

CHAPTER 6: THE NEW COALITIONS

A. Platforms

B. Transversal lobbying

As we highlighted in the previous chapter, the growing paralysis of European associations is finding its cure in a new willingness to go beyond sectoral divisions and create transversal alliances across a chain of values.

These new alliances take different forms:

- platforms of companies built around a common project as an alternative to classical lobbying via a European association;
- transversal alliances going from producer to consumer to present to the Commission a “ready-made consensus”.

In these two cases, the choice of partner is no longer linked to their representativity, but to their capacity to unite around a common project.

A. Platforms

This is today’s big trend in Brussels where all we hear about is platforms, that is to say structures where companies, associations or Institutions unite around a common project.

This is the theory. In practice it is very different; the panorama is more diverse and much more complex.

To give an overview, we see five main types of platforms:

- public/private partnership platforms,
- “shop window” platforms,
- “counter balance” platforms,
- classic industrial platforms,
- platforms created as lobbying tools.

Public/private partnership platforms:

This is without doubt the most common at the moment, giving the European Commission the opportunity to promote dialogue with civil society on a given theme.

The most pertinent example of this type of platform seems to us to be the “EU Platform for Action on Diet, Physical Activity and Health.” Launched and financed by the European Commission, the platform unites an important range of actors: the food industry, retailers, advertisers, consumer associations, health NGOs, scientists and experts on obesity.

This vast and learned assembly seems to focus on discussion rather than partnership: the role of the platform is to unite, exchange, experiment, and disseminate information; it is not about taking decisions.

But there are, on the other hand, examples of public/private partnership platforms which work perfectly and which deserve the title of “lobbying” platforms.

The PV Platform is such an example (the photo-voltaic energy platform) which contrary to our first example unites very complementary members: producers, universities, technology institutes... The Commission supports and finances it, but gives the members of the platform great freedom to put in place a dynamic and coherent strategy destined to ensure the rapid development of photovoltaic energy in Europe.

Other examples of public/private partnership platforms:

- European Hydrogen and Fuel Cell Technology Platform,
- EPBD Buildings Platform.

“Shop window” platforms:

As their name indicates they are meant to inform, to communicate, and to disseminate information. They correspond normally to the desire of an industrial sector or company to improve its image in the eyes of the citizen or consumer.

Two examples can be highlighted from the agrofood sector:

- EUFIC: European Food Information Council, composed of the primary agri-food multinationals, who are also members of CIAA (Coca-Cola, Ferrero, Danone, Kraft, Masterfoods, Pepsico, Unilever...);
- SAI Platform: Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform, also composed of large food companies, some of which are also members of EUFIC: Coca-Cola, Danone, Kraft, McCain, McDonalds, Nestlé, Unilever...

Objectively, these two platforms are very professional: they have substantial budgets, good websites, excellent presentation, and the capacity to sensitise the consumer to the need for a balanced diet (EUFIC) and to convince them of the food industry’s scrupulous respect for the environment (SAI Platform).

But also from an entirely objective viewpoint, these two platforms are primarily communication tools – and simple communication tools – situated in the orbit of the CIAA (Confédération des Industries Agro-Alimentaires de l’UE/Confederation of Agri-food industries of the EU) which centralises all of its lobbying activities towards the EU.

“Counter Balance” platforms:

These correspond to situations where, being unable to merge, small structures unite around a platform to try and create a counter-balance to a dominant structure.

In our opinion the best example of this is EISA (European Initiative for Sustainable Development in Agriculture) which unites a series of dynamic associations from 7 Member States around the concept of sustainable agriculture. Linked to ELO (European Landowners Organisation, see page 29), EISA is gaining in influence and casting a shadow over COPA-COGECA.

Another related example is the “Plate-forme des agricultures durables et solidaires” (Platform for sustainable and united agriculture) which is also attempting to thwart the hegemony of COPA-COGECA on the European level, but which, unlike EISA, suffers from an overly French composition.

Industrial platforms:

They are usually composed of companies, often in association with universities, with the aim of promoting technological innovation and industrial development in their sector. These technological platforms are equally active in the EU’s Research and Development programmes.

