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Brussels Civil Society

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1. Introduction

There is no doubt: In recent years the topics of *civil society* and the third sector have gained momentum in Brussels. Members of the European Commission as well as rank and file representatives of the EU bureaucracy are increasingly referring to *civil society* and to the third/voluntary sector, thus using both as buzzwords in the political rhetoric.

While up until the late 1980s there was almost no reference neither to the topic of the third/voluntary sector nor to civil society in EU official documents, both topics gained importance as soon as the European Union intensified its engagement in the area of social policy. Due to the fact that public opinion began to sharply criticize the "lack of democracy" of European policy making, EU officials became increasingly interested in both, the topic of civil society and the third sector. Indeed, there is a parallelism between the European Union developing into a political community with numerous commitments particularly in the area of social policy and the growing importance of the civil society and third sector discourse in official EU-documents.

However, what does civil society and what does the third/voluntary sector mean in Euro-talk? Who is addressed, which organizations and which constituencies are referred to when EU-committees and particularly the EU-Commission are relating to the dynamic and visionary forces of civil society? Is there a close nexus between civil society and the third/voluntary sector within Euro-talk? And if so, is civil society a synonym for the third/voluntary sector?

These questions are addressed in the following paper, which starts with an analysis of the concepts of civil society and the third/voluntary sector by focusing on those aspects, which these approaches have in common and which are different. The second chapter, based on an analysis of EU documents, focuses on the topics of how civil society is defined in these documents and which specific functions are related to civil society and its organizations. The third chapter analyzes which organizations are representing civil society in Brussels. Finally, the concluding remarks reflect upon the nexus between Brussels civil society discourse and the state of the art of European Union research, either analyzing the development of European polity, policy, and politics or investigating the deepening of European integration.

2. The Third/Voluntary Sector as an Institutional Core of Civil Society

The following chapter highlights the interdependence and thus the "middle ground" between the normative and theoretical concept of civil society, which has originally been based on Political Theory, and the down-to-earth approach of the third/voluntary sector which firstly came to the fore within the context of welfare state research in the 1970th and 1980th.

Neither the concept of civil society nor the third/voluntary sector approach is based on a uniform model and coherent theoretical background. Originally the term "civil society" goes back to the Aristotelian idea of "societas civilis", perceived as an ideal way of life. In the 1970s, the term was used by dissidents and civic movements in Eastern Europe and by intellectuals in Latin America in order to characterize those groups and organizations which were opposed to the ruling authoritarian regimes (Klein 2000; Cohen/Arato 1997: 15). The discussions, which took place in these oppositional groups, strongly influenced debates on democratic theory in the western hemisphere.

In accordance with this line of argumentation civil society translates into a countervailing power monitoring and controlling state activities. This particular understanding is most prominently expressed by Ernest Gellner who refers to civil society as a "set of non-governmental institutions, which is strong enough to counterbalance the state" (Gellner 1994: 5). Whereas Gellner focuses on the control and monitoring function, Jürgen Habermas highlights the voice and agenda setting function of civil society. For him civil society has "the ability to identify social problems ... and ... to pass them on to the political public" (Habermas 1992: 443). From a communitarian point of view, Michael Walzer stresses the integrative and empowering function of civil society. According to his line of argumentation, decisions taken in civil society organizations are influencing at least "to a certain degree major decisions taken within the state and the economy" (Walzer 1992: 82). Finally, Ralf Dahrendorf states from a straightforward liberal tradition that civil society provides the opportunity for "autonomous declaration of interests, values and preferences" (Dahrendorf 1991: 262), thus stressing both the integrative and policy-influencing function of civil society. Whatever function of civil society is highlighted, the different point of views share a common normative underpinning according to which civil society in large promotes the interests and aspirations of the citizenry vis-à-vis and/or against the state.

The linkage between civil society and the third/voluntary sector is easily depicted. Regardless of their theoretical background in their writings, representatives of the civil society discourse unanimously refer to voluntary associations, social networks and movements as providing the infrastructure of civil society. Thus Gellner talks about "a set of non-governmental institutions" (ibid.). According to Habermas "civil society consists of those more or less spontaneously emerged associations, organizations and movements...(ibid.), and Dahrendorf points out that civil society is characterized by "the existence of autonomous, i.e. non-governmental or not in any other way centrally ruled organizations" (1991: 262).

In sum, as the common ground both concepts refer to a societal sphere populated by civic organizations neither belonging to the market nor to the state and which are also distinct from traditional societal institutions such as clans or families because membership in and support of these organizations is not compulsory but based on individual decision-making. In order to differentiate between the institutional core of civil society and its normative dimension some authors such as Jürgen Kocka or Helmut Dubiel distinguish between civil society as an "utopian program" (Dubiel 1994: 67) or normative political vision towards which societies are inclined to struggle, and civil society as an "analytical-descriptive term" serving as an synonym for voluntary associations and organizations (Kocka 2002).

