest groups on the EU's own internal dynamics are also discussed.

2. The Europeanisation of Interest Groups

An overview of the literature does not point to a single, agreed definition of the process of Europeanisation. In most political science literature, the Europeanisation process is viewed as a complex and multidimensional process connected to innovation, modernisation, changes, or adaptation. This makes it necessary to define Europeanisation every time the concept is used (Radaelli, 2000, 2003). To study the Europeanisation of interest groups, focus is placed on the analysis of public policy actors (Kanol, 2016). In this regard, Maurer et al. (2003, p. 54) define Europeanisation as a process in which governmental, parliamentary and non-governmental actors change their attention to and invest their resources and time in EU policymaking, whereas Johansson and Jacobsson (2016) define the actors-centred approach as honing in on what national actors “do” with the EU in national processes. National public policy actors can take an active stance in EU policymaking by engaging, interpreting, appropriating, or ignoring the processes involved with European integration (Woll & Jacquot, 2010, p. 113). Accordingly, we can note the recent growth in interest in the Europeanisation of interest groups as scholars principally consider the role of interest groups in EU policymaking, their participation in EU-level umbrella organisations, and the effects of EU funding on interest groups (e.g., Dür & Mateo, 2014; Johansson & Jacobsson, 2016; Kanol, 2016; Klüver, 2010; Maloney et al., 2018; Pritoni, 2017; Sanchez Salgado, 2014; Sanchez Salgado & Demidov, 2018).

The EU offers many ways of accession to decision-makers that interest groups can take advantage of (Beyers, 2002, p. 591). Further, the EU has available various legal, financial, cognitive, normative, political, and institutional resources that interest groups can use to engage in political activities with the aim of influencing policy (Woll & Jacquot, 2010). Interest groups must take advantage of these opportunities if they wish to influence the outcomes of policy. Moreover, national interest groups should follow a “dual strategy” to promote their interests in front of national and EU institutions to boost their impact on the EU public policy process (Eising, 2004, p. 216). We view the Europeanisation of interest groups as meaning their increased role in the processes of EU policymaking on the national level as well as becoming preoccupied with the European dimension instead of the national one (Warleigh, 2001, p. 620). Interest groups may refer to the EU and use it when they need it and otherwise refer to the national level (Johansson & Jacobsson, 2016). At the same time, institutions can trigger changes in domestic actors’ and interest groups’ interests, ideas, and identities as part of a process of learning (Risse et al., 2001, p. 12). Johansson and Jacobsson (2016) stress that interest groups are not only objects of Europeanisation but also themselves exert an influence on the EU and are hence also subjects of Europeanisation.

Interest groups may engage in Europeanisation processes in different ways. Johansson and Jacobsson (2016) define six types of the Europeanisation of interest groups.

1. Regulatory Europeanisation, which takes the shaping of the legal environment in which interest groups are active into consideration. Here, interest groups adapt to the changes and engage in lobbying with the intention to influence these policy changes.
2. Discursive Europeanisation, which occurs via changes in thinking about policy, politics, or policies, affects the agenda orientation of interest groups, and builds a common pool of knowledge on the EU level. Interest groups may also resist and reject European ideas and norms.
3. Financial Europeanisation, which points to the dependency of interest groups on EU funding. For EU-level organisations, funding coming from EU projects and programmes is very important, yet it also

includes funding for national, regional, and local interest groups (Mahoney & Beckstrand, 2011; Sanchez Salgado, 2014).

4. Organisational Europeanisation, which can translate to interest groups being involved in EU-level umbrella organisations or networking with similar organisations from EU member states and their multilevel relationship. Inclusion in an EU-level organisation can be a strategy to influence EU policymaking or help interest groups influence domestic policymaking by enabling dialogue with national institutions (Fink-Hafner, 2007c).
5. Participatory Europeanisation, which refers to changes in participatory opportunities like possibilities to participate in the European Citizens' Initiative, open consultations of the European Commission, or other arenas such as European Social Forums.
6. Identity Europeanisation, which happens through social interactions as individuals network and participate in a European process. Here, the political socialisation function of interest groups (Warleigh, 2001) is important. Besides interest groups having an influence on the outcomes of EU policy, interest groups should also educate their constituency about EU public policies and include them while formulating the group's positions with respect to EU-related topics (Warleigh, 2001, p. 623).

The EU is not simply located in the Brussels bubble but its impacts are felt well beyond (Sanchez Salgado & Demidov, 2018) and influence interest groups in a variety of ways, which is the main argument put forward in this article.

3. The Europeanisation of Interest Groups in CEE

Even though EU institutions and public policies create additional opportunities for national organisations to influence public policies, not all national organisations decide to take advantage of EU access points (Beyers & Kerremans, 2007, p. 460). Interest groups' level of involvement in EU policymaking as they try to pursue their goals depends on various factors (Lundberg & Sedelius, 2014, p. 323). While an important minority of interest groups advocate their interests regularly on the EU level, most groups (and those representing business interests) primarily remain active only on the national level (Eising, 2008, p. 16). Despite national interest groups recognising the importance of EU policymaking and attempting to influence EU policies, their priorities are still mostly focused on the national and local levels (Lundberg & Sedelius, 2014, p. 323).

The Europeanisation of interest groups from CEE commenced in the mid-1990s when countries from CEE were applying for EU membership. Already during the accession processes, the effects of the Europeanisation on interest groups from CEE were noticeable. In fact, the effects of Europeanisation were more substantial than the effects brought by changing the political system. The Europeanisation process in CEE occurred in the same timeframe as the population of interest groups was growing. Europeanisation thereby contributed to the establishment of new interest groups and the pluralisation of the interest group system (Rozbicka et al., 2021, pp. 199–200). For interest groups from CEE, the EU level also represented an extra option for financing. Funding arising from EU projects and programmes has become ever more important considering the austerity measures during the economic crises and the lack of citizens' support in the form of donations (Stakeholder meeting at the event Faces of Civil Society in the European Union, May 16, 2018). The EU is, after all, one of the key public funders. Several interest groups are financially supported by the EU since European funding is part of a broader strategy for decreasing the democratic deficit and increasing political participation (Sanchez Salgado, 2014, p. 337).

