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Female presence in lobbying careers in Europe: A comparison of women in the lobbying workforce in three national political systems and the EU

Zusammenfassung

Weibliche Präsenz in Lobbying-Karrieren in Europa: ein Vergleich von Frauen in Lobbyberufen in drei nationalen politischen Systemen und der EU

Dieser Beitrag untersucht die Laufbahnen von Lobbyistinnen in Italien, Großbritannien und Frankreich sowie im EU-Parlament. Dabei soll die Hypothese überprüft werden, dass es in politischen Systemen mit einem Gender-Mainstreaming-Ansatz für Frauen leichter ist, Zugang zu politischen, institutionellen und politikbezogenen Karrieren zu erhalten. Angesichts der Unterschiede zwischen nationalen und länderübergreifenden politischen Systemen zeigen die erhobenen Daten ein ausgewogeneres Geschlechterverhältnis unter Lobbyist*innen im EU-Parlament als in den nationalen Lobbyregistern. Die Erklärung dafür wird in der institutionellen Herangehensweise der EU in Bezug auf Gender Mainstreaming und im ausgeglicheneren Verhältnis von Frauen und Männern in politischen und administrativen Führungspositionen in der EU gesehen. Es wird argumentiert, dass es einen Spillover-Effekt von gendergerechten politischen Karrieren auf die Lobbyberufe gibt. EU-Lobbyist*innen müssen der Diversität von EU-Politiker*innen und Verwaltungsmitarbeiter*innen gerecht werden. Daher geht die Institutionalisierung des Gender-Mainstreaming-Ansatzes in der EU über Fragen der deskriptiven und inhaltlichen politischen Repräsentation von Frauen in Politik und Beruf hinaus und schafft zudem ein integrativeres Umfeld für Chancengleichheit in traditionell männlich dominierten Berufen.

Schlüsselwörter
Interessengruppen, Lobbyarbeit, Gender Mainstreaming, Politisches System der EU, Interessenvertretungen, Frauen in der Lobbyarbeit

Summary

This paper investigates women in lobbying careers in Italy, the UK and France in comparison with the EU Parliament to verify the hypothesis that in political systems with a gender mainstreaming approach, it is easier for women to have access to political, institutional and politics-related careers. Given the differences between national and supranational political systems, the collected data display a fairer gender balance in the stock of registered lobbyists at the EU Parliament than in the national registers for lobbyists. The explanatory factors are the EU institutional approach towards gender mainstreaming and a fairer gender balance in EU top-political and administrative jobs. The paper argues that there is a spillover effect from fair-gendered political careers to the lobbying professions. EU lobbyists need to reflect the diversity of EU politicians and administrative staff. In this sense, the EU institutionalization of the gender mainstreaming approach goes beyond issues such as the descriptive and substantive political representation of women in politics while creating a more inclusive environment for equal opportunities in traditionally male-dominated jobs.

Keywords
interest groups, lobbying profession, gender mainstreaming, EU political system, organized interests, women in lobbying

The paper starts considering women's share in lobbying careers in three political systems (the UK, France and Italy) that introduced specific lobbying regulations in the 2010s. According to the three regulations, these national transparency registers offer public data on lobbyists who enlist to carry out their professional activity and access public decision-makers. Data from public registers show that even if lobbying might formally be a gender-neutral career, it is mainly a male-dominated job (< 25 percent of women in the profession), due to the high share of male staffs in the UK, France, and Italy.

According to the hypothesis that the share of women in lobbying careers might be consistent with the proportion of women in the political institution (as lobbyists are counterparts of political and institutional positions), I begin comparing the share of women lobbyists to the percentage of women in the three national parliaments, in order to detect whether there are coherent or similar percentages of women in politics and lobbying. Then, coherently with the gender mainstreaming approach, shaping a favorable environment for a fairer presence of women in European careers, I compare the share of women lobbyists in the UK, France and Italy to the percentage of women lobbyists accessing the EU Parliament in order to identify differences or similarities in the share of female staff lobbying national and supernational political institutions. Then, I refer the data on the share of women in lobbying careers in the EU to the percentage of women in EU political representative institutions in order to identify a possible relation. According to the original hypothesis, a higher share of women in political institutions should entail a more significant presence of women in lobbying careers, as the latter is a political related profession and should have some resemblance, if not a 'mirror effect', with the political élites they ought to relate to.

Results of this national and supranational data comparison may suggest that the diversity management approach and the gender mainstreaming culture – adopted, not without flaws in the EU since the late 1990s – have produced the nowadays significant share of women in top-level political institutions and the most powerful administrative staff. This process of gendering political representation (Kantola 2010), along with the presence of civil society groups actively lobbying for gender equality and the institutionalization of the gender mainstreaming approach in the EU, has triggered a spillover effect on lobbying careers that are still male-dominated at the level of national political systems but appear to be oriented towards gender balance in the EU.

The approach referring to gender mainstreaming culture highlights differences between the gender balance among EU lobbyists and the gender gap in the national stocks of lobbyists while presenting a specific set of answers to the research question on the gendered nature of the lobbyist profession.

