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This is the author's manuscript

Original Citation:

Availability:

This version is available <http://hdl.handle.net/2318/1729377> since 2020-05-05T10:47:38Z

Published version:

DOI:10.1080/13608746.2020.1728958

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(Article begins on next page)

**Preferring Rome to Brussels:
mapping interest group Europeanisation in Italy**

By Andrea Pritoni

Abstract: How much do Italian interest groups undertake their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level? How often have groups gained access to different EU level institutions? This paper presents an original conceptualisation for the concept of ‘interest group Europeanisation’, which takes into account both the percentage of EU lobbying and access to EU institutions, and assesses the role of national centrality (i.e. access to national institutional venues and self-perceived influence in national policy-making) in determining whether there is more or less interest group Europeanisation. Original data from a national survey conducted on around 500 Italian interest groups are provided. Groups that are at the core of the national interest system are *less* likely to undertake a large part of their lobbying activities at the EU level, but *more* likely to gain EU access.

Keywords: European Union, Governance, Interest Groups, Lobbying, Survey Research

The topic of the ‘Europeanisation’ of national interest groups has long been considered highly relevant in interest group research. This is because – as Beyers and Kerremans (2012, p. 263) note – ‘the institutional environment in which European and national interest organisations operate is increasingly a multilevel arena consisting of various national arenas and the European Union (EU) level.’ Indeed, in Western European countries, more and more policy processes are characterised by the (co-) participation of both national actors and supranational institutions (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003): all this represents the well-known concept of ‘multilevel governance’, which in recent years has become one of the most frequently used concepts not only in interest group research, but in public policy analysis more broadly. The basic principles underpinning many of the industrial, social and financial policies of EU member states are drawn up in Brussels; this is even more so for countries – for example Italy – where European ‘best practices’ are not always followed by national actors in policy-making (Quaglia & Radaelli 2007).

The questions this article sets out to address are the following: to what extent do Italian interest groups conduct their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level? How often have groups gained access to EU-level institutions in order to influence public policy? And, above all: what are the main drivers of greater or lesser levels of ‘interest group Europeanisation’?

Theoretically, the contribution of this article to existing research is twofold: first, it lies in presenting an original conceptualisation of ‘interest group Europeanisation’, which is conceived as a twofold concept including the percentage of EU lobbying and access to EU institutions. Studying ‘interest group Europeanisation’ without focusing on both aspects might be insufficient, or even misleading. The second contribution consists of assessing the role of relational factors in the national arena in influencing the extent of interest group Europeanisation. The aim is to build on what Beyers (2002) already claimed a few years ago, namely that being at the core of the national interest system has an impact on the likelihood of being more or less ‘Europeanised’.

Methodologically, original data drawn from a national survey of around 500 Italian interest groups are provided. The data collection for this paper is part of a larger research project aiming at

conducting comparative interest organisation surveys in twelve European countries¹ (Beyers et al. 2016). The survey focuses on topics such as political strategies, organisational development and management, and, of course, Europeanisation. While interest groups' Europeanisation in many European countries is very well-documented in the literature (Eising, Rasch & Rozbicka 2017), the focus on the Italian case also represents a contribution of this article: to date, very few scholars have shown how and why interest groups deal with European issues in Italy. Moreover, studying interest group Europeanisation in Italy is relevant because of the broader implications that this particular research effort has for understanding the relationship between the Italian political system and the EU in general.

This article is arranged as follows: the second section reviews the most relevant literature on the Europeanisation of national interest groups and – following the discussion of a few fundamental Italian characteristics – presents the theoretical hypotheses, while the following section outlines the research design. The fourth section offers descriptive statistics on how much Italian interest groups are 'EU-oriented', whereas the next section consists of the multivariate statistical analyses and the discussion of the empirical findings. The last section of the article offers some concluding remarks and proposes directions for future research.

'Interest group Europeanisation' in Italy

'Interest group Europeanisation': definitions, meanings, and (likely) determinants

In recent decades, the concept of 'Europeanisation' has gained more and more importance in political science, especially in public policy analysis (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003) and interest group literature (Beyers 2002). Yet, there is no consensus on the meaning and boundaries of this concept and a

¹ More precisely, those countries are: Belgium, Germany, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

number of different definitions have been proposed so far (Ladrech 1994, p. 17; Börzel 1999, p. 574; Radaelli 2003, p. 30). In a nutshell, scholars do not agree on whether the concept of ‘Europeanisation’ should be conceived as either ‘...the influence of the national level through European processes or the construction of European integration’ (Saurugger 2005, p. 294).

Since the very beginning of studies on Europeanisation and European integration, scholars recognised the role of interest groups in European dynamics as particularly relevant (Lindberg 1963). The explosion of interest group activity after the Single European Act has thus led to a renewal of works on interest groups in the EU (Grossman 2011, p. 637). Within interest group research, ‘Europeanisation’ is almost always conceptualised following a top-down approach: it is the EU that has an increasingly large impact on the chances of interest groups achieving policy preferences, and interest groups must therefore react to this process of ‘Europeanisation’ in order to maintain (or even increase) their policy influence (Beyers & Kerremans 2007, p. 460).

The increase in the number of decisional access points has also made it possible for European interest groups to take advantage of so-called ‘multilevel venue shopping’, whose practices and dynamics have been studied in depth in the US (Holyoke, Braun & Henig 2012): when policy processes proceed through many different institutional levels, interest groups can concentrate their lobbying efforts where they expect to have greater chances of reaching their aims (Dür & Mateo 2012). This has led to a growing number of organisations seeking to influence not only national legislation, but also European legislation.

Yet, to do so, a national organisation can make use of two (alternative or complementary) strategies: on the one hand, it may attempt to influence Euro-associations that are established at the EU level with the aim of lobbying EU policymakers; on the other hand, it may engage in some direct²

² In the literature, the distinction between ‘direct’ and ‘indirect’ lobbying is generally based on the fact that the former implies face-to-face interactions between groups and policymakers (either political or bureaucratic actors), whereas the

lobbying activities (*ibidem*, p. 971). Generally, the decision to rely on Euro-associations is considered a risky strategy, as these organisations are often rather weak and, above all, tend to be very slow in taking decisions (Mazey & Richardson 2006, pp. 255-256). Thus, national interest groups face a structural incentive to focus on direct lobbying, and this explains why scholars are now increasingly examining national interest groups lobbying at the EU level.³

This growing literature has almost always focused on the access to EU institutions as a proxy for assessing the degree to which interest groups are ‘Europeanised’ (Beyers 2002; Eising 2007; Klüver 2010; Beyers & Kerremans 2012; Dür & Mateo 2012). Only a few studies have followed a different conceptualisation, arguing that ‘interest group Europeanisation’ occurs when interest groups: (i) change their policy priorities, by focusing on EU policies (more than before); (ii) concentrate their lobbying efforts at the EU level (more than before); (iii) change their internal organisation in order to reflect EU characteristics’ (Constantelos 2004, p. 1023).

