Transformations of the State
CRC 597

TranState Working Papers

Whose Voice? Transnational CSOs and their Relations with Members, Supporters and Beneficiaries

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No. 113

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Universität Oldenburg • University of Oldenburg

Staatlichkeit im Wandel • Transformations of the State
Sonderforschungsbereich 597 • Collaborative Research Center 597

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Sfb597 „Staatlichkeit im Wandel“ − „Transformations of the State“
Bremen, 2010
[ISSN 1861-1176]

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(TranState Working Papers, 113)
Bremen: Sfb 597 „Staatlichkeit im Wandel“, 2010
ISSN 1861-1176

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Diese Arbeit ist im Sonderforschungsbereich 597 „Staatlichkeit im Wandel“, Bremen, entstanden und wurde auf dessen Veranlassung unter Verwendung der ihm von der Deutschen Forschungsgemeinschaft zur Verfügung gestellten Mittel veröffentlicht.

Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
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ABSTRACT

It is often claimed that the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) can mitigate the ‘democratic deficit’ of international organisations and the European Union. The underlying assumption is that transnational CSOs are, through their advocacy work, voicing citizens’ interests, anxieties, hopes and ideals. In this paper we report the first results of an empirical research project in which we investigated if, and in what precise way, transnational CSOs are actually reaching out to citizens. In our interviews with officials from 60 transnational CSOs we found that, in most cases, communication between the CSO offices and members is dense when discussing strategic decisions. However, in tactical matters CSO officials seem to rely more on consultation with peers, and the international secretariats often act autonomously. We were also able to identify two prevailing models of consultation in transnational CSOs. First, there is a ‘formal and federal model’ of consultation that features representative bodies in which sub-units are represented. The second is an ‘informal participatory model’, which contains a great deal of ad hoc communication between the office and interested individuals. From the point of view of democratic theory, both models have specific advantages and, thus, it cannot be said that one is generally preferable. Within each category, however, there are CSOs that perform better than others.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In the scholarly debate on European and global governance, it is often claimed that the participation of civil society organisations (CSOs) can mitigate the ‘democratic deficit’ of international organisations (IOs) and the European Union (EU). CSO participation, it is argued, will promote political plurality, enhance accountability and give voice to citizens’ concerns that would otherwise be ignored by government representatives. A key assumption underlying these theory-driven accounts is that transnational CSOs formulate and ‘represent’ citizens’ interests, anxieties, hopes and ideals through their advocacy work. Any democratisation of international politics through CSO involvement therefore seems to depend upon the capacity and willingness of these organisations to take up the concerns of citizens and voice them in the political arena. This may be called the ‘transmission belt thesis’ – the idea that transnational CSOs should function as communicative interfaces that link a global citizenry with IOs (Steffek and Nanz 2008: 8).

If such a transmission belt is actually functioning is a subject of much controversy. Many advocates of civil society involvement in international politics seem to believe that transnational CSOs are indeed connecting IOs with citizens worldwide (Esty 2002). Many authors who perceive civil society participation to have a democratising potential also assume that CSOs voice the arguments of a considerable number of citizens. Most critics of civil society involvement, by contrast, vigorously deny this democratising potential (Anderson 2000; Johns 2003; Trachtman and Moremen 2003). In their view, transnational CSOs are, in reality, a jet-setting elite group that furthers its own interests and/or cultivates its pet issues without much interest in what ‘the people on the ground’ really think. Which of the two contrasting views is correct?

Unfortunately, so far there has been little academic research to empirically answer this question. There is, of course, an enormous amount of excellent literature available on transnational CSOs and advocacy networks. However, much of this work is interested mainly in the political role and importance of non-state actors vis-à-vis states and IOs. The literature focuses on political strategies and tactics, with the aim of discovering the determinants of success in world politics (e.g. Arts 1998: 55-61; Keck and Sikkink 1998: 25-29; Reinalda et al. 2001; Risse 2002: 262-268). Other authors are chiefly interested in the cooperation between IOs and CSOs and ask why, or under what conditions, such partnerships emerge (Bouwen 2002; Martens 2005; Reimann 2006). There is considerably less literature discussing the internal functioning of transnational CSOs,

especially the interaction of their leadership with members, supporters, and those individuals affected by their work. Research that focuses on citizens has been mainly interested in transnational social movements and protest (Tarrow 2005). The question of how CSOs, as fairly professionalised organisations, reach out to their constituencies has been addressed in the national and local context (Guo and Musso 2007), but much less so with regard to transnational organisations. The relationship between transnational CSOs and their constituency of members, supporters, and beneficiaries has thus far remained an understudied issue. In fact, it is only in relation to the EU that we have found an interview-based study on nine development-focused NGOs (Warleigh 2001) and, in a different article based on Warleigh's framework for analysis, a study of NGOs in the drafting process of the European Commission's White Paper on Governance (Sudbery 2003).

In this paper, we present the first results of a much broader empirical research project in which we investigated if transnational CSOs are actually able to function as a transmission belt between international governance institutions and the transnational citizenry. Do the CSOs reach out to citizens, listen and then voice their concerns in international political forums? As we will explain in more detail below, when we say citizens we do not mean 'everyone'. CSOs, by their very nature, can only represent a certain faction of the citizenry. The citizens that CSOs should be expected to directly reach out to can be only their formal members, their supporters, or the beneficiaries of their work. In our research project, we apply a set of four criteria to evaluate the internal organisational structures of CSOs and their relations with the mentioned groups of citizens (for a theoretical justification of these criteria, see Steffek et al. 2010): possibilities of participation (of members, supporters, beneficiaries); transparency of the organisation (internal and external); inclusion of disadvantaged groups (in the sense of empowerment); and independence (from the state and IOs, to avoid distortion of political programmes). These four criteria were operationalised for empirical research through a questionnaire containing 54 questions. These questions were used to guide semi-structured interviews with representatives of 60 transnationally active CSOs involved in political advocacy at the EU institutions in Brussels, and at international organisations based in Geneva.

The remainder of this paper is divided into eight sections. In the next section we provide definitions of key terms, such as 'civil society organisation', and briefly introduce the theoretical approach from which the transmission belt model emerged. Against the backdrop of this normative model we develop and explain the four criteria utilised in this comparative study to assess the extent to which transnational CSOs may represent the citizens' voice. In section three we present the methodology of this research and the case selection. Section four investigates the self-perception of transnational CSO and their relation with members. Section five through eight report the major results of our

empirical investigation, divided along the lines of our four criteria. The concluding section, number nine, puts the results into theoretical perspective, developing two organisational models of CSO outreach to their constituencies.

2 THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND CRITERIA

The theoretical starting point of our research is the claim that CSOs may be able to contribute to a democratisation of international governance. This idea is very popular in the recent literature on international politics and European integration. The underlying conception of democracy varies: some authors adopt a pluralist reasoning, highlighting that the presence of CSOs will lead to a more balanced representation of societal groups and interests in the policy process (Greenwood 2007); others relate to a deliberative conception of democracy, stressing argumentative rationality, public debate, and learning effects that may result from the consultation of civil society actors (de Schutter 2002; Nanz and Steffek 2004). The conjecture in both cases is that CSOs may help link international governance institutions with the global citizenry by transmitting the interests, anxieties, hopes and ideals of citizens to IOs, and to subsequently feed them into their policy processes. As political arguments are not floating freely, but are actually situated in the life world and experiences of citizens, it is necessary from both a normative and a functional point of view that transnational CSOs remain in close contact with the citizenry. In this respect, even a deliberative conception of democracy cannot avoid questions of participation and representation. The purpose of our research is to investigate empirically to what extent transnational CSOs are able to function as transmission belts. This section develops the set of criteria that we used to operationalise the concept of a ‘transmission belt’ for our empirical research.

The term ‘civil society organisation’ is fuzzy and contested, with its meaning changing over time (Jensen 2006; Jobert and Kohler-Koch 2008). It has empirical referents, but also strong normative connotations, at least in the sense of the ‘civility’ of such actors. Authors who seek to avoid such normative connotations are often speaking of ‘interest groups’, rather than CSOs. Still others prefer the term non-governmental organisation (NGO), which is widely used in the context of international governance and law (Martens 2003). The disadvantage of using the term ‘interest groups’ is that it evokes a strong association with the rational pursuit of a given group’s self-interest. Many of the non-state actors encountered in international politics are advancing interest that they frame as public and that have beneficiaries beyond the group of activists, such as the poor, the disabled, the marginalised, or even future generations. The term ‘interest group’, although perfectly adequate to describe transnational business and professional associations, would be a bit misleading in the context of such charitable work. Not least for that reason, non-profit organisations that pursue advocacy for others, or in the name of the common good, are often labelled NGOs, rather than interest groups. That term in

its conventional definition excludes trade unions, professional associations and employers' associations, as well as religious congregations. However, all of those actors are prominently engaged in international politics. For these reasons, we prefer the term 'civil society organisation', which we use in a very broad sense to cover the sample of non-state actors we are studying.[1] CSO is meant to denote a non-governmental, non-profit organisation that has a clearly stated purpose, legal personality, and pursues its goals through political advocacy and in non-violent ways. In addition to activist organisations this definition includes the social partners (i.e. international federations of trade unions and employers associations), consumer associations, charities, and religious communities. Given our focus on internationalised policy-making, all CSOs in our sample are transnationally active. This means either that CSOs are pursuing their political activities simultaneously in several countries, or that they target IOs in their home country whose range of policy-making is, by definition, international.