The paper is set as follows: in paragraph 1, I outline the state of the art of literature on lobbying careers, in paragraph 2, I add some reflections on the main approach in gender mainstreaming in the EU system, posing the theoretical ground for further analyses based on empirical data. In paragraph 3, I present the materials and methods for empirical analysis on public data from transparency registers of lobbyists in the EU, the UK, Italy and France and proceed in paragraph 4 with data analysis on women's share in political careers and lobbying professions in the beforementioned systems. In sections 5 and 6, I present some conclusions based on the analyzed data and the literature's interpretation of women's higher incidence in the lobbying profession within the EU

political system. The political system of the EU has achieved some results in terms of descriptive political representation (especially for the share of women in EU top political careers), enhancing a spillover effect even on political-related jobs, like lobbying. Thus, adopting a Europeanized approach to gender balance issues even in the national contexts could help reduce gender bias in specific workplaces related to politics.

1 A male-dominated career? A focus on the lobbying profession

Before considering the gender balance in lobbying careers, it is essential to introduce lobbying as a profession. Scholars of public affairs and advocacy believe lobbying a specific, even if very niche, profession. Thomas and Hrebenar define a professional lobbyist as:

"A person designated by an interest group to facilitate influencing public policy in that group's favor by performing one or more of the following actions for the group:
- directly contacting public officials;
- monitoring political and governmental activity;
- advising on political strategies and tactics;
- developing and orchestrating the group's lobbying effort." (Thomas/Hrebenar 2009: 135)

Therefore, lobbying can be defined as a professional activity based on sectorial political and economic dossier studying and on special interests representation with public decision-makers. According to this definition, it should be a gender-neutral profession, with a general university background in law, economics, political science, and training on the job path in firms, consultancies, associations.

Reflecting on the global regulation of this activity, Chari et al. define lobbying as:

"the act of individuals or groups, each with varying and specific interests, attempting to influence decisions taken at the political level [...]. An in-house lobbyist is an employee of the organization engaged in lobbying [...]. Professional lobbyists perform this function for a fee." (Chari et al. 2019: 4)

Regardless of the internal or external substance of the lobbyist's activity, it is the professional content, acquired by education (Marlowe 2015) and training on the job, that renders lobbying a profession, or in other words, an organized set of rules, organization models and values with organizational culture and clearly defined functions and models.

The question of gender representation in the lobbying profession is subject to studies on women in male-dominated professions. Corcoran-Nantes and Roberts define women's position within these careers as a "peripheral state" (Corcoran-Nantes/Roberts 1995: 22) to represent female professionals' nearly spatial marginalization from the executive and managerial power's critical roles in these professions. Martin and Barnard (2013) scrutinize formal and covert corporate practices that in these organizations wedge the formal and informal development of women's careers, limiting, de facto, their opportunities to access entry job positions and to develop a career path. Gaines (2017) considers opportunity/lack of voice, inclusion in/exclusion from networking, the role of affinity groups, the opportunity of work-life balance, and the cultural formal and informal rules as push factors for men and pull factors for women in male-dominated professions.

Thus, women's limited share of professionals in lobbying might refer to two specific features: the first one is educational, and the second one is relational.

There should not be specific barriers for women to access the lobbying profession for educational requirements: the study paths at the university level in economy, law or political science (usual background for the profession) do not envisage a gender gap. However, the specific training for the lobbying profession occurs with an on-the-job training activity, with possible obstacles to women due to informal or formal recruitment rules.

With regard to the relational perspective, lobbyists manage working relationships with politicians to represent their special interests. While politicians work for the composition and selection of the collective interest, the lobbyists' task is to persuade politicians to make collective choices according to professional lobbyists' special interests. Even in this sense, persuasive skills and techniques, communication abilities and relational capabilities are all professional tools detaching from the gender dimension of the lobbying professionals: they deal with experience, knowledge, and expertise, which are gender-neutral factors of any job. Nevertheless, an informal organizational culture's requirements often interfere in the professional choice, assuming that the seriousness and effectiveness of an institutional relationship approach conducted by a man are higher than the same activities carried out by a woman in the same professional context. There are several essays on gender bias in hiring and evaluating professional performance in male-dominated professions. In the STEM sector, the 'Jennifer and John effect' resulting as a different evaluation of the same CV proposed with a female and a male name, revealed the effectiveness of a gender bias in weighing similar CVs for hiring the best candidate (Moss-Racusin et al. 2012). Cella and Manzoni (2019) report a voters' gender bias as prejudice on the competence of female politicians in the expression of electoral preference among men and women candidates in the realm of political careers.

In the specific area of the lobbying business, apart from the general gender bias, there is a cultural organization attempt to direct symmetric approach with mainly men decision-makers; this attitude towards a 'mirror effect' between the lobbyist and the lobbied is a definite cultural base for preferring men in the selection and career enhancement of lobbyists.

