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**Particularities of the European Policy
toward Social Nongovernmental
Organizations**

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The paper explores the European policy towards civil society organizations (CSOs) working in the social sphere¹. In particular it focuses on the policy measures aimed at involving CSOs in the policy formulation process (European Commission consultative regime) and maintaining financial assistance for European nonprofit organizations. The point of departure for this paper is the adoption of such EU documents as the White Paper on European Governance and the discussion paper “The Commission and Non-governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership” (2001)² elaborated in order to extend and stipulate the possibilities for civil society involvement in the decision making process at the European level of governance. Why is it worth analyzing and estimating the effects of the European Commissions’ attempts to enhance dialog with NGOs and in particular with organizations working in the social sphere?

Initially, the European Union developed as an integrated economic community where member state governments and cross-European business groups played the key role in the main policy areas. The interests of existing economic associations and transnational companies are transmitted through a wide range of negotiation frameworks. The representation of diffuse interests³ (NGOs) in the negotiation process remained relatively modest. This can also be explained by the particularity of social policy at the European level. The extending of EU competencies in the social sphere and the resistance of national models of social policy to the integrated process facilitates high level political negotiations in which civil society organizations have little say. Despite these challenges, the European Commission made an attempt to extend the involvement of civil society organizations in decision-making as this was seen as

¹ The notion social policy involves welfare policy provided to vulnerable social groups (youth, elderly, poor, unemployed, disabled)

² European Governance. A White Paper, Brussels, 2001 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2001/com2001_0428en01.pdf)

³ The notion *diffuse interests* is used according to the method of categorizing different types of societal actors (diffuse vs. special interests). For a detailed description see B. Finke. Civil Society Participation in EU Governance

Living Review of European Governance, Vol. 2 (2007), N 2. [Online Article]: <http://www.livingreviews.org/lreg-2007-2> cited [20.09.2010]

a source of legitimacy. The involvement of civil society organizations in the European negotiation process was supposed form a bridge between the European institutions and ordinary citizens, thus contributing to solving the problem of democratic deficit in the EU. Therefore service providing organizations were intended to perform first of all as advocacy organizations which determined the particularities of the inclusion of NGOs on the European Commission's agenda, resulted in the development of European associations of NGOs and effected the institutionalization of their participation. In this regard the question about the particularities and consequences of institutional arrangements for NGO involvement and financial support seems to be important to address. Thus this paper is aimed at describing the conditions and main principles for NGO cooperation with the European Commission and analyzing their effect on NGOs' internal structures and the functions they provide. The analysis is focused on the cooperation of CSOs with the European Commission in the social sphere.

The paper addresses its core question in three steps. In the first step it describes the particular conditions under which the main regulations to extend CSO involvement in European policy formulation were adopted. It focuses on the Maastricht Treaty, the discussion paper, "The Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership", and the White Paper on European Government. The second part of the paper is devoted to the particularities of social policy at the European level of governance. It analyzes the way common European social policy is formulated and implemented in order to determine the role civil society organizations play in this process. The next part deals with the European Commission's measures providing financial and organizational assistance to encourage the activity of civil society organizations at the European level. It looks at different kinds of consultative mechanisms and financial arrangements. The paper concludes with the evaluation of factors influencing the particularities of the involvement of social NGOs in negotiations with the European Commission.

European Regulations for Civil Society Involvement

A range of researches carried out on the European Union has shown that a multi-level system of governance has triggered the evolution of a transnational community around certain policy spheres (Beyers, Eising, Maloney, 2008; Kohler-Koch, 1999; Pollack, 1997). This process is clearly reflected in the growth of European interest groups. It is important to mention that economic interests take priority in comparison with civil society groups. However, in the last twenty years the number of diffuse interests (NGOs) and the extent of their activities at all levels of governance have grown significantly. According to some researchers there are two main points of growth: in 1983 and in 1990 (Beyers, Eising, Maloney, 2008: 1113). It is worth noting that the growth of the non-profit sector and the extension of its activity was a natural process which affected all Western European countries and was a result of the expansion of the service economy; the privatization of social security; and the further development of self-organization activity in society (Anheier, 2002). The further development of the EU system of interest representation linked with constitutional reforms, resulted in more majority voting in the Council of Europe, the strengthening of the European Parliament and the extension of EU policy competencies (Beyers, Eising, Maloney, 2008: 1113). How have these developments influenced the role of civil society organizations in the European negotiation process?