Examples:

- Mobile and Wireless Communications Technology Platform (composed notably of Ericsson, Siemens, Nokia, Motorola, France Telecom and Vodafone, and in association notably with the University of Technology of Warsaw);
- European Robotics Platform (composed of Acrobat Company Ltd, Philips, Bosch, Thales, Sagem Defence & Security, Mitsubishi Electric Neuronics, in association with numerous European universities).

Platforms created as lobbying tools:

Confronted by heavy lobbying dossiers and often represented by weak European associations, large multinationals examine the possibility of creating ad hoc structures capable of flexibility (in their composition) and strength (in their actions).

It was in this way that the first industrial platforms were born, conceived from the beginning as lobbying tools.

Examples:

- The Platform for Ingredients in Europe (PIE) composed of around 15 companies (including ADM, Bunge, Cargill, Danisco, Roquette, Tate & Lyle, ...) in order to defend together before the European Institutions the food ingredients dossier;
- The European Basic Foods Platform created by Lactalis, Bunge and Nutrinveste to defend the interests of the first transformation industry in difficult dossiers like nutritional labelling and health claims.

There is no doubt, in our opinion, that platforms created as lobbying tools will see major developments in the months and years to come.

Not only will they multiply, but they will also oblige the classical European associations to re-examine their structures, their membership, their actions and their communication.

It is undeniable that the panorama of European associations as it is described in the first chapter of this book will be greatly shaken up between now and 2010.

B. Transversal lobbying

The emergence of civil society as a means of influence

We insisted in the first part of this book on the extreme importance of NGOs, trade unions and consumer groups.

NGOs have long been considered in Brussels as good communicators and poor technicians. This is no longer true. The Civil Society Contact Group (see page 51) is a real success, based on the specialisation of each branch, and of each NGO in its branches.

The same is true for the trade unions. How can you ignore the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and its sectoral branches? And what can we say about consumer groups? Even if you don't share their views you must be aware of them.

In Brussels all European affairs professionals – or at least the experienced ones – no longer have any doubts about the importance of NGOs and consumer unions; the perception of the importance of trade unions is less widespread.

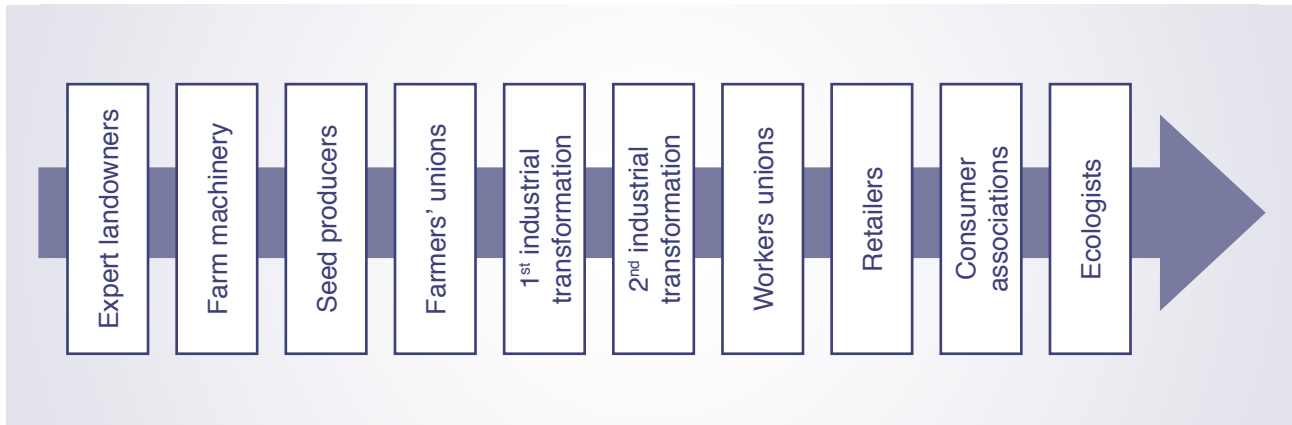
But even if major companies and economic sectors are aware of the importance of NGOs, they generally have a poor understanding of them, and are often reluctant to work in partnership with them.