Even though the focus on institutional access is perfectly understandable,⁴ talking about ‘Europeanisation’ and limiting the analysis to EU access might be insufficient, or even misleading. On the contrary, the concept of ‘interest group Europeanisation’ should be conceived as (at least) a twofold concept, including both the percentage of EU lobbying and access to EU institutions.⁵ In other words, for an interest group to be considered as really ‘Europeanised’, it has to undertake a large part of its

latter implies grassroots mobilisation and/or media campaigns (Binderkrantz 2005). However, in this context ‘direct lobbying’ should be intended as any lobbying activity which is undertaken by national interest groups without involving Euro-associations.

³ However, Beyers & De Bruycker (2018) and Greenwood (2017) – when studying EU lobbying – focus on EU-level associations rather than national interest groups.

⁴ One of the foremost aims of groups is gaining access to EU institutions to influence policymaking (Bouwen 2004).

⁵ Organisational changes due to Europeanisation cannot be analysed in this paper: organisational changes generally need time to be implemented, yet this paper – being based on survey data carried out in 2016-2017 – does not present any diachronic analysis.

advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level *and* obtain access to EU institutional venues. Both aspects should be considered equally important.

That said, what are the determinants of ‘interest group Europeanisation’ in the literature? On this, there are two⁶ broad areas of potential explanations. First, scholars hypothesise differences across types of interest groups in terms of the amount of EU lobbying (Coen 2007, p. 335). In particular, business associations are considered to be more ‘Europeanised’ than other kinds of groups: they have a much more well-defined constituency with concentrated material gains or losses from a specific piece of legislation than public interest groups (or professional associations that are composed of a large number of individuals). Therefore, they can overcome the well-known collective action problem more easily (Olson 1965) and, in turn, they are more likely to lobby at several institutional levels than any other kind of groups.

Secondly, most scholars have focused on organisational resources as an explanatory factor for an interest group’s degree of Europeanisation, claiming that only well-off groups are able to engage in multilevel lobbying⁷ (Beyers 2002; Eising 2007). Studies that belong to this ‘resources-oriented approach’ focus on many organisational resources, among which reputation, the amount of financial resources and the level of expertise are the most important (Beyers & Kerremans 2012).

There is broad consensus on the expectation that reputation matters: generally, more established organisations have greater status and prestige than newer ones (Hannan & Freeman 1993); they have

⁶ However, the choice to lobby at the EU level may be (also) constrained by issues’ characteristics and issue jurisdiction. Firstly, the more a particular issue is politically salient, as well as the more it implies high policy change, the more groups face incentives to develop a multilevel lobbying strategy (Dür 2007; Beyers & Kerremans 2012). Secondly, interest groups lobbying on issues whose jurisdiction is (totally or partially) at the EU level are more likely to be ‘Europeanised’ than interest groups lobbying on issues whose jurisdiction is exclusively at the national level (Constanelos 2004).

⁷ Resource-rich associations can be expected to have the necessary resources to monitor and try to influence legislation at all relevant levels of governance.

had more time to develop organisational capabilities and are better embedded in social and institutional networks. As a result, they are more familiar to policymakers, so they generally enjoy more access (Fraussen, Beyers & Donas 2015). These considerations seem to carry weight in both the national and the European arenas.

Many scholars have also highlighted the role of expertise in shaping access patterns (Bouwen 2004; Beyers 2002; Beyers & Kerremans 2012). Among the so-called ‘access goods’ that interest groups are likely to exchange with (EU) policymakers in order to be invited to participate in policy-making, technical information is one of the most valuable resources they hold (Broscheid & Coen 2007). Interest groups that are well-equipped with expertise are therefore generally in an advantageous position to gain EU access.

Where European access is concerned, financial resources are also considered particularly important: the more ‘rich’ groups are, the more likely they are to target all sorts of venues (Holyoke, Braun & Henig 2012, p. 13). This is because multilevel lobbying is expensive; therefore, groups that are not well endowed with financial resources cannot follow the entire policy process and, in turn, are less likely to obtain access to EU institutional venues.

However, it is not just organisational resources that matter. Relational resources are also important: groups that are central within their national network should have better opportunities to be central also at the EU level. In other words, access leads to access, and if an actor is peripheral in its homeland, it will presumably also be peripheral in Brussels (Beyers 2002, p. 593). Yet, when assessing the role of relational resources, the literature does not speak with one voice: it might also be that peripheral actors at the national level – precisely because of their marginality in the national game – decide to concentrate their lobbying efforts at the European level, in order to find a second option for reaching their policy objectives (Marks & McAdam 1996). Therefore, from this point of view, groups disadvantaged by being a large political distance from the government ruling the country are more likely to engage in multilevel venue shopping (Tatham 2010, pp. 18-19).

If we follow the former perspective, we are led to believe that interest groups that are the ‘winners’ of the national game are also winners at the EU level; on the contrary, if we are more persuaded by the latter approach, ‘losers’ within domestic borders are instead ‘winners’ in Europe, and *vice versa*. What should be the case for Italian interest groups?

Italian interest groups and the EU: (limited) literature and exploratory hypotheses

The story of Italy’s process of Europeanisation has been told many times (Dyson & Featherstone 1996). More precisely, the relationship between Italy and the EU is mainly addressed from three points of view: firstly, the literature has reconstructed in depth the process of Italy’s entry into the EMU (Giuliani 2000). Secondly, a few scholars have studied at length the ways in which many policy areas have been gradually ‘Europeanising’ in Italy (Quaglia 2013). Thirdly, the impact of the so-called ‘external constraint’ (*vincolo esterno*) – i.e. the influence that European preferences exercise on national policymaking – was widely used as an explanatory factor for many policy processes that saw the increasing marginalisation of Italian trade unions in policymaking (Culpepper 2014).

In spite of this impressive volume of literature, much less has been written on the Europeanisation of Italian interest groups. To the best of my knowledge, Constantelos (2004) is the only author who has focused on this topic, with a qualitative case study of *Confindustria*, the leading association of entrepreneurs in Italy. Extensive studies on the importance of European issues for Italian groups, or on the extent of their lobbying at the EU level, or on their access to supranational institutions, simply do not exist in the literature so far.⁸ Curiously enough, these issues have instead been addressed from the point of view of social movements (Andretta & Caiani 2006).

All this implies that, to date, there are no previous theoretical hypotheses about interest group Europeanisation in the specific case of Italy. Yet this does not mean that it is impossible to propose new exploratory hypotheses. More precisely, it seems interesting to build on the concept of ‘relational

⁸ At best, Roux & Verzichelli (2010) investigated Italian economic elites’ judgement of the EU and European issues.

resources' (Beyers 2002) presented in the previous section. There are at least three reasons for this: firstly, because there is no agreement in the literature on whether it has either a positive or a negative impact on the degree of interest group Europeanisation (Marks & McAdam 1996; Tatham 2010). Secondly, because this factor is likely to have a different impact on the basis of the sub-concept of Europeanisation we take into account. Thirdly, because Italy appears to be an interesting case study, from this point of view: its national interest system has long been considered as composed of a small number of groups absolutely central in the national arena (i.e. the so-called *insiders*), and of a much wider variety of groups forced to marginality in the national landscape (i.e. the so-called *outsiders*) (Lanzalaco 1993, p. 129). In other words, Italy seems to represent a crucial case (Seawright & Gerring 2008) to empirically test theoretical hypotheses on relational resources and, in turn, national centrality.

