

# Measuring the Size and Scope of the EU Interest Group Population

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## Abstract

We present a new dataset enumerating the population of organizations listed and/or registered as lobbyists in the EU. In the first part of the paper we describe how we arrived at the population dataset by drawing on three independent sources (Coneccs; Landmarks; EP registry). We briefly discuss the validity of these registers in the context of recent substantial changes in each of them. In the second part, we present descriptive information on the number and type of groups as well as their territorial origins. In the last part, we outline potential research questions that can be addressed with the new dataset. This includes a description of our use of this new interest group sampling frame, combined with internet research, to arrive at a random sample of issues to be used as the basis for further research on the role of groups in the EU policy process.

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## **I. Introduction**

Groups representing a large variety of interests, from countries within and outside of Europe, and geographically rooted at the regional, national, supranational and international levels are active in European Union (EU) politics. In this paper we introduce a new dataset which tries to capture the number and diversity of groups active in politics at the EU level. A number of public registries and commercial sources on actors active in EU politics exist. Yet, each of these sources is characterized by particular insufficiencies as regards the representativeness of the sample of groups they contain (for a comprehensive discussion and empirical comparison, see (Berkhout and Lowery, 2008)). Our goal is to establish the most complete population list of EU-registered interest groups based on a variety of sources. This can then form the basis of better generalization and higher quality research among scholars interested in representation and lobbying in the EU. Our dataset will be made freely available to the public through our web site (<http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/ecpr/intereuro>). The goal of this paper is to explain the process of compiling the dataset, to explain the general contours of the interest-group population listed there, and to discuss the research that this new resource will make possible.

In the next section we outline the sources that went into the dataset and the decisions we took when merging these sources to the “EU interest group population dataset 2007-08.” Section III provides a description of the make-up of EU interest group population along two dimensions: first, the type of interest a group is representing and, second, a group’s level of territorial affiliation, i.e. the level at which a group is organizationally rooted. Section IV compares the dataset introduced here to the CONECCS database previously used by Mahoney. Section V sketches the kind of research questions for which scholars might want to draw on the new dataset. Section VI assesses issues of maintaining the database into the future; and in the Conclusion we summarize our goals for this long-run collaboration.

## **II. The “EU interest group population dataset 2007-08”**

The EU interest group population dataset introduced here draws on three different sources: First, the Commission’s CONECCS data base, in which groups participating in Commission committees or hearings register on a voluntary basis. For our dataset we drew on the August 2007 version of the CONECCS data base.<sup>5</sup> Second, the European Parliament’s (EP) accreditation register in which all groups and their representatives are listed that obtained the EP’s special entry pass which is, according to Rule 9 of the EP’s Rules of Procedure, needed for lobbyists to access the EP’s buildings and to interact with Members of the EP. Our dataset contains the April 2008 version of the EP registry. And, finally, Landmarks’ “European Public Affairs Directory,” a commercial register of groups, firms, national and international institutions as well as regional actors active in EU politics in Brussels. The Landmarks directory used here was published online in July 2007.

As the information in Table 1 shows, the sources that went into our dataset vary considerably in size. The Landmarks directory is the largest, listing 2,522 different organizations active in EU politics. As mentioned above, Landmarks not only covers national, supranational and international interest groups but also businesses, international organizations, law firms, consultancies, and public actors such as regional representations to the EU. This inclusive quality distinguishes Landmarks most strongly from CONECCS whose focus is on EU collective actors, i.e. membership associations organized at the EU level. In addition, it only registers Euro-groups that are ‘considered representative by the Commission’. This is not surprising given the European Commission’s consultation policy to preferentially involve and interact with EU level organizations representing a common EU position (e.g. Greenwood, 2007, 343). Not the least as a result of this restricted scope, the CONECCS data base is considerably smaller than Landmarks covering only 749

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<sup>5</sup> In March 2007 the Commission adopted a Communication on the Greenbook dealing with the “European Transparency Initiative” (COM 2007, 127) and, as a result, closed the CONECCS data base and replaced it with a new voluntary ‘Register of Interest Representatives’ in June 2008 (<http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regrin/>).

organizations. In addition, while the EP registry seems to be as inclusive as Landmarks with respect to the types of actors covered, Landmarks is numerically more encompassing than the EP registry, which covers 1,534 organizations in the version used here (Berkhout and Lowery, 2008: 505-506). In sum, the three data sources do not cover the same populations. Landmarks is much broader; CONECCS is focused on EU-level associations (as opposed, say, to corporations that might have a significant lobbying presence in Brussels); and the EP registry is simply any organization that has a door-pass to enter the Parliament building. By putting these three sources together and deleting the duplicate entries, we hope to create the most inclusive and accurate list of lobbying organizations in the EU yet compiled. Table 1 summarizes the sources from which the data come.