Certainly, as we have seen (Part one – chapter 3) some companies do maintain direct, trusting and constructive relationships with NGOs, trade unions and/or consumer groups, but they are still in the minority.

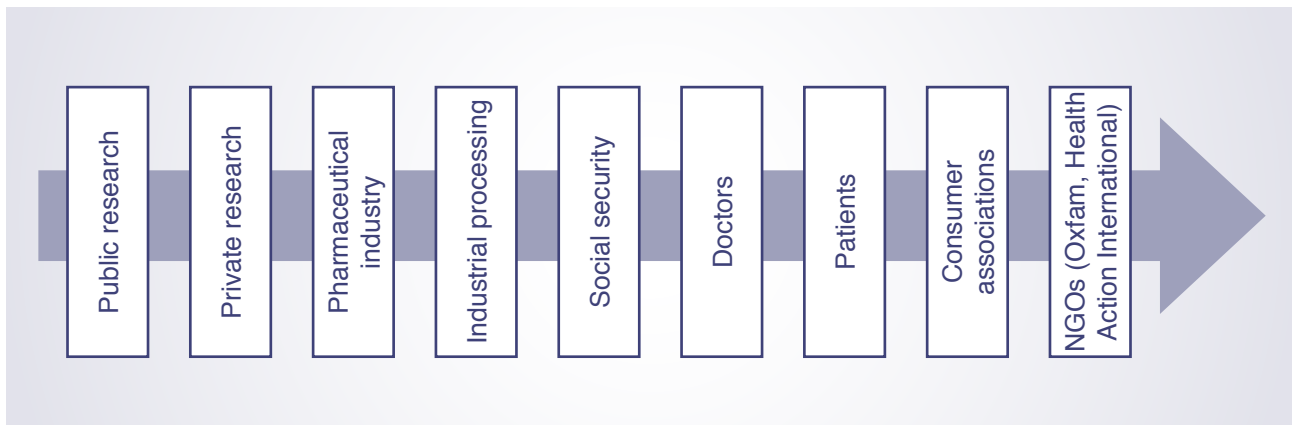
At the risk of repeating ourselves, lobbying is not about putting pressure on people, but helping to find a solution. And what could be better in terms of finding a solution than presenting to the Commission (or to the Institutions) a “ready-made consensus”, which has been negotiated along the chain of values from producer to consumer.

This idea of a chain of values has become very important in lobbying. To illustrate it, we have chosen two examples: the food sector, and the pharmaceutical sector.

Chain of values for the food sector



Chain of values for the pharmaceutical sector



Breaking “the segregation of interests”

When I observe the recent lobbying dossiers, I am amazed by the segregation of interests: each person is in his own box and there is no dialogue. In terms of legislative projects, this separation remains the norm. The European associations don't understand the NGOs and vice versa. Before working together, it is necessary to do some exploratory work, covering the identification of potential allies, and the discovery of points of convergence.

In light of the increasing weight of the NGOs, trade unions, consumer groups, and civil society in general, it is better to try and convince them of your point of view than to impose it upon them. Confrontational lobbying seems to me to be a thing of the past, or at least something to be reserved for special circumstances.