The development of the European system of governance affected not only the scope of the involvement of CSOs in the negotiation process with the European institutions but also its quality. Changes in the forms and the extent of the cooperation between the European Commission and non-governmental organisations are noticeable in the terminology used in documents: from a “consultation” approach to “partnership” and “participation” (Quittkat, Finke, 2008: 184). There are two intertwined reasons which should be emphasized when seeking to explain the gradual elaboration of a normative basis for civil society involvement: the extension of EU competencies after the adoption of the

Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and the debate on democratic legitimacy which the European institutions faced and had to deal with.

The European Social Dialogue with the social partners was established by the 1987 Single European Act as an integral part of EU decision-making in social policy. It embraced two main interest groups: European labor unions and business employee associations. Its principles were later on included in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and required the compulsory consultation of social partner organizations on a range of issues concerning employment and social affairs at the European level. Consultations on diffuse topics were also opened, involving: human rights and women's organizations and environmental and consumer associations. This process took place in accordance with the extension of EU competencies in the social sphere. The European Commission, as the most interested actor, sought to expand its role in various policy areas.

Under the terms of the Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam Treaties (1997), the EU level was granted additional competences in social security, healthcare and social services on the principle of subsidiarity. This means that member states retain the highest level of policymaking while the European institutions take on as many legal and political competencies as needed (Anheier, 2002). This principle demonstrates the resistance of national governments to entrusting competences in the social sphere to the European level. The reasons for this position and the consequences for NGO involvement will be considered in a later part of the paper. For now it is vital to emphasize the importance of the Amsterdam Treaty in the political recognition of voluntarism and the third sector (Kendall, 2010: 50). Therefore the new obligations entrusted to the European Union encouraged the European Commission to cooperate with the organizations working in the areas of social and educational policy. As a result, a wide range of consultation instruments as well as the implementation of funding programmes for NGOs were triggered (Quittkat, Finke, 2008: 191).

The problem of the democratic deficit which the EU institutions faced was another factor which influenced the development of cooperation with civil society

organisations. In the 90s, European experts and academics accused the European Commission of “technocratic decision-making, a lack of transparency, insufficient public participation, excessive use of administrative discretion and of having inadequate mechanisms of control and accountability (Majone, 1998:14). A critical debate on the EU’s democratic legitimacy encouraged the European Commission to intensify contacts with societal groups.

More intensive cooperation with civil society organisations was seen as a tool to promote transparency and openness in the decision-making process at the European level as a whole (Kohler-Koch and Finke, 2007; Dahl, 1994; Horeth, 1999). In response to the problems regarding the crisis of legitimacy, the discussion paper, “The Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership” was adopted by the European Commission. This document proposes the main justifications and principles for cooperation with NGOs. Several justifications for the cooperation are mentioned, including: fostering participatory democracy, representing the views of specific groups of citizens in the European institutions, contributing to policy making, and project management and European integration (article 1.3 of the discussion paper).⁴ It also provides a definition and classification of NGOs involved in cooperation with the European institutions and considers existing relationships. Therefore the adoption of this discussion paper is seen as a crucial moment for furthering public engagement (Kendall, 2010: 49).