(Insert Table 1 about here)

Taken individually, the three sources list a total of 4,805 individual organizations. In order to delete duplicate entries we first merged them all into the same electronic format. Afterwards, the Landmarks entries were electronically re-ordered in alphabetic order. In a further step the Landmarks entries were made grammatically compatible with the CONECCS and EP register entries by, for example, replacing abbreviations (e.g. “Ass.”) through full words (e.g. “Association”). After the datasets were brought into a common grammatical/spelling format, we first merged the Landmarks with the CONECCS dataset, ordered them alphabetically and then deleted duplicates, of which there were 489 in this step. Finally, the combined Landmarks/CONECCS dataset was merged with the EP register and again ordered alphabetically to delete duplicates, of which we discovered an additional 487. Additional duplicates were identified through manual searching, generally from slightly different names or spellings used for the same organization. In all, we deleted 1,105 duplicates out of 4,805, or 23 percent of the total, resulting in a final dataset with 3,700 lobbying organizations.

Of course, 3,700 organizations is certainly an underestimate of the actual population of all interest groups, institutions, businesses, think tanks, law firms, local governments, and other actors which engage in EU politics. Given the quality of data sources which we drew on to establish our dataset we are confident to have included virtually all important actors who are regularly involved in EU lobbying (for a more extensive discussion of the quality of Landmarks, CONECCS and the EP accreditation registry, see (Berkhout and Lowery, 2008). Our estimation of the EU interest group population is certainly low, however, because some entities may only occasionally be involved in EU lobbying, or exert their influence through indirect means, and we do not capture those actors here. Considering the multi-level structure of the EU political system, a considerable share of EU lobbying activities can be expected to be directed at politicians and bureaucrats in national institutions and taking place in the national political arena (Pappi and Henning, 1999, Beyers, 2002, Eising, 2004, Wonka, 2008). These would escape our attention. Although Landmarks and the EP accreditation register contain national actors, their focus is on those actors active at the EU level in Brussels. We do not think that it is possible to systematically compile a list of all such actors in a general dataset. By contrast, a research approach focused on a particular policy debate or a sample of issues would certainly identify organizations active in an indirect manner or with a national-level focus for their lobbying efforts. These groups would be engaged in EU lobbying, but not lobbying the institutions of the EU in Brussels. When interpreting and using the data in our dataset, one should keep in mind that the groups included are those regularly active in lobbying the institutions of the EU in Brussels, not necessarily the individual member states.

### **III. A description of the EU interest group population**

Table 2 presents the breakdown of organizations by the set of group types used in the Landmarks Directory. Note that the directory distinguishes among organizations organized at the EU level and similar organizations or federations of organizations from the national level.

(Insert Table 2 about here)

As has been observed in earlier analyses of interest group populations in the US, the EU, and in various national systems, professional associations and corporations, i.e. groups representing business interests, provide the largest share of groups mobilized for political action, and table 2 shows that the current EU interest representation population is no exception to this trend. Combining the categories associated with business interests (e.g., all those except international organizations, regions, think tanks, political parties, and other) shows that 3,055 or over 82.5 percent of the total come from the business sector.<sup>6</sup>

We can also assess the national origin of the national and regional groups present in the dataset, and Table 3 presents this distribution.

(Insert Table 3 about here)

Table 3 shows, as expected, representatives from large member states dominate the scene. Given the French *étatiste* tradition (Eising, 2004), it is perhaps surprising that there are almost as many French as British groups. Moreover, Benelux groups clearly profit from their geographical proximity to the EU capital Brussels, as actors from these countries are clearly overrepresented given their relative sizes. In addition, organizations from Eastern Europe so far seem to be hesitant to enter the Brussels scene, or at least by 2007-08 they had not made the transition to sustained activity in the EU capital leading to inclusion in one of the three databases that form our population list. This is, perhaps, most remarkable for groups from Poland, which is one of the biggest member states of the EU and one of the economically