Another more noticeable effect of Europeanisation is networking with European organisations. Even during the accession stage, national interest groups from CEE were starting to collaborate with EU umbrella organisations (Fink-Hafner, 2007c). The collective representation of interests and access to policy information are vital reasons for joining EU-level umbrella organisations, whereas the material encouragement given by EU-level organisations to their national member organisation only play a minor role (Eising, 2008, p. 15).

Yet, at the same time, interest groups' contacts with EU-level decision-makers and institutions have remained very limited and few resources are invested in EU-level lobbying (Rozbicka et al., 2021). When interest groups decide to contact EU institutions, the issue needs to be particularly important for them. They also prefer to contact institutions with national representatives such as national members of the European Parliament or Council of the EU where they can contact the permanent representation of the country to the EU in Brussels, or national ministries and officials. Another preference for inclusion in EU policymaking is participation in the process of preparing national positions on legislative proposals of the European Commission (Novak & Lajh, 2018).

The European integration process has clearly affected and altered interest groups in several ways. Fink-Hafner et al. (2015a, p. 81) described five ways in which Europeanisation has influenced the ways interest groups function: (a) the institutional opportunity structure for interest group activities, where the interest group-parliament's relationship has been changed following adaptation to being integrated into the EU political system, while the role of the executive has strengthened; (b) the internationalisation of some interest groups through membership in EU organisations that offered support in the form of know-how and experiences; (c) interest groups' political culture in the way that they become more politically active; (d) changes in interest groups' organisational modes; and (e) the influence of interest groups within the national and EU political systems in the direction of becoming more influential (Fink-Hafner et al., 2015a, p. 81). Notwithstanding that Europeanisation has influenced interest groups in the sense of more activities and influence, interest groups from CEE compared with some older and bigger member states remain less active when it comes to being involved in EU-level policymaking (Rozbicka et al., 2021).

4. Data and Methods

In the empirical part of the article, we examine the current stage of the Europeanisation of interest groups from CEE. We understand the Europeanisation processes more broadly than just contacts with EU decision-makers, namely as a process that influences national interest groups in several ways.

The analysis is based on data collected in an original cross-national survey of interest groups (Beyers et al., 2020). The analysis is limited to the cases of Lithuania ($n = 365$, response rate 40%), Poland ($n = 380$, response rate 28%), and Slovenia ($n = 439$, response rate 36%; Beyers et al., 2020). First, the interest group population on the national level was comprehensively mapped, with the survey then being submitted to all groups in the population. Interest groups were defined as non-governmental organised groups that act for the purpose of influencing political decisions. We also included in the survey latent groups whose primary purpose might not be influencing political decisions (Beyers et al., 2020).

In the empirical analysis, we address the research question concerning which different ways Europeanisation processes have influenced interest groups from CEE. We view Europeanisation as a process that influences

interest groups in various ways and build on the typology developed by Johansson and Jacobsson (2016). In the first part of the analysis, we elaborate on the status of interest groups from CEE in a particular type of Europeanisation. In the second part, we test the correlation between different types of Europeanisation. In this way, we test our assumption that interest group systems can be Europeanised in different ways and check the correlation between different Europeanisation types.

Based on the data available in the mentioned survey, we operationalised each type of Europeanisation with the following variables.

The first variable was *regulatory Europeanisation*, which covers the contacts engaged by interest groups with EU-level institutions over the previous year. The exact question wording was as follows: “During the last 12 months, how often has your group actively sought access to the following EU-level institutions and agencies in order to influence public policies?” The interest groups evaluated the frequency of contacts on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means *we did not seek access*, 2 means *at least once*, 3 *at least once every three months*, 4 *at least once a month*, and 5 *at least once a week*. The focus was on the seven particular sets of contacts: commissioners and their cabinets, officials in the Directorate-Generals of the Commission, member state delegations/permanent representations in Brussels, the Council Secretariat, the leadership of EP party groups and/or European party federations, and other members of the European Parliament and European regulatory agencies. Values for the frequency of contacts with institutions were added together and divided by seven to obtain the average frequency of contacts with EU institutions.

The second variable was *discursive Europeanisation*, which was operationalised as the increase in interest in EU policymaking. The exact question wording was: “Policies originating from the European Union have a different level of importance for different organisations. How important are these policies for your organisation?” EU policies are *the most important focus* (1), *an important focus* (2), *a less important focus* (3), *other areas take up more of our time* (4), or *of no importance whatsoever* (5).”

The third variable, *financial Europeanisation*, was operationalised as funds received from EU projects and programmes. The exact question wording was: “Organisations obtain financial support from different sources. Please indicate the percentage of your organisation’s 2015 budget that came from: Funding from the EU (e.g., payments from EU projects or programmes).”

Fourth, *organisational Europeanisation* was operationalised by networking with EU-level interest groups. The exact question wording was: “One way of achieving your goals is by becoming a member of a European or international interest organisation or network. Are you a member of one or more European/international organisations or networks?”

The fifth variable was *participatory Europeanisation*, which considers taking advantage of different opportunity structures on the EU level. Since we have no data regarding participation at open consultations or on advisory boards organised at the EU level, we analysed the data for general participation in consultations and advisory boards. The exact question wordings were: “During the last 12 months, how often has your organisation been involved in any of the following activities? a) Responded to open consultations by the government; b) Served on advisory commissions or boards?” The frequency of participation was measured on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means *we did not do this*, 2 means *at least once*, 3 *at least once every three months*, 4 *at least*

once a month, and 5 at least once a week. The answers to both questions were added together and divided by two to obtain the average frequency for participation in opportunity structures. Although we are aware that participation in national consultations can be driven by domestic dynamics, we build on findings that Europeanisation changes interest groups' behaviour in the direction of more proactive lobbying also at the national level (see Fink-Hafner et al., 2015b).