Yet, before presenting theoretical hypotheses, what is preliminarily necessary is to define concepts that will be used in the analysis. Firstly, undertaking lobbying activities at the EU level and obtaining access to EU institutions are both being sub-concepts of the whole concept of 'interest group Europeanisation' – but they are not the same thing. The former deals with the strategic choices that each group is called to make in its daily life, while the latter represents a first result of the lobbying activity conducted by the group itself. In other words, the decision to lobby at the EU level is the sole responsibility of the interest group, but the ability to obtain supranational access depends both on the group's choices as well as on those of EU policymakers. This distinction is not of secondary importance for the relationship between national centrality and interest group Europeanisation.

But what does 'national centrality' actually mean? As already noted, the existing literature focuses on national access to operationalise the concept of domestic centrality (Beyers 2002): the more interest groups obtain access to national institutional venues, the more they are 'politically central' in their own domestic arena. Unfortunately, this operationalisation only partially captures what 'domestic centrality' is for interest groups. This is because access is the necessary, but insufficient, precondition for policy influence (Binderkrantz & Pedersen 2017). What really matters for interest

groups is how much they are (or, better, they perceive they are) influential in the policy process. In fact, all interest groups have two main aims: to survive as an organisation and to be influential in policymaking (Schmitter & Streeck 1999; Lowery 2007). The two aims are inextricably linked: you cannot survive if you never reach your policy objectives, but you cannot reach any policy objective if you do not ‘survive’ as an organisation. However, it is the latter especially which has long been considered the ‘Holy Grail’ in interest group research (Leech 2010), and many scholars have tried to empirically assess interest groups’ influence in policymaking.⁹ Domestic centrality should thus be operationalised in a twofold way: first, it means gaining high domestic institutional access; second, it also means a particular organisation perceiving itself to be more influential than others (both allies and rivals) in national policymaking.

All that being said, it is perfectly reasonable that groups that are marginalised in the national arena try to follow a second-option strategy to reach their policy aims. This second-option strategy is usually adopted in lobbying the EU, in particular when lobbying national policymakers is not possible (anymore). However, precisely because groups that are peripheral in the domestic arena do not have sufficient resources to gain access to national policymakers and institutions, they face even greater challenges with regard to EU institutional venues. In other words, they may try to follow a second-option strategy, but that same second-option strategy could lead to even *worse* results than their first-option strategy.

On the other hand, being at the core of the national interest system represents a clear disincentive for groups to undertake a large part of their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level, because doing so would mean to (relatively) diminish lobbying efforts in the domestic arena, where those same groups enjoy a competitive advantage in comparison to all other organisations. In other words, interest groups are conceived as rational actors trying to maximise their chances to reach their aims.

⁹ See, among others: Baumgartner et al. (2009); Klüver (2013); Dür, Bernhagen & Marshall (2015).

To do so, they therefore balance pros and cons of any strategical choice, among which that of (efficiently) allocating their own lobbying efforts among different institutional venues is one of the most relevant ones.¹⁰

However, when groups that are nationally central decide to lobby the EU, they also have more chances to be heard, precisely because of their well-established national links and the amount of their resources: factors allowing interest groups to gain more institutional access at the national level are also very useful to reach similar results at the supranational level, and vice versa (Beyers 2002, p. 593; Eising 2007; Beyers & Kerremans 2012).

As a result, overall, national centrality seems to impact on interest group Europeanisation in a contradictory way: on the one hand, it should decrease Europeanisation in terms of the percentage of EU lobbying; on the other hand, it should increase access to EU institutions.¹¹ Interest groups at the core of the national landscape are thus expected to be relatively *less* likely to favour EU lobbying at the expense of domestic lobbying than interest groups which are marginal in the national interest system - but are also expected to be relatively *more* likely to gain EU access when they need to do so.

¹⁰ What is extremely relevant here is that the amount of EU lobbying is not conceived in *absolute* terms, but in *relative* terms. It could be that groups at the core of the national interest system lobby the EU *more* than groups that are marginal in the national arena. However, it is the balance between national lobbying and EU lobbying that is expected to systematically vary between the former and the latter. More precisely, groups at the core of the national system are expected to focus their lobbying activities at the domestic level at the expense of EU lobbying, with the aim of taking advantage of their dominant position. On the contrary, groups which are nationally marginal are expected to focus their lobbying activities at the EU level at the expense of domestic lobbying, with the aim of compensating for their relative irrelevance in the national arena.

¹¹ Yet, the direction of causality might also be reversed: it could be that European centrality impacts on national access as well as on influence on national policymaking. In other words, groups that get access to European institutional venues might think of themselves as more influential than their allies/rivals both at the supranational and national levels.

Although this theorisation should be general enough to travel all over (Western) Europe, it should be particularly useful in predicting interest group Europeanisation in Italy. When describing interest intermediation in Italy, more than twenty years ago Lanzalaco (1993, p. 129) proposed the term of ‘oligopolistic pluralism’ (a mix of pluralism at the societal level and exclusion at the institutional level): he referred to reduced competition among groups and limited access for a few of them to decision-making. In such a system, the distinction between (a few) ‘*insiders*’ and (many more) ‘*outsiders*’ is striking: there is a very limited number of interest groups that are continuously incorporated in consensual decision-making processes, while any other organisations are almost unheard (and, in turn, unknown) by policymakers.

This striking distinction is still in place in Italy. Pritoni (2017, pp. 77-85) recently demonstrated that national institutional access is highly biased in Italy, with a few stronger groups gaining a high level of access to many different national institutions, while a vast majority of weaker groups virtually gain no access at all, regardless of the institutional venue under consideration. And similar considerations can be drawn with regard to policymaking: also in this case it is possible to differentiate between a few powerful actors, on the one hand, and many more groups exerting limited or even no influence, on the other hand (Lizzi & Pritoni 2019). If this is the case, groups that are central in the domestic arena face the highest incentive not to undertake a large part of their lobbying activities at the EU level, but are also most likely to gain EU institutional access when they need to do so. The opposite holds true for groups that are marginal/peripheral in the domestic arena: they have the highest incentive to try to follow a second-option strategy to be heard by (EU) policymakers, but they are also expected not to gain much institutional access in Brussels precisely because of their marginality in Rome. Accordingly, the four theoretical hypotheses which are empirically tested in this work are as follows:

H1a: *Groups gaining high national access are less likely to undertake a large part of their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level, and vice versa.*

H1b: *Groups gaining high national access are more likely to gain access to EU institutions, and vice versa.*

H2a: *Groups perceiving themselves as more influential in national policymaking than other organisations, are less likely to undertake a large part of their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level, and vice versa.*

H2b: *Groups perceiving themselves as more influential in national policymaking than other organisations, are more likely to gain access to EU institutions, and vice versa.*

Research design

This paper focuses on Italy, but it does not represent a traditional case study. It is a Large-N study of interest groups in a single country. The decision to focus on the Italian polity was taken for two main reasons. First, the Italian case is almost unknown in the literature: with a very few recent exceptions (Capano, Lizzi & Pritoni 2014; Lizzi & Pritoni 2017; Pritoni 2017; 2019; Hanegraaff & Pritoni 2019), scholars have devoted little attention to interest group politics in Italy so far. Secondly, and above all, Italy seems to represent a ‘crucial case’ (Seawright & Gerring 2008) to test the theoretical hypotheses presented in section 2: the Italian interest system still appears to be biased in favour of a few *insiders* at the expense of a much broader number of *outsiders* (Lanzalaco 1993; Pritoni 2017). Thus, the distinction between central and marginal groups in the national arena should matter a great deal in influencing the degree of interest group Europeanisation.