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<sup>6</sup> One caveat to this is that large numbers of citizen groups are listed in the Landmarks category “professional associations and interest groups.” In future analyses, we plan to separate these out in order to have a more accurate assessment of the distribution of bias in the EU interest group population.

most powerful of the Eastern European member states. We also note a large number of organizations from non-member states present in Brussels. We have not reported all of them here but restricted ourselves to organizations from the USA and Switzerland, both of which have more domestic organizations active in Brussels than the typical EU-member state, even restricting the analysis to the long-established EU-15 members. Switzerland, which is comparable in size to Austria, Czech Republic, Finland, Hungary, and Greece, is represented by considerably more organizations than these member states. The US ranks fourth in its national contingent of interest groups in Brussels, behind only Germany, the UK, and France.

Table 4 shows the level at which groups are mobilized.

(Insert Table 4 about here)

National and subnational organizations represent approximately 45 percent of the total, rising to 49 percent with the inclusion of EU branches of national groups. EU- and European groups together represent 44 percent of the total, with the remainder being international organizations or of unknown origin. Although the EU has been conceptualized as a highly integrated multi-level political system (Marks et al., 1996, Kohler-Koch, 1996, Grande, 1996), the numerical strength of regional and national organizations and the degree of political integration this expresses might still be surprising. Clearly, about half of the population of groups active in Brussels have their primary organizational roots in the nation-state or regions.

#### **IV. Comparing CONECCS and the new dataset**

For years CONECCS was taken as the universe of groups active in Brussels (and we provide 2003, 2004, and 2007 versions of the database online for scholars interested in exploring changes over time)<sup>7</sup> but our new database has much broader coverage. Mahoney constructed a database from the information available on CONECCS for nearly 700 civil society organizations active in the EU in 2003. The dataset includes information on group type,

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<sup>7</sup> The date can be found at: <http://sites.maxwell.syr.edu/ecpr/intereuro>

membership size and spread across the European states, organizational character, creation date, founding state, policy area concentrations, Commission funding, positions on consultation committees, and relations with Commission directorates general (DG). Further, from this information she coded: the type of group from self reported organizational objectives, the level at which the group is organized, and whether or not the organization maintained a Brussels office. We can compare the characteristics of the CONECCS database with the broader one and do so beginning in Figure 1, which reports on the types of groups listed in CONECCS.

(Insert Figure 1 about here)

As Figure 1 shows, business dominates the CONECCS database just as Table 2 showed was the case for the broader database. Comparison is made slightly difficult because the two data sources do not use the same classification system, which is why we cannot present a simple side-by-side comparison. However, both tell a similar story of business dominance. Trade, professional and business groups combined comprise 68 percent of the 685 groups in the Civil Society Group dataset. These sectors are able to garner larger stores of resources and consequently exhibit higher levels of mobilization. This is not to say that the interests that would likely counterbalance business are negligible in size, combining citizen, worker, youth and education groups results in nearly a quarter (24.1 percent) of the interests active at the EU level but they remained in the minority.

For the case of 435 organizations in the CONECCS database, we have information about whether they have members in each of the EU member states. Figure 2 shows the geographic coverage of these groups, that is, the number of organizations with members in each of the listed member states.

(Insert Figure 2 about here)

Figure 2 shows that 400 out of 435 groups for which there was membership information had members in France. In general, the wealthier member states exhibit higher



levels of representation. Germany, France the UK and Belgium were the most highly represented while the poorer member states of Portugal, Ireland and Greece were represented by significantly fewer interest groups. Turning to the poorer countries of Eastern Europe, which at the time were candidate countries, again wealthier countries were better represented. The Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia are the wealthier candidates and again are the better represented, while the poorest nations of Lithuania and Latvia receive relatively little representation, with Latvia receiving representation in only 19 percent of all groups for which we have information on membership. Clearly, the vast bulk of “EU” organizations have members in Germany, France, Belgium, the UK, Italy, and the Netherlands, but after that the range of geographic coverage falls off substantially.

There is a systematic relationship between GDP per capita and representation through the EU group system, as illustrated in Figure 3.

(Insert Figure 3 about here)

Figure 3 shows the relationship of state representation through the lobbying universe to state wealth more systematically. The scatter-plot shows the per capita GDP (2001) of the member states and candidate countries plotted against the number of groups through which the nation receives representation. This figure provides further support that wealthier nations are better represented before the European supranational institutions. The outlier is Luxembourg. While it is a very wealthy nation with a per capita GDP of \$43,400, it is also very small with a total population of only 448,569 (estimated 2002). Still, it has more members in EU-level interest groups as he Czech Republic, Hungary, or Poland, countries many times its size by population.