These gender-biased circumstances in the lobbying profession are not new to the subject's specific literature. While various media have displayed several images of women in lobbying (Izadi 2013; Politico.eu 2016) affirming the improvement of women in special interests groups both in the United States and in the European Union, several papers have started to consider the issue of the gender gap among lobbyists. In 1990, Schlozman defined lobbying as an "old boys' political network" (Schlozman 1990: 339). Nownes and Freeman (1998) have studied the gender ratio among US lobbyists, discovering equal professionalism, access to decision-makers capability, and professional expertise, still detecting a severe gender gap in the job. A study by Bath, Gayvert-Owen and Nownes (2008), based on a sample of women who worked as lobbyists, shows that female lobbyists exhibited equal access to public decision-makers, equivalent knowledge of political techniques, and received the same perception of professional seriousness; nevertheless, a consistent gender gap in the lobbying profession endures. Hanegraaff, Berkhout and van der Ploeg (2017) consider male or female staff in this profession as a function of the organizations' culture practicing lobbying. Consultancy,

firms, and associations present different perceptions of women in lobbying and therefore show the additional share of female lobbyists in their workforce, with a fairer gender balance in the associations' sector, while consultancies show a preference for men staffers.

La Pira, Marchetti and Thomas (2019) conducted a gender-based research on data taken from public lobbying registers, focusing on lobbyists in Washington. According to the collected data, women in US lobbying account for 37 percent of Washington's total lobbyists. Research with a different approach was conducted by Junk, Romeijn and Rasmussen (2020), investigating a sample of women in the lobbying profession in Germany, Sweden, Netherlands, Denmark and the UK. This study explored how the female presence in this professional sector ranges from 10 percent in Germany to 30 percent in Sweden. Some defining features of this research contemplate the supply and demand-side factors causing gender imbalance in the lobbying profession in the five considered political systems.

Beyond the diachronic and transnational interpretations presented in the literature on the gender ratio among lobbyists, it becomes obvious that women appear to be a minority in this profession. This outcome is due to a series of career access and progression mechanisms, mainly based on affinity groups. It deals with the lobbying activity's organizational culture, not always inclined to the issue of work-life balance. It presents a preference for the symmetry between the male public decision-maker and the male lobbyist. Therefore, it is crucial to assess the extent of this gender imbalance in the lobbying profession in national political systems while considering data from a supranational political system, such as the EU, where lobbying is a long-time recognized and practiced profession and where systemic gender balance was introduced with the gender mainstreaming approach.

2 Gendering lobbyism through gender mainstreaming?

This paper's research hypothesis is that gender imbalance in lobbyism might find a barrier in political culture, assuming the principles of gender mainstreaming and diversity management as cornerstones. In this sense, a comparison based on the share of female lobbyists in the three political systems that introduced lobbying regulation in the 2010s (UK, Italy and France) and the percentage of female lobbyists in the EU (where a solid culture of gender mainstreaming grew in the 1990s, affirmed in the 2000s and started to produce relevant effects by the end of the 2010s) might be useful to test the research question. Before considering the data in the three political systems and the EU, a brief review on gender mainstreaming will be presented to show how this approach helped shape a different and more inclusive European political, economic, and social environment.

In 1998, soon after the 1995 United Nations World Conference on Women in Beijing introduced the principle of gender mainstreaming, the Council of Europe defined gender mainstreaming as:

> "The (re)organization, improvement, development, and evaluation of policy processes, so that a gender equality perspective is incorporated in all policies at all levels and all stages, by the actors normally involved in policymaking." (Council of Europe 2004: 11)

This approach obtained great recognition at the European institutions' level, with the European Commission pursuing this strategy since 1998, with the first European Commission Guide to Gender Impact Assessment. Mazey (2001) recognizes the suitability of the gender mainstreaming method to specific policy areas of the EU and especially to sectors and areas of intervention of the European Commission. Shaw considers the constitutional embeddedness of the principle of gender mainstreaming in the European Union's legal framework and calls gender equality and diversity management central to the European Union law policy strategies (Shaw 2002, 2005). The affirmation of the gender mainstreaming strategy, in its dimension of the definition of tools, planning of objectives and apparatuses, implementation and verification of outcomes, has been highlighted in gray literature (EC policy documents 2011, 2014; Council of Europe 2004) and in scientific literature (Rees 2005; Kantola 2010), not without avoiding open questions and possible hitches (Squires 2005; Cavaghan 2017). O'Hagan and Klatzer (2018) refer to specific tools, e.g. on gender budgeting. Critics of this approach's real impact focus on institutions' compliant attitude (Cavaghan 2017) and underline the mere descriptive – and non-substantive – outcomes of GM, for instance, on political representation (Celis et al. 2008). At the same time, advocates of the impact produced by GM in the EU system underline the overall gendering process of political representation and the diffusion of women in top administrative and institutional careers, take into account the development of civil society interest groups actively supporting gender equality at the EU level, evaluate the institutionalization of gender mainstreaming in EU law, politics and policies and propose further re-assessment of the gender question in the EU on the ground of the gender mainstreaming outcomes (Kantola 2010).

