

HOW ADVOCACY AND LOBBYING HAPPEN AT EU LEVEL

As an invitation letter to a civil society agora organised by the European Parliament states: “It is not enough to tell people that Europe is being built for them - Europe needs to be built with them”. But it also recognised this is a very difficult task with half a billion citizens and distant, confusing institutions.

At the moment the best ways to influence European policies are as follows:

- Know your target
- Work through your NGO platform
- Engage in dialogue early

1. Know your target

The main institutional actors to lobby on European issues are: the European Commission, the European Parliament, the European Council, the Economic and Social Committee, National Permanent Representations in Brussels and National Governments.

The Commission

This is the key target of influence because it initiates legislation. The Treaty of Lisbon envisages that the Commission should consult widely but no system of accreditation

for Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) is foreseen as it is the case in other international organisations like the Council of Europe or the UN.

For the moment, there are three forms of consultation used by the European Commission:

- Consultative committees in different policy areas. The Brussels based platforms (like Culture Action Europe) can act as advisers together with other stakeholders before the issuing of a legislation.
- Structured on-going dialogue with civil society does take place in some policy fields but it is up to each Directorate General to organise it and so practices vary. DG Trade, Employment and Development for example organise regular meetings with interested parties on specific issues or on horizontal issues.
- Consultation processes where the policy or legislative proposal is put on the web page of the respective Directorate General and public contributions are welcomed.

European Commission website: http://ec.europa.eu/index_en.htm

The European Parliament

If the NGOs are not satisfied with the EC's legislative proposal, they can lobby Members of the European Parliament for amendments to the text. This is a key task for Culture Action Europe, especially since the Parliament's role has increased over the recent years in parallel to the increase of its competencies (in adopting legislation; monitoring the activities of the Commission and deciding the budget).

European Parliament website: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/>

The European Council

This body is considered to be the most non-transparent of all decision-makers and the most difficult to lobby from Brussels because its members can be effectively influenced only at national level. That requires having effective partners nationally that are committed and skillful enough to transfer the policy agenda to the national decision-makers. Thus, as Culture Action Europe always maintains, the national governments remain very important in terms of political communication in Europe.

European Council website: <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/>

The Presidency of the EU

It is also very important to lobby the rotating presidency on specific key issues, if the country holding the Presidency for six months is willing to take it on board and make it one of its priorities. To do so, you need to talk to national contacts, at early as a year before the Presidency starts. Note that some organisations (e.g. Amnesty International and the larger NGOs) submit papers to the Presidency stating what their policy or legislative expectations are from it.

List of Presidencies on the European Council website:
<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/council-eu/presidency-council-eu/>

The Permanent Representations to the EU

These are very useful information and contact channels. Culture Action Europe does not have close contacts with all 27 Perm Reps but is of course eager and willing to pursue specific contacts on the basis of members' interests and networks.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

The EESC works with the NGO networks and it is useful in terms of information and contacts. A Liaison group has been established between the Committee and the Brussels based platforms as a structure for political dialogue on different initiatives of common interest. Culture Action Europe is a member of this Liaison group. However, note that some civil society platforms are strongly questioning the representativeness of the EESC in terms of civil society participation.

The EESC website: <http://www.eesc.europa.eu/>

2. Work through your NGO platform

The approach and the extent to which communications have been developed between the Commission (primarily) and the NGOs depend very much on the thematic area. In the areas where the EU is competent and therefore where there is economic interest, lobbying and advocacy tend to be more structured. In other areas, where there is no or a limited legal basis, the Open Method of Coordination is gaining ground and civil society participation increasingly organized.

NGOs and NGO Platforms can seek to:

- Follow the policy and legislative agenda of the Commission and react to certain issues of interest. Some of the Brussels based platforms want to change this approach in order to develop more membership driven agenda (proactive approach).
- Identify issues that are important for the organisation (its members respectively if it is a network) but are not yet on the EU agenda and try to influence their incorporation.
- Identify issues from the agenda of the Commission that are important for the or-

organisation and that the Commission is dealing with but in an unsatisfactory way and try to influence its approach.

The most successful NGO platforms enjoy almost “insider” status and have multiple entry points, thus influencing the process through informal contacts at the earliest possible stage – before the document is even drafted and presented for consultation. The informal contacts help a lot because they can open a “policy window” for something new – e.g. if the Commission is going for a feasibility study or an impact assessment.

For the Commission NGO Platforms are the preferable partners because they are representative, have high expertise and are transparent in terms of their governance. Outside of the platforms, it is very difficult for individual NGOs to make their cases heard (except for the very biggest who have considerable media presence).

3. Engage in dialogue, not just lobbying

Lobbyists have a bad press but in fact they are just trying to protect the interests of their members, which is a perfectly legitimate ambition. Much lobbying, especially in smaller organisations, takes place when change is already happening! Often, unless you are a very powerful group, it is too late to make a difference. But effective dialogue should happen all the time. If it does it can predict change, notice shifts in policy, explain the on the ground situation, educates, inform the decision makers and build genuine alliances. This approach is particularly important for the cultural sector, because we are small, because our issues are not always priority and because we have impacts in so many different policy areas.

There are some key elements of a successful dialogue:

- Know who are the key players, names, position and responsibilities
- Find out how decisions are taken (e.g. by asking Culture Action Europe!).
- Develop a tailored approach to each of the players.

- Consider timing: the European agenda is so full, badly timed documents get nowhere.
- Consider the political orientation of both the European and National parliaments.
- If you want to get your point into the policy agenda, you need to build a coalition (networks, think tanks, trade unions, etc.).
- Proposals should be practical, and very clear in terms of political and technical arguments.