Mahoney (2008) combined CONCCS, the EP registry and the European Public Affairs directory to create a sampling frame from which to randomly sample advocates active on EU issues. This broader sampling frame led to a much wider range of actor types, beyond the primarily EU-level and industry focused groups listed in CONCESS.

## **V. Possible uses of the new dataset**

We plan to make the database we have created freely available to scholars world wide by posting it on a web site once it is fully cleaned and checked for accuracy. It should be helpful to researchers with quite different research interests. First, the dataset can be used to draw a sample of organizations active in EU politics. The dataset allows restricting the population of groups from which to draw a sample to a certain type of actor. For example, scholars interested exclusively in consultants' and law firms' activities in EU politics could select only those actors and draw their sample from this sub-population. The sampling of organizations might serve two quite different research interests: first, scholars might want to study the extent to which organizations deal with EU politics and which strategies they apply when engaging in EU politics. Such a sampling strategy would thus be attractive for scholars with an interest and focus on organizational studies. Secondly, researchers might sample a number of groups and use the sampled groups to identify a set of policy issues. These issues might be identified via groups' homepages or by phoning them up asking for the most recent issue they have been dealing with and then investigated more closely.

Whatever the exact research interest and thus sampling strategy might be, using the dataset presented here to sample a number of groups will help to avoid introducing a systematic bias in the groups investigated which might result, for example, when sampling from media sources or EU institution's official hearings, consultations or committees. Sampling issues or groups from media sources can be expected to lead to a bias towards issues that have generated a degree of conflict that makes them newsworthy. Moreover, selecting groups through media might lead to a systematic bias towards organizations that are conceived as important and influential players. Sampling from official documents might introduce a bias towards particularly active groups or groups institutionally privileged by a particular EU institution, such as EU wide organized interest groups by the Commission.

Moreover, the dataset can be used to identify the EU interest group population, i.e. those groups that are regularly active in EU politics and lobbying in Brussels. The dataset could be further developed to see how the number of groups and the types of groups vary in different policy areas or in the different Directorates General of the European Commission, or what types of groups are more active in intervening with the Commission, the Council, and the Parliament. One could assess whether some policy areas characterized by a strong overrepresentation of business groups while others show a more balanced representation of groups representing specific and diffuse interests. Moreover, some policy areas, such as agriculture for example, might have a strong supranational organization, COPA in this case, enjoying something like a representational monopoly at the EU level and therefore being part of a relatively small EU sector group population. Another question that is interesting from a population perspective is the relative representation of groups from the different member states. National groups play an important role in Brussels, yet the extent to which producers, workers, consumers etc. from different member states see their interests represented directly vis-à-vis the EU institutions might vary strongly for reasons related to the structural make-up of national interest intermediation and state traditions – French *étatisme*, British pluralism and German corporatism – or to a lack of resources or experience in Brussels, as might be the case for groups from the economically less developed member states in Eastern Europe. Differences in the composition of the (sector-specific) group populations can be expected to affect the dynamics of politics and policy outcomes and should therefore be of interest to interest group scholars. Moreover, from a democratic theory perspective the composition of EU interest group population(s) might be the starting point for reflections on possible deficiencies in the representation of particular societal groups and interests in EU politics.

Finally, our dataset might allow identifying “issue populations,” i.e. groups for which we have theoretical reasons to assume that their members and constituencies are affected by a specific EU decision. These “issue populations” might considerably diverge from “sector

populations” as a sector might be composed of different branches and only some of them might be directly affected by an EU decision. Having thus identified the potential “issue population” one might go about comparing it to the population of groups being active in that issue to see to what extent the mobilization potential was actually realized. A number of very interesting questions could be addressed this way: (how) does mobilization vary across different issues (and which factors could possibly explain this), are the groups that mobilized representing heterogeneous interests or do we rather see activities of rather, in terms of their preferences, homogeneous “policy communities” and finally how does mobilization affect the relative success of interest groups in exerting influence on a particular policy? So far, large parts of EU interest group research is focusing on “interesting” cases, i.e. cases where groups were heavily mobilizing and which showed strong political conflict. However, such a sample can hardly be expected to be representative of the large number of decisions being taken at the EU level and thus does not lend itself to generalized statements about the quality and character of interest group politics and interest group influence on EU decisions.

