

**Pan-European Non-Governmental Organizations: European Union
Sponsored Mobilization and Activism for Social Rights**

Pauline P. Cullen

**Department of Sociology
State University of New York at Stony Brook
Stony Brook, NY 11794-4356, USA.
Email: pcullen@ic.sunysb.edu**

**Paper to be presented at the European Community Studies Association
Sixth Biennial conference, University of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
June 2-5 1999**

**Work in progress - comments welcome
Please do not cite without the permission of the author**

European debates on the role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) increasingly recognize the growing importance of the third sector not merely in a service provision, but also in the creation of employment and the empowerment of marginalized social groups. European Union (EU) policy discussion often stresses the need to foster citizen involvement through greater consultation with transnational NGOs. As a consequence, social welfare NGOs have reoriented their domestic and international strategies in strengthening EU-wide umbrella organizations and establishing lobbying offices in Brussels.

The EU as a system of international governance plays an increasingly important role in the support and organization of the European NGO sector. An important aspect of this involvement is EU sponsorship for the transnational mobilization of both local and national non-profit organizations into pan-European non-governmental consultative coalitions. This paper examines the development of EU-sponsored NGO consultative coalitions and the effect that NGO affiliation with the EU has upon NGO national and transnational organizing capacities. This research assesses the implications of this form of organization for the NGO sector in European countries and suggests that NGO participation in such EU-sponsored coalitions in enabling social NGOs to aggregate their influence through European level cross sectoral collaboration is an indication of new opportunities/constraints for this sector.

In order to study these EU -sponsored NGO coalitions I interviewed representatives from movement organizations (NGOs) who are members of an EU- sponsored social policy coalition known as the Platform of the European Social NGOs (the Platform), a sample of EU officials, and labor representatives working in the EU social sector. ¹ I concluded that EU-sponsored NGO coalitions have facilitated the emergence of alliances between diverse and often oppositional pan European NGOs working on social justice issues. Organizations, occupying contrary ideological positions, differing in organizational structure, which had often been in conflict with one another are now communicating, exchanging information, and signing common policy positions. ² Second, alliances are being forged between the NGO coalition and the European representation of labor, the European Trade Union Confederation. Finally, relations between the NGO coalition and the EU institutions have become regularized.

Of note is the role that the EU institutions play in these developments in particular, the claim that the European Commission³ and more recently, the European Parliament⁴ have begun to move away from top-down legislating, to a more responsive and participatory style with networking through EU interest coalitions providing the infrastructure for this process (Ward and Willams, 1997; Greenwood, 1997). Moreover, I argue that these developments are new in that they are characterized by a mix of top-down policy making – through EU-initiated efforts to cultivate the support of European citizens and bottom-up claims making by pan European social interest-organizations with claims to represent a range of Europe-wide constituents.

Drawing from research in the areas of social movements, (Marks and McAdam, 1996; Tarrow, 1997), voluntary organizations (Young, 1992; Salamon and Aneheier, 1996) and EU governance and interests (Mazey and Richardson, 1993; Richardson, 1996; Wallace and Young 1997; Greenwood and Aspinwall, 1998), this paper contributes to an understanding of how transnational NGO coalitions are mobilizing in unlikely partnerships, and how intergovernmental forums such as the EU are becoming the focus for the financial support, legal consolidation and political activism of the European NGO sector.

PAN-EUROPEAN SOCIAL NGOS AND TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL ACTIVISM

The transnational nature of problems such as poverty, discrimination and social exclusion has prompted the development of transnational NGOs designed to address these concerns. As non-state /non-corporate actors NGOs are curious contenders for an international role. Their most important claims for inclusion rest on norms of democracy and civic participation, which are weak at the international level. Transnational NGOs participate in many ways, targeting intergovernmental politics as they lobby and help formulate, implement and monitor the policies of states and intergovernmental organizations. In practice many NGOs adopt goals that combine the coordination of dialogue with the grassroots sector with the use of lobbying tactics to target governmental and international policy makers (Clark, Friedman, Hochstetler, 1997; Arts, 1998; Willets, 1996). On the one hand, states have incentives to welcome NGO efforts to participate in intergovernmental fora by including them as the voice of citizens and/or informed observers on governance issues on an international level. On the other, NGOs demand resources and the principled action of governments that governments may be unable or unwilling to undertake (Smith, 1997; Smith, Pagnucco, and Chatfield, 1997). As a result, NGO activism for increased participation in international politics faces a mixed reception from the representatives of international governance.

To date much of the research on transnational NGOs has been confined to activism on human rights and the environment and relations with international organizations such as the United Nations (Wapner, 1995; Smith, 1995; Weiss and Gordenker, 1996; Willets, 1996(a) 1996(b) ; Boli and Thomas, 1997; Keck and Sikkink, 1998). This paper contributes to the bases for this rapidly growing body of research on transnational NGOs and their role in global institution building by examining a new sector of transnational NGO activity on social policy and social welfare issues around an expanding form of international governance –the European Union.

THE EUROPEAN UNION AND THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL NGO SECTOR

The European Union is at a key stage in its history. It is on the brink of forming an economic and monetary union. It is also gearing up for enlargement eastwards to encompass a range of countries whose economies continue to undergo enormous structural change. Although, greater economic and political union between European countries has immediate implications for systems of social stratification and social protection in European societies, the debate around these issues has been remote for the European public.⁵ This sense of remoteness coupled with a lack of popular support for the latest amendments to the European Treaties has pushed this 'democratic deficit' onto the agendas of EU officials and social interest organizations. Specifically, the slim margin by which the Treaty of European Union (1993) was ratified reflected widespread dissent on this major amendment to the European "constitution" and invoked concerns about a lack of legitimacy and transparency for European citizens on EU matters.⁶ An EU institutional response has been to enter into a *civil dialogue* with the NGO sector as representatives of the European citizen.⁷ These developments have created a new set of opportunity structures for pan-European NGOs concerned with social citizenship issues.

For some commentators these events mark the emergence of a European civil society where social interests negotiate transnationally for access to resources (Touraine, 1994; Weiler, 1995). For others, this transnationally-oriented interest group activity does not mark

the extension of a European public sphere but rather an elitist and exclusive arrangement between a group of co-opted interlocutors (Hoskyns, 1996; Favell, 1998).⁸ From these perspectives, the relations between the EU institutions and NGOs are characterized by the binary of co-optation or pluralistic representation. This paper puts forward a third alternative based on the work of Marks and McAdam and their examination of the relationship between the EU and social groups which concluded that these interactions were neither characterized by co-optation or independence but rather a mix of bottom up contestation and top down institution building.⁹ According to this perspective interests negotiate through competition and cooperation towards mutual goals within a multi-level system of governance.¹⁰

Pan-European social NGOs while aware of the elitist nature of international policy making and the dangers of co-optation, also recognize the potential of the EU for bypassing restrictive national policy.¹¹ Consequently, NGO agents have seized the new civil society /citizenship agenda and, with the support of the European institutions, have sought to secure funding and influence for ideals-oriented political activities. This is evidenced by their effectiveness in promoting 'citizenship' issues. Most recently new provisions in the area of gay rights and anti-racial discrimination far beyond that of the national state level (Meehan 1993; Soyosal, 1994; Weiner 1997).

EU efforts to rationalize pre-existing ad-hoc consultative relations through the sponsorship of networks have been documented across many EU policy sectors. Network based consultation is not new for EU interest groups. However, what is new is its application to the highly contested and politicized area of EU social policy making.¹² In this sense, the establishment of a set of consultation procedures for social NGOs on EU policies does mark a shift in EU institutional procedures. The extension of consultative status to social NGOs on European policy matters problematizes the EU principle of subsidiarity that protects state sovereignty over national policy making from EU level intervention.

Substantial evidence does suggest that transnational NGOs are being increasingly consulted and utilized by both national and international institutions.¹³ However, EU sponsorship of NGOs has developed in an ad-hoc manner. Sponsored anti-poverty programs (1977-1994) marked some of the first EU support through European NGO networks to national and sub-national social service and community action based organizations. Organizations receiving support usually have an explicit European dimension and work on an issue, which can be linked to the EU predominantly economic agenda. It was not until the mid 1980's that environment, development, consumer and women's groups began to be consulted systematically by EC officials (Hoskyns, 1996; Cram, 1997). Sponsorship of the European Social NGO Platform came in the wake of the Treaty of European Union (1993), where the importance of links with this sector was first formally expressed in the creation of a non-binding resolution (Declaration 23) on greater EU cooperation with the voluntary sector (Communication from the Commission on Promoting the role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe, CEC, 1997).

THE NGO COALITION - THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL NGO PLATFORM

The European Social NGO Platform is an EU-sponsored, Brussels based, coalition of European NGO networks and federations of voluntary and social welfare organizations formally launched in 1994 to promote a semi-institutionalised dialogue between NGOs, EU institutions, national governments, and labor and employer interests on social policy matters. Its official functions are to facilitate informational exchange between its NGO members,

encourage their adoption of common policy positions and provide regular consultation with the EU on social policy matters (Platform of Social NGOs, 1996).