Focusing on the Italian interest system as a whole means that all interest groups involved in some political activity in Italy must be taken into account. But what kind of interest groups? Where the identification of the population(s) of interest groups to be analysed is concerned, two methods are proposed in the literature (Marchetti 2015, pp. 274-276). A policy-centred sampling defines specific policy issues and identifies the interest groups (associations, firms, institutions, etc.) that intervene in them. The organisation-centred sampling, on the other hand, includes all groups of a specific type

(e.g. business groups, trade unions, public interest groups, etc.) with the only caveat that they represent membership associations. In the former case, scholars use the ‘behavioural definition’ (Baumgartner et al. 2009) of interest group; in the latter, the ‘organisational definition’ (Binderkrantz, Christiansen & Pedersen 2015) of interest group is preferred.

In this paper, the latter definition is used. Accordingly, interest associations were originally sampled into eight categories, following the well-known INTERARENA coding scheme (*ibidem*): business groups, e.g. Confindustria, Confcommercio and Confartigianato; identity groups, e.g. LGBTQI community groups such as Arcigay and Arcilesbica; institutional groups, e.g. local government associations such as ANCI (Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani) and UPI (Unione delle Province Italiane); leisure groups, for example sports associations and institutions like Associazioni di tifosi (i.e. associations of supporters) and CONI (Comitato Olimpico Nazionale Italiano); occupational groups, e.g. professional associations and orders such as Organismo Unitario dell’Avvocatura for lawyers and Consiglio Nazionale del Notariato for notaries; public interest groups, e.g. environmental groups such as Legambiente and consumer groups such as Federconsumatori; religious groups such as CEI (Conferenza Episcopale Italiana) and ANMI (Associazione Nazionale Musulmani Italiani); and trade unions such as CGIL, CISL, UIL.¹² However, because in this case too many categories

¹² The decision to use the INTERARENA classification depends on the fact that – similarly to this article – that project uses an organisational definition of interest groups. The coding process was developed as follows: first, each interest group was coded separately by two different researchers (the author and a colleague who is unanimously regarded as an expert on interest groups in Italy); second, contradictory cases – i.e. interest groups included in different categories by the two coders (7 per cent of the whole sample) – were solved jointly.

might impede a clear observation and analysis of data, they have been re-coded into three broader categories: ‘business’¹³, ‘citizens’¹⁴, and ‘others’¹⁵.

Hence, and given the lack of an official list or directory that contains the entire population of interest groups in Italy, the population of interest groups has been retrieved from multiple sources. More precisely, a mixed strategy has been followed, meaning a combination of bottom-up and top-down approaches, as the most recent literature suggests (Berkhout et al. 2018). At the end of this very complex procedure – which is presented in full in the online Appendix – the invitation to participate in the online survey on which this study is based was sent to 1,277 Italian interest groups. Of these, 478 returned the questionnaire either totally or partially filled out, giving a response rate of 37.4 per cent,¹⁶ which is quite satisfactory (Marchetti 2015).

In the literature, surveys have been criticised for (potential) nonresponse bias (Armstrong & Overton 1977). If respondents differ substantially from those who do not respond, the results do not directly allow us to say how the entire population would have responded. Yet in this case, the results do not appear to be biased: response rates among group categories are not particularly uneven, ranging from 29.6 per cent among occupational groups to 45.8 per cent of identity groups. Where the re-coding of all groups in ‘business’, ‘citizens’ and ‘others’ is concerned, the response rates are again

¹³ This includes only the ‘business group’ category of the INTERARENA coding scheme.

¹⁴ This includes the categories ‘identity groups’, ‘religious groups’ and ‘public interest groups’ of the INTERARENA coding scheme.

¹⁵ This includes all the other categories – ‘unions’, ‘institutional groups’, ‘leisure groups’ and ‘occupational groups’ – of the INTERARENA coding scheme.

¹⁶ The first invitations were sent in mid-January 2017, while the online survey remained open until the end of March 2017. Over the course of this time period, four reminders were sent to non-respondents every two weeks in order to solicit their participation in the survey. This gave rise to five ‘waves’ of data collection, among which the first included the majority of respondents. Only legal representatives (namely, presidents or national secretaries) were allowed to answer the questionnaire.

rather similar to one another.¹⁷ Moreover, respondents and non-respondents are also similar with respect to age: groups returning the questionnaire display a mean age of 39.7 years, whereas groups that decided not to participate in the survey are characterised by a mean age of 37.2 years.

That said, statistical models are operationalised as follows (see also Table 1). First of all, two different models are presented – each focused on the analysis of a particular aspect of interest group Europeanisation – with two different dependent variables. In Model 1, the aim is to explain why some groups undertake large parts of their advocacy/lobbying work at the EU level, whereas others do not. Therefore, with respect to the dependent variable ‘Percentage of EU lobbying’, data have been collected thanks to the answers to the following question: ‘Thinking generally about all the advocacy/lobbying work your organisation undertakes, approximately what percentage of your organisation’s time is spent at the European level?’. Respondents were allowed to indicate any percentage from 0 to 100.

Model 2 aims to explain varying levels of access to EU institutions, namely: *a*) European Commissioners and their collaborators; *b*) Officials of the Directorate Generals of the European Commission; *c*) Member-state delegations; *d*) Council Secretariat; *e*) Leaderships of EU parties; *f*) Members of the European Parliament; *g*) EU Regulatory Agencies. In this case, the dependent variable consists of an additive index taking into account all answers to the following question: ‘During the last 12 months, how often has your group gained access to the following EU-level institutions?’ Respondents were allowed to indicate one of the following options: *(i)* ‘we did not do this’ (= 1); *(ii)* ‘at least once’ (= 2); *(iii)* ‘at least every three months’ (= 3); *(iv)* ‘at least once a month’ (= 4); *(v)* ‘at least once a week’ (= 5). Therefore, the dependent variable ‘EU access’ ranges from 7 (respondents indicating ‘we did not do this’ for all institutional venues) to 35 (respondents indicating ‘at least once a week’ for all institutional venues).

¹⁷ Business groups: 38.1 per cent (135/354). Citizens’ groups: 43.3 per cent (165/381). Other groups: 32.8 per cent (178/542).