## **VI. Assessing the development of the EU group population over time**

We plan not only to make this database available to scholars to use for a variety of purposes, but also to update it periodically to allow studies of the dynamics of organizational activities in Brussels. This presents some particular research problems however because there is no guarantee that the source materials on which our database is constructed will remain stable in their format and procedures or even that they will continually exist.

First, the good news: although the Landmarks Public Affairs Directory is after 2007 only available through an online subscription, it is now published by a new publisher, Dod’s, and thus likely to keep existing over the next couple of years. It should therefore be available for updating the database. Second, the largest challenge to the consistent continuation of our database seems the replacement of CONECCS with the ‘Register of Interest Representatives’.

The 'Register of Interest Representatives' that replaces CONECCS from June 2008 onwards could be an important new data source. At the moment, after a slow start-up, the register lists about 1700 organizations. However, the quality of the data is disputed (eg FT, 2009, Alter EU, 2009). These criticisms are twofold: first, due to vague instructions or categories organizations provide incomparable information on for instance finances related to lobbying. Second, and more importantly, the voluntary character of the register and the absence of criteria on the side of the Commission (like 'entering the building' such as the case for the EP register) has led to large numbers of seemingly irrelevant registrations. The quality of the new register in terms of the registration of 'relevant' interest representatives might therefore not be the same as in CONNECS. The use of this list in future versions of our database will thus require intensive checks of the validity of the information provided. Third, the register of the European Parliament may be abolished during the next couple of years, not the least, because in the up-coming evaluation of the new Commission register, the Commission will examine a possible merger with the Parliament register.<sup>8</sup>

The combination of Landmarks Public Affairs directory with the more time-sensitive EP register should make it possible to continue updating the dataset introduced here. Depending on its future development and quality, we will also draw on the new 'Register of Interest Representatives'. To do so we will closely monitor the developments and check the quality and validity of changes in the above mentioned data sources. In case the new Commission register indeed turns out to be a source of questionable validity, we might exclusively rely on Landmarks and the EP registry for the continuation of our data base, given that these two sources cover most (around 90 per cent) of the organizations listed in CONNECS. Needless to say in this regard we would of course welcome a true EU interest representatives' registration system with encompassing information on, for example, which EU institutions the respective representative interacted with in its efforts to influence EU

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<sup>8</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/commission\\_barroso/kallas/doc/joint\\_statement\\_register.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/kallas/doc/joint_statement_register.pdf)

policies. In any case, we need regular assessments of the size and shape of the EU interest group community and we will be working into the future to establish these databases.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has given an overview of a newly created database. We expect that scholars in a variety of areas will be interested in using it for their own research purposes. Rather than each construct a new population list from which to sample, it seems preferable for the research community to have some shared infrastructure, which is why we propose to break from typical scholarly practice and make these databases available freely, without limit, to the academic community. For our own purposes, we expect to be conducting projects based on a sample of issues drawn from assessments of the activities of a sample of groups drawn from this database. Others, however, might want to use the database for other purposes, which we encourage. Finally, we hope to be able to maintain and update the database regularly into the future. In the end, we hope that the creation and maintenance of new research infrastructure such as this might encourage the development of an increasingly vibrant research community studying lobbying and the mobilization of interests in the EU.

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## Tables and Figures

Table 1: Sources of “EU interest group population dataset 2007-08”

<i>DATASET</i>	<i>NUMBER OF ORGANIZATIONS</i>
CONECCS	749
Landmarks directory <sup>9</sup>	2,522
EP accreditation register	1,534
Total groups listed in any of the three sources	4,805
Minus duplicates	-1,105
Final Dataset	3,700

Table 2: Types of organizations registered to lobby the EU.

Group Type	Frequency	Percent
1. Professional associations and interest groups	1,847	49.9
2. Corporations	492	13.3
3. Chamber of Commerce	36	1.0
4. Consultants	219	5.9
5. National employers’ federations	58	1.6
6. International organizations	118	3.2
7. Law firms	124	3.4
8. National trade and professional organizations	252	6.8
9. Regions (including municipalities)	267	7.2
10. Think tanks and training	146	4.0
11. Labor unions	30	0.8
12. National associations of Chambers of Commerce	27	0.7
14. Political parties*	7	0.2
13. other	7	0.2
Missing	70	1.9
Total	3,700	100.1

Note: \* = not a Landmark category

<sup>9</sup> The Landmarks directory lists organizations in different categories (trade organizations, professional organizations etc.). Some organizations are listed in more than one category. The figure 2,522 in the table refers to the number of unique organizations listed, after deleting duplicates.