Among their stated policy objectives is the creation of a legally codified system of consultation between European Social NGOs and the EU institutions; the improvement of communication between grassroots NGOs and EU representatives and the recognition of a European Bill of Human Rights (Platform Interim Report, 1998). NGO members are drawn from the largest and most influential social sector NGO networks operating at EU level. These networks represent a range of voluntary and non-profit organizations that provide services to and campaign on behalf of the disabled, women, migrants, young and older people the unemployed and the socially excluded. (see table 1 for a list of Platform members)

The selection of the Platform provides a number of advantages for the study of EU-sponsored transnational NGO coalitions. This coalition is unique in that it is the first officially recognized EU-NGO coalition for the social welfare sector, and second the structure itself and the majority of its members are all to varying degrees dependent upon EU funding.¹⁴ Thirdly, the Platform represents a diversity of organizational types and memberships at the European level. It is a network of networks lobbying in the social policy field, with each organization representing from hundreds to thousands of affiliates and individual members held together by a commitment to shared values, shared political experience, funding, project agreements, and joint participation in EU sponsored transnational gatherings.

Focusing on the Platform is also an important test of the notion of a multi-level polity. This Forum represents a specifically EU level consultative arrangement where Platform members represent both the national and subnational levels of organizational arrangements and activity. The Platform was also selected because its affiliates are organizations rather than individuals. Organizations comprise the unit of analysis for this paper because research on social movements has generated consensus around the notion that organizations represent a principal means of generating collective political action in modern societies.¹⁵

INSERT TABLE HERE

PAN EUROPEAN SOCIAL NGOS AS TRANSNATIONAL SOCIAL MOVEMENTS:

Important agents for attitudinal and legally codified changes in European societies, paradoxically EU social NGO group activity has remained largely outside the scope of sociological analysis. However a number of scholars (Marks, McAdam, 1996; Tarrow 1995; Tilly 1996), combining an interest in social movements and the application of new institutionalist theories to the emerging European polity, have begun to chart the effects of the Europeanization of political action: the way that certain individuals, groups and organizations have begun to deliberately shift their strategies and organizational forms from the state and its institutions at the national level to the new transnational European one. Theoretically, this literature has been informed by theories of

“political opportunity structure”, that chart the interaction of actors and the institutional or political opportunities that their context and its evolution create. Moreover these scholars argue that this is leading to a new kind of “governance structure” of power and legitimacy in the European Union, in which politics becomes a multileveled game of interests and representation between the nation-state and other political arenas (Marks, Schrapf, Schmitter and Streeck, 1996).

Conceptualizing transnational NGOs as transnational social movements organizations and the process of European integration as a new opportunity structure for NGOs allows us to examine how these organizations emerge, develop accomplish or fail to accomplish their goals. Political Opportunity and Political Process models of social movement mobilization have been critiqued as conceptually vague, structurally biased catch all categories which are virtually synonymous with the larger "environment" within which organizations are embedded (Gamson and Meyer, 1996; Goodwin and Jasper, 1999). In recognition of this, I argue for a formulation, which considers opportunities and constraints as incentives and expectations that necessarily involve agency and interpretation. In this sense the institutional structures of the European Union are conceptualized as a shifting playing field with various cultural constructions and strategic players where political action is both channeled and created in a variety of ways.

As such this paper also engages debates within the social movements literature on the mobilization of external resources by weak social actors, (Piven and Cloward, 1977; Lipsky, 1968), the importance of influential allies and exploitable institutions for activism (Staggenborg, 1986; Tarrow, 1996; Cress and Snow, 1997), and the implications of external sponsorship for the tactics and goals of social movement organizations (Haines, 1984; McAdam, 1982; Jenkins and Eckert, 1986). Transnational NGOs frequently work with other NGOs and governmental or corporate allies to promote the global changes they seek. Because of their relative weakness when compared with governmental actors in international politics, transnational social movements must amplify their voices by building broad coalitions of organizations seeking similar policy goals. Thus, the principal ideas, goals, and strategies of social movement campaigns can rarely be traced to a single organization, but rather they arise from dense webs of interactions among transnational social movements, policy makers and international organizations bureaucratic agents (Smith, 1995). Strong movements are those that can demonstrate broad public support for their goals, partly by mobilizing the support (or neutralizing the overt opposition) of other non-movement social organizations, experts, and public officials. To be sure, movement organizations such as European Social NGOs face a range of constraints and opportunities defined by transnational political environments.

SOCIAL INTERESTS, EU INSTITUTIONS AND EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE

EU related literature from a variety of academic disciplines considers the process of EU policy making as marking either the aggregation of domestic interests through state centered apparatus (Milward, 1992; Moravcsik, 1994; Streeck, 1996) or contrarily as a site where individuals and groups can, under certain conditions arising from a multi-level polity, transcend national legal and policy ghettos to assert their supra-national (Hoskyns, 1996; Marks and McAdam, 1996, McLaughlin and Greenwood, 1995)). Accordingly, analysis of the influence of EU level interest activity differs in the emphasis it places on various sectoral actors. Moreover, EU level business interests have been recognized as an important actor whilst social interest groups have been accorded little status as policy participants. Research on EU level interest group representation has for the most part asserted that public interest

groups are 'weak groups' with little or no substantive influence on European public policy making (Streeck, 1996; Scharpf, 1996). Thus, both theoretical speculation and empirical work has outlined the significant legal and political limits placed upon social interest activity (Streeck, 1994; Schmitter, 1995; Rucht, 1997).¹⁶ However, the notion that social interests are unimportant because of a lack of political influence is questioned by recent research, which establishes the impact of public interests in shaping the parameters for transnational policy making (Young, 1992; Greenwood, 1997; Cram, 1997). Rejecting both realist and structuralist assumptions that NGOs are at best background variables in international politics I instead consider NGOs as episodically influential agents who are knowledgeable and capable players in this political environment.

THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTIONS- PATRONS AND ADVERSARIES?

Scholars have recognized the complexity of the role played by the EU institutions (Powell and DiMaggio, 1997; Jørgensen, 1997). Analysts have, for example, cautioned against over-generalization concerning the role of "the Commission", which is a highly differentiated structure, or the impact of the European Parliament, as its influence varies between policy sectors (Cini, 1997; Cram, 1997). These institutions are an essential element of the 'organizational field' within which these social movement organizations are embedded (Cress and Snow, 1997). Specifically, the European Commission and the European Parliament are at once the sponsors for and the target of activism for groups campaigning for social and democratic rights.

The European Commission

The European Commission's (the Commission) importance for social NGOs stems from its almost exclusive right to initiate legislation and, to a lesser extent, from its role in policing European legislation (Nugent, 1997; Cini, 1996). The Platform is supported through Directorate General V (Employment, Industrial relations and Social Affairs) and interactions are for the most part directed towards this unit and its personnel. Many members of the Platform have pre-existing relations with this unit and in some cases membership of the coalition has complicated these bi-lateral arrangements. It remains chronically understaffed for the range of functions it undertakes and is thus dependent upon outside interests (Greenwood, 1997). This also ultimately limits access by interests as hard-pressed Commission officials find it difficult to cope with an increasing quantity of interest representation.¹⁷ These conditions have been central to the sponsorship of interest group coalitions such as the Social NGO Platform, organized as single points of access to the diversity of such interests within a particular sector.

The European Parliament

The powers of the European Parliament, enhanced by the Treaty of European Union (1993), have particularly developed the landscape of European-level public interest organizations. The most important mechanisms in the Parliament for interests to engage are the committee systems, rapporteurs, and intergroups. These are the contexts where research and lobbying on social policy issues occurs. For some interests, intergroups can represent a "best chance" for interest groups in the EU, particularly for those who lack access elsewhere to institutional

structures.¹⁸ The Parliament's Committee on Social Economy has offered a commitment to the development of consultation procedures between NGOs and EU institutions.¹⁹ Interviews with EP officials and documentation confirms that the EP has entered into a set of arrangements with the Social NGO Platform in an effort to counter what Parliament officials consider as Commission attempts to subvert and co-opt the consultation process.²⁰

It is important to consider EP support for the Platform in the context of the adversarial nature of EP -- Commission relations. It has been asserted that the Platform has on occasion been the victim of inter-institutional conflict. It may also be the case that the coalition may be entering into a series of strategic alliances with either institution. Coalition staff and activists are highly skilled and experienced lobbyists some have previously been employed as EU officials. As such they are aware of the benefits which can be derived from playing these institutions against one another.²¹

TRANSNATIONAL REPRESENTATION OF LABOR

The European Trade Union Confederation ETUC is the official EU representation of European labor activity and is a member of a previously established EU consultative arrangement, "the social dialogue", established in the 1980's as a consultative committee on employment and labor market affairs.²² The ETUC's initial response to the Platform can be characterized as hostile and dismissive.²³ The labor organization regarded the NGO coalition as competition to their position as privileged negotiators on EU public policy.²⁴ The ETUC has been criticized for its ineffectiveness (Marks and McAdam, 1996) and its inability to address women workers interests (Hoskyns, 1996). In some regards, it is an organization in crisis, as it attempts to respond to the diversification of labor markets and the changing nature of work itself. Its strategy to retain its position within the semi-corporatist arrangements of the EU social dialogue and to respond to its critics, has included efforts to enter, albeit cautiously, into consultations with the social policy NGO sector (Abbott, 1997; Cockburn, 1997).