Lastly, *identity Europeanisation* considers the relationship between interest groups and their members. We analysed answers to two questions: the influence of the membership on the organisation's position on public policies and the influence of the membership on the organisation's decisions on political strategies. The wording of the first question was: "Thinking about your organisation's position on public policies, how would you rate the influence of the following actors?" with "your membership" being the one of the categories up for consideration. The answers were given on a scale from 1 to 4, where 1 means *very influential*, 2 means *somewhat influential*, 3 *not very influential*, and 4 *not at all influential*. The wording of the second question was: "Thinking about your organisation's decisions on political strategies, how would you rate the influence of the following actors?" with "your membership" being the one of the categories up for consideration. Answers were provided on the same 1–4 scale. The answers to both questions were later added together and divided by two to obtain the average influence of members within interest groups. This type of Europeanisation has some limits in the analyses. Questions about the influence of interest groups were only asked when interest groups had a membership base.

5. Analysis and Results

5.1. Regulatory Europeanisation

Interest groups from CEE have very few contacts with EU institutions. This might not be surprising given that interest groups are active in a specific area and policies are not constantly being formulated for this area. Further, Brussels is quite distant from interest groups from CEE and the cost of contacting EU institutions is high. Interest groups accordingly probably limit their contacts to the amount that is strictly necessary. However, 71.3% of interest groups from Lithuania, 65.9% from Poland, and 78.5% from Slovenia did not contact EU institutions at all in a period of one year (see Figure 1). The frequency of contacts with individual EU institutions is also similar among the countries. Poland stands out with slightly more frequent contact with all EU decision-makers, while Slovenian interest groups lag behind with the least frequent contact with EU decision-makers. We could hypothesise that Polish interest groups are more active also due to the size of their country. While both Lithuania and Slovenia are smaller EU member states, Poland is characterised as a large EU member state. The only exceptions are contacts with the leadership of European party groups and federations where interest groups from Lithuania share the same low frequency of contacts as Slovenian interest groups. The most frequent access is to members of the European Parliament. This is likely because interest groups can also contact members of parliament who come from their home country, which makes the European Parliament a more accessible institution. Carroll and Rasmussen (2017) in their comparative analysis of interest groups present in the European Parliament show that economic resources as well as cultural resources, such as membership of the population in civil society organisations, explain the engagement of interest groups from different countries with members of parliament, where CEE is known to have a lower tradition of civil society involvement. However, interest groups from Slovenia that have the highest level of civil society involvement among our three country cases (Novak & Hafner-Fink, 2015) also have the least frequent contact with EU institutions.

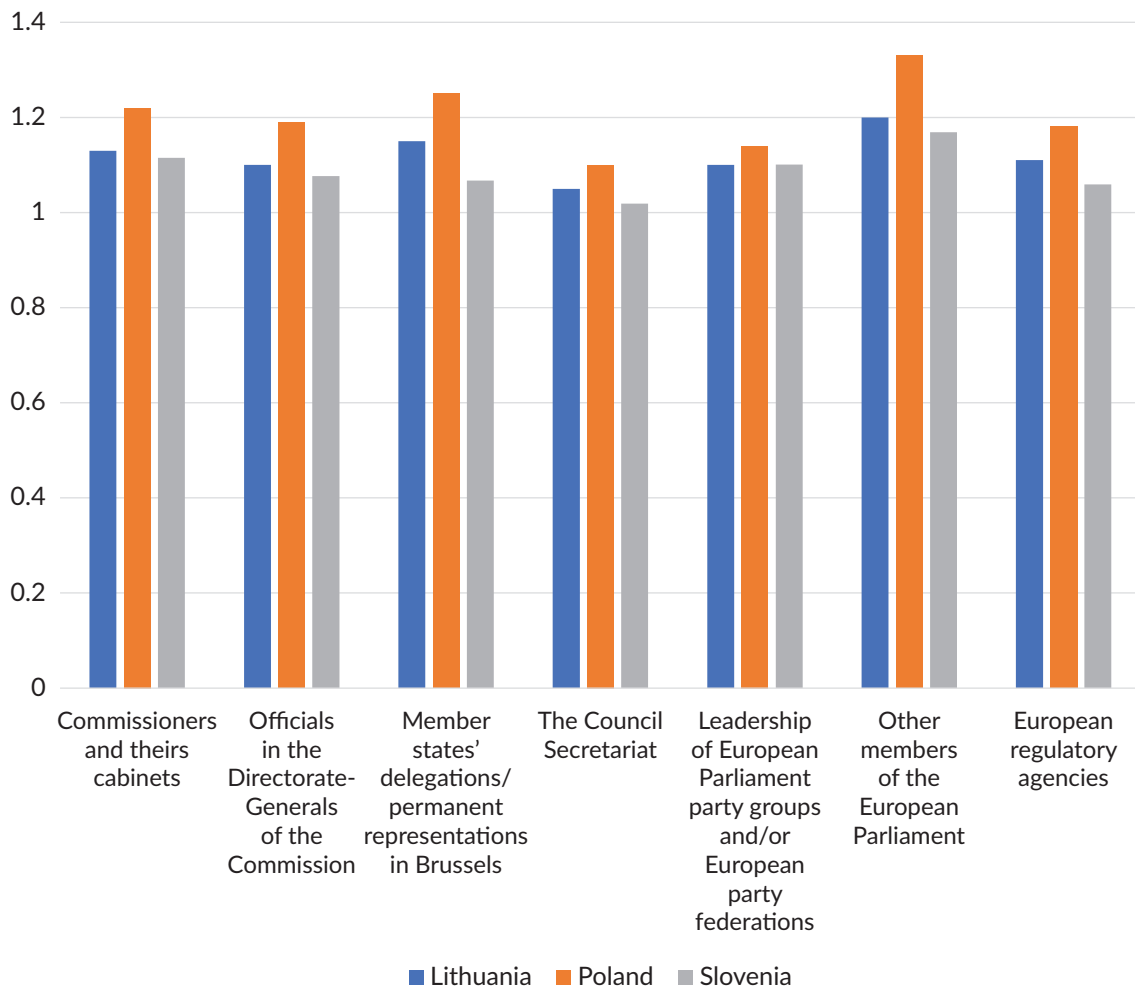


Figure 1. Frequency of contacts with EU institutions, mean value, where 0 means *we do not seek access* and 1 means *at least once*.