The focus of our project is on the methods utilised by CSOs to reach out to their constituency. In practice, these constituents might be their members, supporters, or beneficiaries. *Members* of a CSO have an official affiliation and usually pay membership fees. *Supporters* are those who voluntarily offer services, ideas or funding to a CSO without attaining official member status. We define as *beneficiaries* those individuals whose life chances a given CSO seeks to improve through its advocacy and service provision, and/or for whom the CSO claims to speak. Despite the positive connotation of the word 'beneficiary', there is no guarantee that these individuals eventually benefit from the activity of the CSO. Below, we suggest a list of four criteria to assess the degree to which a transnational CSO is able to successfully reach out to its members, supporters and beneficiaries:

(1) participation
(2) inclusion
(3) transparency
(4) independence

The first, and most central, criterion is *participation*. The presumption of our research is that transnational CSOs need to reach out, regardless of means and procedures, to members, supporters, and beneficiaries in order to fulfil their democratising function.[2] The

[1] Not all scholars would agree that he term 'civil society organisation' can be used in such a broad sense. As Kohler-Koch and Quittkat (2008) have found in a survey, academic specialists disagree if one should include business associations, professional associations and trade unions under the CSO heading.

[2] It should be noted at this point that not all perspectives share the view that CSOs must be internally democratic in this way to have democratic effect. From a strictly pluralist perspective, for example, CSOs do not need to meet this requirement. In line with this view, a proposed law to regulate the inner organisational structures of associa-

aim of this exercise is to establish a communicative process by which the decision-makers in CSOs learn about the concerns and interests of their societal constituency. Participation, thus, refers to practices through which the members, supporters, and beneficiaries of a CSO are involved in the internal decision-making process of the organisation. In practice, participation might be organised in very different ways. Members usually have the formal right to elect the CSO board and sometimes directly make decisions at the strategic level. While voting rights are justly limited to formal members, supporters should also be consulted in the decision-making process. Supporters who donate money and volunteer services to the CSO, which may be more than what the members contribute, should have a right to be heard. As the beneficiaries are heavily affected by the activities of the CSO, they too should have a chance to get their voices and opinions heard in the process of decision making. By allowing the individuals affected by its advocacy work participate in its internal decision-making processes and external activities, a CSO can ensure that its activities and lobbying efforts are in line with the needs of its constituents.

Formal opportunities for participation do not automatically ensure that all those affected by a CSO's work can participate on equal grounds. Schattschneider (1960: 35) already noted the discrepancy between the ideal and the practice of egalitarian access to societal interest groups: "[T]he flaw in pluralist heaven is that the heavenly chorus sings with an upper class accent." Formal rules and procedures are probably a good first indicator for the energy a CSO has put into trying to enhance the participation by members, supporters and/or beneficiaries. However, not all those who participate are equally able to speak the language of professional policy makers, nor do all have the same social capital and social networks with which to empower their arguments. Given this discrepancy, we supplement the criterion of participation with the criterion of inclusion.

The principle of *Inclusion* means, to us, that CSOs should undertake empowering activities towards potentially disadvantaged groups among their members, supporters and beneficiaries. We do not expect CSOs to empower all possibly disadvantaged addressees of global or European governance but only those within their own constituency. Disadvantaged groups and individuals may be those coming from underdeveloped regions of the world or marginalised groups in an otherwise affluent society (e.g. mi-

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tions was rejected in Germany in the 1970s. It was perceived to lead to a "juridification of the remaining pluralistic leeway in the political system" (von Alemann and Heinze 1981:117, translation by author), but the law, which had been promoted by both liberal and conservative forces, was also not approved because it seemed to be targeted one-sidedly at weakening trade unions (Offe 1981). We do not share the view that "exit" is sufficient as a mechanism for CSO members to express discontent. Members, supporters, and beneficiaries should be able to actively participate in the respective organisation.

grants, those who are illiterate, individuals with handicaps, etc.). Possible empowerment activities could include: special funding for representatives of disadvantaged groups (such as travel grants), affirmative action, capacity building, and the provision of technical assistance. Such empowerment activities are a precondition for effective participation by disadvantaged persons. The two criteria can be distinguished neatly from one another, as inclusion requires the empowerment of certain persons in order to enable them to voice their political concerns; whereas, participation requires that these individuals are in fact consulted.

Our third criterion, *Transparency*, is almost universally considered to be a necessary element of good governance (Bovens 2007: 449). Transparency may be defined as "easy access to accurate and comprehensible information about policy decisions and decision-making processes" (Naurin 2002: 9; see also Nanz and Steffek 2005: 375). Only by knowing what organisations do and how they do it can chains of accountability be constructed (Grigorescu 2007: 626). The issue of transparency has gained more importance as IOs have extended their activity to virtually all areas of governance. Transparency is also a precondition for receiving the adequate input at the right point in time, thereby making participation and inclusion meaningful, in addition to allowing the transmission belt to work.

In principle, the concept of transparency means being open and providing information to the general public. How could such a demand be operationalised for empirical research? The key measure is the extent of transparency, namely the extent to which they publish anything their constituents might be interested in, as there are numerous types of information to be made public. One transparency demand that CSOs, and other organisations, experience concerns information on the way they reach decisions (Anheier and Themudo 2005: 195). CSO should make it public in an accessible and comprehensible manner through which decision-making procedures they form their positions. This can be most easily achieved by publishing their statutes, by-laws or memoranda of association. Contributions to the budget of a CSO ought to be transparent, too. Ideally, information on the budget should specify its size and its origin in detail in order to allow the interested publics to assess its independence from government or companies. Making expenditures public is necessary for financial accountability, but also enables the observer to identify organisational priorities through the appropriation of funds for specific budget lines. Finally, we consider it beneficial to transparency if a CSO is regularly evaluating its own activities, in particular if the evaluation is performed by external agencies or consultants, and if the results are made public.

Our fourth indicator is *independence*. As it is generally assumed that civil society is separate from the state and the market (Anheier et al. 2001: 17), the independence of CSOs from both of them represents an interesting question for empirical research. For

our study it is particularly interesting, as CSOs are assigned a specific role in democratising international governance. If CSOs are to have a role as transmission belts of citizens' interests and concerns, those citizens need to be ensured that the CSOs are free and unconstrained in their expression of interests and arguments. If the independence of a CSO is jeopardised, it would be prevented from exercising its function as intermediary between citizens and the sites of policy-making. On closer inspection, the criterion of CSO independence has two, often interlinked, dimensions: organisational and financial independence. There are different circumstances which can pose a threat to the political independence of a CSO. The organisational independence is endangered if the founder of the CSO is the state, an intergovernmental institution, or a single profit-making corporation (see Martens 2001 for the creation of NGOs by UNESCO). The same is true if a CSO's staff is seconded from, or financed by, political institutions or commercial enterprises.

Organisational and financial independence, rather obviously, go hand in hand and the former can be measured to a certain extent by the latter (Martens 2001). As non-profit organisations, most CSOs depend, at least to some degree, on financial support from the outside. However, if they receive a large amount of funding from government agencies or a single private company, they might run the risk of becoming co-opted (Bichsel 1996: 236-238; Hirsch 2003: 9). Consequences of co-optation may be that political or business actors utilise CSOs for their own purposes; that CSOs avoid criticism of the state, IOs or company that provides funding; or that their programs and projects reflect donor views rather than the needs of either their beneficiaries or the preferences of their own members. We are aware that relations of organisational and financial dependence are only indicators of a propensity for co-optation rather than proof that it occurs. For example, while in some countries government-funded organisations may indeed be government-driven, in others governments do not expect favours or conformity in return for funding (Bichsel 1996: 237). Nevertheless, our indicators of independence allow us to assess the probability that co-optation might become an issue for a transnational CSO.

3 CASE SELECTION AND RESEARCH STRATEGY

3.1 Case Selection

To reiterate, the purpose of our study is to obtain an overview of the internal functioning of transnational CSOs across policy fields. Unlike EU studies that normally focus exclusively on the Brussels community of CSOs, we set out to compare them to globally active organisations that are working with the United Nations system and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). With these considerations in mind, we decided to study four policy-fields in which CSOs are typically active at both the European and global level: environmental protection, human rights protection, trade, and peace. We took

European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), EU Migration policy, EU Environment policy, EU External Trade policy, the UN Human Rights Council, the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, the WTO, and the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) as institutional focal points around which various CSO activities might revolve. We did not select our CSOs for study according to theory-driven criteria, in the sense of picking least likely cases or most likely cases. We initially remained agnostic as to what organisational characteristics of a CSO would make successful outreach to citizens more or less likely.

Our first consideration in case selection was to choose civil society actors that were regularly active in their respective policy field. This could not be taken for granted, as official registers are full of CSOs that appear only occasionally at their respective meetings and, in some cases, appeared only once. Our second consideration was to analyse only those CSOs that have a certain amount of political influence. Questions of legitimacy of CSOs have arisen over the last few years precisely because their political influence has become ever more visible. In order to assess the activities and importance of CSOs in their respective policy-fields we scrutinised the lists of participants distributed before and during important events (for example, sessions of the UN Human Rights Council). We investigated which CSOs participated most often (and were present at most sessions of a negotiation series, for example), which were well-represented (in numbers of officials present), and which were most active in terms of delivering written statements. In addition, secondary literature on CSO activity in their respective policy-field provided information on which CSOs to choose for interview. During our field work we controlled for the validity of our own selection by asking CSO representatives for their own assessment of which groups were most important/influential in the given policy-field or negotiation series. In this way, we complemented our initial list of CSOs. The selection of CSOs for study, of course, also depended on their availability for interview, which in practice proved to be a major restraint.