THE RESPONDENTS

Those interviewed represent organizations with a diversity of interests and correspondingly hold varying perceptions of the purpose, function and role of the Platform for their organizational objectives and for social action at a European level. Differing perceptions on these issues may be attributed to a variety of factors -- from the historical development of and resources available to particular groups to their pre-existing relationship with the European institutions. These factors in turn influence individual and organizational level relationships amongst NGOs and between NGOs and EU level institutional networks.

Clearly, organizations with different resources and maintenance needs all have interests in forming coalitions under certain environmental conditions but for different reasons (Staggenborg, 1986). An examination of these variables may explain the rational calculations that inform group and individual approaches to an arrangement such as the Platform.

However, such a resource based analysis leaves untouched the perceptions and understandings held by individuals who constitute and are constitutive of these organizations. These interpretations play an important role in shaping the day to day practice of organizational activity and ultimately the environment in which resources are mobilized and decisions are taken. By focusing upon the very perceptions that actors such as NGOs or Commission officials have of their own interests, it is possible to better understand the

complex interactions of belief systems which impact the way policy agendas are set and support is mobilized for EU action. As an NGO respondent remarked, "Organizations, officials and NGO networks have very different understandings and consequently [different] ways of getting to their objectives."²⁵

ORIGINS OF THE PLATFORM

NGO respondents describe the Platform as emerging from a loosely structured, ad-hoc talking shop constructed by a small group of organizations mobilizing in reaction to a series of discussions held around EU consultative papers on social policy.²⁶ This early activity involved a core set of NGO networks taking very general positions on European integration, poverty and social justice. As one NGO respondent recalled, "These meetings and the decision to continue them came from the idea to bring the NGOs from the social field together that had responded to the first real consultative paper on EU social policy."²⁷

The point at which and reasons why the Commission became officially involved are important for understanding the subsequent development of the coalition. NGO respondents claim that the inspiration for the Platform came from NGO initiatives long before Commission involvement. One respondent asserted, "There is some question as to what extent the Commission took this opportunity to structure and to limit the process according to their agenda."²⁸ Commission officials interviewed concluded that, "The Platform was a Commission venture originating from a budget line created by the European Parliament and as a practical outcome of a NGO conference, the European Social Policy Forum."²⁹ From the Commission's perspective it seems that the Platform was initially considered as a public relations exercise with responsibility for its organization held by the Commission unit for publications and publicity. Consequently their sponsorship of the project gave them a strong claim to publicize the structure and to claim a degree of responsibility for its creation.

During its first two years of existence the Platform's consultative role was restricted to post-hoc reaction to previously formulated policy proposals and policy documents.³⁰ Its standard modus operandi was to assemble a working group from its members who together reached a common position, which was then submitted to the Commission. These formative interactions between the Platform and the Commission did not evolve around any specific policy measures or any direct proposals.³¹ The Platform's other main activity during this period was their involvement in preparations for the previously mentioned Commission sponsored NGO conference, the European Social Policy Forum, which took place in March 1996.

NGOS AND OFFICIALS

Interview data suggest that, despite what might seem to be a conflict based relationship, there is a certain amount of consensus between the Platform members and the Commission. Quite simply, both parties have a strong interest in promoting a European-level social policy. This consensus rests upon a mutual exchange of legitimacy. Whether the interest on the part of the Commission is instrumental or if there is a genuine interest in promoting a social policy for Europe is a matter of speculation. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that there are some shared values of a more general kind, such as a belief in the European institutions and the process of European integration. For the Commission officials interviewed, NGOs were valuable if at times inefficient participants. For NGO respondents the Commission officials were committed

yet constrained actors. As one individual noted, "The Commission must react and interpret NGO activity within the restrictive political and economic environment on EU level for social affairs."³² On the other hand, Commission officials dealing with social NGOs characterized them as "disorganized, under-resourced, unrepresentative and lacking in transparency."³³ For the NGOs, Commission insistence upon their greater accountability is considered as somewhat unjustified and as an indication of the 'lack of understanding' typical of the bureaucracy. International bureaucracies and challenging groups such as NGOs inevitably hold conflicting interpretations of each other's position. This mismatch of perceptions ensures a contested relationship between these allies.

EP officials considered the Platform as "A flexible and non-bureaucratic interface with civil society."³⁴ For the EP the NGO coalition was a chance to avoid the mistakes made with what it considered as an elitist social dialogue, where the labor organizations and employers had created a closed system of negotiation on EU social and employment policies. The EP put itself forward as a defender of the Platform's position and as a counterweight to the Commission strategy of, "Constantly creating hurdles over which the Platform has to jump."³⁵

Aware of the EP's need to assert its democratic credentials, NGO members were eager to pursue relations and receive support. EP backing was important if the coalition was to make a transnational political impact. However NGO members were also aware of the Parliament's relative weakness compared to national assemblies. Nevertheless, relations with the EP did provide a chance to, "to persuade politicians of the usefulness of a civil dialogue."³⁶ In short, the ability to maneuver between these institutions would be essential to the Platform's future development.

EU FUNDING - EXTERNAL SUPPORT AND CONTROL?

While environmental opportunities and crises are likely to provide the impetus for the formation of coalitions, there are a number of obstacles to the maintenance of coalitions (Staggenborg 1986). One such obstacle can be the question of resource derivation. Commission sponsorship of the Platform can be considered an example of both the enablement and management of NGO activity. Sponsored coalitions are often considered as examples of external support leading to co-optation and control. There are two overlapping hypothesis in this "resource derivation" debate. The social control hypothesis argues that external sponsorship moderates organizational tactics, thus dampening the prospect of militant collective action (Haines, 1984, McAdam, 1982; Piven and Cloward, 1977). The other hypothesis contends that external patronage does not automatically mute radical dissent but channels it into more professional and publicly palatable forms (Jenkins and Eckert, 1986). One NGO group, relying almost entirely upon EU subventions, made the point that funding from the EU had not "conflicted" their organization. However, they admitted that their funding status had been a point of criticism from other groups in their broader movement- and therefore was used to question their legitimacy.³⁷

The social NGOs are dependent on their relations with the Commission to negotiate their annual budget.³⁸ Both NGOs and Commission officials perceived competition for funding between NGOs as pervasive and as creating particular sets of problems for the establishment of collective forums. The reason for such intense competition between organizations was explained by one NGO director as a problem of "The European Parliament and particular NGOs who work together to produce too many small budget lines that are

difficult to administer for the Commission.”³⁹ As a result, competition between NGOs for small amounts of money exacerbated tensions within the social affairs NGO community. Groups working on similar areas and competing for scarce budget lines then face each other at Platform meetings where they are asked to adopt common positions on policy. For some groups this merely intensified potential conflicts.

Commission officials professed to be on the whole sympathetic to NGO funding dilemmas and suggested that NGOs seek funding from the private sector through the medium of Foundations. They reason that in order for NGOs to be successful they need to package themselves and the services they provide as “valuable commodities” where investment in their activities makes “economic sense”. For most NGOs this ideology of commodification rests uncomfortably with their philanthropic, socialist and activist traditions. It seems that less conflict occurs when the focus rests upon the democratization that NGO activity can provide. In this sense it is their associational and participatory dimensions which are most easily reconciled to the EU discourse on the promotion of a civil dialogue with a Citizens Europe.

INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL DIVISION

Ideological conflicts among movement organizations are perhaps the most notorious obstacles to the maintenance of coalitions (Staggenborg, 1986). To be sure, the diversity of interests, organizational styles, traditions, and personalities create a charged and at times oppositional environment. Accounts from respondents confirmed this, indicating that the survival of a contentious and at times fragile consensus between Platform members depended to a large degree upon a “managed” sublimation of potentially divisive issues. Respondents attested to the existence of both intra and inter organizational conflict on both ideological and substantive issues. Avoiding confrontation was considered as important in the construction of a united front on common policy positions, for presentation to other constituents. Overall this management of conflict seems to be a central theme in NGO respondents’ discussions of their collective activity generally and participation in the Platform specifically. Examples of such conflicts include a longstanding disagreement between COFACE, an organization dealing with family policies, and the EU branch of the International Save the Children Alliance (ISCA). COFACE considered children’s rights as necessarily bound to the family unit, whilst ISCA campaigned for children to be considered as citizens and as individual rights bearers. Additionally, a point of contention between the European Women’s Lobby (EWL) and the European Disability Forum (EDF) rested on their differing perspectives on the notion of equal opportunity and positive discrimination.⁴⁰

The Platform’s operating procedures exacerbated disagreements amongst NGO members. By the end of 1997 these problems had both EU officials and NGO members frustrated with the coalition’s lack of progress. What had begun as a method to create cohesion was now becoming a showcase of the divisions within the social affairs NGO community. One NGO characterized the Platform’s activities as “Cautious, with more time taken in process rather than action, often resulting in a series of low impact decisions.”⁴¹ In this way the Platform was considered as an exemplar of much EU level work where efforts to combine a diversity of opinion with some element of representativeness render activity cumbersome and of limited effectiveness.