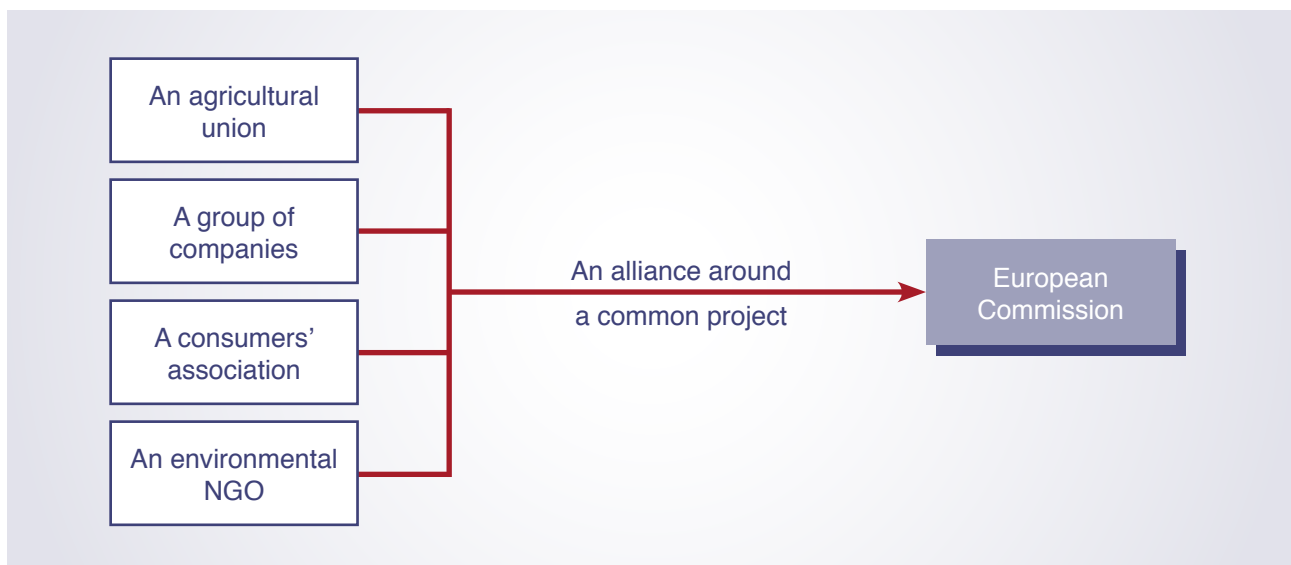
Presenting a common front to the Commission or Parliament, in association with an NGO or consumer group, or both, is most welcome as it offers a solution.

In reference to the two tables above, the aim of a transversal alliance is not to unite the entire chain, but a part of the chain. The identification of potential partners is an essential parameter. The more diverse your network, the easier it will be to select constructive partners.

This pro-active lobbying is a move away from the beaten path. It is more subtle, more delicate, and more complex to put into place. It is also more exciting. It requires a global network to identify the right partner. But those who practice it will tell you; this pro-active lobbying of tomorrow is a 100 % winning strategy.

Transversal lobbying: the theory

In the new transversal alliances, the choice of partners is no longer linked to their representativity, but to their capacity to unite around a common project.



In this way, the new paths of influence in Brussels will change lobbying strategies from opposition to proposition.