5.2. Discursive Europeanisation

Although interest groups from CEE rarely make contact with EU institutions, they still have an interest in EU policies and regard them as important. Almost 29% of Lithuanian interest groups, 50% of Polish interest groups, and 40% of Slovenian ones believe that EU policies are important or very important for them. On the other hand, for almost 21% of Lithuanian groups, 18% of Polish ones, and 26% of Slovenian ones EU policies hold no importance for them at all (see Figure 2). Polish interest groups that have the most frequent contacts with EU decision-makers also find EU policies the most important. While more Slovenian than Lithuanian interest groups with the least frequent contacts with EU decision-makers find EU policies to be important, they also regard them as not important at all. In Lithuania, the biggest share of interest groups finds other areas of policymaking more important. The importance of EU policies appears to not affect the frequency of contacts on the EU level, at least in the cumulative stage, although other research shows that contacts between interest groups and political parties can also be explained by interest groups engagement in EU policies (Berkhout et al., 2020). Professionalisation of interest groups and cooperation with other organisation could further increase interest in European lobbying environment (Labanino & Dobbins, 2023b).

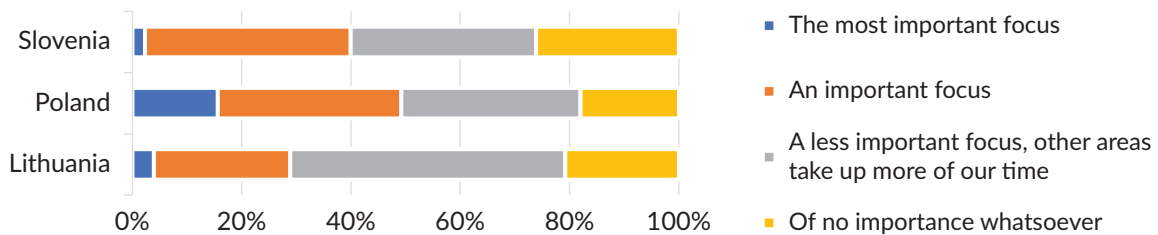


Figure 2. Importance of EU-level policymaking for interest groups from CEE.

5.3. Financial Europeanisation

EU funds can prove especially important for organisations without a stable funding source such as membership fees, national funds, or regular donations. For 36.57% of Lithuanian interest groups, 40.1% of Polish ones, and 17.3% of Slovenian ones, EU funds represent at least a partial financial source. On average, for interest groups that receive EU funds, they represent almost 35% of the budget of Lithuanian interest groups, 33% for Polish interest groups, and almost 25% for Slovenian interest groups. A larger share of Polish interest groups is financed by European funds, albeit this financing represents a bigger share of the budget of Lithuanian interest groups.

In countries that lack national funding or where there is no culture of citizens donating to support the causes of interest groups (Stakeholder meeting at the event Faces of Civil Society in the European Union, May 16, 2018), EU funds might be vital for the operation of interest groups. Financial Europeanisation has influenced interest groups in the sense that they are becoming more professionalised to be able to compete for these limited resources. However, EU funds are often short-term and subject to co-financing with the recipient's own resources. This is leading to short-termism in project-oriented financing, which for small interest groups from CEE may mean restricting their activities solely to projects and fundraising and relying on temporary, precarious staff (Stakeholder meeting at the event Faces of Civil Society in the European Union, May 16, 2018). The temporary nature of EU funds may also explain why EU funds are less important than national funding when it comes to the professional development of interest groups (Dobbins et al., 2022).

Simultaneously, the competition for EU funds is very strong. It demands the almost professional organisation of interest groups to be able to apply for these financial resources. Financing that comes from EU projects and programmes may thus become inaccessible for voluntary non-governmental interest groups. Research has demonstrated that interest groups from CEE that receive EU funding have bigger budgets, better access to national and EU decision-makers and are more likely to lobby (Novak & Lajh, 2019). Czarnecki and Riedel (2021a), on the other hand, showed that interest groups from CEE that receive EU funds find the EU more important but are not more likely to contact EU institutions.

5.4. Organisational Europeanisation

Networking with European organisations is undertaken by many interest groups from CEE. After all, membership in EU umbrella organisations is significant for the representation of CEE interest groups at the EU level (Czarnecki & Riedel, 2021a). Interest groups that are members of EU umbrella organisations are more likely to get access to European policymakers (Hanegraaff & van der Ploeg, 2020). More than 54% of

Lithuanian interest groups, 39% of Polish ones, and 60% of Slovenian ones are members of at least one network or umbrella organisation from abroad (see Figure 3). On average, Lithuanian interest groups are members of 1.7 such networks or umbrella organisations, Polish interest groups of 2.1, and Slovenian interest groups of 2.5. Slovenian interest groups are prominent with a high share of interest groups that network with similar organisations from abroad. Lithuanian interest groups also have a high share in this respect, while on average they are members of fewer international organisations.

Some differences can be observed among interest groups from various countries in CEE as concerns where they see the beneficial contributions of their membership in international organisations. Lithuanian and Polish interest groups view the information they obtain regarding international political developments to be key. The expertise and information interest groups can receive from European organisations are less important for Polish interest groups. Lithuanian interest groups find it particularly important that European organisations represent their interests in front of EU institutions, while only a small number of Slovenian interest groups benefit from judicial advice and access to government agencies and consultancies due to being a member of European organisations.