Another source of tension, which disabled the coalition, was the fear of take over (Kleidman, 1993; Staggenborg, 1986). NGOs, fearful of co-optation, perceived Commission

attempts to rationalize and assist the networks development as a method to divert its participants from the real centers of power. On this point one NGO respondent asserted, "As Platform members we want to keep our own identity, we don't always agree on all issues, we want to keep our separateness."⁴² This pull towards retaining their sectoral focus created a situation of mistrust between networks. For these groups the Platform marked a potential loss of individual sovereignty where it was possible that the Commission will only see the Platform and would stop contacting individual members of the Platform. This fear of take over has been documented as a process in which tension arises as the coalition attempts to establish its own identity while organizations seek to maintain their own visibility (Staggenborg, 1986). Whether or not these fears are warranted, there is some evidence to suggest that this could become a reality with the decision in early 1998 by the Commission to discontinue a well established bi-lateral consultative arrangement with COFACE, the long standing family policy social NGO. This decision was justified on the basis of the NGOs membership of the Platform structure.⁴³ In this instance, a bi-lateral consultative arrangement on a specific policy area was substituted for the broader scope of the coalition's collective voice. For this social NGO, membership of the Platform is proving to be a double-edged sword providing opportunities yet also restricting its lobbying activities.

OPPORTUNITIES AND THREATS

The European Social Policy Forum

The first real opportunity for public exposure came with the Social Policy Forum in 1996. This event drew together 1000 participants mainly from the social and voluntary NGO sector but also including representatives from member states, EU officials and labor and business representatives.⁴⁴ This conference was to be the first official EU sponsored collaboration between labor, employers and NGOs in a campaign for European social justice. NGOs perceived the event as a unique opportunity to enter into a political debate on social justice. However, most NGOs were disappointed, assessing the venture as hastily organized and predominantly controlled by the Commission and therefore offering little real opportunity for NGO input. As one individual commented, "We had no impact on the content, the result was that there was no real political debate."⁴⁵ For their part, Commission officials acknowledged that there had been a lack of preparation for the Forum but noted that there had been some benefits from the event, namely the involvement of labor and employers. As one official commented, "There was good attendance, good papers which created a small momentum."⁴⁶ For this official the Platform and Forums were not ends in themselves but were useful structures to facilitate a long-term process of NGO incorporation.

In this sense, even if the event itself was disappointing, the connections made through preparations for the Forum did have a spin off effect, in a follow up conference organized later that year by the Platform with the sponsorship of both the European Parliament and the ETUC, entitled "The EU and the Consultation of NGOs" (Platform News July 1996).

The Platform's next opportunity came with the Amsterdam Treaty, held in March 1997, which became the coalition's main focus. The Platform established a series of working groups and mini-conferences in an effort to lobby member state governments and EU institutions for an expansion of social provisions. Coalition members worked hard to influence policy makers campaigning for an EU bill of social rights, the expansion of projects to combat social exclusion, poverty and discrimination, and importantly, a legal obligation to consult the voluntary sector. The negotiations were crucial for some organizations whose

national members were experiencing the implications of cuts in social spending and whose own existence depended upon a continuation of EU level funding commitments. The result of the negotiations fell far short of NGO expectations.

Disappointment with the outcome of the negotiations marked a turning point for the coalition. Interview data and Platform press releases confirm member organizations' disorientation and disillusionment with the results of the Intergovernmental Conference. Nevertheless, the 1996 Social Policy Forum and the Treaty negotiations had provided the Platform with a specific work-plan and the basis to enter into and consolidate relations between its own members, the EU institutions and the ETUC.

COLLABORATIONS

Despite its intra-organizational difficulties and an unfavorable political environment, the Platform did manage to involve itself in an increasing number of meetings and events with the ETUC and the Commission.⁴⁷ The ETUC's is actively pursuing a series of projects with the Platform. Examples of such collaborations are a jointly organized conference "For a Europe of civil and social rights in 1997 and more recently a seminar on "Democracy and Justice for Europe" 1998 and a joint campaign for a European Bill of Fundamental Rights (Platform, *Interim Report*, 1998; *Platform News* April 1999).

Individual coalition members were also collaborating with the ETUC. An example was a coalition of the European Women's Lobby (EWL) and the ETUC. The EWL, the largest EU level women's interest group and a staunch critic of the ETUC for its limitation of the policy dialogue on the future of working life (especially for women), agreed to support one another on common positions. The EWL director asserted that such collaborations are strategically short-term in that they are forged with the plan of latter disengagement-in some sense as a truce where agreement to cooperate is also the agreement not to oppose one another on certain issues.⁴⁸ Both organizations asserted plans to continue with consultation. Thus, while organizations such as the EWL assert their independence from long term entanglements with labor sector interests, their activities indicate a more widespread trend with a greater frequency of contacts, joint public campaigns and substantive policy interventions.

Luxembourg Conference December 1997

Despite these collaborations, frustration with their lack of political impact brought some coalition members to consider the withdrawal of their participation. However, for a core of supporters the coalition deserved another chance. This was to come at the Luxembourg Conference, a seminar that involved contributions from the ETUC, the Commission and the EP (Platform of European Social NGOs, 1998). Interview data confirmed that participants perceived the conference as a resounding success. This event was to be the well-needed morale boost for the coalition. EP officials later remarked "Here we see the real potential of NGOs, they are united speaking with one voice for a European social policy."⁴⁹ The Luxembourg conference reinforced the members' commitment to the coalition. It also strengthened EP support, substantiated with a public hearing held in the Parliament on civil dialogue, which generated much interest and support for the coalition and its objectives.⁵⁰ These collaborations continued as preparations intensified for the next major social policy event, the 1998 European Social Policy Forum. By the end of March 1998, the Platform had managed to secure official bi-yearly meetings with the Commission, the European Parliament

and the ETUC. Aside from these formal events, the coalition was guaranteed a series of monthly meetings with these organizations.

The Platform's ability to increase its affiliations may be attributed to a number of factors. First, the coalition is fortunate in that it includes a number of established organizations, which are in a position to provide some internal support and an organizational infrastructure. Organizations such as the European Women's Lobby and the European Anti-Poverty Network provided the coalition with the legitimacy and the expertise to survive a number of threats and take advantage of opportunities. The Commission's focus upon a series of large public events also worked to help maintain the coalition. Research suggests that coalitions are more likely to succeed if they focus upon specific tasks, such as the Forums, that are too expensive for any one organization or on which high-resource organizations would not prefer to spend all their resources (Staggenborg, 1986).

THE FUTURE OF THE PLATFORM

In light of the accomplishments achieved as the Luxembourg conference coalition members and EU officials began to reflect upon the future of the Platform. Both NGO members and EU officials agreed on the need for a reform of the Platform's organizational procedure. This review of the coalition coincided with discussions on the renewal of the Platform's contract. The Platform commissioned a survey asking for input on both the future agenda of the structure and possible procedural reforms. An analysis of the survey data revealed differences of opinion as to the future development of the coalition (Cullen, 1998). Commission officials presented a negative evaluation expressing disappointment with the Platform's rate of progress, lack of co-operation and disclosure to Commission representatives. EP officials were significantly more positive regarding the coalition's past achievements and future development. The overwhelming negativity of the Commission's evaluation greatly surprised the coalition members. They had not expected such a response. The Commission officials had gone as far as to threaten to remove their sponsorship of the Platform. Sobered by the Commission response and ever aware of the danger of complacency in such a restrictive political environment for social issues, the coalition proceeded to reform its procedural structures.

However, nothing could have prepared the coalition for its most serious challenge to date. The threat of the loss of funding, a constant factor for most social NGOs, was to become a reality. On June 10, 1998, in an unprecedented move the Commission in reaction to a ruling of the EU court the European Court of Justice (May 12 1998-C-106/96) suspended 100 budget lines for the support of social and development NGOs.⁵¹ The Platform and its members were immediately affected. The announcement of the Commission decision spurred the social NGOs into a full-scale EU-wide protest campaign. This campaign would involve the Platform in a new and more intensified series of collaborations. The Platform and an alliance of development and humanitarian NGOs with ETUC backing launched what it termed as the "Red Card Campaign" in all member states. The campaign included a range of collective actions from institutional lobbying, Europe-wide media exposure to public demonstrations. The most pertinent protest came at the second Social Policy Forum held in Brussels at the end of June. This time the Platform took full advantage of its position, using the Forum as a lever to rally all of the organizations hit by the budget freeze.⁵² The show of strength paid off with a series of unprecedented meetings between the EU institutions to resolve this publicly embarrassing crisis.⁵³ The EU, campaigning hard for an inclusive citizen

friendly Europe, had been caught de-funding initiatives to support the homeless, abused women and children and programs to combat racism.⁵⁴ While this episode highlighted serious fault lines in budgetary procedures and the vulnerable position of NGOs working in the social field within the financial and legal framework of the European Union, the Platform's effective response to the crisis demonstrated its influence on the European political scene.