Table 1 *Variables and operationalisations for statistical analyses: descriptive statistics*

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Operationalisation</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> | <i>Mean</i> | <i>S.D.</i> |
|--------------------------------------|---|----------|------------|------------|-------------|-------------|
| <i>Dependent Variables</i> | | | | | | |
| Model 1: multilevel lobbying: EU (%) | Percentage of daily lobbying at the EU level: numeric variable (0-100) | 288 | 0 | 95 | 11.61 | 11.53 |
| Model 2: access to EU institutions | Additive index (yearly access to EU commissioners, officials in DGs, members of EU Parliament, EU regulatory agencies, etc.): numeric variable (7-35) | 382 | 7 | 30 | 10.08 | 4.72 |
| <i>Independent Variables</i> | | | | | | |
| H1: national access | Additive index (yearly access to ministers, members of parliaments, civil servants): numeric variable (3-15) | 387 | 3 | 15 | 7.76 | 3.10 |
| H2: self-perceived influence | Additive index (self-perception of organisation's own influence with respect to both allies and rivals): numeric variable (2-6) | 339 | 2 | 6 | 3.49 | 1.29 |
| <i>Control variables</i> | | | | | | |
| Group type | Business (N=135); Citizens (N=165); Others (N=178) | 478 | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. | N.A. |
| Age | Subtraction between the year 2017 and the year of foundation of the group: numeric variable | 474 | 1 | 160 | 39.69 | 27.35 |
| Budget | Organisation's annual operating budget in 2016 in Euros: ordinal variable (1-8) | 427 | 1 | 8 | 3.53 | 1.73 |
| Expertise | Paid staff (full-time equivalent): numeric variable | 383 | 0 | 100 | 7.07 | 16.04 |

As for *independent variables*, in order to test H1 – which postulates that domestic institutional access has a contradictory impact on the percentage of EU lobbying and on EU institutional access – the variable ‘National access’ takes into account direct contacts that each interest group had (during 2016) with national ministers, parliamentarians and bureaucrats.¹⁸ To test H2 – which claims that the self-perception of being particularly influential in domestic policymaking has a contradictory impact

¹⁸ More precisely, this additive index depends on the answers to the following question(s): ‘During the last 12 months, how often has your group gained access to: a) ministers; b) parliamentarians; c) civil servants in national ministries?’. Also in this case, with regard to each institutional actor, respondents were allowed to indicate one of the options between (i) ‘we did not do this’ (= 1) and (v) ‘at least once a week’ (= 5). Thus, the independent variable ‘National access’ ranges from 3 (respondents indicating ‘we did not do this’ for ministers, parliamentarians and civil servants in national ministries) to 15 (respondents indicating ‘at least once a week’ for all institutional venues).

on the percentage of EU lobbying and on EU institutional access – an additive index is used, summing up the responses to the following question: ‘How would you rate your organisation’s influence on national public policy compared to that of your allies/rivals?’ In both cases – with regard to allies as well as rivals – respondents could indicate whether they thought they were less influential (= 1); had roughly the same influence (= 2); or saw themselves as more influential than their allies/rivals (= 3). Thus, this additive index ranges from 2 (groups perceiving themselves as less influential than their allies and rivals) to 6 (groups perceiving themselves as more influential than their allies and rivals).

Furthermore, statistical models retest some earlier hypotheses and include them as control variables. First, the variable ‘group type’ is included to make a distinction between business groups, which are chosen as the reference category, on the one hand, and citizens’ groups and other groups, on the other hand. The second control variable is ‘budget’. On this, the online survey asked about the annual operating budget of the organisation in 2016 in Euros.¹⁹ For the third control variable, ‘reputation’, the variable ‘Age’ reports the difference between 2017 and the year in which all single interest groups were founded.²⁰ The fourth control variable, ‘expertise’, takes into account how many full time equivalent paid members of the staff work in the interest group.²¹

¹⁹ Respondents were allowed to select one of the following options: *i*) under 10,000; *ii*) between 10,000 and 50,000; *iii*) between 50,000 and 100,000; *iv*) between 100,000 and 500,000; *v*) between 500,000 and 1 million; *vi*) between 1 million and 5 million; *vii*) between 5 million and 10 million; *viii*) over 10 million.

²⁰ Age is considered a proxy for the concept of ‘reputation’ on the basis of organisational ecology theory. Scholars following this approach argue that newly established groups face a higher threshold in being recognised as legitimate players by policymakers and other organisations (Hannan & Freeman, 1993).

²¹ It could be questioned whether staff size is a good proxy for the concept of ‘expertise’: for example, a group could have a large staff size but only a few policy experts or a small staff comprised almost entirely of experts. However, this generally represents an exception rather than the rule: the vast majority of scholars, when operationalising expertise, share this operational choice (Baumgartner et al. 2009; Klüver 2013). The assumption in this case is that the higher the number of employees, the higher the possibility that those same employees are endowed with all the information and knowledge that are necessary in the policymaking.

Europeanisation of interest groups in Italy: descriptive statistics

As already noted, this article represents the first empirical study that addresses the extent to which Italian interest groups focus their lobbying activities at the EU level and obtain access to EU institutions: this kind of data has not existed in the literature to date. Therefore, the descriptive aim of this work is at least as important as the explanatory one. With respect to this, two tables are presented: the first (Table 2) shows the percentage of advocacy/lobbying activities that Italian interest groups undertake at the EU level; the second (Table 3) shows how often groups obtain access to various European institutions.

Table 2 *Frequency of Italian interest groups' lobbying at the EU level*

| <i>Response</i> | <i>Business</i> | | <i>Citizens</i> | | <i>Others</i> | | <i>Total sample</i> | |
|--------------------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|---------------|------------|---------------------|------------|
| | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| We do not lobby the EU | 13 | 13.8 | 13 | 14.3 | 23 | 22.3 | 49 | 17.0 |
| Less than 10% | 22 | 23.4 | 21 | 23.1 | 29 | 28.2 | 72 | 25.0 |
| Between 10% and 25% | 49 | 52.1 | 51 | 56.0 | 50 | 48.5 | 150 | 52.1 |
| Between 26% and 50% | 9 | 9.6 | 5 | 5.5 | 1 | 1.0 | 15 | 5.2 |
| Between 51% and 75% | 1 | 1.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.3 |
| More than 75% | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 1.1 | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 0.3 |
| <i>Total (valid responses)</i> | <i>94</i> | <i>100</i> | <i>91</i> | <i>100</i> | <i>103</i> | <i>100</i> | <i>288</i> | <i>100</i> |

Notes:

- *Question:* 'Thinking generally about all the advocacy/lobbying work your organisation undertakes, approximately what percentage of your organisation's time is spent at the European level?'
- N = 288
- *Source:* Author's own data.