I consider gender mainstreaming in the EU as a systemic approach with medium-long term perspectives and outcomes, obtaining results not only on substantive representation and on policy areas with impacts on women's lives, but more systemic and comprehensive changes. The share of women lobbying in the EU is much larger, as data will show in the following paragraphs, than the percentage of women lobbying in France, the UK, and Italy, because of a spillover effect from the political institutions, who adopted gender mainstreaming as an organizational paradigm, to the European organizations working with the institutions. As lobbying within the EU is a structured institutional communication model to present special interest from economy and society to political institutions, it should consider and reflect the leading organizational paradigms institutions adopt. In this sense, gender mainstreaming as an overall paradigm has penetrated European institutions in a significant and distributed way, producing a greater descriptive female representation and making the culture of gender enhancement acquainted in all those collective subjects carrying out activities with the institutions. It is no coincidence that in European political institutions with a high political representation of women, this culture of equal gender opportunities – and, in a broader sense, diversity management – produces effects in the organized social groups that receive its institutional culture, going beyond the convergence between descriptive and substantive women representation (Young 2000; Caroll 2001). My hypothesis will be presented with an in-depth explanation of methods and materials on the dataset of lobbyists and MPs in Italy, France, the UK and the EU.

3 Women in the lobbying profession in the political systems of the UK, France and Italy

In this paragraph, I consider a merely quantitative perspective, reporting the existing public data on interest groups representatives in Italy (with the Registro dei rappresentanti di interessi, at the Camera dei Deputati, the lower chanber of the Parliament, established in 2017), in France (with the Répertoire des représentants d'intérêts, also introduced in 2017 at the Haute Autorité pour la transparence de la vie publique) and in the United Kingdom (with the Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists, presented in 2015, and lately modified in 2017). The three regulatory experiences in the UK, France, and Italy introduce different modalities and characters, but all share two common elements: 1. approval in the 2010s; 2. publicity and free availability of datasets.

At the end of 2014, the Transparency of Lobbying, the Non-Party Campaigning, and Trade Union Administration Act introduced minimal regulation in the UK, with a compulsory register devoted exclusively to lobbying consultancies while excluding other organizations (corporation, association, NGO) from the record-keeping procedures. Upon registration, the organizations pay 1000 GBP per year to partially fund the registrar's expenses, with an independent body controlling the register in coordination with the Government and the Parliament. Registered organizations need to provide yearly reporting and keep up-to-date information on consultancy governance, staff, and a full list of clients. The register data are public and freely available online.

The French lobbying governing model is based on different and more in-depth regulatory premises. Law 1691 of 2016 on "Transparence, lutte contre la corruption et modernisation de la vie publique" provides a regulatory framework for every professional interest group lobbying at the national public policy level. The French regulatory framework's interest representatives have to compulsory enlist in the High Authority's register on public life transparency, an independent administrative authority created in 2014. The Authority's task is to maintain and update the registered organizations; the High Authority poses questions and verifies any information provided by lobbyists, collects and evaluates the annual report of registrants' activities, and provides sanctions for non-conforming behavior.

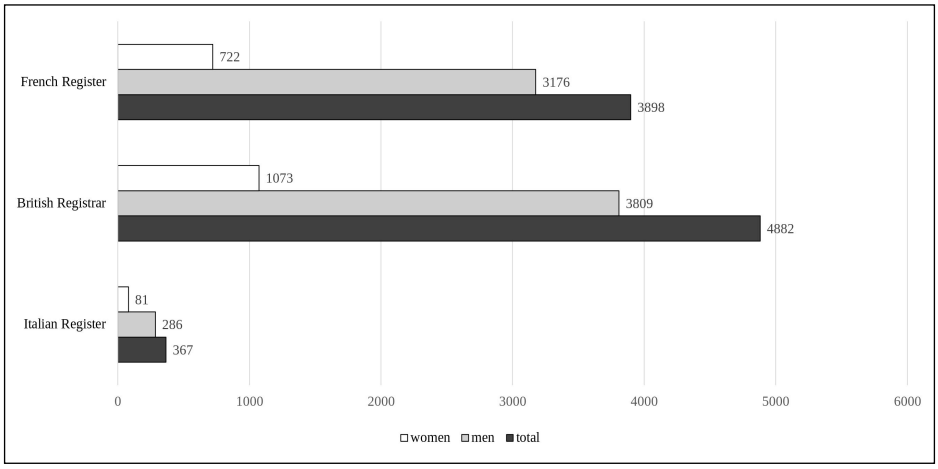
Since 2017, the Italian regulatory mechanics only applies to lobbyists accessing to the "Camera dei Deputati", the Italian Parliament's lower branch, and not to lobbyists working with MPs in the Senate (the other parliamentary branch), which has no specific system of rules for special interests representatives. Every special interest group (firm, consultancy, ONG) willing to access the Chamber of Deputies for lobbying reasons needs to register on a publicly accessible register of transparency, committing itself to the respect of the related code of conduct and the transmission of a yearly report on activities and meetings with MPs for lobbying. Each registered special interest group can appoint two, three or at most four of his own representatives, equipped with a personal badge, to access the Chamber, have meetings with MPs, and present data, reports and studies to them.