DISCUSSION

This paper investigates the existence of transnational NGO activity within the context of the European Union. Specifically, I examine the origins and development of an EU sponsored consultative arrangement between social welfare NGOs and EU institutions. I apply a social movement's perspective to these developments with particular emphasis on the notion of political opportunity structure. The concept of political opportunity structure refers to the set of environmental constraints and opportunities that "encourage or discourage (collective action) and lead it towards certain forms rather than others (Smith, 1995). Social movements are likely to emerge under political and economic conditions that support (or at least do not completely suppress) mobilization and where there is capacity for influence vis-a-vis established political actors is favorable (McAdam, 1982; Piven and Cloward , 1977). Moreover the form that collective action takes place is largely shaped by the character of targeted institutions. While a favorable environment is vital to social movement emergence, social movement actors do not merely passively await new political opportunities: they actively attempt to shape these opportunities and convert them into expanded movement actions. Moreover, political processes and institutional contexts are strategic and structural inspiring and demanding action as well as constraining it. In this sense movement mobilization, particularly in the case outlined here is often a defensive response to contracting circumstances.

Rucht (1997) in his work on transnational social movements disaggregates the concept of political opportunity structure, which he calls 'context structure' into the cultural, social and political contexts. The social and cultural contexts are closely related, and they help define the possibilities for mobilization of people and resources, while the political context delimits the possibilities for political action. Different environmental factors will have different effects and will be more or less significant across different movements and times. Social and cultural facets of movement opportunity structures are defined as mobilizing opportunities. These distinctions are analytical and are used as a heuristic device rather than a rigid classification of social reality.

Mobilizing opportunities for the European social NGOs include the social context and the structural and spatial organization of the population that the movement seeks to address. In other words, people with social ties that share similar interests or identities and contexts such as professional organizations and coalition structures. Movements can best flourish in social contexts where they can build upon pre-existing organizational bases and social networks. For the Social NGO Platform, pre-existing relations, overlapping memberships and their shared social ties with EU officials and Labor representatives within the rather exclusive Brussels environment provides a foundation for the Platform's existence. It is important to stress the emergent and negotiated nature of these social networks. These are not pre-existing structures yet rather social relations and the information, ideas and emotions that flow through them (Jasper and Goodwin, 1999). Mobilizing structures can also have contradictory effects on movement mobilization with social ties acting as de-mobilizing structures. This is especially the case with elite alignments, which can render groups vulnerable to co-optation and the dissolution of grass-root support. Along these lines Platform members close collaboration with EU officials has been

noted as having a variable impact on the social NGOs mobilizing capacities both in terms of autonomy and indigenous support.

The cultural⁵⁵ context refers to the attitudes and behaviors of the participants and the population, which a movement seeks to influence. The cultural context is important for movements' attempts to mobilize individual and organizational adherents, active supporters, sympathetic media coverage and material resources for its political struggle. In the European social policy case the cultural context consists in part of a working consensus between particular EU officials, NGOs and Labor representatives around a set of norms which hold that the EU is an important site for political and social change and that further integration requires some form of European social policy. The struggle to define and expand (frame) these norms as well as broadening public awareness of them is an essential part of NGO activities.

The second dimension of Rucht's conceptualization refers to the strategic resources available to movements. These are shaped by political institutions and influential allies. Specifically, movement strategies are affected by access to formal policy making processes, policy implementation capacities of international institutions, movement alliance structures and movement conflict structures (Rucht, 1997). To be sure participation in the Platform has provided social NGOs greater access to political institutions and formal policy making processes. In this sense, even though social NGOs possess a contested consultative status, membership in the coalition has at least created an additional layer of communication evidenced by relations between the Platform, Commission officials, EP agents and ETUC representatives. The Social Policy Forums, and the additional conferences sponsored by the ETUC and the EP are all examples of points of access for the Platform into the EU political process. These 'openings' or institutional avenues channel protest and political action in a variety of ways.

The policy implementation capacities of the EU on social policy matters also provide an important strategic opportunity for European social NGOs. Both the Commission and the EP lack the resources for enforcing policy legislation. This situation forces Commission and EP officials to rely on the Platform for assistance. The third dimension of variability of strategic opportunity structures for the Platform is the configuration of allies that the coalition relies upon for symbolic, material and /or political support (Rucht, 1997). Symbolic support consist of formal, public endorsements, in this case from other influential NGOs, Commission officials, Parliamentarians and Labor leaders. The Platform's main source of symbolic support is derived from EP agents and Commission officials. The Commission is also the major source of the Platform's material support. Political support, perhaps the most crucial, is more difficult to assign as it comes from allies who are in positions which allow social NGOs to directly influence political processes. This latter form of support has yet to be substantiated as the Platform remains restricted to a consultative role on EU policy matters.

Finally, movement conflict structures are an important element of the European social NGOs' strategic opportunities. These consist of the configuration of opponents that seek to limit, undermine, or repress social movement mobilization and activity. The actors with the greatest ability to block the Platforms strategies are states (through the Council). A constant tension exists between EU sponsorship of social NGO consultation and the limited policy competence for social policy at the EU level. The recent budget crisis is an example of a repressive development, which disabled and disconcerted the social NGO community. Commission agents and labor representatives may also be considered members of the conflict structure. Both parties have reason to limit the Platforms development . This is in line with the

theoretical and empirical debates around benefactor-movement relations, where powerful allies can also restrict a movement's expansion (Cress and Snow, 1997).

Literature on interest group participation supplements this analysis in establishing the case that social NGOs are important actors and that to discount their significance is to underestimate the contribution of interests more generally to the expansion of EU policy competencies. Analysis of the Platforms origins and development support the notion that the dialectic between NGO mobilization and EU institutional agents has created a both opportunities and constraints for relatively powerless interests. Whether these developments are evidence of increasing influence for social NGOs and or a reconfiguration of EU governance is less certain. However, the existence and longevity of the Platform does provide some basis to question the realist assumptions of interest groups participation and European governance. As this analysis shows in the actual course of struggle between challengers and institutions, institutional structures may channel and define the area of interaction- but they can also be transformed, thereby altering the nature of the system and the future course of such struggles. The ability of social interests –social NGOs to manipulate such opportunities and negotiate such threats has altered future strategic possibilities for these movements and ultimately a facet of EU governance on social matters.

CONCLUSION:

Political institutions and influential allies shape the opportunities for political action by existing challengers within a given political system. As such, restricted and opportunistic institutions and limited international political will for social justice create an uncertain combination of threat and opportunity for transnational NGO coalitions. The survival and longevity of the transnational social NGO coalition depends on its ability to manage its conflicts and maintain a degree of consensus between its unlikely yet influential allies. For the social NGO coalition the competing visions of the purpose and function of the Platform coupled with a restrictive political and economic environment, ensured this will be no easy task. The Commission and the ETUC support the coalition in its function as a channel for information and occasional consultation. While NGO members and EP officials consider the alliance as possessing the potential to increase the profile and effectiveness of social issue NGOs on both a European and national level. Allies maintain a degree of consensus through the shared perception of the EU's utility in bringing about political and social change. The questions that remain are: will transnational coalitions such as the Social NGO Platform evolve from their present consultative status towards an arrangement of negotiation on EU public policy making? Alternatively, will participating social NGOs remain as mere consultants on EU public policy with participation in such coalitions increasing EU institutional control over European level social interest activity? I suggest that the chances for EU social NGOs to evolve from consultants to negotiators will to a large extent depend upon the coalitions successful negotiation of its internal divisions and the degree of support or resistance of EU level labor organizations, EU institutions and national governments to such arrangements. Negotiation of internal divisions may be facilitated by the appointment of a strong coalition chairperson capable of mediating between the diversity of membership and committed to a unifying program of work. ETUC support may rest in part on convincing labor that NGO representation will not challenge their position whilst providing additional support for their social and labor market initiatives. Finally, EU level negotiating status for NGOs will require concerted support from both the EP and the Commission- where both perceive that NGOs can supply the expertise and legitimacy essential for European public

policies to succeed. The relationship between NGO activity and democratization, however, is ambiguous. Two fundamental propositions one De Tocquevillian and one Gramscian are evident. The former contends that NGO activity strengthens civil society and hence democracy by improving interest articulation and representation. The latter argues that NGO activity simply institutionalizes existing patterns of political contestation, between civil society and the state and within civil society itself, adding an additional dimension to struggles which remain fundamentally class based. (Clarke, 1998). I find varying degrees of support for both of these positions. Participation in EU sponsored coalitions does guarantee Pan-European Social NGOs and their national/local affiliates representation within the processes of EU policy making. NGOs play an important role in increasing the profile of the sector at both EU and national contexts. Relations between the NGO sector and the European Parliament are important in this regard. In particular, if the Platform continues to diversify its repertoire of contention to incorporate actions such as collective protest, media exposure and cross-sectoral alliances, then it may indeed fracture the exclusive nature of the nascent European public sphere.

Pan-European NGOs also contribute to the negotiated character of EU multi-level policy making. The Platform therefore offers a relatively narrow and exclusive filter for the European social NGO sector. However, as NGOs participate within this transnational European public sphere, they may be transformed but they are also transformative. Their representation of the local/national/transnational is an important addition to the potentially exclusive and power-laden transnational public sphere.