5.5. Participatory Europeanisation

Since we do not possess information concerning how often interest groups from CEE participate in open consultations organised at the EU level, in this article our interest is how frequently interest groups from CEE generally participate in opportunity structures. We build on the assumption that Europeanisation processes change interest groups' behaviour into a more proactive one also at the national level (see Fink-Hafner et al., 2015b). During the previous year, over 52% of Lithuanian, more than 61% of Polish, and

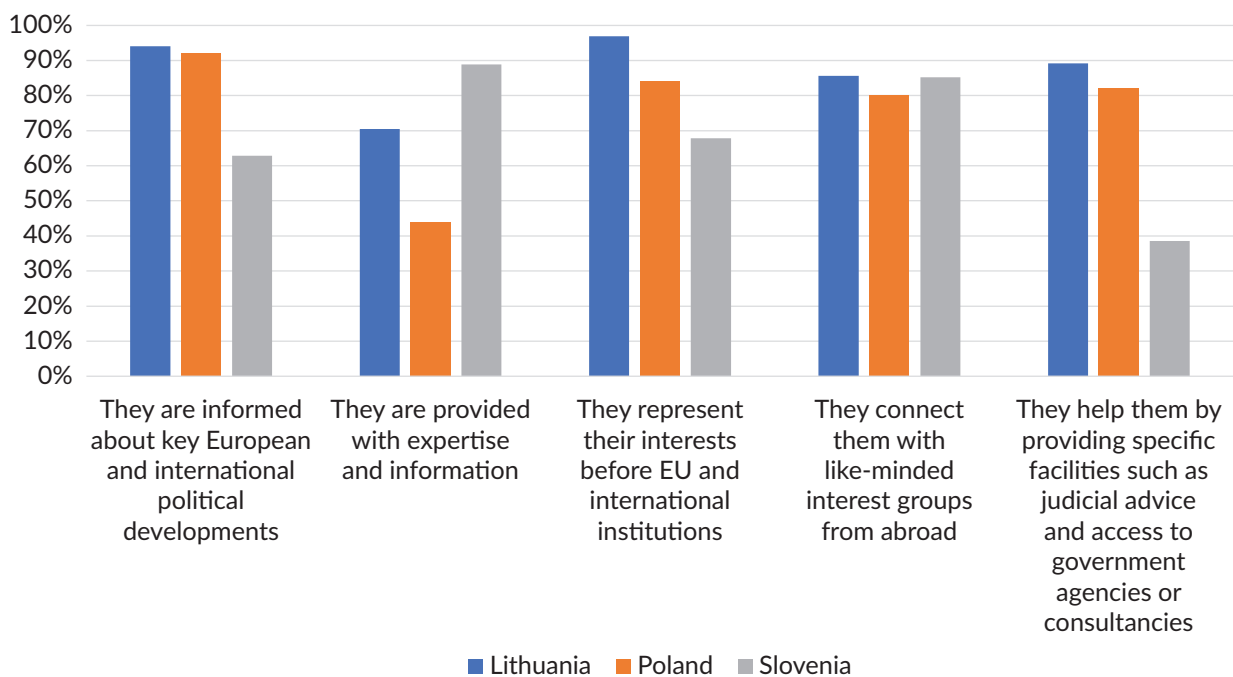


Figure 3. Benefits of membership in European and international organisations (combined share in percentage of very beneficial and partly beneficial).

less than 40% of Slovenian interest groups had participated at least once in public consultations (see Figure 4), whereas 69% of Lithuanian, 60% of Polish, and less than 45% of Slovenian interest groups participated in an advisory commission or board (see Figure 5).

Slovenian interest groups feature the lowest participation level in consultations and advisory boards. This could be connected with the small number of contacts with EU decision-makers. These interest groups' smaller inclusion in opportunity structures might also be a consequence of the big share of understaffed interest groups (almost 70% of the groups do not have any staff) or due to a lack of information about these opportunities. Nevertheless, engagement with national opportunity structures could be explained also by domestic dynamics, such as the level of corporatism (Slovenia has the highest level of neo-corporatism; Rozbicka et al., 2021). In comparison, Polish interest groups have the largest share of groups being included in consultations and quite a large share of being included on advisory boards. These groups have also frequent contact with EU-level decision-makers and just 25% of them have no employees. However, it is probably unlikely that, during a one-year timeframe, every interest group will have the opportunity to participate in a consultation. Although public policies are constantly being made, policies in a specific area of interest do not change all the time.

5.6. Identity Europeanisation

Identity Europeanisation can influence the relationship between an interest group and its membership base. Including members in the decision-making of interest groups is important for the political socialisation of the members and for building their social capital. This indicator was analysed only for interest groups that have members. Members are significantly more important in Lithuania, where in 90.4% of interest groups members have at least some influence on decisions made regarding political strategies, and in 88.8% of them, members