Table 3: Country of origin of organizations registered to lobby the EU.

Country	Frequency	Percent
A. EU-15 States		
Germany	380	18.7
UK	285	14.0
France	274	13.4
Netherlands	150	7.4
Italy	139	6.8
Belgium	120	5.9
Spain	75	3.7
Austria	54	2.7
Sweden	41	2.0
Denmark	42	2.0
Finland	18	0.9
Portugal	15	0.7
Luxemburg	13	0.6
Ireland	13	0.6
Greece	5	0.3
B. New EU-27 States		
Poland	28	1.4
Czech Republic	16	0.8
Slovakia	12	0.6
Hungary	11	0.5
Romania	7	0.3
Latvia	4	0.2
Estonia	4	0.2
Lithuania	2	0.1
Slovenia	3	0.2
Cyprus	2	0.1
Malta	2	0.1
Bulgaria	2	0.1
C. Selected Non-EU States		
USA	181	8.9
Switzerland	75	3.7

Note: The table lists the nation of origin for those organizations that list it. For Non-EU states, we include only the two most prominent home countries.

Table 4: Level of territorial focus of organizations registered to lobby the EU.

Territorial focus	Frequency	Percent
Subnational	297	8.0
National	1,371	37.1
EU Branch of national organizations	154	4.2
EU level	1,368	37.0
European, not EU	274	7.4
International, not European	127	3.4
Missing	109	3.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,700</b>	<b>100.1</b>