These issues are considered in the context of the European Unions singularly difficult challenge –achieving democratic legitimacy and its attempts to use resource poor social interests to counter this lack of accountability. European social interest representation is also considered to be conditioned by the unique multi-level character of EU decision making and policy processes where EU institutional facilitation and social interest activism combine to provide the context for a possible transformation of European governance on social matters.

¹This paper draws upon data from 50 semi-structured interviews conducted in Brussels, Belgium, with members of a diverse group of NGOs working on social welfare and social justice issues, Commission officials and staff members of the European Parliament and the European Trade Union Confederation, August-September 1997, January and May 1998 and January 1999. This research was assisted in part by the Council for European Studies Pre-Dissertation Fellowship (1997).

² However coalition membership does not mediate all forms of conflict and in fact has become a source for new forms of division

³Cram's (1997) detailed study of two rather different policy areas –social policy and information technology policy-highlights the Commission as a key institutional actor which behaving like all bureaucracies is opportunistic in exploiting 'windows of opportunity' and mobilizing diverse sets of policy actors in favor of policy change.

⁴ Interview with Member of European Parliament and secretariat for social affairs Jan 1998 and May 1998. See also Nugent(1998) for a discussion of the increased powers of the Parliament in the post Maastricht era and its interest in supporting the activities of social interest groups.

⁵EU policy making takes place across supranational, national and local levels with certain policy areas dealt with at the EU level and others dealt with at national or sub-national levels, a system of considerable complexity further accentuated by the absence of a locus of centralized power. The lack of a central government has grave consequences for democracy in the sense that there is no political body that can be held collectively responsible for its actions.

⁶ This 'democratic deficit' has been a major concern throughout European politics in recent years with strong criticisms that the EU system does not meet democratic standards and that European governance will despite a high level of performance not produce political legitimacy. These debates have been consistently used by the European Parliament as a basis to claim further powers in European policy making. The European Commission and the European Council have vied with one another to demonstrate their democratic credentials and have sought to establish mechanisms for openness and transparency in decision making. As such these debates provide an important context for EU level social interest politics to develop.

⁷ The civil dialogue initiative is part of an EU wide program Citizens Europe which programs include, measures to improve equal opportunities and the situation of women in working life, public health and consumer protection, education, employment creation and increased openness and transparency of EU institutional arrangements and policy making.

⁸ The Europeanization of politics in Europe in fact represents an anomaly in terms of liberal democratic theory- as Favell (1998) points out in his discussion of EU immigration regime and his critique of the Habermasian account of the emergence of the European public sphere, "that what goes on in Europe, goes on largely outside of the media eye, beyond public knowledge; many traditional channels of political representation are absent and Europe works in a progressive sense, extending its own powers by its systematic restriction of access to voice and participation. This position is an important corrective to the implicit assumption, found particularly in work on social movements, that the dynamic of interests (social movements) in western societies is the progressive contestation of the given political system to expand in an inclusionary direction forcing a pluralism more representative of the disadvantaged. In the new European context, then it is no surprise that normatively the only direction that a Europeanization engineered by elite social movements can move in – it is argued- is one which offers a broader, more culturally diverse, post-national public sphere (Weiler, 1995). However, as Favell (1998) argues the power of the European realm is inverse to its accessibility, despite it paradoxically being an arena offering the globalization and universalization of transnational politics beyond the nation state. Its universalizing and restrictive elitist tendencies are two sides of the same coin

⁹ As such this project considers European and national levels of governance not as antithetical but as mutually reinforcing and transnational interest group activity as negotiating between these multiple levels of organization and influence.

¹⁰ Recent work by Marks and McAdam (1996) explores this assertion in relation to a variety of different union and campaign organizations across Europe, their hypothesis is that there is a new kind of political opportunity structure emerging at European level, that is pulling these organizations into organizing transnationally. Moreover they argue that this is leading to a new kind of 'governance' structure of power and legitimacy in the European Union in which the sovereignty of the nation-state is in decline, and politics becomes a multi-leveled game of interests and representations between the nation state and other political arenas.

¹¹ Through intervention in transnational politics NGOs seek to exploit the vulnerabilities of states that are created by interdependencies. Using a transnational strategy such movements plan to mobilize representatives of other states or international agencies in order to pressure domestic targets, by bringing an essentially domestic conflict into the international political arena transnational NGOs raise the stakes in the conflict, bringing greater international costs for a national elite that remains unyielding. (Smith, 1995).

¹² Broadly speaking the EU has developed from a purely economic union to possessing a social dimension. As such EU social policies are predominantly regulatory in nature and emerge from a narrow political mandate (Majone, 1995; Cram, 1996). To be sure the EU social dimension has developed slowly and painfully since the early 1970's, with periods of expansion and contraction, matched with attending ebbs and flows in social interest activity. Hoskyns (1995) has mapped this path with her analysis of the development of European social policies for women arguing that the multi-tiered nature of EU polity and the position of 'supported women activists' has had specific implications for the EU social project. Pierson and Liebfried (1995) concur emphasizing that "...even in social policy, supposedly an area where member states reign supreme -policy making now occurs through a complex interplay of social actors and decision makers at multiple levels" (Liebfried and Pierson, 1995, p.465).

¹³ The evidence includes a growing body of research on the importance of pan European NGO activity in the policy setting processes of the European Union (Greenwood, 1997; Ward and Williams, 1997). It also includes the fact that governments and inter governmental agencies are increasingly providing funds to these NGOs as part of their efforts to promote international policies. (Salamon and Anheier, 1996 and Smith, 1995). The EU estimates that 800m ecu of its budget is channeled annually to NGOs (COM(97)24).

¹⁴ Examples of the range of financial dependence, are organizations such as the European Women's Lobby, whose secretariat and programs are funded 90% by the EU, to ET Welfare, a social service organization, that receives a smaller subvention for its secretariat but relies upon the EU for the financing of 80 % of its projects (European Women's Lobby, 1997, *Annual Report*, 1996, p.21; ET Welfare, 1997, *1996 Annual Report*, p.95-96, p.62).

¹⁵ In particular work addressing national organizational coalitions, (Staggenborg, 1986) which found that coalitions were most likely to form when new opportunities or threats emerged in the broader political environment is relevant to the unpredictability of the EU interest group environment.

¹⁶ Research on environmental NGO sector contends that limiting factors such as scarce resources, EU funding and a lack of institutional access ensure that these groups lack the key elements of a favorable opportunity structure (Rucht, 1996.) My research on the Social Policy Platform tests this argument by systematically analyzing a new semi-institutionalized channel of representation available to NGOs networks working on social policy issues and suggests that these new consultative structures may increase the influence of social NGOs within policy setting processes.

¹⁷ This is supported by interviews with both Commission officials from DGV and DGXIII and staff members of social and consumer NGOs (January and May 1998)

¹⁸ Euro-interests are actively involved with the EP. For example, the European Public Health Alliance, EuroLink Age and COFACE coordinate the intergroups on public health, elderly people and the family and consumers respectively. The European Women's Lobby, meanwhile, has close links with the women's committee in the EP.

¹⁹ Interview with Member of European Parliament and secretariat for social affairs Jan 1998 and May 1998. See also Nugent(1998) for a discussion of the increased powers of the Parliament in the post Maastricht era and its interest in supporting the activities of social interest groups.

²⁰ Interview with MEP and members of the Social Economy secretariat May 6 1998. *Communication from the European Parliament Social Affairs Committee- Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organizations and Foundations in Europe*, EP, May, 1998)

²¹ The EU is also a political system in the process of development and as such promotes a situation of intra-institutional rivalry. Not only the content of policy making but questions regarding the areas in which policy should be made and the rules for decision making become matters of dispute. Hence the EU is a highly fragmented and uncertain environment for coalition formation. I would argue that this unpredictability whilst difficult for social NGOs to navigate can at the same time provide opportunities for unlikely alignments.

²² My comparison of these cases is informed by the existence and trajectory of a fore runner to the civil dialogue- the *social dialogue* between the Trade Unions, the Employers and the EU institutions. This social dialogue gave the ETUC negotiating status on EU social , industrial and employment policy. EU attempts to rationalize and formalize the policy arena through the creation of institutionalized policy dialogues - such as the civil and social dialogues indicate a long-term shift in this direction.

²³ NGOs often challenge the interests of other interests and they can generate opposition from counter-movements. The strength and organization of the opposition influences the organizations potential political impact. The ETUC may not be a counter-movement however their alliance with the NGOs must be considered in this light.

²⁴ Interview with ETUC Confederal Secretary for Social Affairs August 28,1997 and the General Secretary for Women's Affairs, August 29,1997.

²⁵ Interview with NGO official August 21,1997.

²⁶ Coalitions typically form around campaigns, which are deliberate efforts to coordinate movement actions around a particular policy or event and thereby extend the movements' message beyond its public to a more general audience. (Chatfield,1992)

²⁷ Interview with NGO respondent, September 02,1997.

²⁸ Interview with NGO respondent August 23 1997.

²⁹ Interview with Commission official DGV on Social Affairs August 18, 1997.