In order to study from a gender perspective the population of the three national registers, and to compare it to the European Parliament registers, I collected data from the public registers between 14–25 July 2020, starting from the open data available in the free format on platforms dedicated to British Register, French Register, and Italian Register.

All data extracted from the three platforms were organized in terms of individual lobbyists instead of organizations (Appendix 1); making it possible to create a gender-organized database of over 15 200 individuals with gender verification, where necessary, by automatic systems of gender recognition (Gender API).

The output of this data analysis is described in figure 1.

Figure 1: Registered lobbyists by gender in the UK, France and Italy – absolute values



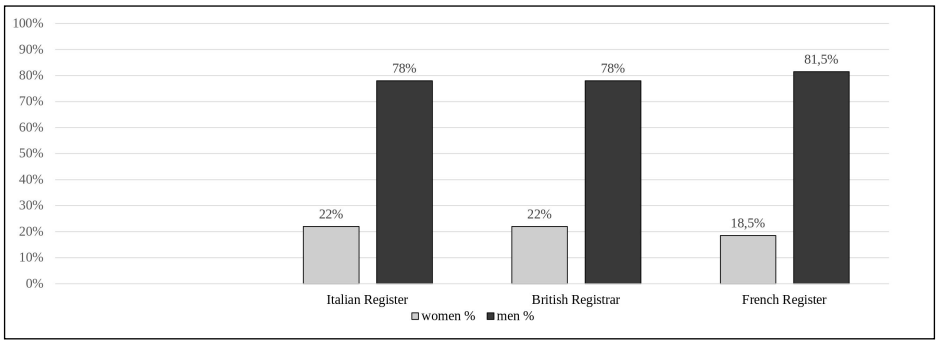
Source: author's elaboration on public lobbyists datasets: British Registrar of Consultants Lobbyists, French Register of Interests Representatives, Italian House of Deputies Register of Interest Representatives.

Different political and electoral systems, diverse regulation models for lobbyists (partial for some political institutions or general for all the institutional system, on the ground of compulsory or voluntary registration) and inclusions of a more or less large number of special interest groups in the registration process should lead to different results in quantitative terms of registered (and 'official') lobbyists. Thus, institutional provisions about lobbying regulation and cultural differences show the numeric effect, ranging from 367 registered individuals in Italy to 3 897 registered lobbyists in France (plus 6 076 support staff) to 4 882 consultants in the UK Registrar. Nevertheless, when considering the percentage of the gender composition of the three datasets, the results in terms of gender imbalance show little variation, as shown in figure 2.

In figure 2, it is possible to see how, despite numerical differences, the female percentage of the registered lobbyists ranges from 18.5 % of the French Register (where female staff to support lobbying is 36 % of the total) to 22 % of the UK and Italian Registers.

The proportion of female lobbyists in the UK, France and Italy is lower than the data reported by La Pira, Marchetti and Thomas (2019) on lobbyists registered in Washington (37 %) and consistent with the range between 10 and 30 % indicated in the sample research conducted in Germany, Denmark, Netherlands, UK, and Sweden (Junk/Romeijn/Rasmussen 2020).

Figure 2: Registered lobbyists by gender in the UK, France and Italy – % values



Source: author's elaboration on public lobbyists datasets: British Registrar of Consultants Lobbyists, French Register of Interests Representatives, Italian House of Deputies Register of Interest Representatives.

Compared with the breakdown by gender in the leading national representative bodies in France, UK, and Italy, it might be useful to compare women's share in lobbying with the percentage of women in political careers in representative institutions. It is helpful to compare women's rates in representative institutions and women in lobbying for different reasons. First, the two professions have constitutive mutual relations: MPs are among the main subjects encountered by lobbyists. Lobbying is a political communication activity based on a stable and lasting political relationship between representatives of special interests and legislators, called to determine the general interest through the public decision process. The work of the lobbyists and the MPs are connected and integrated jobs, and in this sense, a comparison of the shares of women in the two related professional fields shows its relevance. Lobbyists are counterparts of MPs and top-level government staff in an institutional relation of interest representation. As counterparts, both careers share the same knowledge and expertise, and it is not unusual that MPs and government staff initiate a lobbying career after the end of their institutional mandate.

Second, for women-related policies, according to the gender mainstreaming approach, it is crucial to have both women in public decision-making roles and women presenting special interests. According to the EIGE view on gender mainstreaming[1], the presence of women both in decision making and in special interests representation is crucial for two reasons. On one side, the incidence of women in institutional careers encompasses an adequate representation of female needs and perspectives in the decision making process and in specific arenas of public policy. On the other side, the presence of women in the activity of special interests representation might help encompassing a feminine perspective in the activity of lobbying, making it more open to specific gender perspectives and issues. This presence of a fair share of women on both sides (special interests and general interest) can best integrate a 'lived' and unreported gender vision and standpoint in the whole decision-making process. In this sense, adequate female staff in