Figure 1. Distribution of Group Types in the EU Interest Group Environment

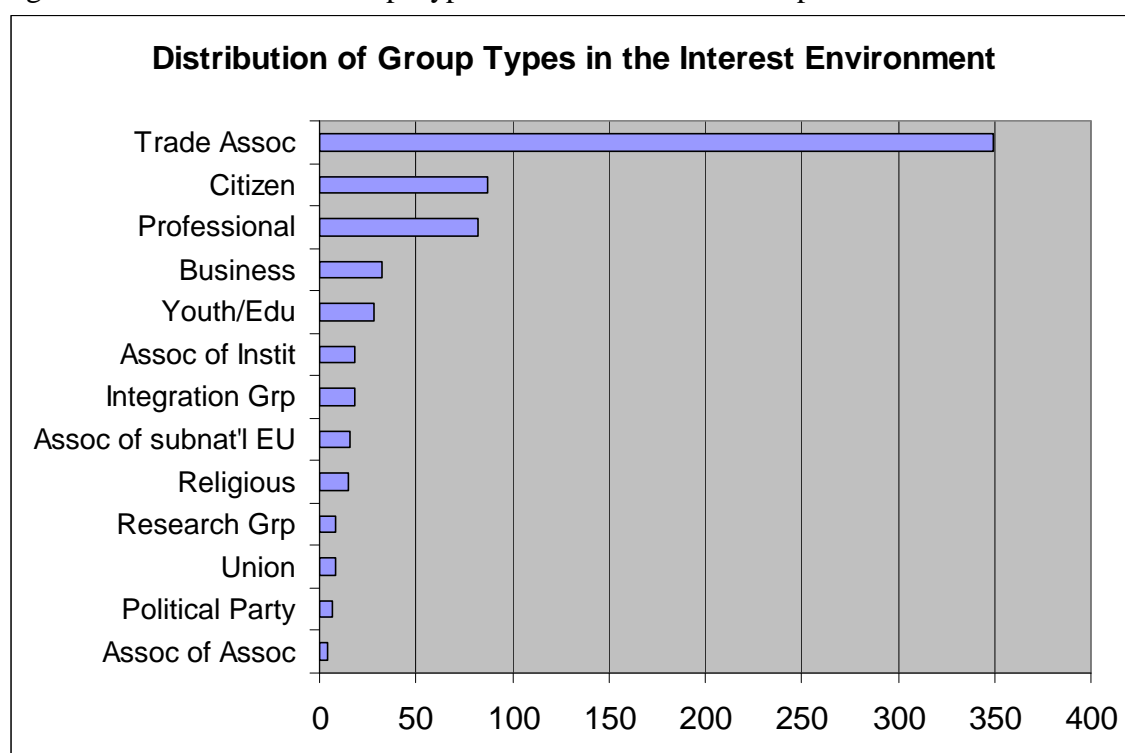
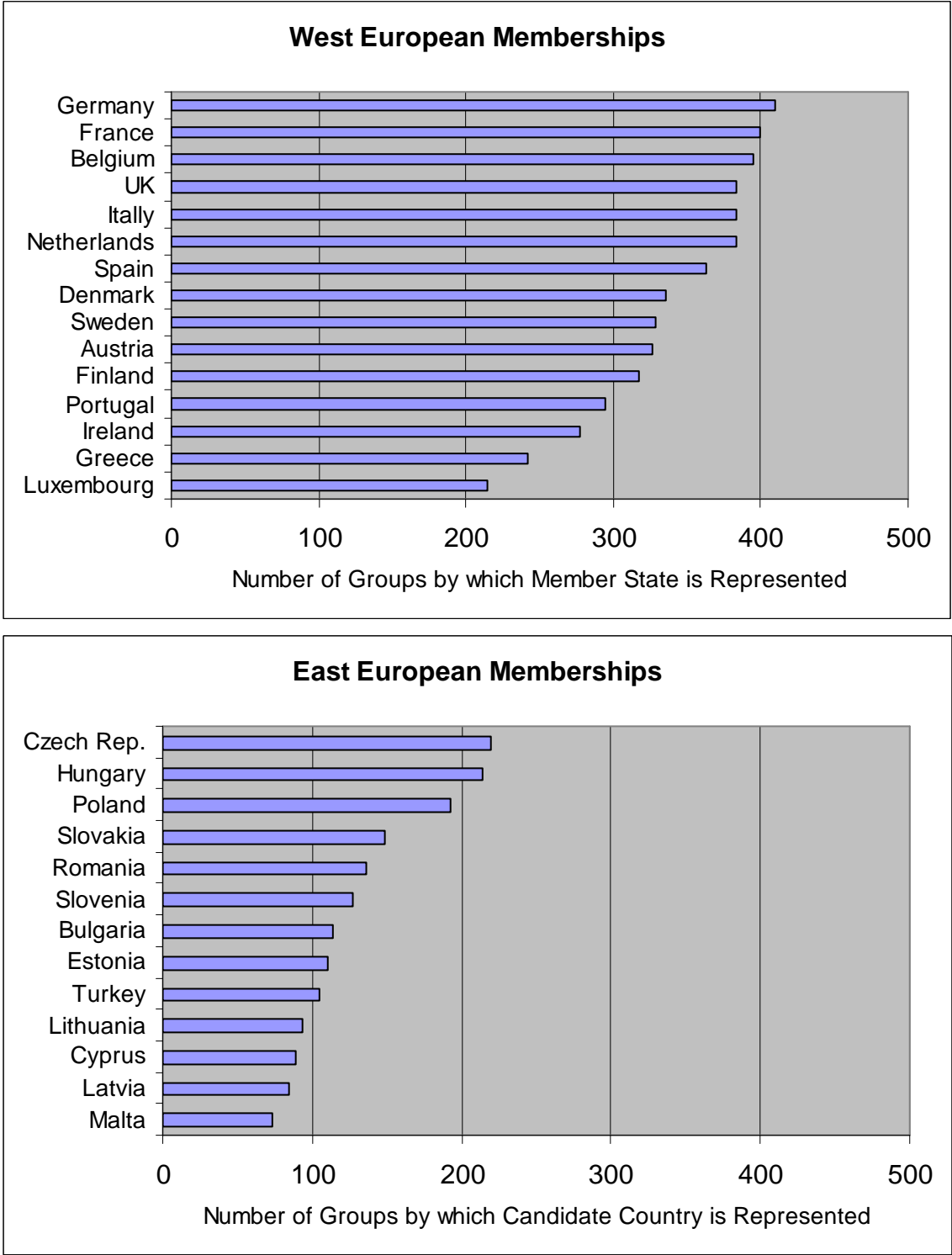


Figure 2. Number of Organizations by which Member States and Candidate Countries are Represented



Note: The figure includes data on the location of membership for 435 groups listed in the CONECCS database for which membership data was available. Germany, for example, had members in 410 of the 435 groups, whereas only about 80 groups had members in Malta.

Figure 3. Relationship between State Wealth and Representation