³⁰ An example of this was its contribution to an EU policy proposal entitled 'Living and Working in the Information Society: People First' ,(COM (96)389, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities)

³¹ Assessing the quality of interactions and or the coalition's effectiveness is very much complicated by the nature of EU social policy making. The EU is not a state and social policy as a particularly guarded form of national policy is in most cases not under EU competence. A lack of direct policy impact may depend more on the fact that there is very little policy being made.

³² Interview with NGO official Sept 4,1997.

³³ Interview with Commission officials from DGV (Social Affairs) September 3,1997 and DG XXIII (Relations Mutuals and Charitable Associations) May 19,1998.

³⁴ Interview with Member of the European Parliament and staff member of the Social Affairs secretariat, May 20, 1998.

³⁵ Interview with Member of the European Parliament and staff member of the Social Affairs secretariat, May 20, 1998.

³⁶ Interview with the Platform coordinator, May 21,1998.

³⁷ Interview with NGO Director, May 18,1998.

³⁸ If budget lines are frozen or if the Commission wants to redirect its spending in this field, it can do so. Instead of being funded by the national organizations, there is a flow of money downwards to the national levels for different projects from the EU through the European networks.

³⁹ Interview with NGO director, September 7,1997.

⁴⁰ Although Platform members have recently engaged in a series of discussions to build consensus around the issues of equality and non-discrimination. These debates are planned to produce a common declaration on terminology and definitions to be used as a corner stone for future policy work. This declaration is to be presented at an Equal Opportunities seminar in Bonn on 27-28 May 1999.

⁴¹ Interview NGO director August 21, 1997.

⁴² Interview with NGO staff member August 28, 1997.

⁴³ Interview with DGV official May 5, 1998 and Interview with Platform Coordinator May 6, 1998.

⁴⁴ This conference saw the official launch of the EU civil dialogue program which is stated to have two main aims "to ensure the views and grassroots experience of the voluntary sector can be systematically taken into account by policy makers at European level, so that policies can be tailored to meet real needs and to disseminate information from the European level down to the local level so that citizens are aware of the developments, can feel part of the construction of Europe and can see the relevance of it to their own situation, thus increasing transparency and promoting citizenship" (*Commission Communication Promoting the role of Voluntary Organizations and Foundations in Europe*, CEC, 1997, p.12)

⁴⁵ Interview with NGO director, August 21, 1997.

⁴⁶ Interview with Commission official with portfolio for the Social Policy Forum, August 22, 1997.

⁴⁷ Platform of European Social NGOs- *Platform News*, April 1998.

⁴⁸ Interview with European Women's Lobby and the European Trade Union Confederation, (August 19 and September 03, 1997)

⁴⁹ Interview with a Member of the European Parliament (Social Affairs Committee) May 17, 1998.

⁵⁰ European Parliament Press Service, *EU Public Hearing on the Consultation of Social NGOs*, March 03, 1998, Strasbourg.

⁵¹ The budget crisis had come about as the result of a 1995 court case brought by the British Government against the Commission over unlawful expenditure on social programs. The Courts decision had found that the Commission had overstepped its boundaries interfering with an area of national competence.

⁵² The Irish Times, "NGO funding falls victim to EU's institutional rivalry", July 17, 1998, European Diary, p 12

⁵³ Responding to the chorus of protest from NGOs and the European Parliament the Commission set up a Committee to report on July 14. This deemed 56 of the lines to be fully lawful, 19 partially lawful and the rest problematic. The Austrian presidency of the European Union then intervened to set up a 'trialogue' of Commission, Parliament and Presidency to resolve the matter. The trialogue took place with uncharacteristic speed on July 17 and agreed a formula whereby the problematic budget lines would be re-designated as either 'pilot projects' or 'preparatory measures', and therefore lawful within existing procedures or 'autonomous operations' which would require a Commission communication and parliamentary and council approval.

⁵⁴ Platform of Social NGOs, *Platform NEWS*, June-August, 1998. The Platform of European social NGOs, Brussels.

⁵⁴ It is important to recognize that culture permeates the political opportunities and mobilizing structures mentioned above.

REFERENCES:

- Abbott, K.(1997) The European Trade Union Confederation: Its organization and Objectives in Transition, *Journal of Common Market Studie*(35) 465-481
- Arts, B, (1998) *The Political Influence of Global NGOs: Case Studies on the Climate and Biodiversity Conventions*. Utrecht: International Books.
- Boli, J., & Thomas, G.(1997). 'World Culture in the World Polity: A Century of International Non-Governmental Organisation'. *American Sociological Review*, 62/2 171-190.
- Clark, A.M. Friedman, E.& Hochstetler,K.(1997). Changing Repertoires and Shifting Frames in International State-Society Relations: A Comparison of NGO Participation in the Global UN Conferences on the Environment, Women and Human Rights., *World Politics*, (22), ?
- Clarke,G, (1998) Non-Governmental Organizations and Politics in the Developing World, *Political Studies*, (46),36-52
- Cini, M. (1996). *The European Commission, Leadership, Organisation and Culture in the EU Administration*. Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press.
- Cockburn,C.(1997) Gender in an International Space: Trade Union Women as European Social Actor. *Women's Studies International Forum*,(20) 459-470
- Cowles, M,G.(1995)'Setting the Agenda for a New Europe: The ERT and EC 1992', *Journal of Common Market Studies* (33),No.4, 501-526.
- Cram, L.(1997). Calling the Tune without Paying the Piper? Social policy Regulation: The Role of the European Commission , *Policy and Politics*,21,135-146.
- Cress, D.& Snow,D.(1998) Mobilization at the Margins:Organizing by the Homeless. In Costain,A.& McFarland.(Eds.). *Social Movements and American Political Institutions*. New York:Rowman and Littlefield Press
- Cullen, P. (1998). The Future of the European Social NGO Platform, The Platform of Social NGOs: Brussels.
- Favell, A. (1998). *Philosophies of Integration: Immigration and the Idea of Citizenship in France and Britian*. London:MacMillam; New York: St.Martins Press.
- Gamson,W.A, and Meyer,D.S.(1996) ."Framing Political Opportunity" In McAdam ,D. McCarthy ,& J.D. Zald, M. (Eds.) (1996). *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*. New York, NY:Cambridge University Press.
- Goodwin, J& Jasper, J(1999) Caught in a Winding,Snarling Vine: The Structural Bias of Political Process Theory, *Sociological Forum*,(14) 27-54
- Greenwood, J.(1997). *Representing Interests in the European Union*. New York: St .Martins Press.
- Greenwood, J& Aspinwall, M.,(1998)*Collective Action in the European Union-Interests and the New Politics of Associability* London :Routledge.
- Haines,H.(1984).Black Radicalization and the Funding of Civil Rights:1957-1970.*Social Problems*.32/331-372.

- Hoskyns, C.(1996). *Integrating Gender-Women, Law and Politics in the European Union*. London: Verso Press.
- Jenkins,C. & Eckert,C.(1986). Channeling Black Insurgency: Elite Patronage and Professional Social Movement Organizations in the Development of the Black Movement. *American Sociological Review*.51/812-29.
- Jorgensen, E.K.,(ed)(1997) *Reflective Approaches to European Governance*, MacMillian Press, London.
- Keck,M,& Sikkink ,K.,(1998) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Kleidman,R.(1993).*Organizing for Peace:Neutrality,the Test Ban and the Freeze*. Syracuse,NY:Syracuse University Press.
- Kohler-Koch,B., Organized Interests in European Integration: The Evolution of a New Type of Governance? in Wallace H., and Young A.,(ed) (1997) *Participation and Policy making in the European Union*, Clarendon Press:Oxford.
- Landau,A & Whitman,R.. (Eds). (1997) *Rethinking the European Union, Institutions, Interests and Identities*. New York :St. Martins Press.
- Lipsky,M. (1968).Protest as a Political Resource, *American Political Science Review*, 62:1144-1158.
- Majone, G.,'The European Community: Between Social Policy and Social Regulation', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, vol.31no.2(1993)pp.153-169
- Marks, G. & McAdam, D. (1996) Social Movements and the Changing Structure of Political Opportunity in the European Union. *West European Politics*. 9/2 ,249-278.
- Marks, G. Hooghe, L.& Blank, K.(1996) European Integration from the 1980's:State Centric v. Multi-level Governance. *Journal of Common Market Studies*.34/3,341-378.
- Marks, G.(1996). An Actor- Centred Approach to Multi-Level Governance, in *Regional Dimension of the EU. (Journal Offprint)* Portland:Frank Cass Journal.
- Marks,G. Scharpf, F.W. Schmitter,P.C. & Streeck, W. (1996) *Governance in the European Union*. London: Sage Publications.
- Mazey, S and Richardson ,J.,(eds) (1993) *Lobbying in the European Community*, Oxford, Oxford University Press
- Mazey, S.& Richardson, J. (1996) "The Logic of Organisation: Interest groups", In (Ed.) Richardson, J. *European Union -Power and Policy Making*. New York: Routledge.
- McAdam ,D. McCarthy ,& J.D. Zald, M.. (Eds.) (1996). *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures and Cultural Framings*. New York, NY:Cambridge University Press.
- McAdam, D. (1982). *Political process and the Development of Black Insurgency*. Chicago: Uiveristy of Chicago Press.
- McCarthy, J.D. & Mayer, Z. (1977). Resource Mobilization in Social Movements: A Partial Theory. *American Journal of Sociology*. 82:1212-41.
- McLaughlin, A.M.& Greenwood, J.(1995).The Management of Interest Representation in the European Union. *Journal of Common market Studies*.33/1,143-156.
- Meehan, E. (1993). *European Community Citizenship*. Verso:London.
- Milward, A.,(1992)*The European Rescue of the Nation State*, Routledge,London
- Moravcsik, A.,(1996)"Negotiation and the Single European Act:National interests and Conventiional Statecraft", *International Organization*, vol.45, no.1,1991, pp.19-56
- Nugent,N.(1997). *The Government and Politics of the European Union*. Macmillan: London.