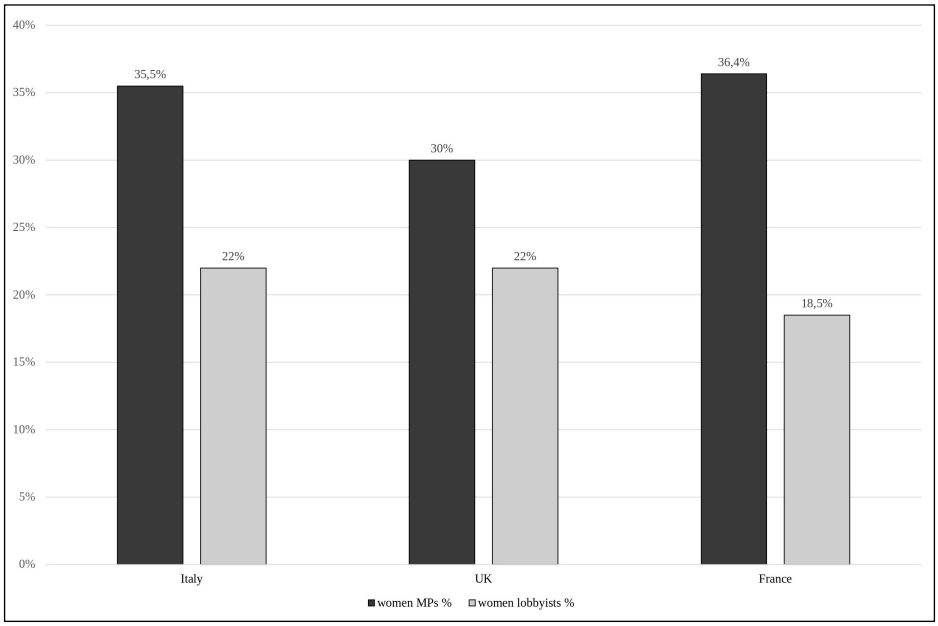
1 See https://eige.europa.eu/gender-mainstreaming/what-is-gender-mainstreaming [access: 11 January 2020].

lobbying organizations help to join this perspective in representing interests, providing a more effective professional service, due to a gender diversity viewpoint.

Third, comparing the percentage of female lobbyists and parliamentarians in these three political systems can eventually help understand the nature and the extent of gender imbalance in the profession of lobbying in these political systems.

The data in figure 3 exemplify this comparison between the proportion of women in parliaments and lobbying registers in the UK, France and Italy.

Figure 3: Percentage of women lobbyists and women MPs in Italy, France and the UK



Source: author's elaboration on public lobbyists datasets and OECD data: British Registrar of Consultants Lobbyists, French Register of Interests Representatives, Italian House of Deputies Register of Interest Representatives and OECD Women in politics data.

The comparison between the two close careers highlights a sensitive gap between women in top jobs of political representation, a milestone in the professional path, and women registered in the public registers of lobbyists, a prerequisite for exercising this profession. Female careers in lobbying in the three political systems present a severe gender imbalance. The gender gap in lobbying jobs looks even more acute than the gender imbalance for women in parliament: in the latter women have been benefitting from interventions and mechanisms for gender-equal opportunities (quotas, double-gender voting preference), while in lobbying careers there are no balancing mechanisms in the free and open market system. Therefore, at least for the three considered political systems, evidence from the dataset in figure 3 seems to confirm Schlozman's definition of lobbying being an "old boys' political network". Therefore, it is essential to consider whether this gender segregation in lobbying careers has ground in a different political

system, like the EU, where the gender mainstreaming approach has helped women to gain access to institutional positions and policymaking arenas.

4 Looking at Brussels, the EU gender mainstreaming headquarters, for gender-equal opportunities in lobbying careers

Intending to complete the collection of lobbyists' data referring to a different political system, the EU, in which lobbying always played a crucial role in decision making (Klüver 2013) and gender mainstreaming presents a longterm and serious-minded approach, public data from the Transaprency Register at the European Parliament constitute useful reference for a comparison. The comparison hypothesis is based on the need to know whether in a politicl system in which gender mainstreaming has been implemented for some time and in which lobbying is structured within the decision making process, there is a higher percentage of women in lobbying careers.