In a way, the discussion paper created the basis for the White Paper on European Governance which was adopted in 2001.⁵ In this document the European Commission admits that the existing system, in which it consults mainly economic interest groups but not civil society as a whole, must be reformed. In this respect the White Paper on European Governance recognized the need for systematic dialog and consultation with volunteer organizations (Saurugger, 2008: 1281). The European Commission launched the process of

⁴ Discussion paper “The Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership” (http://ec.europa.eu/civil_society/ngo/docs/communication_en.pdf)

⁵ European Governance. A White Paper, Brussels, 2001 (http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2001/com2001_0428en01.pdf)

extending contacts with societal groups in order to “enhance both input legitimacy and effective political problem-solving” (Finke, 2007: 13). This document suggests developing more intensive interaction with the European Economic and Social Committee and the European Parliament. It is also aimed at making the system of forums and consultations with interests groups more transparent and based on stronger procedures. Further specifications were made in the Treaty of Lisbon whose articles stipulate that European institutions should seek dialog with citizens and maintain consultations with civil society organisations (Kuhnle, 2010: 72).

A brief overview of the adopted regulations for cooperation between organized civil society groups and the European Commission shows that this process was fostered by such political factors as the delegation of the competencies to the European level of governance and the problem of the democratic deficit of the European institutions. As a result these new mechanisms for cooperation were introduced and the number of diffuse interest groups taking part in European negotiations was increased (Sanchez-Salgado, 2007: 253). Thus these basic regulations created a conducive environment for the involvement of NGOs. At the same time, the adoption of basic documents affected policy towards NGOs in the way that Beate Kohler-Koch points out: while the White Paper proposes strengthening civil society, “structural deficiencies of societal representation in EU governance such as problems of collective action, missing yardsticks for representativity, and selectivity in the interaction of EU institutions and interest groups remain unsolved” (Finke, 2007: 14). In order to examine these effects the analysis begins with the particularities of the policy area in which social CSOs perform.

Particularities of the European Social Policy and Decision-Making Process

The range of NGOs' activities and the level of their involvement in the decision making process at the EU level is affected by the sphere in which they perform as co-operation with the European Commission is organized by policy areas (environment, social affairs, humanitarian and development, aid, trade etc). Common European policy reached quite a high level of integration in such areas as ecology and agriculture. There are widespread established contacts between the European Commission and environmental NGOs as well as organizations working on development issues. The existing convention about European standards in these spheres serves as a framework for cooperation between member states and non-state actors including civil society organizations. Regarding social policy it is necessary to emphasize that this area is still outside of common EU regulations. There are two main reasons accounting for this.

Firstly there is great diversity among member states in terms of economic development – a gap which increased after recent enlargements. Therefore the size of social transfers and public services varies in different countries. This apparently affects the level of NGO involvement in service providing activity in different European countries. There is also another, more fundamental reason for the diversity: the variety of national systems of social-protection. This is partly explained by such enduring political and ideological values as the expansive notion of *economie sociale* in France; various interpretations of the Catholic social doctrine of *subsidiarity* (in the national social welfare context) in continental Northern Europe; the tradition of an *ideller* sector in Sweden; the emphases on associationalism and *volontariato* in Italy; *cooperativismo* across Spain; and the concept of *charity*, expressed in a complex body of common law, in the United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland (Kendall, 2001: 8). As a result, national social policies differ considerably in terms of national cultures, laws and the way of providing social services (Anheier, 2002). As Fritz Scharpf stresses, European countries belong to different welfare models which affect the “normative

assumptions regarding the demarcation line separating the functions the welfare state is expected to perform” (Scharpf, 2002: 650). Despite the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 under which European Union competences were extended, the formulation of common social policy is still a matter for negotiation between member states.

A significant part of the European Commission’s regulations in the social sphere was adopted between the early 1970s and the early 1990s. The European Union experienced a surge of public regulations in such areas as environmental protection, consumer protection, women’s rights, and health and safety in the workplace. It is important to stress that the implementation of these directives was entrusted not to executive agencies at the European level, but to the individual member states of the Community (Pollack, 1997: 582). Therefore, despite the attempts to adopt social policy minimum standards, social programs and the financing of the social sphere is still largely the responsibility of EU members (Kuhnle, 2010: 73). The role of the European Court of Justice is crucial here because applications from non-governmental actors (including NGOs) foster the implementation of EU regulations at the national level. Nevertheless it seems justified to claim that integrated social policy at the European level is still at the stage of formulation.