In the end we obtained a sample of 60 transnational CSOs available for study that are politically most active and are considered, by us and their own peers, as being influential. A look at the sample (Annex 1) shows that it includes general interest NGOs as well as special interest groups, such as trade unions and employers’ organisations. Given our focus on outreach to citizens, one interesting characteristic became immediately obvious: many of the most active and influential CSOs are ‘umbrella organisations,’ which means that their constituency exists of other civil society groups, not directly by individuals. 35 of our 60 cases fall into this category. In these cases the envisaged transmission belt would have to bridge several organisational sections before it reaches the citizen. Our sample also contains ‘hybrid’ cases of organisations that have both individual *and* organisational members. *PICUM*, for example, is an organisation

active in EU migration policy and offers membership to individuals interested in migration issues, in addition to refugee organisations. Another special case is transnational religious groups, such as Franciscans International or the Quakers, whose members are individuals who also form national or regional groups.

3.2 Research strategy

As a first step, we collected all information on the respective CSOs that is publicly available in either printed form or, in most cases, on the Internet. In particular, we were interested in their statutes and bylaws, budgetary information, reports, and products of their advocacy. We also searched for codes of conduct to which they adhere, in addition to the results of external evaluations. The results of this search were already useful for our assessment of external transparency of a CSO. Subsequently, these results were complemented by interviews with CSO officials. Our interview partners were either in charge of external relations of a CSO, usually in large professionalised organisations, or policy officers responsible for advocacy work in Brussels and/or Geneva. Most interviews with CSO representatives were conducted face-to-face, although some were conducted by telephone, between spring 2007 and fall 2008. The interviews lasted on average one hour, were tape-recorded and fully transcribed. All interviews were conducted following the same set of 54 questions, which were included in our interview guideline. While some questions asked for general information about the CSO (for example, “How many members does your organisation have?”), most gathered information relevant for assessing the CSOs in reference to our criteria. We were careful to avoid encouraging socially desirable answers by avoiding normatively charged wording and by spreading questions on key issues (such as member participation) across the interview. 15 questions came with a set of possible answers (‘multiple choice’), while 39 questions were open. In most cases, the combination of different answers was possible so that in the following sections (also for the multiple choice-questions), the total number of answers typically do not add up to 60 (whether several answers were combined is indicated in the footnotes). In addition, not all of our interviewees answered all of the 54 questions – the information on how many interviewees did not answer a specific question is also included in the footnotes.

4 HOW TRANSNATIONAL CSOS SEE THEMSELVES (AND THEIR MEMBERS)

In our interviews we first explored the organization’s perception of the role and importance of its constituents. The first, admittedly rough, indicator is a name. What do CSO officials call the individuals that constitute their organisations?[3] 28 CSOs refer to them as members and eight as supporters. Others prefer terms indicating a horizontal working

[3] Some interviewees wished to combine answers.

relationship, such as colleagues (8), friends (4), partners or collaborators. Whereas six referred exclusively to terms describing employment relations (such as ‘staff’, ‘employees’, or ‘interns’), indicating that they do not perceive a broad societal base, but instead are a group of professionals speaking for themselves. Ten interviewees pointed out that they deal mainly or exclusively with representatives of member organisations and not directly with individual members. As they nevertheless call these representatives their members, we need to caution that, in the following discussion, some ‘members’ may be representing a lower level of the organisation, like national chapters or other affiliated groups. Although we are focusing on the ‘downward’ dimension of communication in transnational CSOs, it is not implied that communication arrives directly ‘on the ground’.

When asked for whom the organisations actually claim to speak, most CSO officials say that they speak for their members: 35 CSO officials gave this answer. These members include individual members and member organisations, some of which are umbrella organisations themselves. 18 organisations mentioned that they primarily speak for their beneficiaries; while six CSO officials answered that they speak for both groups, members and beneficiaries. Among those who claim to speak for their beneficiaries, *SFCG* and *Saferworld* said that they speak on behalf of people/communities affected by conflict; whereas, *Human Rights Watch* indicated that they speak for victims of human rights abuse. Many CSO officials, however, were careful not to say that they actually ‘speak for’ these individuals, or on their behalf; they chose wordings such as “we try to ensure that voices from the ground are heard by policy and decision makers” (*International Alert*), or said that they work “side by side with movements and organisations of poor people” (*Action Aid*). In this context, the interviewee from *Friends of the Earth* pointed out: “We work very closely with partners, with allies, for instance, in indigenous groups and communities. So, in a way, we also represent their voices in our campaigns. And we have series of strategic allies that we work with in the farmers’ movement, in the indigenous people movement. We do not speak on their behalf, but work with them closely”. This quote exemplifies a quite common ambivalence: on the one hand, many CSOs want to represent the voices of their beneficiaries; on the other hand they are well aware that this may involve the risk of being paternalistic. Besides their members and beneficiaries, seven CSOs answered that they speak for general purposes, such as the environment (*BUND*), nature (*WWF)*, mankind in general (*CIMADE*), human rights (*Amnesty International*), or the NGO community (*CONGO*). The CSOs which claim to speak for a general purpose may also claim to speak for their members: “We speak for human rights – we only speak for our members insofar as they consider human rights as the central concern of our association […]” (Interviewee *Amnesty International*, translation by authors).

Interestingly, only two organisations stated that they speak on behalf of citizens or civil society more generally: *Germanwatch* said that they were “representatives of civil society and a lobby for the weak […] a voice for Southern countries, countries that are not so strong”, while *ECAS* said that they speak for “citizens in general”. Only one CSO, *FES*, indicated that they speak for their donors. While most interviewees claimed to be speaking for a specific group of persons and/or a wider purpose, the *Crisis Management Initiative* indicated that they speak on the basis of their expertise rather than on the base of their members’ views. The interviewee from the *International Crisis Group* answered that they speak on behalf of what they think were the “facts on the ground”, whereas another organisation named itself a “think tank” and a “monitor for citizens”. While the representative of *Pax Christi* said that they speak for and in the name of the organisation, the representative of *GLOCOM* said the organisation generally speaks “for itself”. Finally, *ICTSD* said that they speak “for nobody”[4].

When asked for what purpose members are involved in the organisation (multiple answers possible), the most common answer, given 36 times, was that members contribute to policy development and provide input to the CSO. This input by the CSO’s members is very important for some of the organisations. *QCEA*, for example, indicates that their members make the important policy decisions, while the *Alliance Sud* said that their members formulate the policy goals. The CSO officers we interviewed also highlighted their members’ involvement in project implementation and campaigning (22 answers) and fundraising (24 answers). Many CSO officers also referred to their members as helping to provide services to the general public (14 answers). Twelve CSOs indicated that their members were engaged in an evaluation of the CSO’s activities. The interviewee from *WIDE*, for example, mentioned that the organisation has an external evaluation of their activities and that the members are invited to contribute to it. Another answer given by seven CSOs was that their members were directly involved in advocacy.

Some CSOs highlighted their members’ pivotal function at the national level, be it through participation in national debates (*IHEU*), through advocacy at the national level (for example, *FTA*), or through their national and local work with beneficiaries (*CCME*)[5]. In this context, a certain task-sharing becomes visible between the CSO advocacy office that concentrates on lobbying at the international organisation on the one

[4] The answers do not add up to 60, since it was possible to combine answers. All CSOs that we interviewed answered this question.

[5] The answers do not add up to 60, since the combination of several answers was possible and only 44 CSOs out of 60 answered to this question. Among the 16 CSOs that did not give an answer most indicated that they did not have members and that therefore the question was not applicable.

hand, and the national member organisations that are involved in advocacy or service provision in their respective countries on the other. Although many CSOs assign very active roles to members, this is not universally the case. Our interviewee from the *Crisis Management Initiative* described their function in rather passive terms: “Obviously they get the annual report, but they also get invited to the annual meeting”.

To summarise, our interviews revealed that most CSOs have individuals that they would perceive as their societal constituency. Very few are consciously and openly detached from such a basis. CSO members are involved in many different types of activities: they contribute to policy development as well as implementation, fundraising, and evaluation. However, the degree to which the CSOs’ members are involved in the organisations seems to vary enormously.

5 PARTICIPATION

As highlighted above, the presumption of our research, with regard to the criterion of participation, is that the CSO offices should reach out to their members, supporters, and beneficiaries. We therefore focused on the communicative process between CSO staff and their constituency, in particular between the international advocacy office of CSOs and their members[6]. We concentrated on the ways in which the CSOs consult and cooperate with their members and how the members can participate in the CSOs’ decision-making and political activities, considering both formal and informal means of consultation and communication, in addition to conflict resolution mechanisms.

How often do CSO officers personally get in touch with their members? Most interviewees reported rather frequent interaction. 17 officers responded that they had daily contact with CSO members, six indicated that they had weekly contact, and 13 indicated that these contacts take place regularly/often. Only seven responded that they had monthly contact and four indicated that these contacts were rare[7]. However, many CSO officers said that the frequency of member interaction depended upon the demand for it from members. This was highlighted by the interviewee from *ITUC* who said that “it depends. There are some who contact me on a weekly basis, and there are others who

[6] The distinction between members and supporters could not always be made clearly in the empirical cases. Some CSOs referred in their answers to their ‘members’, although we would qualify these persons as ‘supporters’, and the CSOs are also sometimes inconsistent with regard to how they classify these individuals.