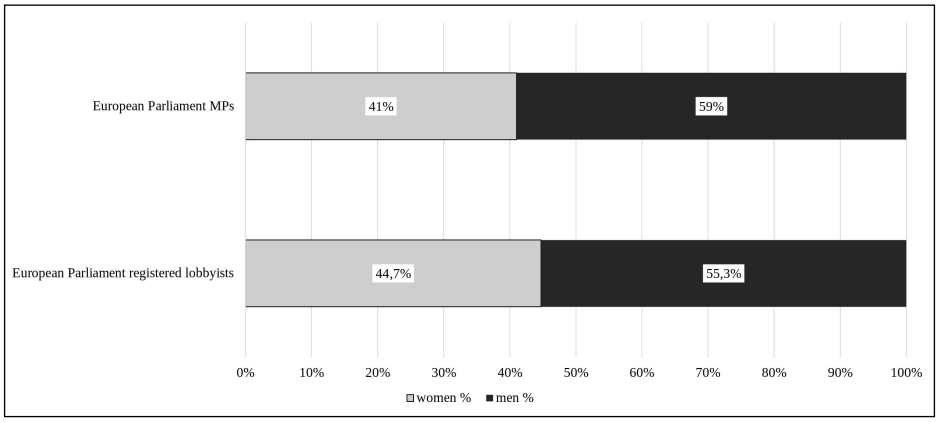
Since 2008, the European Commission has set up a transparency register for all lobbyists working in Brussels, enlisting on a voluntary and incentive basis. Since 2011, the transparency register has taken on an expected value for the Commission and the EU Parliament (Antonucci 2012). Since 2014, the rules for lobbyists require that only those recorded in the register ("conditionality") have distinct rights and duties: 1. access to institutional offices, Commissioners and administrative heads of the Commission and European Parliamentarians; 2. convene in Parliamentary auditions; 3. receive the European Parliament/of the European Commission's sponsorship for specific events; 4. receive priority information from the Commission and Parliament, including news on groups of experts who assist the work of the Commission. This mechanism led to a new lobbying regulation model, based on selective incentives aimed at the special interests groups who register on a voluntary basis, instead of introducing a compulsory registration for all special interest groups (like France) or a regulation void only for some interest groups (like in the UK, for consultants and consultancies) or a set of rules opening access to limited public institutions (like in Italy, for only one of the two branches of the Parliament). The result of this idea of conditional cooperation between institutions and interest groups in policymaking was the EU Transparency Register, with over 11 800 interest groups registered in July 2020. For this paper, I created a dataset of the European Parliament's database of individuals representing registered organizations and accessing the EU Parliament habitually by a yearly badge. This dataset's analysis, created on public data by the European Parliament on July 25, 2020, required gender verification on existing data and automatic gender recognition (Gender API).

The gender ratio of registered lobbyists accessing the European Parliament is shown in figure 4.

The data referring to the European political system seem to open a positive view of more equitable gender distribution in political careers and lobbying in the EU. Data show that in the EU's political system the share of women in lobbying professions is significantly higher than in the considered national political systems: 44.7 % of the female

lobbyists accredited to the EU Parliament doubles the proportion of 18.5 % of female lobbyists certified in the French system and 22 % of female lobbyists registered in the Italian and British registers.

Figure 4: Percentage of women MEPs and registerd lobbyist at the Europaliament



Source: author's elaboration on datasets: Women in the European Parliament, Europarliament Register of Accredited Lobbyists.

Furthermore, the percentage of the total lobbyists in the European Parliament exceeds even the rate of European female MPs: 44.7 % of lobbyists vs. 41 % of Parliamentarians. Despite positive actions for having more women in the European Parliament, like double gender preference, the share of women MEPs is lower than the share of women in lobbying professions accessing to the Europarliament. This data would not give reason to be surprised: becoming MEP is often the climax of a career path in national and European political institutions, while being registered in the transparency register is a pre-condition for practicing the profession of lobbyist in the EU. However, in all the national political systems considered (Italy, France and the UK), the percentage of women MPs was always higher, in some cases consistently, compared to the percentage of women registered as lobbyists in the transparency registers. Therefore, this data needs to be reconsidered and commented on in the light of the reported literature on the gender gap in the lobbying profession and gender mainstreaming in the EU in paragraphs 1 and 2.

5 Why more female lobbyists in Brussels? A multifactor explanatory note

Based on the data by gender of the lobbyists registered in Italy, the UK, France and the EU Parliament, it seems relevant to reflect on why lobbying is mainly a male-dominated profession in the national political systems while, at the same time, the same job presents a gender-balanced structure in Brussels. This poses the question: Why are there many more women in the lobbying profession in Brussels than in Paris, London, and Rome? A monocausal explanation of the data emerging from this paper would not be

adequate, and indeed, the issue calls for further research. Nevertheless, some factors could help to sketch a first explanatory pattern.

The first element to consider has to deal with the very nature of the EU's political system: a supranational derived political system, aimed at integrating the different Member States in taking collective decisions valid for all. The EU supranational style of governance, measuring itself genetically and constitutively with diversity (Heritier 1996; Mair/Zielonka 2002; Shaw 2005), welcomes and favours the gender difference among the principles and practices at the institutional level. In the constant symmetry between institutional and socio-economic systems, pluralism diversity and equality take up and adapt to social and economic forces working closely with the European institutions. In this sense, in the European political system, the equal possibility for women to be working in male-dominated activities reflects the relevance of the EU political goals to favour pluralism and diversity towards inclusivity, while revitalising the impact of the EU's founding principles of pluralism, diversity, and equality.

Secondly, the European Union is an institutional setting where lobbying has established itself quite early and specifically (van Schelen 2002; Coen 2007; Baumgartner 2007). Interest groups of regional, national, and trans-European origin, representing diverse economic, social, and cultural interest, have been working with institutions (especially Commission and Parliament) within a very peculiar and often cooperative relationship model. This long-time presence of lobbying in the EU and the lobbying status in the European system have made it possible to accredit the profession on a social and economic level, avoiding the aura of negativity accompanying this work in other political contexts. The presence of an almost equitable share of women within this profession in the European system certainly involves the social acceptance of the lobbying activity in the EU's institutional, social, and economic context. The stigma still surrounding this profession in the political systems where lobbying has been introduced and regulated (e.g. France, the UK and Italy) consents to explain the scarce presence of women in the stock of professionals; this might be due to the need to have access to economically profitable but also socially considered jobs.