The diversity of social policies in different countries affects the shape and the size of the non-profit sector, patterns of intermediation with the authorities and the sector’s role in providing social services. It apparently also influences the interests NGOs express at the EU level. As Kendall stresses, umbrella organizations represented at the European level tend to defend “nationally sanctioned protections and special statuses differentiating them from for-profit entities (as with the German and Dutch cases)” or perceive European integration as “potentially providing opportunities to circumvent obstructive national structures and regulations (as in the French case)” (Kendall, 2001: 9; Kendall, 2010). Therefore European civil society is characterized by strong decentralization and a multi-polar character because of different national

backgrounds and the interference with the activity of national civil society organizations at the European level (Eisele, 2005: 12).

According to Geyer, there is also diversity within European social policy itself. The European Union's social policy is well established in gender, youth and some areas of labor policy. At the same time it is less developed in disability, public health and anti-poverty policy; and poorly established in anti-racism and elderly policy. These differing levels of policy development generate different tactics and interests for the NGOs (Geyer, 2001: 482). Therefore the resistance from member states towards accepting common European standards in the social sphere, coupled with the diversity of interests in the third sector, encourages the European Commission to establish partnerships with particular NGOs working on the transnational level. In seeking to garner support for the formulation of common European social policy, the EC also encouraged maintaining European-based associations. Therefore, the particularities of social policy formulation and the composition of actors involved in this process influenced the strategies the European Commission used to establish cooperation with NGOs. There are two main mechanisms of cooperation between the European Commission and civil society organisations: financial support and involvement in the negotiation process. They are intertwined in the way that the European Commission strengthens the capacities of general interest groups by co-financing a certain number of European associations while offering them privileged access to the consultative committees (Saurugger, 2008: 1284). The way these mechanisms are used and the effects they produce are examined in the parts of the paper to follow.

Particularities of the European Commission's Funding of CSOs

Financial support played a key role in developing the collaboration with civil society groups at the European level. Funding has been an efficient tool used by the European Commission in order to maintain and support NGOs which foster a European dimension among target groups, other NGOs and national authorities. Financial support for non-profit organizations has been provided since the 80s and, according to Declaration 23 of the Maastricht Treaty, the range of financial support for NGOs was to be extended. Currently, social allocations occupy the second position in European spending on NGOs and amounts to 400 million Euros per year on average. Over recent years NGOs have been increasingly active lobbyists at the European level, interacting regularly with European officials. These joint efforts have resulted in the creation of a trans-national network and promoted mobilization along specific 'vertical' issue lines which are often linked with and funded by European Commission action programs supporting socially excluded groups (Kendall, 2001).

These procedures faced some difficulties when in 1998 the College of Commissioners took the decision to block to the spending of 800 million Euros earmarked for supporting NGO activity at the European level. The main argument justifying this was that the European Parliament had created new lines of expenditure without ensuring it had the necessary authority to do so. As a result, the European Commission had to find other resources and expertise to fund activities (Giampiero, Wilson, 2002). This crisis fostered the development of civil society organizations for cooperation and resulted in the creation of alliances and coalitions of NGOs which possess significant lobbyist resources.

The structure of funding provided for NGOs suffers from asymmetrical distribution among CSOs operating at the European level. In general, as Rosa Sanchez-Salgado claims, humanitarian organizations receive a considerable amount of funds and support from the EU but there is no specific budget line for human rights groups working in the EU (Sanchez-Salgado, 2007: 256). The

amount of funding also depends on the state of relations with the European Commission. Groups such as the European Youth Forum (EYF) and the European Women's Lobby (EWL) have received financial support from the European Commission since the 1980s. This support was arranged in the frame of so-called A-budget lines which cover EU administrative activities and represent long-term economic commitments over five to six years. Very few NGOs are provided with A-budget support. The main examples here are the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and the European Youth Forum (EYF).