[7] Most of the 11 CSOs that did not answer this question said they did not have members in this sense. Eight CSOs responded in an ambiguous way. Several CSOs combined different answers, saying, for example that with some individual members they had daily contact, while with others this contact only rarely took place. Hence, again, the answers do not add up to 60.

contact me like once a month and others once a year. So it really differs from one to another”. It may also vary among the departments within the CSO.[8]

With regard to the means of communication, the CSOs’ staffs reported to be using a wide range of communication channels for keeping in contact with their members. Many indicated that they communicate through individual letters and emails (36), newsletters (35), conferences (31), and real-time communication (26). Interactive fora (13), the homepage (12), the intranet (12), and hearings (3) were also mentioned[9]. The CSOs’ modes of communication, thus, encompass one-way communication (such as newsletters or the CSO’s Internet homepage) and interactive modes[10]. Our interviewees largely agreed upon the importance of gaining input from their members, despite the large variety of communication channels between a give CSO’s staff and its members.[11].

Our interviewees particularly highlighted their members’ importance with regard to the CSOs’ strategic decision-making. While many CSO officers answered that the strategic decisions were made by the CSO’s board (37 chose this answer), approximately the same number answered that these decisions were made by their members, either at the annual member conferences (28 answers) [12], by member surveys and discussions (8 answers), or in committees composed of members or member representatives (4 answers). Thus, most often, CSOs indicated that their strategic decisions were made by the board and/or by their members, most frequently at the annual member conferences. Twenty-one CSOs responded that their strategic decisions were made by the board/executive or steering committee *and* by their member conferences/member discussions. Many CSOs have highly formalised and elaborate structures of member par-

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8 According to the interviewee from *CCME*, the frequency does not depend on the size of the member organisation: “Small organisations are often better at processing information, depends more on how compatible the EU and national policy is. This is very important” (Interviewee from *CCME*).

9 Combinations of answers were possible. Fourteen CSOs did not answer the question.

10 However, as the interviewee from *Birdlife* indicated, “The communication channels that are used most often are not always the most important ones. Individual emails and email-lists are very frequent means of communication, but personal meetings are also very important. They are more difficult to organise and more expensive, but the personal contact at these meetings is very important (translation by authors)”.

11 In this context, the interviewee from *Solidar* stated that “[…] we are a member driven organisation, so we exist at the will of our members, if you like. They pay affiliation fees in order to have their interests represented collectively. So we need to make sure that our work is being led by their priorities.”

12 Two CSOs (*ESF* and *Christian Aid*) mentioned that their member conferences took place more often than once a year, one CSO mentioned that its member conference only took place every 3-4 years (*CONGO*), and one CSO (*Pax Christi*) highlighted that its strategic decisions were taken at the annual conference *and* at their tri-annual world assembly composed of all members.

ticipation in decision making. In some CSOs, the board is composed of member representatives (for example, the presidents of the member organisations) or its composition is approved at a member conference, and annual member conferences are complemented by meetings of members that take place more often, such as continental and regional consultations (for example, *Pax Christi*) or specific committees (for example, *Solidar*). In other CSOs, the member conferences adopt long-term strategic action plans for the organisation: for example, at *Action Aid*, where a “massive participatory exercise” (Interviewee from *Action Aid*) took place to decide upon the 5 years guideline. This may also serve as a means to inform the members about the past and current work of the organisations (as our interviewee from *PICUM* pointed out).

Particularly in those CSOs that contain organisations as members (umbrellas) the decision-making procedures are highly institutionalised and member organisations are involved through specific, formal procedures in the strategic decision-making. While umbrellas often involve their member organisations in the strategic decision-making, there are other organisations in which these decisions are made by the management board (for example at *Saferworld*) or, even, by a single CSO officer, who answered our question on where the strategic decisions were made: “That would be basically me, understanding *GLOCOM*’s mission which is the promotion of the Internet and various Internet principles” (Interviewee from *GLOCOM*). In total, 10 CSOs answered that the strategic decisions were made by the advocacy office and 18 referred to different persons and departments within the CSO, among them to CSO staff and management (9 answers)[13].

In contrast, with regard to the tactical, day-to-day decisions, most of our CSO staff interviewees answered that these were made by the advocacy office (38 CSOs chose this option). Only eight indicated that these were made by the board, and six referred to member surveys and discussions; one officer indicated that, in addition, such decisions were made at regular meetings of members[14]. Twelve CSO officers referred to different persons and departments within the CSOs, five interviewees said that these decisions were taken in specific working groups and committees, and eight referred to individuals in the CSO management, including the executive directors[15]. Some of our interviewees explicitly differentiated between the decisions depending on their importance and on

[13] Again, these answers do not add up to 60, since the combination of answers was possible and 3 CSOs did not answer this question.

[14] One officer claimed that these decisions were taken at the annual member conferences which seems, however, difficult to be implemented in practice.

[15] Again, these answers do not add up to 60 since the combination of different answers was possible and 4 CSOs did not answer to this question.

whether they concerned urgent matters. While budgetary questions, for example, are decided by the member conferences, other issues are decided upon by the Executive Committee or groups of members (Interviewee from *Bankwatch*). As our interviewee from *Birdlife* pointed out, day-to-day decisions that need to be decided quickly can be handled by the secretariat alone, as long as they do not contradict the general strategies set forth in the position papers that are agreed upon by the members.

It becomes visible that most CSOs have a certain task-sharing between those at member conferences and the board, which are responsible for the strategic decision-making on the one hand, and the advocacy offices, or other staff and management, which make the day-to-day tactical decisions on the other. Specific mechanisms, such as working plans that are agreed upon by members or the board and which serve as guidelines for the daily work of the organisation, ensure that the different bodies within the CSO act in accordance with each other and with the general goals of the organisation. The board is, however, sometimes additionally involved at the level of the tactical decisions; while some CSOs indicated that they try to also involve their members at this level of decision-making, mainly through ad hoc surveys and discussion.

When asking CSO representatives about the motivation for this rather frequent interaction with their members, the answers (multiple answers possible) mentioned most often were:

(1) to inform the members about the work of the organisation (36);
(2) to receive the members' input in policy-making (31);
(3) to mobilise members for advocacy at national and other levels (30);
(4) to convince members that the IO is important (18);
(5) to base policy advice on public support (18).[16]

The answers show that the interaction between the IO-level of a CSO and its members is a two-way process, that is, informing members about the activities of the IO-level office is as important as receiving member feedback for policy-making. The top-down dimension of communication is illustrated by the attempt to mobilise members for advocacy at other levels and also ranks very high among the motivations for member interaction. In general, the answers reveal a rather strong position of many IO-level offices vis-à-vis the rest of the organisation. These offices definitely are not just service-providers, instrumental in channelling member concerns and interests to the IO. Instead, it is also their role to provide leadership, initiate policies, and encourage member engagement at levels other than the IO level.

[16] Nine CSOs mentioned other motivations for member interaction than those listed and 15 CSOs did not answer the question, 11 of them because they had no members.

Asked about a possible trade-off between organisational effectiveness and member access to the CSO, nine organisations confirmed that such situations occurred while 34 CSOs denied it.[17] What is noteworthy is that those CSO representatives who perceived the trade-off and those who did not often described the same situation in the interview, but seemed to draw different conclusions from it. Many interviewees said that slow responses from members were occasionally a problem in their advocacy work. While some concluded that this was a real obstacle to working efficiently, others found that the communication with their members increased the quality of their work regardless. One CSO representative said: “The more you consult, the less efficient you are, it is inevitable […].” (Interviewee at *ECAS*). Another explained:

> Sometimes you might have the situation that you need to react very quickly and you need input which is not coming on time […] But in general I rather see [it] positive than a trade-off from this, because with my work I do on the EU level I am effective and I am listened to because I bring specific examples and […] the officials hear something they do not hear from the governments. And that makes my position stronger. If I tried to do that based only on my knowledge which I have being in Brussels, I would never be able to get the same results. (Interviewee at *Bankwatch*)

Thus, what often differs is not the situation itself but the way it is perceived and handled by CSO staff.[18]

A large number of CSO representatives (29 out of 60) declared that they were generally satisfied with the communication with their members.[19] Ten organisations replied that they are not satisfied, the most prominent concern being insufficient feedback from members: “I think it [the communication with members] could be a lot better because we send out a lot of information and don’t necessarily receive the feedback that we’re looking for.” (Interviewee at *Solidar*) Many of those who claim to be generally satisfied also expressed this worry: “If it was up to me, I would want more, but for what I think is realistic I am satisfied.” (Interviewee at *BUND*, translation by authors) One CSO representative explained that he did not expect members to contribute very much due to the complexity of the issues he dealt with and which are largely unknown to them. (*Ger-*

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[17] 17 CSOs did not provide an answer to the question, 11 of which indicated that they had no members.

[18] Some CSOs indicate that they have successfully overcome the trade-off between effectiveness and member access through the introduction of clear consultation procedures (e.g. setting deadlines, establishment of specific bodies responsible for taking short-term decisions) that all members have agreed to. *WIDE* has employed an officer who is in charge of the communication with members.