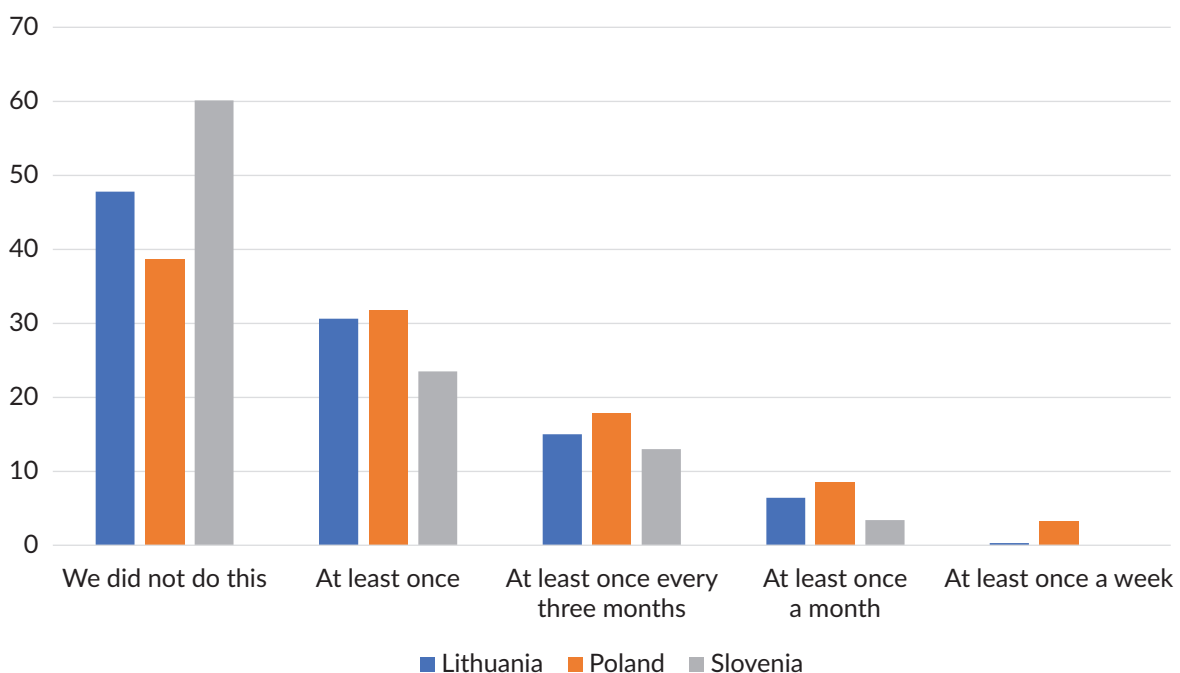


Figure 4. Frequency of participating in open consultations in the last year.

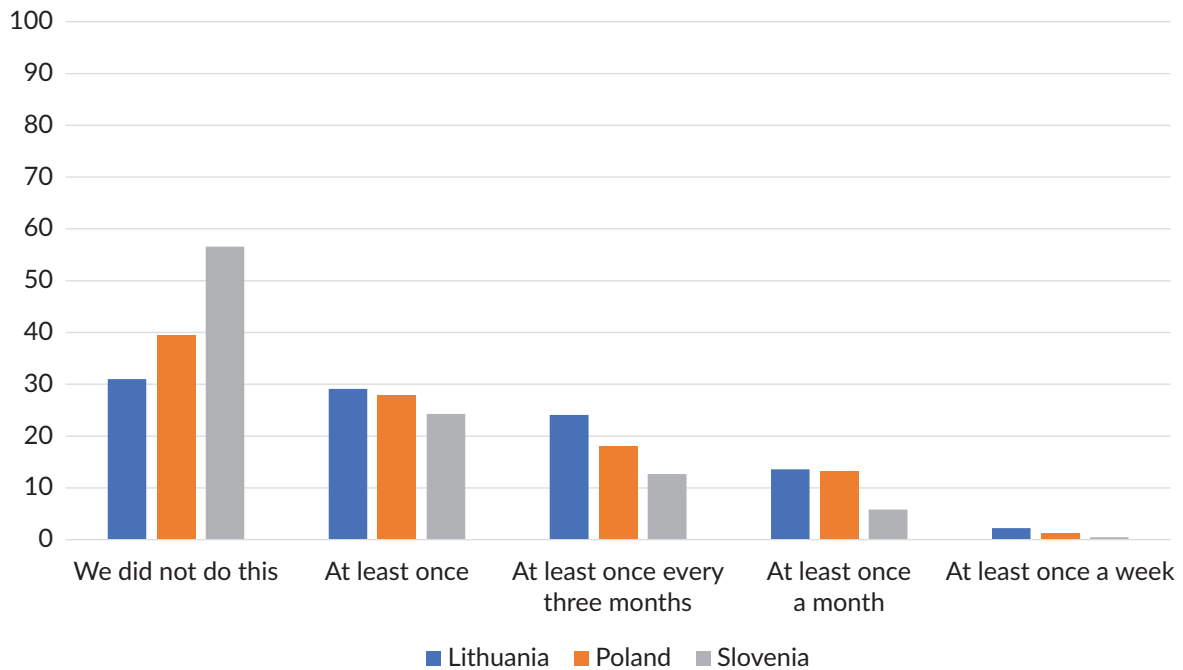


Figure 5. Frequency of participating in advisory commissions or board in the last year.

have at least some influence on the forming of positions on public policies. In 82% of Polish interest groups, members have some influence on decision-making concerning political strategies of the organisation, and in almost 79% of these groups, members have some influence in the forming of positions on public policies. On average, the members of Slovenian interest groups are less influential when the organisation is making decisions on political strategies and forming positions on public policies. In 76.9% of organisations, members have at least some influence when the organisation is making decisions on political strategies, and in 72% of them members have at least some influence while positions are being formed on public policies (see Figures 6 and 7). In general, members of interest groups from CEE, compared to those from Western Europe, have voices that are more influential in the internal decisions of their interest groups (Berkhout et al., 2023).

5.7. Correlations Between Different Types of Europeanisation

In the second stage of the analysis, we considered the correlation between different types of interest groups in Europeanisation. We performed bivariate correlation analysis and used Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The analysis was performed separately for each country.

Most of the Europeanisation types are correlated, showing that interest groups become Europeanised in various ways. It is not that some organisations follow one type of becoming Europeanised and others other types; instead, the same organisations follow different paths to Europeanisation (see Table 1). The direction of correlation shows that interest groups more interested in EU policymaking also contact EU institutions more frequently, a bigger share of their budgets comes from EU programmes and projects, and are more likely to be a member of European organisations. As the importance of EU policies for interest groups rises, so too does interest groups’ participation in open consultations and advisory commissions and boards. Interest groups in receipt of EU funds more often contact EU institutions and participate more frequently in different opportunity structures. Interest groups with greater contacts with EU institutions also participate