The overwhelming majority of civil society organizations enjoy B-budget lines and project funding which cover programs from two to three years and under one to two years correspondingly. The European Commission grants funding for NGOs which are able to provide sufficient organizational capacity. Therefore small organizations face difficulties competing with resourceful NGOs. As some scholars claim, this asymmetry in financial support for different kinds of NGOs results in antagonism between them and "create[s] difficulties for coordinating common strategies between the NGOs" (Greyer, 2001: 481). As a result, there is a distinct hierarchy between the social NGOs. The most important indicator is staff and financial resources. There are three main groups of civil society organizations which cooperate with the European Commission:

1. Associations created with the support of the European Commission (The Liaison Committee of Development NGOs to the EU (CLONG), European Youth Forum (EYF), European Women's Lobby (EWL), European Environmental Bureau);
2. Organizations structured into alliances, federations or networks (Eurolink Age and Save the Children, European Solidarity Towards Equal Participation of People (EUROSTEP), SOLIDAR, CIDSE, APRODEV);
3. Organisations which encompass national and international NGOs (Amnesty International, Oxfam International, Greenpeace, Open Society Institute etc.).

There are some tensions between different kinds of organizations which are working in a similar policy field. For instance, a European Union-oriented organization such as the European Youth Forum has a particular spot in terms of cooperation with the European institutions, in comparison with the European Public Health Alliance whose interactions are restricted by the fact that they have contact only with the section of the Employment and Social Affairs DG (Geyer, 2001: 482). As Mahoney demonstrates, political institutions can wield strong influence through direct subsidies, payments, grants and other financial incentives. Funding can result in so-called 'lobby-sponsorship' whereby the European Commission funds general interest groups with the aim of building its own constituency and further enhancing its legitimacy (Saurugger, 2008: 1284). Thus the European Commission tends to provide funding for selected NGOs and prefers to work with EU-level umbrella organizations. At the same time the Commission risks undermining both the autonomy of NGOs (through imposing conditions on the grant of subsidies) and their suitability as "mechanisms of voice" for the otherwise disenfranchised (by favoring certain 'tame' groups) (Warleigh, 2001: 622).

European Commission Consultation Regime

Experts highlight the leading role of the Commission Directorate General (DG) responsible for social policy in building ties with civil society organizations; above all DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion should be mentioned. In dealing with issues such as gender, youth, social exclusion, disability and racism, Directorate General V sought to establish contacts with interest groups who played a more important role in these issues than the social partners (Finke, 2007: 79). It establishes such negotiation frameworks as conferences, online consultations, expert groups, expert seminars, or policy forums.

The notion consultation regime is used in order to describe the variety of cooperation mechanisms between the European Commission and civil society organizations. The term embraces such frameworks as online consultations, conferences, expert groups, expert seminars, policy forums, and ad hoc

meetings. Supported by the European Union, social NGOs have structured consultations through such mechanisms as:

- ✓ institutionalized relations with certain EU-based associations with the particular right to be consulted by the EC (for instance, the European Platform of Social NGOs);
- ✓ the bi-annual meetings of the European Social Policy Forum, institutionalized twice yearly meetings between the European Platform of Social NGOs, Parliament, Commission and European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC);
- ✓ policy specific meetings regarding particular Commission proposals (conferences, ad hoc meetings and on-line consultations).

The European Platform of Social NGOs (the Social Platform) was established in 2005 and embraces 39 member organizations functioning in the social sphere. The DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion had a remarkable role in establishing and supporting relations with the Social Platform, granting it the status of consultative body (Quittkat, Finke, 2008: 201).

Annual meetings are usually arranged by the Directorates and involve associations of NGOs. NGOs have the opportunity to comment on recent issues and the European Commission announces new initiatives. As an example, there are regular meetings (European Social Policy Forums) of the Platform of European Social NGOs with officials from the European Commission. The aim of these forums is to discuss strategic points of interaction between the European Commission and NGO associations. The European Commission encouraged networking among NGOs and supported the establishment of the Platform of European Social NGOs. This Platform was used by the European Commission for consultations. In spite of its contribution to the formulation of common European social policy, some experts question the ability of these meetings to resolve the democracy deficit dilemma (Nugent, Paterson, 2003; Finke, 2007).