[19] Six CSOs provided an ambiguous answer and 15 organisations did not reply to the question, nine of which indicated that they did not have members.

manwatch) Several CSO representatives pointed out that member communication was imbalanced, i.e., that some members contributed much more than others. One CSO representative stated: “There are always only a few [members] who give feedback and it is usually the same ones.” (*BUND*) and another said: “I have a group of persons […] [who] are more active than others and it’s difficult to maintain the momentum with everyone.” (*ESF*)

34 CSOs report that they have experienced situations where members were unhappy with the way the organisation was working strategically or tactically (four of which only report one single incident). Usually these problems are related to differences of views between members that have to be resolved, for example regarding controversial policy issues. The interviewee at *Amnesty International*, for instance, cited abortion and UN peacekeeping missions as such controversial issues. The problems may also be related to communication and consultation procedures between the IO office and the members, for example if the members wish a less diplomatic and stronger wording in lobbying documents. 13 CSO representatives claimed to never have encountered conflicts about participation within their organisation, but some stressed that they could only speak for themselves and that other colleagues might have had different experiences.[20]

Seventeen CSOs indicated that they have formal conflict resolution mechanisms in place and that designated bodies (e.g., the Steering Committee, the Board or the Secretary General) are entrusted with resolving such disagreements within their organisation. Eighteen CSOs have not developed formal mechanisms, but thirteen of them report that they resolve such conflicts informally, i.e., through discussions, often on an individual basis. Four organisations indicate that they have formal as well as informal conflict resolution mechanisms in place.[21] Several CSO representatives pointed to the limits there are for CSO staff to resolving conflicts between members. The interviewee at *ECRE* said, for example: “[…] we can never make all members happy at once. That’s the real challenge of being a European NGO.” Generally the awareness of problems related to participation is rather high among CSOs. More than half of the interviewed organisations indicate that they have experienced such difficulties. However, roughly half of those CSOs that have seen such disagreement have responded with the installation of formal conflict resolution mechanisms.

To summarise, while members play a more important role in the formulation of long-term, strategic decisions of CSOs, the tactical and day-to-day decisions often appear to be left completely in the hands of the advocacy office. Some organisations try to limit the officers’ discretion by specific safeguard mechanisms, such as long-term work plans

[20] Ten CSOs replied that they did not have any members and three organisations did not answer the question.

[21] Ten organisations do not have members and eleven did not provide any answer.

that establish a framework for the day-to-day business. In addition, the autonomous role of the secretariat in short-term decision-making is, to some extent, mitigated through ad hoc consultation via telephone, e-mail, etc. Nevertheless, the IO level office is in a rather strong position with regard to the individual members, or member organisations, which is also confirmed by the responses related to the motivation for member interaction and the emphasis on members' importance for the CSO's advocacy work.

Not surprisingly, there are important differences between organisations with predominantly organisational members (umbrellas) and those with individual members. Particularly in umbrella organisations, the participation of the member organisations is ensured by formalised decision-making procedures. Here the member organisations are represented in the member conferences and boards, and in most cases they are involved in the making of strategic decisions. However, the degree to which member representatives are involved in the everyday business of an umbrella organisation varies greatly. Some CSO officers report being in constant contact with them, while others say that they have "rare" contact and ascribe a more passive role to their members as receivers of information. The situation is similar in the group of organisations that have an individual membership base. Some interact frequently with those members, while others do not seem to pay great attention to their views.

The differences we found regarding the perception of a trade-off between member access and efficiency also suggest that the members' role is different from one CSO to another. While the input from their members is regarded as vital by some CSO officers, others perceive consultation as a burden. This might be an indicator for different organisational cultures in which members (no matter if organisational or individual) are considered more or less important. However, members themselves also contribute to these differences: not all members are able or willing to make the same contribution in terms of policy input to the IO level of the CSO.

6 INCLUSION

Against the backdrop of the critical remarks on equality of participation mentioned in the previous section and the imbalances within CSOs that are a point of critical concern in the current literature (see, for example, Edwards 2000; Hudson 2000; Courville 2006), we expect from CSOs to undertake empowering activities towards probably disadvantaged groups among their members/supporters and beneficiaries[22]. Empowering activities are a precondition for effective participation of disadvantaged groups among the CSO's constituents. In our interviews we asked CSOs representatives whether they undertake empowering activities, who they consult regarding policy development and

[22] Above, we defined disadvantaged groups and individuals as those coming from disadvantaged regions in the world or disadvantaged sectors in society.

for whom the CSO claims to speak. Our interviews revealed that many CSOs indeed have provisions for empowerment in place. 38 out of 60 CSOs responded positively to our question (five answered negatively and three in an indeterminate way)[23]. However, the mechanisms that CSO representatives classify as empowerment encompass a large variety of activities. The answer given most often by the CSOs was that they engaged in consultation and cooperation with disadvantaged groups and that they asked for their input (18 CSOs gave this answer), either directly or via their member organisations. Some CSOs, such as *PICUM,* undertake field visits in order to ensure that the voices of those they affect are reflected in their projects and policies, while others say that they achieve this by cooperating with local partners (for example, *Saferworld*).

Still, our interviewees stressed that they were careful not to engage in paternalistic behaviour: “So we are not coming and saying ‘in Africa the people think like that’. What we’re saying is you need to consult them and if you want, we can give you the names of the partners we have on the ground and we can even invite them to Brussels to come and talk to you” (Interviewee from *Saferworld*). In this context, nine of our selection of CSOs mentioned that they acted as channels for the voices of disadvantaged persons, for example, by organising roundtables with IO representatives and groups of marginalised people (for example, *ICTSD*) or by providing travel grants to enhance the participation of women from developing countries at international venues and CSO meetings (for example, *WIDE*). CSOs act here as facilitators for disadvantaged persons by providing them with the means to participate at international political events and, thus, giving them the opportunity to raise their own concerns. Eleven CSOs indicated that through their general policy they pursued the aim of empowerment, and 9 CSOs said that they engaged in capacity building and training, for example through training funds (*IISD*) or other activities. The CSO *Asylkoordination*, for example, organises training for refugee organisations and communities on how to get registered as an organisation, on how to get funding, etc., at national and EU level. In addition to these activities, which may either target the CSO’s members or persons outside the organisation, the CSOs also undertake activities aiming for empowerment that are focused exclusively on their own members and organisational structure.

Nine CSOs indicated that wealthier sections within their organisation provide funding to less affluent ones. Within the *Climate Action Network*, for example, Northern ‘regional nodes’ help southern networks to attend negotiations (by paying travel costs) and help fund their participation in telephone conferences. Sometimes they even provide their Southern counterparts with the means to pay salaries so that their staff can work fulltime for the organisation. Other possible instruments include differentially structured

[23] 14 CSOs did not answer to the question.

membership fees for richer and poorer sections within the CSO (this is, for example, set in place by *Solidar* and *EPLO*). Additionally, some CSOs have specific staffing provisions in place aiming at empowerment (eight CSOs gave this answer): for example, they have equal opportunity hiring practices, they particularly promote younger staff, or they have specific internship programmes designed for persons coming from developing countries (the latter is, for example, the case at the *Asian Legal Resource Centre*). Gender mainstreaming was mentioned by three CSOs as means for empowerment. Three other CSOs mentioned that their boards include members of different constituencies. In one example, our interviewee from *PICUM* reported that one position on the board is reserved for a representative of migrants' organisations, and, in another example, the *ENAR* bylaws postulate that one out of the two board members per country should be from an ethnic, religious, or other minority and that gender parity shall be ensured.

As discussed above in section 4, most CSOs perceive themselves as speaking particularly for their members. However, they consult with others in addition to their members when deciding on strategy and tactics, which is also potentially relevant for inclusion. Our interviewees most often indicated that they consult other international CSOs (28 CSOs mentioned this). While some CSOs are part of a more formalised network of CSOs who they see as their 'allies' (for example, *Germanwatch* through the *Climate Action Network*), others rely on more informal consultations (for example, *IP Justice* or *ATTAC*). The interviewee from *Greenpeace* indicated that they needed information from other CSOs due to a lack of resources. Hence, besides strategic advice, CSOs consult with each other in order to obtain expert information. Others, such as *FTA*, also indicated that they contacted other business organisations in order to publish common press releases and statements. Another often received answer was that CSOs consult with those they affect, local CSOs and stakeholders (this answer was given 16 times). In this case as well, more formal and institutionalised consultations with affected populations can be distinguished from informal ones. In this regard, some CSOs, such as the *Franciscans International*, point to their communications channel with their beneficiaries via their member organisations. Others report that they organise workshops and meetings with local activists and beneficiaries, and that they maintain close ties with local organisations (i.e., *ALRC*). Local CSOs are important consultation partners for some transnational CSOs (such as for *Amnesty International*), since they work more directly with the persons concerned. While some CSOs, such as *SFCG,* have established procedures for gaining feedback from beneficiaries[24] and for feeding their positions into

[24] As one interviewee reported: "In Nepal we have a radio programme on youth which is a soap opera. And what we then do is we have a listeners group of beneficiaries which is youth from rural areas and we actually have discus-

their decision-making process, others report that they consult with beneficiaries without there being any formal mechanism in place.

Five CSOs also stated that they consult with IOs, such as FAO, ILO, and UNCTAD (*IATP*) or the EU Commission (*FIELD*). Additionally, seven said that they consulted governments and national delegates. Furthermore, external researchers and experts are mentioned as important consultation partners by eight CSOs. Three CSOs indicated that they consult with donors[25].