The first consideration that can be drawn by looking at Table 2 is that – on average – Italian interest groups are only partially focused on EU policymaking: only a very limited percentage of respondents (5.8 per cent) undertake more than 25 per cent of their usual lobbying activities at the EU level. Even though we might think that interest groups in Italy are aware that many important decisions are taken in Brussels rather than in Rome, it appears that they still continue not to identify

the European level as the most important stage of policymaking. Secondly, differences among types of groups are not particularly straightforward on this point. Yet, even in a context of limited variation, business groups and – to a lesser extent, citizens’ groups – appear to be more EU-oriented than other groups. This appears to be reasonable: the EU usually legislates on economic issues, which are of particular interest to business groups.

The second dimension of the concept of ‘interest group Europeanisation’ deals with the degree of EU access. Table 3 shows how many groups – for each category – obtained access to various EU institutions at least once every three months during 2016.

Table 3 *Italian interest groups’ access to EU institutional venues*

| <i>EU institutional venue</i> | <i>Business</i> | | <i>Citizens</i> | | <i>Others</i> | | <i>Total sample</i> | |
|-------------------------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|---------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------|
| | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> |
| Commissioners | 17 | 15.6 | 8 | 6.3 | 12 | 8.3 | 37 | 9.7 |
| Officials of DGs | 20 | 18.3 | 5 | 3.9 | 12 | 8.3 | 37 | 9.7 |
| Member-state delegations | 27 | 24.8 | 11 | 8.6 | 15 | 10.3 | 53 | 13.9 |
| Council Secretariat | 16 | 14.7 | 5 | 3.9 | 8 | 5.5 | 29 | 7.6 |
| Leadership of EU parties | 15 | 13.8 | 10 | 7.8 | 10 | 6.9 | 35 | 9.2 |
| Members of parliament | 26 | 23.9 | 21 | 16.4 | 14 | 9.7 | 61 | 16.0 |
| EU regulatory agencies | 7 | 6.4 | 7 | 5.5 | 11 | 7.6 | 25 | 6.5 |
| <i>Total respondents</i> | <i>109</i> | <i>100.0</i> | <i>128</i> | <i>100.0</i> | <i>145</i> | <i>100.0</i> | <i>382</i> | <i>100.0</i> |

Notes:

- *Question:* ‘During the last 12 months, how often has your group gained access to the following EU-level institutions and agencies in order to influence public policies?’ Groups answering ‘at least once every three months’ or more.
- N = 382
- *Source:* Author’s own data.

As we can see in Table 3, the percentage of Italian interest groups that enjoy frequent access to EU institutions is rather low. Even where that same access is relatively more frequent – in the case of Members of the European Parliament – only one respondent out of six (16 per cent) declares that

direct contacts take place at least once every three months. Notwithstanding all the (correct) considerations regarding the ever-growing influence of EU policymaking on national policymaking (especially in cases like Italy) (Featherstone & Radaelli 2003; Quaglia & Radaelli 2007), it seems that Italian interest groups still prefer to lobby in Rome rather than in Brussels.

Yet, it also appears that the degree of access varies on the basis of the interests represented. More precisely, business groups show the highest values with regard to all EU institutions. This is a really interesting result, which seems to confirm previous literature (Eising 2007; Beyers & Kerremans 2012) and provides rather negative news concerning the level of bias characterising the Italian interest system in its relationship with European institutional venues. Overall, the empirical findings do not come as a surprise: a few years ago, when studying the country of origin of organisations registered to lobby the EU institutions, Arndt Wonka and colleagues (2010, p. 468) noted that Italian groups were not particularly numerous, especially if the size of the country is taken into account. The number of German groups was almost triple, and the number of French and British groups more than double, the number of Italian groups in this special ranking. Even Dutch and Belgian groups were more numerous than Italian organisations.²² More recently, the tendency shown by Italian interest groups to prefer Rome to Brussels has been confirmed by Graziano (2012) and Pritoni (2017, pp. 89-97).

Explaining the Europeanisation of Italian interest groups

I estimate two ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models on the tendency shown by Italian interest groups to undertake a considerable part of their lobbying activities at the EU level (Model 1) and to gain access (Model 2) to the main EU institutions. In both cases, independent (i.e. national access and self-perceived influence) and control variables are the same, while only the dependent

²² Yet Benelux groups clearly profit from their geographical proximity to the EU capital Brussels.

variable varies. Unfortunately, not all groups participating in the online survey could/wanted to respond to the set of questions on which this study is based: thus, statistical models are characterised by missing values and the number of cases included in all the regressions varies between 248 (Model 1) and 312 (Model 2).²³

Table 4 *Multivariate regressions*

| | <i>Model 1</i> | <i>Model 2</i> |
|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | <i>Multilevel lobbying: EU</i> | <i>Access to EU institutions</i> |
| (Constant) | 5.868* (3.320) | 62.807*** (19.707) |
| <i>Control variables</i> | | |
| Business groups | Reference category | Reference category |
| Citizen groups | -1.651 (1.601) | -0.991 (0.619) |
| Other groups | -4.043*** (1.485) | -2.367*** (0.572) |
| Age | 0.022 (0.026) | 0.028*** (0.010) |
| Annual budget | 0.890* (0.454) | -0.102 (0.173) |
| Paid staff (full time equivalent) | 0.113*** (0.042) | 0.066*** (0.015) |
| <i>Independent variables</i> | | |
| National access | -0.083 (0.232) | 0.523*** (0.084) |
| Self-perceived influence | -0.847* (0.511) | 0.196 (0.185) |
| <i>Diagnostics</i> | | |
| Observations | 248 | 312 |
| R ² | 0.130 | 0.287 |

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; p<0.10 *, p<0.05 **, p<0.01 ***

Source: statistical analyses based on author's own data.

Table 4 presents mixed results. On the one hand, both national access (H1) and self-perceived influence (H2) have the expected signs in both statistical models. On the other hand, the relationship

²³ The issue of missing values is not of secondary importance: the groups answering these questions may be systematically different from the groups in the rest of the sample. If this is the case, responding groups would not be representative of the sample as a whole. However, as the online Appendix demonstrates, there are no significant differences between groups responding to questions on EU lobbying and EU access, on the one hand, and the whole population of groups analysed in this study, on the other. Statistical results presented in Model 1 and in Model 2 are therefore representative of the whole population of interest groups.

between independent and dependent variables is not always statistically significant and – in particular in Model 1 – R^2 is rather low, which means that much remained out of the picture. More precisely, self-perceived influence is statistically significant in predicting how much Italian interest groups lobby at the EU level, while national access is statistically significant in predicting EU access.²⁴ This means that the analytical framework presented in section 2 only partially captures the main reasons why Italian interest groups are more or less Europeanised. This is not surprising, though: the concept of ‘interest group Europeanisation’ is particularly complex and multifaceted and many different factors are likely to have an impact on how much interest groups lobby the EU and gain access to supra-national institutions. Yet the main finding of this empirical analysis is that national centrality is likely to be among those factors, at least with respect to the Italian case.