However, despite this institutional interface there are at least three decisive features by which the third sector approach differs from the civil society concept. Firstly, the third sector approach is not a normative concept. The sector approach simply refers to a societal sphere, which is situated in-between the market, the state and the family. Secondly, the civil society concept exclusively focuses on those functions of voluntary/third sector organizations, which from a policy point of view are situated at the in-put side of the polity. In other words, the service delivery function of civil society organizations is not taken into consideration by the civil society concept. On the contrary, since the third sector approach was developed within the framework of welfare state research, up until recently the service delivery function has been of prime interest for third sector research. Moreover, third sector research stands for an emphasis on empiricism, while the civil society discourse primarily belongs to the realm of political theory. And finally due to its empiricism, the third sector approach is closely linked to organizational theory and research analyzing the specificity of organizations operating in this particular societal sphere in-between the market, the state and the family.

An important feature of this specificity is the multi-functional character of third sector organizations. Unlike the organizations of the market and the state, i.e., corporations and government entities, third sector organizations are not restricted to the fulfillment of just one task. On the contrary, by definition they are always playing very different roles and thus cooperating with very different environments. According to Ben Gidron, third sector organizations are "multi-tasking organizations" being simultaneously active in service provision, advocacy, and societal integration (Zimmer 2004). There is no doubt that the multi-functional character poses significant challenges to the management of these organizations. At the same time, it offers the opportunity for public-private partnerships and state-third sector co-operations in very different societal and policy-fields. By giving voice to critical positions and by providing expertise and in-depth knowledge of particular issues, third sector organizations are from a functional point of view important partners of the state and its administration at the agenda setting and policy-formulation stage of the policy-cycle. The same, however, holds true for the implementation and also for the feedback stage. As service providers third sector organizations are part of the welfare mix and therefore deeply embedded in national welfare state arrangements. As advocacy and consumer organizations they are, however, also obliged to voice criticism or support for governmental policies. Particularly from a governance point of view, the multi-functional character of third sector organizations offers a wide variety of possibilities for public-private partnerships.

Whereas the analysis of third sector-public partnerships on the output-side of the polity during the implementation stage of the policy cycle has always been a key issue, interest representation as well as agenda-setting activities and thus the civic functions of third sector organizations have more or less been neglected by third sector research until recently. The civil society discourse, however, draws our attention just to these political and advocacy functions of these organizations. In the following we will take a closer look at the documents of the EU in order to investigate how Brussels perceives third sector organizations, as partners in welfare service provision, as civil society organizations or as both. It seems that the multi-functional character of the organizations makes them highly attractive for European governance. The reason for this attractiveness is twofold: firstly, co-operation with them as civil society organizations serves as a promise for a further development of democracy, secondly, as service providers they are highly welcomed policy partners for strengthening EU policy implementation without interference from the national states. In the following chapter

we will analyze whether and to what extent these very different connotations have made inroads into official EU-documents.

3. Civil Society and the Third/Voluntary Sector within Euro-talk

With the exception of the policy field of foreign aid there has been very little reference neither to civil society nor to the third sector and its organizations on the European Union scene during the 1980th and early 1990th (Anheier/Kendall 1999: 283). As one important exemption counts the so-called Fontaine Report, issued in 1986, which refers to the third sector as being an important vehicle within the process of creating a European Community (Kendall/Anheier 1999: 283).¹ As a follow-up of this report there were different initiatives during the early 1990th aiming to intensify co-operation particularly between the Commission and specific segments of the nonprofit/voluntary sector such as sports clubs or welfare associations. However, with respect to scope and outreach those initiatives were of limited importance. In other words, up until recently the organizations of civil society did not become a point of reference in Euro-talk. This changed significantly in the late 1990th. The reasons why civil society and its organizations were discovered by the European Union are twofold: Firstly, the EU started to re-define its political goals by giving increased importance to social policy and specifically to the struggle against unemployment. Secondly, Romano Prodi made the fight against the democratic-deficit of European policy-making to the prime goal of his presidency. The reason why democracy moved up the list of priorities on the European scene is closely connected to the scandalous behavior and the dismissal of the members of the Santer Presidency, the predecessor of Romano Prodi (Greenwood 2001).

Let us take a closer look at the documents, which were issued against the background of a severe crisis of legitimacy, particularly of the European Commission, and while social policy issues gained importance in Brussels. Studying the documents we will focus our attention on the following two features:

1. What is the definition of civil society resp. third sector? More specifically: Which organizations belong to the civil society nonprofit or third sector universe?
2. Which functions shall fulfilled by civil society and third sector/voluntary organizations? Are they primarily perceived as service providers and thus partners of public-private partnerships, or are they looked upon as advocacy groups giving voice to the people of the European Union?