In conclusion, CSOs generally undertake activities that aim at the empowerment of disadvantaged persons, both within and beyond their own organisation, staff, members and beneficiaries. Some CSOs act as facilitators who make it possible for disadvantaged persons to claim their own voice, while most CSOs are careful not to say that they are actually speaking for these persons. Rather, they claim to speak for their members. The CSO officials that we interviewed were well aware of the reproach of paternalistic behaviour towards those they affect. With regard to consultation and policy input, CSOs are not only oriented towards their members, but are also particularly oriented towards their peers, above all internationally operating NGOs, IOs and national government staff. Some CSOs also highlight that they consult with those they affect, but here it is useful to distinguish those CSOs that have formal consultation procedures in place from some others who simply stated that they would consult with ‘people on the ground’.

7 TRANSPARENCY

CSO are not only actors who demand transparency, but ought to be transparent themselves. In our view, decision-making processes especially need to be transparent as a precondition for successful participation. Having said that, we should stress that most of the issues that we address in this section would elsewhere fall under the heading of ‘CSO accountability’- a term that we do not use here.

An empirical approach to transparency comprises two dimensions (cf. Grigorescu 2007: 627):

- the addressees of transparency, and
- the extent of transparency.

The first dimension refers to the group of people who have access to the information published. We distinguish between transparency towards the public at large as the broadest degree of transparency and inner-organisational transparency, i.e., transparency

sions with them, and ask them whether they felt that the discussion in the radio programme was relevant and whatever they say is then input immediately in our programme. So there is a continuous cycle…”

[25] The answers do not add up to 60, since the combination of answers was possible and 4 CSOs that we interviewed did not answer to the question.

towards members. The second dimension of transparency refers to the numerous types of information to be made public. A regular transparency-related demand towards IOs and CSOs concerns the way in which they reach decisions (Anheier and Themudo 2005: 195). In addition, the advocacy positions of a CSO should be traceable. A CSO should also disclose a certain amount of financial information. Ideally, this would include not only the overall size of the budget, but also the percentages that different donors have contributed (see section 8 below). When assessing the transparency of CSOs, one should also consider whether they have made a conscious commitment to openness and accountability. For example, a CSO might choose to sign or impose on itself a code of conduct that makes its principles and practices public. Furthermore, CSOs might conduct or commission evaluations of their own work, which demonstrates a certain level of self-criticism and a commitment to improving their activities.

The empirical assessment of CSOs is therefore based on interview questions regarding the extent of information published, as well as to whom the information was addressed. More precisely, CSOs were asked which documents were made public and to whom the information was made available (i.e., the public or members). Additionally, CSOs were asked whether or not they evaluate their activities and if they have subscribed to a code of conduct. The interviews were complemented with information available on CSO websites and in CSO publications, such as annual reports, evaluations, and budget reports.

CSOs were asked whether they made draft papers, minutes of board meetings, financial reports, activity reports, and/or evaluation reports available to the public. Five CSOs indicated that they publish minutes of Board meetings, ten CSOs distribute draft papers, seven organisations make mailing list archives available, 22 CSOs publish activity reports and seven CSOs make evaluation reports public.[26] To be able to judge the difference between inner-organisational transparency and transparency towards the larger public, CSOs were asked whether they provide their members with more information than the general public. 39 CSOs confirmed this while only five organisations claimed that their members do not receive more information.

This result is in apparent contradiction with the responses regarding the publication of specific documents. In that context, 25 organisations indicated that documents distributed to their members are also made available to the public. These contradictory answers could be interpreted in the way that CSOs believe to be giving more information to their members although this is not the case. Also, it might indicate that docu-

[26] Multiple answers possible. Four CSOs gave an undifferentiated answer (e.g., saying that documents are being published but without referring to the specific ones asked for), 13 CSOs did not reply to the question, and eleven CSOs indicated that none of the documents inquired about are made available to the public.

ments beyond those we inquired about are exchanged between the CSO office and its members. Alternatively, and perhaps most plausibly, it could be that the additional information transmitted to members is shared informally[27] and therefore is not mentioned when a CSO is asked about specific documents.

When considering the publication of financial information, the results indicate a rather high degree of transparency. 41 out of 60 organisations publish the overall size of their budget, while only 12 organisations do not reveal their financial situation. Seven organizations, however, chose not to answer this question at all. In several cases, CSO representatives claimed during the interview that their budget was available on their website or in their annual report, but it was later found that this was not the case. 44 organisations publish the percentages that specific donors or categories of donors (e.g. foundations, international organisations, states) contribute to their budget, while eight organisations choose not to publish this information and the remaining eight did not provide an answer to this question.[28]

It is striking that of the twelve CSOs that do not indicate the overall size of their budget, eight are organisations defending special rather than general interests, e.g., trade unions or business associations. This corresponds to about 67%, while the overall share of special interest organisations in the sample only amounts to approximately 17%. Even if our sample is too small for sweeping generalisations, there seems to be a tendency for CSOs defending a general interest to be more transparent about their overall budget than organisations defending special interests.

To the question of whether their organisation possessed a code of conduct, 19 out of 60 CSOs answered negatively, sometimes adding that they had “nothing in written” (*HRW* and *Asylkoordination*) but nevertheless had “common standards and values of what is acceptable” (*Asylkoordination*). Only 12 out of 60 CSOs responded positively.[29] Of those 12, eight indicated that they adhere to an inner-organisational code of conduct, such as a “Code of Ethics” (*WWF*) or “Guiding Principles for Conflict Prevention” (*International Alert*). Three CSOs are signatories to the INGO Accountability Charter[30]. A

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[27] By informal we mean that the information cannot be traced in written documents. Alternative ways of providing members with information might be phone conversations, e-mails, or meetings.

[28] Out of these 44 CSOs, 7 claim that 100% of their budget are made up of membership fees (or 100% private donations for 1 CSO) but do not indicate the overall size of their budget. Five of these seven CSOs are organisations defending special interests.

[29] 14 CSOs did not answer the question.

[30] A code of conduct created by CSOs for CSOs which outlines their “common commitment to excellence, transparency, and accountability” (www.ingoaccountabilitycharter.org). It has been signed by 16 large transnational CSOs as of now.

fourth organisation has signed this charter, but the interviewed policy officer was not aware of it, in spite of the fact that information about it is available on the CSO's website. The remaining 15 CSOs adhere to their organisation's mission statement or staff manual, to donor or national regulations for non-profit organisations (e.g., "Belgian law" in the case of *EuroCommerce* or "European Commission regulations" for *IHEU*), or to general philosophical or religious values, such as the "Quakers' testament" (*QUNO*) or "Franciscan values" (*Franciscans*). One can safely conclude from these answers that formal codes of conduct are still of minor importance to transnational CSOs, at least for our sample. Moreover, if they exist, their relevance for any individual policy officer appears to be limited.

With regard to evaluations, we differentiate between internal and external evaluations. Internal evaluations are usually targeted towards advocacy activities, programmes and projects, organisational impact, goals achieved etc., and they are designed for internal use or for reporting to donors. They are typically carried out by the CSO's staff or through member surveys, or by organisational bodies, such as their General Assembly or board. Yet *SFCG*, for example, hires staff specifically to carry out evaluations. External evaluations are conducted by outsiders, e.g., by hired consultants or peers. They often relate to specific programs or projects, but can refer to the work of a CSO in general. For example, in the case of *Solidar* an external consultant was hired during a process of strategic planning to overlook and evaluate the organisation's strategic plan.

Our results show that a large majority of CSOs, 42 out of 60, evaluate their activities only internally. A mere seven organisations commissioned voluntary external evaluations to improve their work and efficiency. It should to be noted that conducting evaluations can only aid transparency if the evaluation reports are made public. Yet, only seven organisations indicated that they make evaluation reports available to the general public. Four additional organisations provide at least their members with these documents. Eight CSOs point out that they are required to produce evaluation reports of projects and/or programs for their donors, thereby increasing their transparency at least for their contributors. Notwithstanding the possibility that evaluations as carried out by the majority of the CSOs interviewed contribute to improved organisational efficiency, these findings are rather unsatisfactory from the point of view of transparency, especially towards the public at large.

To sum up, it appears that CSOs are more transparent towards their members than to the public at large. It seems, however, that the additional information provided to members is of the informal kind, since it cannot be detected when asking about the publication of specific documents. With regard to financial transparency, most of the CSOs interviewed publish their overall budget as well as the percentages contributed by different donors. Among those CSOs who do not reveal their overall budget, the percent-

age of organisations defending special interests is disproportionally high in comparison with the overall sample. Formal codes of conduct are of little apparent importance for transnational CSOs. As for evaluations, very few CSOs undergo independent external assessments and internal evaluations are rarely published.

8 INDEPENDENCE

The criterion of independence aims to assess the degree to which CSOs are autonomous from nation states and IOs. It is a necessary precondition for CSOs to fulfil the 'transmission belt' function of forwarding citizens' interests and concerns without being co-opted by public authorities (Steffek et al. 2010). For the purpose of analysing the independence of CSOs, we generally distinguished between two dimensions: financial and political independence. Financial independence refers to the question if CSOs or their activities are financed from public budgets. If being (co-)funded by either nation states or IOs, CSOs might be more susceptible to the political influence of public authorities (Hulme and Edwards 1997). Political independence refers to the question if CSOs tend to adjust their policies and strategies to governmental requirements. Since time constraints prevented us from scrutinizing CSO policies in detail, we approximate the political independence by evaluating four aspects which indicate a given CSO's *susceptibility* to being co-opted: the CSO's foundation, its staffing, its relationship with the IO where it is active, and the strategies it utilises for advocacy.[31]

The assessment of the financial independence was based upon official financial reports and was, if necessary, complemented by additional inquiries during our interviews. It was measured by the total percentage of public funds as contributions to a CSO's annual budget. We considered funding to be public if it was provided either by governments or IOs. 14 organisations refused to provide any information on sources of funding. The remaining 46 CSOs are divided as follows: 22 CSOs do not accept public funding (10 of which are funded solely by members) while 24 do (table 1).