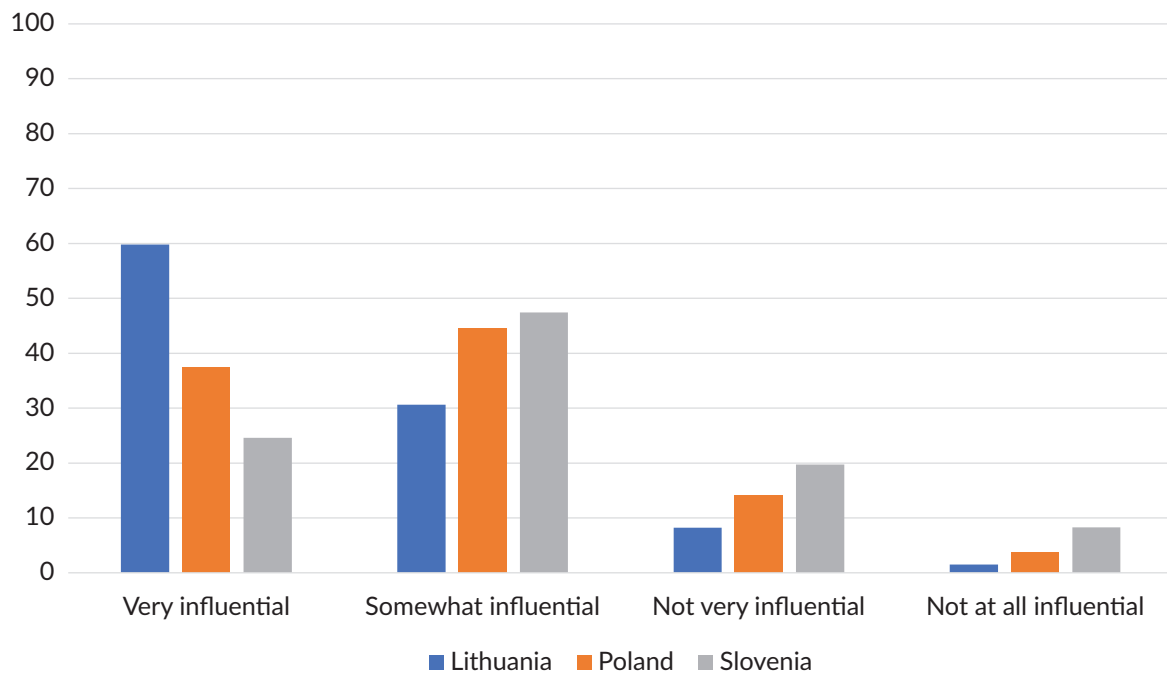


Figure 6. Influence of members in interest organisations on the positions of public policies.

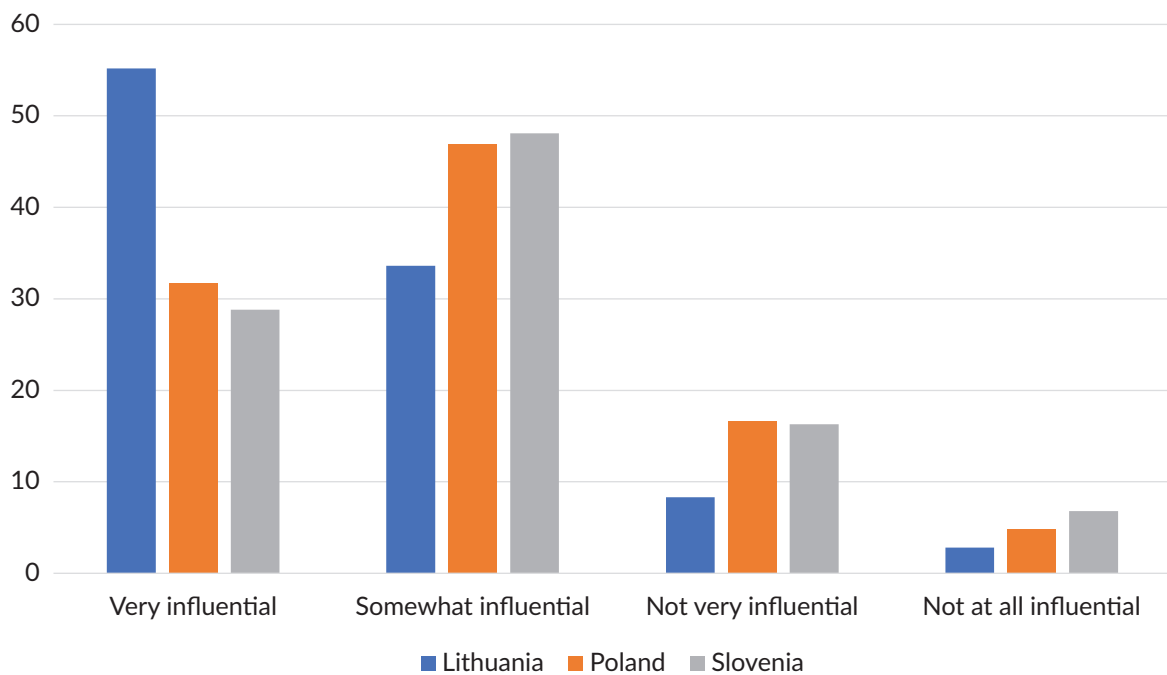


Figure 7. Influence of interest organisations' members on decisions on political strategies.

Table 1. Correlation among the types of Europeanisation.