- Pierson, P., and Liebfried, S., (1995) *Fragmented Social Policy: The European Union's Social Dimension in Comparative Perspective*. Washington, D.C: Brookings Institute.
- Piven, F. & Cloward, R.A. (1977). *Poor People's Movements: Why They Succeed, How They Fail*. New York: Vintage Press.
- Powell, W.W. & DiMaggio, P.J. (Eds.), (1996). *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Richardson, J, Policy making in the EU : 'Interests, ideas and Garbage Cans of Primeval Soup', in Richardson, J (ed) (1996) *European Union- Power and Policy Making*. New York, Routledge Press.
- Rucht, D. (1997). Limits to Mobilization-Environmental Policy for the European Union, In Smith, J., Pagnucco, R. & Chatfield, C. (Eds.) (1997) *Solidarity Beyond the State: The Dynamics of Transnational Social Movements*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Salamon, L.M. and Anheier, H.K. (1997). *Defining the NonProfit Sector-A cross-national analysis*. New York: St. Martins Press.
- Sandholtz, W. (1989) '1992: Recasting the European Bargain', *World Politics*, 42, pp. 95-128.
- Sbragia, A.M. (ed) (1993) *Europolitics*, Washington D.C., The Brookings Institute.
- Scharpf, F. (1996). Negative and Positive Integration in the Political Economy of European Welfare States. In Marks, G. Scharpf, F. Schmitter, P. Streeck, W. (Eds.). *Governance in the European Union*. London and California: Sage Publications.
- Smith, J. (1995). "Transnational Political Processes and the Human Rights Movement", In Kreisberg, Dobkowski, M & Walliamn, I. (Eds). *Research in Social Movements, Conflict and Change*, 18, 128-142. Greenwich CT: JAI Press.
- Smith, J., Pagnucco, R. & Chatfield, C. (Eds.) (1997) *Solidarity Beyond the State: The Dynamics of Transnational Social Movements*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Soyosal, Y. (1994). *Limits of Citizenship: Migrants and Postnational Membership in Europe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Staggenborg, S. (1986). Coalition Work in the Pro-Choice Movement Organizational and Environmental Opportunities and Obstacles. *Social Problems*. 33/5, 374-390.
- Streeck, W. (1995) *From Market Making to State Building? Reflections on the Political Economy of European Social Policy*. The Brookings Institute, Washington, D.C.
- Tarrow, S. (1995). *The Europeanization of Conflict: Reflections from Social Movement Research*.
- Tarrow, S. (1997). *Fishnets, Internets and Catnets: Globalization and Transnational Collective Action*. Working Paper. *Center for Advanced Study in the Social Science*. Madrid: Juan March Institute.
- Tilly, C. (1996). Social Movements and National Politics. In C. Bright & S. Harding. (Eds.) *Statemaking and Social Movements: Essays in History and Theory*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Touraine, P. (1994). *Post-National Membership and the European Community*. London: University College London Press.
- Wallace H., and Young A., (ed) (1997) *Participation and Policy making in the European Union*, Clarendon Press: Oxford.
- Wapner, P. (1995) *Environmental Activism and World Civic Politics*. New York: City University of New York Press
- Ward, S. & Williams, R. (1997). From Hierarchy to Networks? Sub-central Government and EU Urban Environment Policy. *Journal of Common Market Studies* .35/3, 437-462.

-
- Weiler, J. (1996). *The selling of Europe: The discourse of European citizenship in the IGC 1996*. Cambridge: Harvard Law School.
- Weiner, A. (1997). Making Sense of the new geography of citizenship: Fragmented citizenship in the European Union. *Theory and Society* .26/4, 529-560.
- Weiss, T.G. & Gordenker, L (Eds) (1996) *NGOs and Global Governance*. Boulder Colorado: Lynne Rienner Press.
- Willems, P.(Ed.) (1996). *The Conscience of the World: The Influence of NGOs on the UN System*. Washington DC: The Brookings Institute.
- Willems, P.(1996) From Stockholm to Rio and beyond: the impact of environmental movement on the United Nations consultative arrangements for NGOs, *Review of International Studies*.(22) 57-80.
- Young, D.(1992). Organising Principles for International Advocacy Associations. *Voluntas*, 3/1-28.

European Union Documentation:

- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities. Opinion on the Commission Communication concerning the development of the social dialogue at Community level, Economic and Social Committee of the European Communities. CES 106/97 Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Communication from the Commission on Promoting The Role of Voluntary Organisations and Foundations in Europe, *COM(97) 241final*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Living and Working in Information Society: People First , Bulletin of the European Communities, *Supplement 3/96*, Luxembourg: Office for the Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Partnership for a New Organization of Work, Green Paper, Bulletin of the European Communities, *Supplement 4/97*, Luxembourg: Office for the Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Draft Treaty of Amsterdam. Conference of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, *CONF/4001/97*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Working on European Social Policy-Report on the First European Social Policy Forum, *CM-NF-94004* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities Green Paper :Work and live in the Information Society-Priority to human dimension? *CM-NF-96-003* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Commission of the European Communities and Council of the European Communities White Paper on the European Social Policy: A way forward for the Union, *CE-84-94-880* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities

European Parliament Press Service, *EU Public Hearing on the Consultation of Social NGOs*. 5/3, 1998. Strasbourg

European Women's Lobby. (1997). *Annual Report 1996*, p. 21

ET Welfare. (1997) *1996 Annual Report*. p.95-96, p.62

Parliament of the European Communities. *Communication from the European Parliament Social Affairs Committee- Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organizations and Foundations in Europe*. EP.5/98.

Platform of European Social NGOs.(1998). *Interim report 2/06/97to 31/01/98*, Brussels.

Platform of European Social NGOs- (1998) *Platform News*, April.

Platform of European Social NGOs.(1998) *Logical Framework/Working Programme*, 1998-99. Brussels.

Platform of European Social NGOs.(1997) *Meeting of the College*. Brussels.

Platform of Social NGOs,(1998) *Platform NEWS*, June-August, 1998. Brussels

Platform of Social NGOs (1999) *Platform News*, March-April, 1999. Brussels

Table 1 Membership of the Platform of European Social NGOs

European Association for care and help at home (AEOSHAD)	Advocacy and Service oriented organization dealing with the needs of the elderly and disabled in the home
International Movement ATD Quart Monde	International organization campaigning for human rights and social justice
Red Cross/EU Liaison Bureau	European branch of the Red Cross movement working on support for socially disadvantaged and eastern and central European refugees
Comite Europeen de Coordination de l'Habitat Social (CEOCHDAS)	Advocacy organization also providing services and housing stock for the homeless
Confederation of Organisations for the Family in the EC (COFACE)	Organization which coordinates affiliates who provide services and campaign for the disadvantaged families
Eurolink Age	Advocacy organization for the rights of older people in the EU
European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)	Advocacy and community action organization fighting against poverty and social exclusion
European Disability Forum (EDF)	Advocacy organization working for the rights of the disabled and the elderly disabled
European Forum for Child Welfare (EFCW)	Organization working for the rights of poor and marginalized children
European Migrants Forum	Advocacy and outreach organization for migrants and refugees
European Network of Unemployed (ENU)	Organization representing the unemployed and low income
European Round Table of Charitable Social Welfare Associations (ET Welfare)	Service based and campaign organization which coordinates the work of charities in the fight against social exclusion
European Social Action (ESAN)	Community action based organization working for the rights of the poor and disadvantaged
European Women's Lobby	Women's advocacy organization for the equality, social justice and democracy
International Council on Social Welfare	Social Welfare organization working for the rights of welfare beneficiaries and the reduction of inequality in European societies
International Save the Children Alliance	European branch of the International organization working for the rights of exploited and disadvantaged children
Mobility International	Advocacy organization for the rights of the young disabled
Solidar	Socialist organization working against poverty and racism and for democracy and development in both western and eastern Europe
Youth Forum	Organization working for the rights of marginalized youth.
European Public Health Alliance	Organization promoting and protecting the public health interests of all people in Europe
European Federation of the Elderly (EURAG)	Promoting elderly peoples quality of life on social , societal and political levels
European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)	Organization representing service providers for homeless people.
International Planned Parenthood (IPPF)	Promoting increased support and access to reproductive health services
Inclusion International (ILSMH)	Organization fighting for human rights and social justice for people with mental handicap
International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA)	Working for the liberation of lesbians/gay women and gay men from legal, social, cultural and economic discrimination