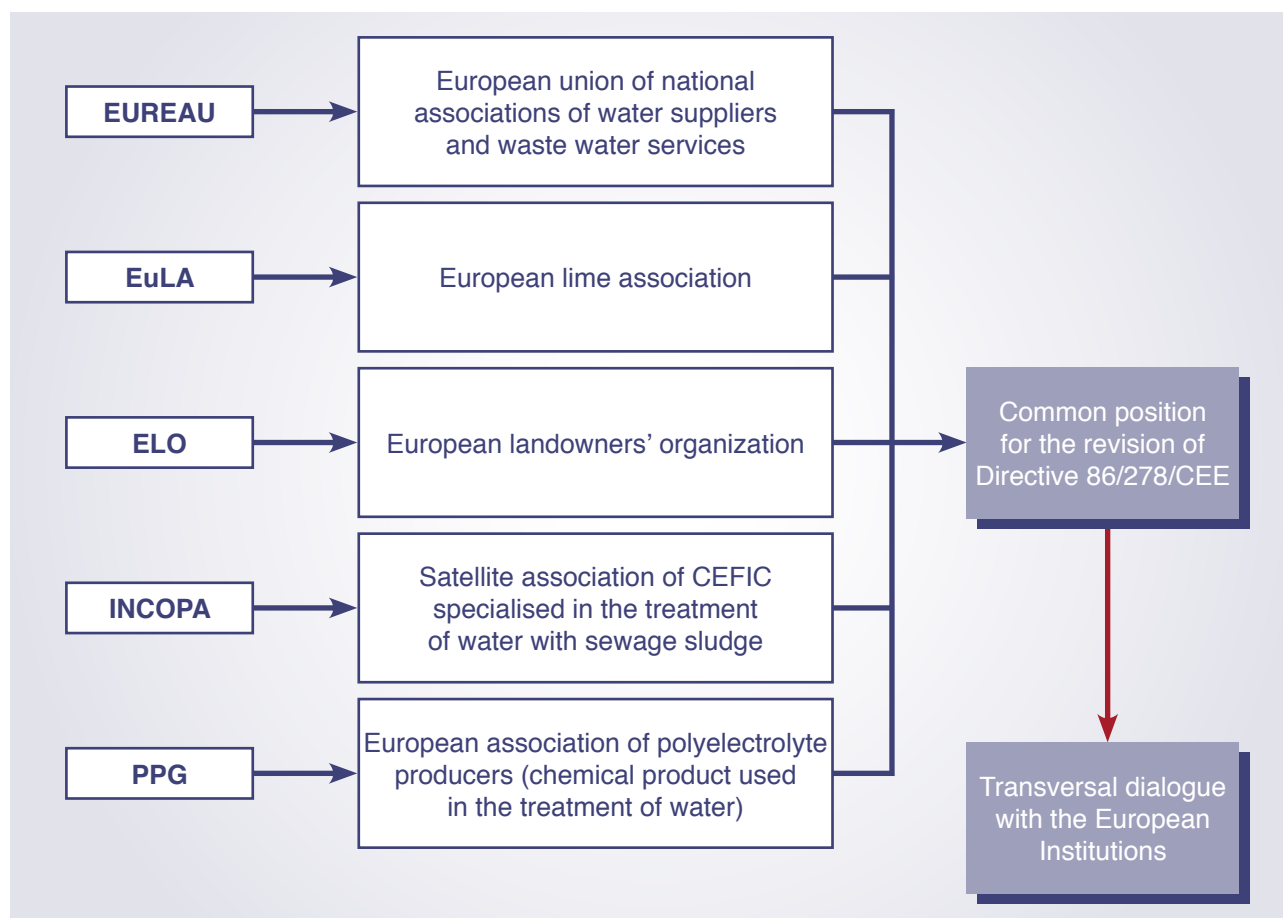
Transversal lobbying: the practice

The sewage sludge dossier

In early 2006 the European Commission announced its intention to revise in 2007 Council Directive 86/278/EEC on the protection of the environment, and in particular of the soil, when sewage sludge is used in agriculture.

This horizontal dossier crossed several fields of regulation (soil use, waste treatment, protection of natural resources). Following the reflections of several actors at a forum to discuss the strategy to adopt for soil protection, an innovative transversal coalition was formed uniting:

A transversal alliance for the revision of the Directive on the use of sewage sludge in agriculture:



This transversal coalition which unites the main stakeholders from upstream to downstream (primary materials, water managers, chemical industry, agricultural users) enabled them to build a strong and credible common position. This common position:

- integrates the latest technological evolutions (biocides),
- proposes a long-term regulated control system,
- insists on the benefits of recycling for the quality of the product and the service delivery.

On 26 March 2006, the coalition organised a workshop attended by over 50 participants including DG Environment, the European Parliament, several Ministers for ecology, CIAA, COPA-COGECA, CEFIC... The workshop concluded with a global agreement that it was necessary to revise Directive 86/278/CEE in a flexible and balanced way, integrating into the future legal framework the latest technical evolutions in the sector. There is no doubt that the upcoming proposal for revision will be inspired by this agreement.

As we come towards the end of this book, there is no doubt in my mind: the coming years will be marked by a triple evolution in European lobbying:

- 1. an increasing loss of influence for classical European associations,**
- 2. a detailed reexamination of the strategy for influence of the major economic powers,**
- 3. an explosion of platforms and transversal lobbying.**