In other words, Italian interest groups seem to follow what Jan Beyers (2002), in his famous work on Europeanisation, called the ‘negative persistence hypothesis’ and the ‘compensation hypothesis’ with regard to the percentage of EU lobbying, whereas they appear to be characterised by the ‘positive persistence hypothesis’ and the ‘reversed positive persistence hypothesis’ with respect to European access. What appeared to be *contradictory* hypotheses might be instead *complementary* hypotheses, which are more or less useful on the basis of how we conceptualise interest group Europeanisation. Yet, at the same time empirical findings cannot allow one to exclude that other relevant factors should have been taken into account. Among these factors, the literature previously demonstrated that especially issue salience (Baumgartner & Leech 1998, pp. 177-184) and issue jurisdiction

²⁴ With respect to Model 2, even with a high number of ordinal categories, an ordinal regression is the mathematically correct model specification. However, in this case the interpretation of the results would be messy given the dependent variable’s large number of ordered values; this is why both models are OLS regressions. Yet, to confirm that OLS results are robust, a robustness test has been conducted by running the same model specification as an ordinal regression. Empirical results do not differ significantly: both independent variables have the expected sign; ‘national access’ is highly statistically significant.

(Constantelos 2004) are likely to affect interest group Europeanisation. Perhaps, mixed statistical results depend on the fact that neither the former nor the latter have been tested in this study.

Before concluding, a few words on control variables are necessary, because a few interesting empirical findings should be stressed. First of all, the kind of interest represented matters for both dimensions of interest group Europeanisation: business groups – as already noted in the descriptive statistics section – are both more inclined to undertake a large part of their lobbying activities at the supranational level, as well as to obtain access to EU institutional venues than citizens' groups and – above all – other groups are. On this, we thus have a further empirical confirmation of what has been repeatedly argued in the literature (Coen 2007, p. 335).

A further (partial) confirmation of previous empirical findings in the literature concerns organisational resources: expertise and reputation, in particular, matter for EU institutional access. The more interest groups are well equipped with these particular resources, the more likely they are to gain access to EU institutional venues, and vice versa. Yet financial resources impact on interest group Europeanisation in a more contradictory way: they are a good predictor for the percentage of EU lobbying, while they are much less useful for EU institutional access.

In broader terms, the Italian case is fairly similar to the French, German and British cases (Eising 2007), as well as to the Irish and Spanish cases (Dür & Mateo 2012), and to the Belgian and Dutch cases (Beyers & Kerremans 2012). Put differently: where institutional access is concerned, resources seem to matter all over (Western) Europe.

Overall, the theoretical framework proved to be sufficiently useful for predicting the degree of Europeanisation of Italian interest groups. It is worth noting that different factors are useful to differing extents in predicting various aspects of the concept of 'interest group Europeanisation'. This is a first – rather preliminary – confirmation, that the concept of 'interest group Europeanisation' is a multifaceted one: it is useful to take into account all its sub-dimensions, rather than focusing exclusively on institutional access.

Conclusions

In recent years, an ever-growing number of empirical studies have analysed the degree of ‘Europeanisation’ of national interest groups. This is not particularly surprising, though, given that the institutional environment in which European and national interest organisations operate is increasingly a multilevel arena characterised by the (co-)participation of both national actors and supranational institutions.

Despite this growing literature, there is still a lack of systematic studies on the degree of Europeanisation of Italian interest groups: in Italy, scholars have not paid sufficient attention to interest group politics and the Italian case is almost absent from comparative research (for an exception: Hanegraaff & Pritoni 2019). This article has aimed specifically to address this gap, both from a descriptive point of view – ascertaining whether Italian interest groups can be considered as more or less ‘Europeanised’ – as well as an explanatory point of view: hypothesising why Italian interest groups do what they do in their relationship with the EU.

From a descriptive point of view, the most interesting finding is that – on average – Italian interest groups show a rather limited degree of ‘Europeanisation’: they do not undertake most of their advocacy/lobbying activities at the EU level and they do not frequently obtain access to EU institutional venues. In other words, Italian groups clearly prefer lobbying in Rome to lobbying in Brussels. On this, albeit in a context of low variation, business groups seem to be relatively more ‘Europeanised’ than any other kind of groups.

From an explanatory point of view, the analytical framework proposed in section 2 has received sufficient empirical validation: relational resources seem to matter for interest groups’ Europeanisation. National centrality – intended as national access and self-perceived influence in national policymaking – is a decent predictor of both the percentage of lobbying activities undertaken in the supranational arena and the level of EU institutional access which Italian interest groups obtain. The former is negatively and the latter positively correlated with relational resources. This means that groups that are marginal in Rome actually try to follow a second-option strategy to reach their policy

aims and, in doing so, they thus decide to undertake much of their lobbying activity in Brussels. Unfortunately, this attempt does not lead to any particular improvement of their condition: at the EU level too they gain less institutional access than groups which are already at the core of the national interest system.

Many years ago, Antonio Gramsci (1920) famously juxtaposed the ‘optimism of will’ to the ‘pessimism of reason’: empirical findings presented here seem to confirm that well-known motto and sound like a further confirmation of the level of bias characterising EU institutions (Beyers 2002; Eising 2007; Beyers & Kerremans 2012; Dür & Mateo 2012), at least with regard to Italian interest groups. Furthermore, empirical findings presented here might lead to broader considerations on the Italian political system and its relationship to the EU in general. More precisely, the fact that the overwhelming majority of Italian interest groups prefer lobbying in Rome rather than in Brussels could indicate that – from this point of view also – Italy in the European context does not play that central role that past history, demographic size and economic weight would have suggested. Moreover, it could also represent a further confirmation of a well-known feature of Italian policymaking: that of focusing more on relationships consolidated over time (which are more likely to exist between national interest groups and national policymakers) than on a rational and systematic analysis of the decision-making context (which should suggest focusing more on supranational venues, where a great part of policy decisions is determined) (Di Mascio & Natalini 2016). Put another way: it appears that for Italian interest groups, ‘who’ you know continues to be more important than ‘what’ you know. However, both these hypotheses are quite impressionistic, since they do not deal with the very heart of this work, and should be simply considered as possible food for thought for future research.

Yet, future research should also focus on further issues, which remained untouched in this work. First of all, there is a need to insert the Italian case into a comparative perspective. The literature has convincingly demonstrated that institutional settings, as well as long-term traditions, do matter for

interest group Europeanisation (Eising 2007; Klüver 2010; Dür & Mateo 2012): only with a comparative research design can the effects of those same institutions be ascertained (or, at least, searched for).

As remarked above, the literature has also stressed the impact of issue characteristics for an interest group's decision to lobby at the EU level (Baumgartner & Leech 1998, pp. 177-184; Baumgartner et al. 2009): generally, highly salient and conflictual issues imply more multilevel lobbying. Hence, another very relevant direction for future research is to focus on policy processes in more depth. Finally, further research should also take into account how (much) issue jurisdiction impacts on the abovementioned trends. Indeed, in the literature many scholars have argued (and empirically demonstrated) that interest groups lobbying on issues whose jurisdiction is – either totally or partially – at the EU level are generally more 'Europeanised' than interest groups lobbying on issues whose jurisdiction is exclusively at the national level (Constantelos 2004).