Advisory committees differ from the annual meeting in their more systematic intermediation with EU officials. Informal consultations are one of the most widespread forms of interaction with NGO associations. Normally, these take the shape of ad hoc meetings. All these forms of intermediation are used to inform third sector representatives about European initiatives and programs and also to get feedback from civil society. Therefore, these mechanisms focus on the policy formulation process in order to assist the European Commission in its attempt to set the agenda for common European policy.

As some researchers stress, societal NGOs working at the national level recognized the need to cooperate with the EU institutions in order to have an access to the policy formulation process. As a result, the internal structure of numerous NGOs was reshaped and particular “European” departments and branches were formed. Whole areas of management focused on European lobbying appeared in the national third sectors and a number of networks were set up (Sanchez-Salgado, 2007: 264). The European Commission also adopted some institutional frames which encouraged the creation and maintenance of the European associations. Thus, the European social partner organizations’ right to be consulted by the Commission is based on the European organizations’ representativeness. In order to be recognized as European social partners and consulted by the European Commission, the social partner organisations must:

- ✓ act at a cross-industry level, or relate to specific sectors or categories and be organized at European level;
- ✓ consist of organisations which are themselves an integral and recognized part of Member States' social partner structures and with the capacity to negotiate agreements, and which are representative of all Member States, as far as possible;
- ✓ have adequate structures to ensure effective participation in the consultation process (Quittkat, Finke, 2008: 191).

These criteria were elaborated in accordance with the European Commission’s goal to cooperate with the European-dimension NGOs (Sanchz-

Salgado, 2007: 254). At the same time it seems to be obvious that the criteria settled upon narrow the range of civil society organizations involved in the consultation process. The large number of small interest groups dealing with European regulations continues to face imposing transaction costs when they attempt to organize across borders (Saurugger, 2008: 1285).

The question about access regulation for NGOs was raised in such documents as the White Paper on Governance and the Green Paper on Governance. The European Commission feared that a system of accreditation and the granting of consultative status would privilege only a few – the most resourceful interest groups – and so it chose “to encourage self-regulation by inviting the groups to elaborate a voluntary code of conduct” (Saurugger, 2008: 1281). The European Commission register for interest representatives was created as an open space in order to invite NGOs to use this informational resource without external pressure.⁶ But, the absence of regulations seems to reinforce the situation in which groups possessing financial and social resources are privileged whereas the voices of small interest groups, be they general interest or small business groups, are not heard quite as loudly in the consultation process. This situation results in unequal organized civil society involvement in the policy-making process (Saurugger, 2008: 1283). Therefore, the European procedures for cooperation do not level out the existing diversity among civil society organisations and sometimes even make it deeper.

Stijn Smismans analyzed the discourse of civil society as constituted by the European Commission and the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) and its impact on the structure of EU-level civil society. He argues that the civil society discourse shaped by the Commission and the EESC favors a functional, output-oriented conception of civil society involvement. This results in a preference for contacts with Brussels-based confederations of associations and stimulates the emergence of large NGO-networks covering a broad range of

⁶ The European Commission register:
<https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/transparency/regrin/welcome.do?locale=en#>
http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/reg/statistiques_en.pdf

issues at the EU-level (Smismans 2003: 491). This specific structure of European civil society explains, among other things, why EU-level NGOs are far too elitist to allow their members to take part in shaping policies. As researchers agree, civil society associations have failed to assume a “europeanizing function as conceptualized by advocates of active citizenship” (Warleigh 2001; Finke, 2007). This is mostly explained by the fact that the European umbrella organizations do not have direct members or local branches (Eiese, 2005: 12).