Table 1: Sources of Funding

Publicly Co-funded	*Privately Funded*	*n/a*
24	22[32]	14

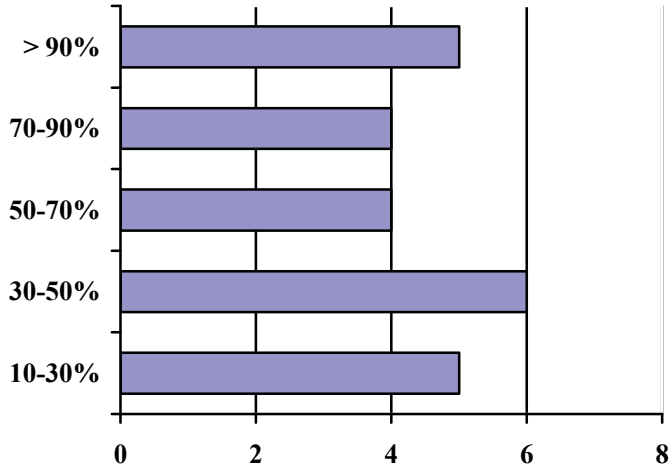
One interesting point about the 24 CSOs that receive public funding is the relatively high percentage of some budgets that is provided by public sources (figure 1). Eight

[31] For a more detailed elaboration see Steffek et al. 2009: 18f.

[32] Please note, this information could not be verified by official accounts for all 22 CSOs, because ten organisations do not publish financial reports. In these cases, we fully relied on interview statements.

CSOs draw from 50% to 90% of their funding from public sources, and the budget of five organisations even consists of more than 90% public funds.

Figure 1: Percentages of Public Funding



Several nation states provide funding for our chosen CSOs, but the percentage shares of national governments are in most cases relatively moderate. However, we identified two striking exceptions: In 2007, *FES* received 91% of its funding from different German government agencies and *EPLO* received 50% of its funding from the UK Department for International Development. As for IOs, the only large scale funding agency for the CSOs in our sample was the EU. Not only did a large number of CSOs receive EU contributions, but even the percentages are remarkably high: in three cases EU funding exceeds 70% of the CSOs' total budget (*ENAR*, *HEAL* and *ECAS*).[33]

Our assessment of the political independence of our sample of CSOs begins with an analysis of their foundation. Ana analysis of the history of our CSOs shows that there are three groups of public actors that might provide incentives for the foundation. First, the foundation of three organisations was initiated by (former) parliamentarians or politicians. For example, *the Crisis Management Initiative* was founded in 2000 by the former president of Finland, Martti Ahtisaari. Second, another two organisations were founded with major incentives from national governments. For example, *IISD* was founded in 1990 by a joint initiative of different Canadian governmental agencies.[34]

[33] One of which even reported feeling pressure from its major donor, the European Commission.

[34] The idea for the foundation of IISD arose from the recommendations of a National Task Force on Environment and the Economy that was established by the Canadian Council of Ministers on the Environment. The Government of Manitoba suggested Winnipeg for its headquarter. Major initial funding was provided by the federal gov-

Third, IOs exert certain influence on the foundation of transnational CSOs by privileging certain types of organisations and encouraging the creation of new CSOs. The foundation of two CSOs went hand in hand with the history of an IO and both still play a privileged role there as ‘social partners’: *BusinessEurope* was originally founded to monitor the European Coal & Steel Community and *IOE* was founded as a constituent part of the International Labour Organization (ILO).

Although not directly asked about it, three interviewees stated that the emergence of umbrella organisations in Brussels is necessitated by the position of the EU to cooperate preferably with organisations that represent a unified voice of European civil society.

When questioned about the recruitment of professional staff, eleven CSOs reported that a candidate’s experience with specific IOs was an advantage. In most statements, however, it remained unclear if this implies working experience *within* an IO or experience with lobbying an IO. Only one interviewee clearly stated that the CSO actively recruits former government and IO staff. An analysis of the general relationship they have with IOs revealed that 15 out of our chosen 60 CSOs are in a contract with at least one IO. Only two of them, however, have contracts with non-EU-institutions.[35] The remaining 13 organisations have been contracted by the EU for implementing a specific project. Additionally, we asked all CSOs for self-assessments that indicated the general role of the IO (partner versus counterpart) and the basic working approach. That approach can be reactive (responding to offers or calls for consultation) or proactive (launching own initiatives). Regarding their role vis-à-vis the IO, only four CSOs described themselves exclusively as partners (*ECAS*, *CCME*, *DBV* and *Oxfam*). The majority of statements were undecided, in the sense that most organisations oscillate between acting as counterpart and partner of the IO, depending on the policy issue concerned. Similarly, most CSOs (32) were undecided on whether to classify their dominant working approach as either proactive (acting on own initiative) or reactive (responding to calls from the IO). Only two interviewees stated that their organizations acted exclusively reactively (*ENAR* and *FES*)[36], although four more said that they acted predominantly reactively. 14 organisations indicated an almost exclusively proactive working approach.

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ernment (Canadian International Development Agency and Environment Canada) that was reduced to about 22% of the total budget (contributions by the federal Government and Governments of provinces) in 2007.

35 One case is the Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation (FES), which has temporarily implemented WTO programs for capacity building in least developed countries through its national offices. The other case is WWF Germany, which sometimes takes over lead tasks for projects in the maritime area.

36 ENAR and FES receive public contributions of 92% and 91%, respectively.

With regard to the strategies that are applied by CSOs for influencing policies of IOs, we distinguish between cooperative (direct lobbying/direct relations to policy-makers, participation in formal consultations), confrontational (public demonstrations, mass protests, etc.) and neutral (policy papers, press releases) strategies. Two organisations said to apply exclusively cooperative strategies: *SFCG* stated to participate in formal consultations only and *DBV* stated additionally to lobby directly to policy-makers. Four organisations apply exclusively neutral strategies. Not a single organisation relied exclusively on confrontational means. The most interviewees (27) stated to use some combination of cooperative and neutral strategies. 18 organisations said they occasionally also resorted to confrontational strategies. Three organisations apply confrontational measures in addition to neutral strategies while the remaining 15 organisations make use of completely mixed strategies, including cooperative, confrontational and neutral means.

To summarise, the analysis of independence gives certain reason for concern. With regard to financing, especially the EU sponsors some CSOs to such an enormous degree that doubts about the independence of the organisations arise. The EU also exerts a notable influence on the structure of European civil society by fostering collaboration with umbrella organisations. Concerning political independence, most CSOs adopted a rather cooperative attitude towards IOs, but we would not argue that this finding hints at co-optation, since willingness to cooperate is essential for successful political advocacy and only two organisations apply exclusively cooperative strategies. There is probably also a selection bias towards cooperative organisations in our sample because we were looking for the most important CSOs, and confrontational organisations tend to remain rather on the margins.

9 CONCLUSIONS

Most of the CSOs that we interviewed are aware of the importance of their members' participation and of possible problems related to it. However, we observed a difference between tactical, day-to-day decisions and long-term strategic decisions. While many CSOs invite their members to be involved in long-term strategic decisions, for daily business and tactical issues CSOs rely more on consultation with peers, namely other international CSOs, although the international secretariats often act autonomously. Nevertheless, the communication between the CSO offices and their members is dense; most organisations interact through various communication channels and communicate frequently. Several CSO officers mentioned that they were unsatisfied with the feedback they got from their members. Apparently, many CSO's members are not very eager to get involved in the CSO's decision-making (see also Warleigh 2001: 623) and are instead satisfied with a certain 'task-sharing', leaving the daily business to the staff of the advocacy offices, which is often more familiar with the institutional setting and decision-making processes of the international organisations. This also corresponds to the

finding that CSOs are undergoing increasing ‘professionalisation’ (see, for example, Martens 2005).

Many of the CSO officers that we interviewed highlighted that they had provisions for empowerment in place, which we took as the CSO’s effort to include the persons who are affected by or benefit from the CSO’s activities. These provisions either target the CSO itself through staffing policies or member empowerment, or they target populations outside the CSO. While we cannot assess the efficacy of these mechanisms in detail here, their existence documents that transnational CSOs take the problem of uneven representation seriously.