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Appendix

Sampling procedure

Differently from the US and the EU, in Italy lobbying registers do not exist and there has never been any formal registration nor official lists of Italian interest groups. At a first glance, this would seem to prevent any empirical analysis of the Italian interest system as a whole. However, it does not represent an insurmountable challenge. To address this, Renata Lizzi and Andrea Pritoni (2017) have recently proposed a complex sampling procedure.

Firstly, they decided to recur to a very broad list of Italian interest organisations as a starting point: ‘*Guida Monaci*’ (GM) (<https://www.guidamonaci.it/new/>), which is a voluntary and periodic register of Italian associations and firms. In more detail, GM is a Business Information Company publishing periodic registers of Italian organisations and companies that operate in economic, social, cultural, professional, and public administration areas. Currently, ‘*Sistema Italia*’ is the dataset of GM and represents the state of the art on ‘Who does what’ in Italy. It is thus very similar to other bottom-up sources – encyclopaedias, handbooks, directories – used in the literature so far. The main advantages of this source lie in both its inclusiveness – thousands of different organisations are listed – as well as in its periodicity: indeed, ‘*Guida Monaci sul Sistema Italia*’ is available for the years 1971, 1979, 1986, 2001, 2005, and for 2013 there is an online edition. Overall, organisations and companies are currently listed in 21 categories, 17 of which contain firms (which are listed depending on the economic sector where they operate).

Secondly, in order to take into account only membership organisations, Lizzi and Pritoni excluded all actors listed in the abovementioned 17 categories containing only firms. For similar reasons, they also excluded all actors listed in the following categories: ‘Education and scientific research’; ‘Judiciary Bodies’; ‘Public Administration Bodies’. Their original population thus consisted of 27,401 associational groups listed in the ‘Various Organisations’ category. Yet this very broad category has a good number of sub-categories that do not include interest groups. More precisely,

also European agencies, territorial bodies, religious dioceses and churches, etc. are included in the abovementioned category. Thus, they further restricted their population to: *i)* Associations; *ii)* Committees; *iii)* Confederations; *iv)* Federations; *v)* Foundations; *vi)* Leagues; *vii)* Unions; *viii)* Professional Orders; *ix)* Think tanks. In this way, the whole population is reduced to 3,686 interest groups. However, as scholars usually suggest, each empirical analysis dealing with national interest systems has to focus on interest groups which are politically active at national level. Therefore, they also excluded all interest groups that are sub-nationally focused. This operation leaves them with a population of 1,551 interest groups.

As a third step, to distinguish between interest groups which are politically active and interest groups which are not, they decided to conduct an empirical analysis of interest group appearances in the media.²⁵ Put differently, their choice was to use media appearances as a checking procedure for actual interest group mobilisation. In this way, their final population dropped to 594 interest groups (Lizzi & Pritoni 2017, pp. 298-301).

Yet, to develop a population which is the result of both bottom-up and top-down mapping strategies, as the most recent literature suggests (Berkhout et al. 2018), the decision to focus on media appearances as a proxy for interest groups' mobilisation appear to be too demanding: above all, not all interest groups are equally 'newsworthy' (Binderkrantz 2012); moreover, some interest groups might seek not to appear in the media. Thus, for this article it was decided not to follow Lizzi and Pritoni's final procedural step and to take into account all their 1,551 organisations – regardless of media appearances – as a starting point.

Those same 1,551 interest groups are a 'starting point' because *Guida Monaci* – as said before – cannot be used as the sole source of information. This is basically due to the fact that the registration of the various organisations is carried out on a voluntary basis only. Thus, it may be that a lobbying

²⁵ They chose to focus on national newspapers. More precisely, they selected two national dailies: '*la Repubblica*' and '*il Sole 24 Ore*'.

organisation prefers not to register, making it invisible in the *Guida*. In order to minimise this problem, two more top-down sources of information have been added: firstly, the Transparency Register set up by the MISE (Italian Ministry of Economic Development) in October 2016²⁶; secondly, all interest groups (which were not already listed in the *Guida*) participating in a parliamentary hearing (either in the Chamber of Deputies or in the Senate of the Republic) from the beginning of the XVII legislature (March 2013) and until the end of 2016. In this way, it was followed both a bottom-up (the *Guida*) and a top-down (MISE Transparency Register and parliamentary hearings) mapping strategy (Berkhout et al. 2018) and I have been able to add 43 additional interest groups to the abovementioned list of 1,551 organisations, bringing the total population to 1,594 groups.

Yet, given that only 1,277 of them have a national website and a valid e-mail address, it was not possible to send the online questionnaire on which this study is based to the whole population of groups. The invitation to participate in the survey was exclusively sent to those same 1,277 interest groups with an e-mail address, which therefore constitute the final population of Italian interest groups. See, on this procedure, Table A1 below:

Table A1 *Interest groups in Italy: sampling procedure*

| <i>Population</i> | <i>No. of actors</i> |
|---|----------------------|
| Bottom-up sampling (<i>Guida Monaci</i>): firms excluded | 42,808 |
| Education institutions and public/judiciary bodies excluded | 27,401 |
| Only associations, committees, confederations, federations, foundations, etc. | 3,686 |
| Sub-nationally focused interest groups excluded | 1,551 |
| Top-down additions (MISE Transparency Register + parliamentary hearings) | 1,594 |
| Only interest groups with a website and an e-mail address (final population) | 1,277 |

²⁶ This register is neither complete nor systematic. Yet it represents one of the first efforts made by the Italian government to list interest groups that have relationships with public bureaucracies.

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Robustness test

Table A2 *Robustness test: response rates among different samples of interest groups*

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Sample</i> | <i>Whole population</i> | | | <i>Model 1: EU lobbying</i> | | | <i>Model 2: EU access</i> | | |
|-----------------|---------------|-------------------------|----------|-----------|-----------------------------|----------|-----------|---------------------------|----------|-----------|
| | | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>RR</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>RR</i> | <i>N</i> | <i>%</i> | <i>RR</i> |
| Business groups | | 135 | 28.2 | 38.1 | 81 | 32.7 | 22.9 | 89 | 28.5 | 25.1 |
| Citizens groups | | 165 | 34.5 | 43.3 | 78 | 31.5 | 20.5 | 104 | 33.3 | 27.3 |
| Other groups | | 178 | 37.2 | 32.8 | 89 | 35.9 | 16.4 | 119 | 38.2 | 22.0 |
| | Total | 478 | 100.0 | 37.4 | 248 | 100.0 | 19.4 | 312 | 100.0 | 24.4 |

| <i>Variable</i> | <i>Whole population</i> | <i>Model 1: EU lobbying</i> | <i>Model 2: EU access</i> |
|-----------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mean age | 39.7 | 37.2 | 39.0 |

Notes:

- RR = response rate
- X^2 (chi-square) between ‘whole population’ and ‘EU lobbying’: 2.57; Cramér’s V between ‘whole population’ and ‘EU lobbying’: 0.05
- X^2 (chi-square) between ‘whole population’ and ‘EU access’: 0.24; Cramér’s V between ‘whole population’ and ‘EU access’: 0.02