European policy towards civil society organizations has an impact on their internal structure and their ability to represent citizen’s interests. Mahoney claims the European Commission “has a remarkable and often unrecognized ability to influence the dynamics of the interest groups system” (Mahoney 2004: 462–463). A number of authors show that many civil society organizations are unable to act as catalysts for the participation of citizens, since their internal governance structures are insufficiently democratic. Interests are represented in participative processes by key officers or organizational elites with very little members’ input. The logic of multi level governance demands a high level of expertise and particular knowledge from CSO’s representatives. And therefore European associations are increasingly close to governments and resemble public bureaucracies. At the same time, some scholars argue that the involvement of interest groups and NGOs “aided the Commission in gauging the likely reception of future EU policies ‘on the ground’ – an important piece of knowledge in a system of decentralized implementation where much of the success of EU policies would depend on voluntary acceptance and compliance rather than enforcement” (Eisele, 2005: 7).

The overview shows that the development of mechanisms for cooperation between societal NGOs and the European Commission is strongly influenced by the EU institutions’ need for expertise and legitimacy, and less by the idea of creating new forms of political representation at the EU level (Saurugger, 2008: 1286). These incentives affect the strategies the European Commission chooses for cooperation with civil society organizations. Summarizing this part of the paper it is important to emphasize that the European Commission, using financial



tools and consultation regime procedures, encourages relations with European-based NGOs and associations. Favoring particular kinds of NGOs, the European Commission fosters unequal representation of civil society organizations in the consultation process as well as in funding. Correspondingly, the inequality in resources of various CSOs (different budget lines and the requirements for financial support from the European Commission) affects the level of NGO involvement.

Conclusion

The main idea of the paper was to analyze the principles of European policy towards civil society organisations at the European level of governance. In particular, it focused on the conditions for formation particular European policy towards societal NGOs and the ways this policy is implemented. As analysis shows, the European Commission's particular interest in NGOs was part of more large-scale reform of the European governance system in order to increase the transparency of decision making. The extension of the European Commission's competencies in the social sphere was another incentive for fostering cooperation with NGOs. These particular conditions determined the instrumental approach towards civil society organisations from the point of the European Commission. Seeking to attract public support for the formulation of common European policy in the social sphere, the European Commission encouraged the maintenance of European associations and NGO consortiums. In order to achieve this goal the European Commission introduced two main instruments: providing financial support and arranging consultation tools.

As analysis shows, the procedures adopted favor building relations with particular kinds of NGOs: European associations and umbrella organizations. For instance, in order to obtain European funding and consultation status NGOs have to meet the requirement of representativeness and prove their particular focus on the European dimension. It is obvious that these frameworks create obstacles for small NGOs which possess much more modest resources. Moreover, the European Commission also is less interested in cooperation with advocacy

organizations, favoring instead service-providing NGOs. Therefore, European regulations and funding mechanisms have influenced the shaping of the specific, European-oriented representation of civil society organizations.

Regarding the particularities of NGOs involved in negotiations, it is worth noting that the structure of EU-level NGOs is too elitist as they lack members from and ties with social groups whose interests they represent. This fact raises the question about their contribution to transparent decision making at the European level of governance. The European decision-making process stimulates all stakeholders to cooperate including European and national officials, political actors, business associations, trade unions and NGOs. Such negotiators need to be more informed about European regulations and be capable of carrying out expert functions; this is not generally the most common function of NGOs. As a result, only the most resourceful organizations (in terms of financial resources and the level of staff professionalism) are able to be involved in the negotiation process as equal partners. These particularities blur the boundaries between non-profit actors and commercial groups as well as public organizations acting at the European level.

The very fact that common social policy is still at the stage of formulation accounts for the role NGOs are able to play. European social NGOs are mostly involved with agenda setting and the policy formulation phase of the policy cycle because the welfare states are still in charge of the implementation of social policy. Therefore societal NGOs, whose activity is usually focused on providing services to citizens, are encouraged to perform advocacy functions at the European level of governance.

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