	Pearson correlation	Regulatory Europeanisation	Discursive Europeanisation	Financial Europeanisation	Organisational Europeanisation	Participation Europeanisation	Identity Europeanisation
Regulatory Europeanisation	Lithuania	1	-0.346***	0.279***	0.280***	0.446***	-0.097*
	Poland	1	-0.423***	0.158*	0.295***	0.497***	-0.141
	Slovenia	1	-0.353***	0.246***	0.062	0.474***	-0.122*
Discursive Europeanisation	Lithuania	-0.346***	1	-0.212***	-0.253***	-0.379***	0.181***
	Poland	-0.423***	1	-0.213**	-0.347***	-0.492***	0.097
	Slovenia	-0.353***	1	-0.196***	-0.141***	-0.389***	0.200***
Financial Europeanisation	Lithuania	0.279***	-0.212***	1	0.193**	0.216***	-0.054
	Poland	0.158*	-0.213**	1	-0.016	0.178**	0.133
	Slovenia	0.246***	-0.196***	1	0.035	0.194***	-0.079
Organisational Europeanisation	Lithuania	0.280***	-0.253***	0.193**	1	0.364***	-0.018
	Poland	0.295***	-0.347***	-0.016	1	0.394***	0
	Slovenia	0.062	-0.141***	0.035	1	0.115**	0.032
Participation Europeanisation	Lithuania	0.446***	-0.379***	0.216***	0.364***	1	-0.249***
	Poland	0.497***	-0.492***	0.178**	0.394***	1	-0.234***
	Slovenia	0.474***	-0.389***	0.194***	0.115**	1	-0.162**
Identity Europeanisation	Lithuania	-0.097*	0.181***	-0.054	-0.018	-0.249***	1
	Poland	-0.141	0.097	0.133	0	-0.234***	1
	Slovenia	-0.122*	0.200***	-0.079	0.032	-0.162**	1

Note: *** $p < 1\%$, ** $p < 5\%$, * $p < 10\%$.

more often in opportunity structures. Interest groups that are members of European organisations participate more often in consultations and advocacy groups, albeit this correlation is weaker for Slovenian interest groups.

Some other differences emerged in the correlation of various types of Europeanisation depending on from which country interest groups came. For interest groups in Lithuania and Slovenia that recognise the importance of EU policymaking, the members are more influential in decisions about political strategies and while forming positions on public policies. For Lithuanian and Slovenian interest groups with more frequent contact with EU decision-makers, the members have a greater influence while making decisions within their organisation, whereas Lithuanian and Polish interest groups with more frequent contact with EU decision-makers are more likely to be a member of a European organisation. Only for Lithuanian interest groups is the share of financing from EU funds correlated with the likelihood of being a member of a European organisation.

6. Conclusion and Discussion

The article focused on the question in which different ways the processes of Europeanisation influenced interest groups from CEE. To that end, we applied the comparative approach. Case studies of the selected countries from CEE are interesting for two reasons. First, all three cases—Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia—are new member states. They joined the EU in 2004 following a decade of accession efforts. During the accession period, interest groups from CEE had to quickly adapt to the new situation whereby EU-level policymaking became part of domestic affairs. When interest groups wish to have a say in policy affairs in the membership period, they need to monitor and become involved in EU policymaking as well. Compared to the founding EU member states, the Europeanisation processes required have been much more intense in the new(er) members. While founding member states could gradually adapt to the common policymaking, the new(er) ones entered an EU with competencies in many policy areas, whereas in areas not within the jurisdiction of the EU, the European Commission has still been able to propose common goals.

Second, Lithuania, Poland, and Slovenia are also “new kids on the democracy block.” All three researched countries underwent a democratic transition and adopted a new political system in the 1990s. During the old political regime, interest groups were regulated by the state and only started to develop more with the democratic transformation, leading to the pluralisation of interest representation. Alongside the Europeanisation process, in the early 1990s, interest groups from CEE were also impacted by the considerable changes upon converting to a democracy. During the last few years, the Polish interest group system has been especially impacted by processes of democratic backsliding (Labanino & Dobbins, 2023a, 2023b; Pospieszna & Vetulani-Cęgiel, 2021).

One aim of this article was to demonstrate that interest groups may be influenced in various ways by the Europeanisation processes. This argument is important because research often operationalises the Europeanisation of interest groups with a limited number of variables, such as contacting EU institutions, being in receipt of EU funds, and membership in EU-level umbrella organisations. Our analysis shows that interest groups from CEE have become “European” in a range of ways, namely, the same organisations have been Europeanised in different aspects. Still, some interest groups appear not to have been affected in any way by the Europeanisation process. Such organisations were shown to remain active on the national level,

not to network with other European organisations, to receive national sources of funding, and to find EU policies of little or no importance to them. At the same time, we also observe that regulatory and discursive Europeanisation is most typical of Polish interest groups, identity Europeanisation is more characteristic of Lithuanian interest groups, and financial and participatory Europeanisation is characteristic of Lithuanian and Polish interest groups, while organisational Europeanisation has the strongest effect on interest groups in Slovenia. Over 60% of interest groups are included in such networks and benefit in particular from the expertise and information they receive. The country differences in the Europeanisation of interest groups system in CEE confirm the call to pay more attention to each country's particularities rather than treating them as one region (Riedel & Dobbins, 2021).

Further, levels of different types of Europeanisation are correlated with individual interest groups, giving an idea of the impact of the Europeanisation process. The effects of Europeanisation make national interest groups more active in EU policymaking. Interest groups that find EU policies more important to them are also more likely to contact EU decision-makers, network with European organisations, and be in receipt of EU funds. Interest groups (but not Slovenian ones) that are members of European organisations have more contacts with EU-level decision-makers. In addition, interest groups (except those in Poland) for whom EU policies are important also participate more often in open consultations and advisory boards as well as include their members while making decisions within the organisation. This is especially important for the political socialisation of members (Warleigh, 2001).

Moreover, as Johansson and Jacobsson (2016) note, interest groups are not only objects but also subjects of Europeanisation when influencing the EU's internal dynamics. Following the 2004 enlargement, EU policymaking has been no longer a process of searching for a compromise between 15 member states, but between 25 member states (in 2004). Interest groups in older member states must now compete for influence with a growing number of potentially opposing interests. This can be seen in particular in the competitive environment for limited EU funds, access points to decision-makers and attracting attention in public consultations, yet at the same time interest groups' involvement in EU policymaking also increases the chances of building coalitions and forging alignments between different interest groups advocating the same policy position. The latter is especially seen in the involvement of interest groups in EU-level umbrella organisations. Although this article mainly considered the effects of Europeanisation processes on interest groups from newer member states, the effects of working in the opposite direction cannot be denied.

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Conflict of Interests

The authors declare no conflict of interests.

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