Thirdly, and in more specific ways, the energetic gender mainstreaming policies developed by the Commission since the 1990s have impacted European organized civil society present in Brussels. They stimulated the presence of a more significant number of women in public life, work, economy, and institutions. This circumstance is a critical assessment in terms of replicability in political systems based on a different institutional approach. The institutions adopt specific and targeted, concrete, and measurable policies, a coherent response comes from organized civil society. In this sense, the work on the dual aspect of gender mainstreaming (considering the gender dimension within all public policies and making the issue of gender representation central to the institutional system) produced effects that go beyond the political dimension (the growing presence of women at the top of the European institutions). It also provides a symmetrical impact on EU civil society relating, working, and designing policies side by side with the European institutions. In this sense, a trend towards gender balance in the lobbying profession in EU attests and esemplifies the ability of gender mainstreaming to achieve better policymaking, better institutional functioning, and make decision-making processes more effective, even in its outcomes (EIGE 2019).

However, from a fourth perspective, the simple top-down pedagogical approach of the institutions active in promoting gender mainstreaming policies would not have been sufficient, without a significant development from women's bottom-up associations, carrying out advocacy on equal opportunities for gender within the European context. The first seminal experience, now a well-established reality – the European Women's Lobby, the umbrella organization of European groups for promoting the female role in work, society, economy, and politics – opened the path for women's social activism in the EU context. Nowadays, 190 professional women's associations in various policy areas, listed in the European Register for transparency and actively involved in EU policies, act as advocacy and lobbying groups with the European institutions and promote gender-equal opportunities in the EU. From the bottom, these social experiences of women interest groups constitute the relevant responses of organized civil society towards gender mainstreaming policies. While promoting awareness of gender issues, these groups cooperate with European institutions to publicize a fairer condition for women, transmit gender equality messages to the mass media and create a favorable public opinion. Hence, through these interest groups' bottom-up activity, gender mainstream policies become alive and operational in society, in workplaces, and in the economy.

6 Conclusion

Thirty years ago, Schlozman called the lobbyist profession a job "based on the old boys' political network" (Schlozman 1990: 339). Gender data from public lobbyists registers in Italy, France and the UK confirm the hypothesis of lobbying as a still male-dominated profession with 18.5 % of women in lobbying in France and 22 % in the UK and Italy. The lobbying profession's feminization rates show lower numbers than the parliamentarians' feminization rate in the three political systems, collecting 30 % of women in the UK, 35.5 % in Italy and 36.4 % in France. The share of female MPs is a proportion well above the women listed in the lobbying registers.

The discussion is different when looking at the female presence in lobbying careers in the EU. Data from female lobbyists registered with the European Transparency Register reveal the percentage of 44.7 % of women in the profession, a share of feminization higher than the proportion of women in the European Parliament (41 %). There are multicausal explanations for this gender balance in lobbying careers in the EU. On the one hand, many public policy areas have become European. Consequently, it is more useful and incisive for lobby groups to carry out lobbying directly in Brussels and no longer in the national political capitals. More lobby groups in Brussels means more lobbying jobs opportunities in the EU's supranational political system, with an overall Europeanization of the lobbying business sector. Secondly, in ideal terms, the European context is much more inclined to accept diversity and propose equality of access. Due to the EU's fundamental values, this general orientation towards inclusivity and equality of treatment favors differences and equal gender opportunities. A further element of the explanation of the gender balance in Brussels' lobbying profession lies in the importance of the EU gender mainstreaming approach, aimed at guaranteeing a gender dimension in all public policies and attention to gender representation. This policy approach, effective since the end of

the 1990s (Kantola 2010) – with still perfectible implementation (Cavaghan 2017) – has achieved significant cultural change and women's institutional presence in the European system, helping to transfer its main principles and values to the social and the economic dimensions working with the EU institutions. Finally, a lively European organized civil society built on equal opportunities for women in male-dominated careers has also contributed to delivering bottom-up responses to the gender mainstreaming approach. These organizations promoting gender equality issues in professions, society and the economy have done important cultural work towards the European public opinion, the transmission of information towards the mass media, and policymaking collaboration with European institutions. Even if the gender equilibrium in the EU lobbying profession has several explanatory factors (longer use to lobbying and apter regulation, better lobbyists status and reputation), the ideal European approach to diversity and equality, the consistent perspective of gender mainstreaming, and the vital activity of European civil society on gender matters help in performing a fairer share of women in this profession in the Europan context. In this sense, the idea of transferring this EU ideal and value-based approach based on diversity, equal opportunity, and gender mainstreaming to national political systems could stand as one of the paths to hinder formal and informal barriers for women in traditionally male-dominated careers such as lobbying.

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