With regard to the criterion of transparency, we observed a difference between CSOs that act for general purposes and those that act on behalf of special interests (for example, a specific industry). The CSOs that defend a general interest usually are more transparent with regard to their budget than special interest groups. Altogether, external evaluations are not very popular among the CSOs that we interviewed; most of them evaluate their activities only internally (that is, conducted by members or staff). In this context, we also observed that codes of conduct did not play an important role for the daily business of the organisations. These findings can be related to the lively debate in the literature about CSOs’ accountability, in which frequent calls for codes of conduct are made (for example, Bendell 2006). With regard to independence, the difference between CSOs pursuing a general interest and those pursuing a special interest seem to matter yet again. Since CSOs that lobby for a special interest usually dispose of more private sector resources than do general purpose groups, they are normally more independent from the governmental sector than are the general purpose groups that often rely upon such funding. We also observed a certain influence of IOs, particularly of the EU, on a CSO’s formation and internal structuring. The European Commission encourages the formation of networks of CSOs and also prefers to work with these networks (see Warleigh 2001: 622; for other organisational requirements, namely the group’s ‘representativeness’, see Greenwood 2010). This is the main reason for the large number of CSOs belonging to this organisational type within our sample. Despite this influence of IOs on CSOs’ formation and although many CSOs increasingly pursue cooperative strategies towards IOs, only very few classify themselves solely as partners of the IOs and/or governments. Most CSOs insist on their role as a counterweight to other groups and to the governmental sector.

What do the results imply for the democratisation of international governance? Are transnational CSOs reaching out to citizens and, in any meaningful sense, representing their interest and values, hopes and anxieties? Most CSOs take their members, supporters and beneficiaries seriously, as is indicated by the frequent contact the CSOs maintain with them. There are, however, tremendous differences between CSOs in how this

outreach is organised in practice. Among the transnational CSOs that we considered, we found two distinct models of interaction. First, there is the formal and federal method of organising outreach that is typical for umbrella organisations. Second, there is the informal and direct participatory method of organising outreach to individuals that is typically found in expert organisations, but also in some larger organisations that we classified as membership organisations.

The formal and federal model typically functions through representative bodies in which the organisational and, in some cases, individual members of the umbrella are present. The organisational members may be national member organisations, national chapters of the same CSO, or autonomous groups that constitute an alliance. In the formal federation, participatory rights are normally explicitly stated and participatory procedures are very clear. The transnational representative body, whose name varies, is central to controlling the executive of the organisation and to providing the input from members or member groups. The formal federation thus emulates the model of representative democracy that exists in the public realm, and, thus, it should not be surprising that the EU encourages the formation of transnational CSOs precisely along these lines.

From the point of view of democratic theory, this model of outreach has at least one clear advantage: it safeguards the rights of all parts of the CSO membership to influence the internal policy process of the organisation. On the other hand, such a complex organisational structure cannot respond quickly and ad hoc to new developments, while it must grant substantial leeway to the advocacy office. Furthermore, the chain from the decision-making centre to the individual member tends to become long and opaque in these umbrellas, in particular when they are embedded in network structures that are on the rise in the capitals of transnational governance. From the perspective of an individual member or supporter, this tends to produce the same ‘remoteness effects’ that multilevel governance also suffers from in the public domain. In addition, formal, federal practices of consultation tend to be inward-looking, in the sense that they privilege formal members over informal supporters and beneficiaries. Exemplifying this, mechanisms of empowerment that formal federations reported were often directed to disadvantaged groups *among their own members*.

The informal method of organising outreach is definitely typical for small transnational organisations without a federal structure or mass membership. These organisations typically consult their members and supporters electronically, often asking rather specific questions. This is made easier by the fact that most of their members or supporters have considerable expertise in the CSO’s area of specialisation. When citizens outside the organisation are contacted under this organisational model, they are commonly people affected by their work. Quite obviously, these organisations cannot claim to be representative of an impressive number of citizens. But small size may have its

advantages: if managed properly, these organisations allow for a high level of direct participation and of internal deliberation. If they can remain in close contact with the persons affected by the international policies pursued in their field of activity, they add a valuable citizen's perspective to the international political arena.

In sum, we cannot say a priori that one specific type of transnational CSO, or one specific consultation regime, is superior to another in its ability to reach out to citizens and gather their concerns. Rather, we should develop standards of participation and empowerment that are tailor-made for the respective type of organisation. Participation and empowerment should mean different things for different types of organisations. Under the formal, federal model of consultation we would expect that procedures of internal democracy are consistently applied and that efforts are made to mobilise and support disadvantaged groups of members. Under the informal model we would expect organisations to be open to direct participation of their limited number of members and supporters, to enable processes of deliberation by all, and to reach out to those affected by their work. Our research showed that there are organisations in both camps that take the outreach to their members and beneficiaries very seriously, while others appear somewhat reluctant. Thus, even though we acknowledge that the term 'outreach to citizens' may mean different things for different types of CSOs, we are still able to critically evaluate the performance of individual organisations through this differential approach.

One example may suffice to illustrate the critical potential inherent in our approach. In Brussels we found a small group of three organisations, all located in the field of EU foreign relations and security that definitely cannot count as the citizens' voice in international politics. They were the only organisations (out of 60) that did not perceive themselves as representing or speaking for concrete individuals but on behalf of their 'expertise'. None of them have any members beyond a relatively small circle of activists and only the representative of one of the three organisations reported to consult occasionally with beneficiaries of their activities. Moreover, two of them were founded by ex-government and IO officials. Such expert organisations may be characterised as professional think tanks very close to the centres of political decision-making, but definitely not as an embodiment of citizens' concerns. We should stress, however, that these are outliers and not representative of our sample. Most transnational CSOs have at least some grounding in the citizenry and some potential to establish a communicative transmission belt between citizens (understood as their members, supporters and beneficiaries) and IOs.

One limitation of the research performed so far concerns the umbrella organisations that are important civil society players, particularly in Brussels. Within the formal, federal structure of the umbrella we concentrated on the link between the first and second layer of organisation, when counting from the top, but were not able to follow the chain

of communication down to the individual member. This research clearly needs to be complemented by a systematic analysis of participation and consultation below the second layer, taking into account not only formal channels of representation, but also informal avenues for individuals that can bypass one or, even, several layers in this construction. Only then can we pronounce any judgment on the ability of these complex multi-level structures of organised civil society to become something like ‘the citizens’ voice’.

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ANNEX: LIST OF ORGANSIATIONS UNDER STUDY

(n.b. ‘policy field’ refers to the context in which an organisation was interviewed, which is not necessarily its only field of activity)

Acronym	*Full Name*	*Policy Field*
ActionAid	Action Aid	Trade
AHRC	Asian Legal Resource Center/Asian Human Rights Commission	Human rights
AIEU	Amnesty International EU Office	Human rights
Alliance Sud	Swiss Coalition of Development Organisations	Trade
Amnesty Int.	Amnesty International	Human rights
Asylkoordination	Asylkoordination Österreich	Human rights
ATTAC CH	Vereinigung für eine Besteuerung von Finanztransaktionen zum Nutzen der Bürger	Trade
Bankwatch	The CEE Bankwatch Network	Environment
BirdLife Int.	BirdLife International	Environment
BUND	Bund für Umwelt und Naturschutz Deutschland e.V.	Environment
BUSINESSEUROPE	The Confederation of the European Business	Trade
CAN	Climate Action Network International	Environment
CCME	Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe	Human rights
Christian Aid	Christian Aid	Trade
CMI	Crisis Management Initiative	Peace
Congo	The Conference of Non-Governmental Organisations in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations	Human rights
DBV	Deutscher Bauernverband	Trade
ECAS	European Citizen Action Service	Environment
ECRE	European Council on Refugees and Exiles	Human rights
ENAR	European Network Against Racism	Human rights
EPLO	The European Peacebuilding Liaison Office	Peace
ESF	The European Services Forum	Trade

Acronym	*Full Name*	*Policy Field*
ETUC	European Trade Union Confederation	Trade
EuroCommerce	Association of Commerce of the European Union	Trade
FES	Friedrich-Ebert Stiftung	Trade
FIELD	Foundation for International Law and Development	Environment
FoE Europe	Friends of the Earth Europe	Trade
Franciscans Int.	Franciscans International	Human rights
FTA	The Foreign Trade Association	Trade
Germanwatch	Germanwatch Nord-Süd-Initiative e.V.	Environment
Glocom	Global Communications Platform	Human rights
Greenpeace Dt.	Greenpeace e.V. Deutschland	Trade
Greenpeace Int.	Greenpeace International	Trade
HEA	Health & Environment Alliance	Environment
HRW	Human Rights Watch	Human rights
IATP	Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy	Trade
ICC Dt.	Internationale Handelskammer	Trade
ICC Int.	International Chamber of Commerce	Trade
ICTSD	International Centre for Trade and Sustainable Development	Trade
IHEU	International Humanist and Ethical Union	Human rights
IISD	International Institute for Sustainable Development	Trade
International Alert	International Alert	Peace
International Crisis Group	The International Crisis Group	Peace
IOE	International Organisation of Employers	Trade
IP Justice	IP Justice	Human rights
ISIS Europe	International Security Information Service, Europe	Peace
ITUC	International Trade Union Confederation	Trade
Oxfam Int.	Oxfam International	Trade
Parität	Der Paritätische Wohlfahrtsverband	Human rights

Acronym	*Full Name*	*Policy Field*
Pax Christi	Pax Christi e.V.	Peace
PICUM	The Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants	Human rights
QCEA	The Quaker Council for European Affairs	Peace
QUNO	The Quaker United Nations Office	Trade
Saferworld	Saferworld	Peace
SFCG	Search for Common Ground	Peace
Solidar	SOLIDAR	Trade
UN Watch	UN Watch	Human rights
WIDE	Women in Development Europe	Trade
WWF Dt.	World Wide Fund For Nature, Deutschland	Environment
WWF Int.	World Wide Fund For Nature, International	Trade

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