For getting an idea how the sector and civil society gained momentum in Euro-talks in the last years we will focus on the following documents:

- The 1997-Communication by the Commission: "Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organizations and Foundations in Europe" (COM/97/0241 final),
- Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee (1999): The Role and Contribution of Civil Society organizations in the Building of Europe. (OJ C329,17.11.1999),
- The Commission Discussion Paper of 2000: "The Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership" (COM/2000/11final),
- The Commission White Paper on European Governance of 2001 (COM/2001/428final)
- The 2002-Communication by the Commission: "Towards a Reinforced Culture of Consultation and Dialogue - General Principles and Minimum Standards for Consultation or Interested Parties by the Commission" (COM/2002 704 final).

Promoting the Role of Voluntary Organizations and Foundations in Europe

The 1997-Communication was the first to focus specifically on voluntary organizations which, however, were not placed under the realm of civil society but primarily linked to the social economy. The concept of the social economy, which puts a high emphasis on co-operatives and mutual societies, is primarily embedded in the French tradition. The social economy is perceived as a specific segment of the economy, whereas its societal functions are given less priority. The Communication refers to voluntary organizations as a specific part of the social economy which is "by far the most difficult to delimit or define" (COM 1997: 1). The 1997-Communication has been significantly influenced by the results of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. The Commission highlighted both the economic and social importance of voluntary organizations. Voluntary organizations are acknowledged for their decisive role for democratic societies; i.e. voluntary organizations as means of social cohesion and social and political participation. Due to this quality the Commission ascribes an influential role to the organizations in the process of further EU integration (COM 1997: 8). The prime focus of the Communication, however, lies on the decisive importance of voluntary organizations for the labor market and thus for employment. In sum, voluntary organizations are described in their role as service providers and as often-underestimated contributors to the national economies. Against this background the Communication advises "that the sector should be encouraged to play a bigger part in the quest for job creation as stated in the 'Employment Pact' " (COM 1997: 4).

¹ The report was written by the rapporteur of the European Parliament's committee of Legal Affairs and

The Role and Contribution of Civil Society Organizations in the Building of Europe

In contrast to the aforementioned document the Opinion of the Economic and Social Committee (EESC), issued in 1999, gives high priority to the nexus between civil society and voluntary/third sector organizations. Indeed, the increasing attention paid to the concept of civil society in Brussels is connected with the development of a special understanding and terminology, respectively with the terms “organized civil society” or “organizations of the civil society”, which were introduced by the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) in its 1999-Opinion. With this publication the concept of civil society began to make inroads into Euro-talk. Moreover, the terminology developed by the EESC has been quite influential and was taken up both by the White Paper on European Governance from 2001 and by the EU database for consultations (CONECCS).²

According to the EESC civil society translates into “the sum of all organizational structures whose members have objectives and responsibilities that are of general interest and who also act as mediators between the public authorities and citizens” (EESC 1999, 7.1). More precisely, the EESC refers to the following organizations:

- “the so-called labor-market players, i.e. the social partners;
- organizations representing social and economic players, which are not social partners in the strict sense of the term;
- NGOs (non-governmental organizations) which bring people together in a common cause, such as environmental organizations, human rights organizations, consumer associations, charitable organizations, educational and training organizations, etc.;
- CBOs (community based organizations, i.e. organizations set up within society at grassroots level which pursue member-oriented objectives), e.g. youth organizations, family associations and all organizations through which citizens participate in local and municipal life;
- Religious communities.” (EESC 1999, 8.1)

The analogy between the organizations enumerated by the EESC and the common understanding of the third sector is obvious. However, the general qualification for being part of the third sector – the obligation to work on a non-profit basis - is missing. Nevertheless, the EESC’s approach towards civil society and its organizations coincides with the perception of the third sector as the institutionalized core of civil society. From a functional point of view, the EESC stresses both the integrative as well as the policy-making or governance function of

Citizens’ Rights (Mrs. N. Fontaine) in 1986.

civil society organizations. According to the first line of argumentation the ESSC highly acknowledges the potential of civil society organization for the future development of the EU as these organizations can contribute to a public and democratic discourse on relevant political issues. From a governance and policy perspective the EESC speaks up for the introduction of a "civil dialogue" which translates into the establishment of a Brussels-based "communication forum" (EESC 1999, 9.4). Against the background that the EESC has the self-conception of being the "bridge between Europe and organized civil society" (cf. http://www.esc.eu.int/pages/en/org/pla_EN.pdf), it places itself at the heart of the "civil dialogue". In other words, the EESC perceives itself as the "representative of civil society organizations" (EESC 1999, 10) in Europe.

The Commission and Non-Governmental Organizations: Building a Stronger Partnership

The 1999-Discussion Paper, co-authored by the President and the Vice-President of the Commission in 1999, uses the term "NGO-sector" (European Commission 2000: 1.1) for referring to those organizations, which are characterized as being non-profits, operating independently of the state and working on a voluntary basis for the benefit of society (ibid.1.2). In accordance with the EESC-Opinion the Discussion Paper provides a strong indicator for the increased recognition of the set of organizations generally dubbed as third sector or - in EU terms – organized civil society in Brussels. Again the Discussion Paper refers to the multi-functional character of these set of organizations by distinguishing between "operational NGOs (which) contribute to the delivery of services (such as in the field of welfare), whereas the primary aim of advocacy NGOs is to influence the policies of public authorities and public opinion in general" (European Commission 2000: 1.2). While the Paper also acknowledges NGOs as partners of policy making and project management, it particularly highlights the civic functions of NGOs. The Commission sees the involvement of civil society organizations as a means to tackle the "lack of democracy" within the European Union. From the Commission's perspective especially Brussels based European networks of civil society organizations have the potential to support the development of a European public opinion. Additionally, the Commission emphasizes the benefits of civil society's involvement in EU-policy making as representatives of different groups of citizens NGOs/NPOs inform EU institutions of the peoples needs. At the same time the organized civil society has the ability to provide expert knowledge to the EU institutions, thus serving as a means to avoid policy failures. As a consequence, the Commission hopes to get more acceptance for its

² Cf. http://europa.eu.int/comm/civil_society/coneccs/question.cfm?CL=en

policy decisions. In sum, the paper makes a strong point for intensifying dialogue and consultation between civil society and the European Institutions in order to achieve both, to tackle the "lack of democracy" in European public policy decision making and to further European integration.

The White Paper on European Governance

The 2001-White Paper assigns civil society an important role within the new approach towards European governance. It directly refers to the EESC definition and consequently uses the terms "organized civil society" and "organizations of civil society". Therefore the complete spectrum of nonprofit-organizations ranging from business associations to trade unions, hobby and leisure clubs and including the churches is covered by the term civil society organizations (European Commission 2001). The Paper takes up the aforementioned ideas and concepts related with the multi-functional character of civil society organizations. It particularly highlights the importance of civil society organizations as channels of communication between the EU and the citizens. Thus, the White Paper also focuses on cooperation and dialogue between civil society and the European Institutions. Besides the long-established "social dialogue" the White Paper already envisages the establishment of a "civic dialogue" (European Commission 2001) which currently ranks high on the EU agenda. Several functions which are now ascribed to the "civic dialogue" are explicitly mentioned. According to this line of argumentation civil society organizations are of central importance for:

- the development of a European public by providing a „structured channel for feedback, criticism and protest“;
- promoting democracy on national level;
- acting as a political corrective, as „an early warning system for the direction of political debate“ (European Commission 2001: 14f.)

The involvement of NGOs is not just emphasized as a means of fostering the link between the citizens and the EU but as well as a means of providing expert knowledge to the commission. As such, the consultations that take place in various forms help to develop a longer term policy perspective. Thus, the consultations with the civil society are an important part of EU policy making. However, at the same there is the need for reforms as the consultation procedures lack transparency. Not just the EU institutions are considered to be in charge of tackling this nuisance, the civil society organizations are urged to contribute as well. The

White Paper underlines the requirement for NGOs/NPOs to introduce rules of good governance, communication and democratic procedures within the organizational structures. (European Commission 2001). This line of argumentation is particularly taken up by the 2002-Communication from the Commission. Another step towards a clearer consultation practice is the announcement to develop close partnership arrangements between the Commission and civil society – a suggestion which is now taken up in the discussion on the establishment of the so-called civil dialogue.

In sum, the White Paper underlines once more the importance of civil society organizations as vehicles for the fostering of participatory democracy. However, compared to the 1999-Commission Paper the White Paper is less enthusiastic about the potentials of organized civil society to efficiently tackle the widely criticized lack of democracy within European policy-making. It makes quite clear that the European Institutions and not organized civil society are the bedrock of legitimacy for European policy-making: “Better consultation complements, and does not replace, decision-making by the Institutions” (European Commission:16).

Towards a Reinforced Culture of Consultation and Dialogue

As announced in the White Paper the Commission worked out guidelines for the "interaction between the European Institutions and society" (Communication 2002: 1.) which were published in a Communication of the Commission in 2002. There are two significant aspects which makes this Communication special and sets it apart from the up until now discussed documents: Firstly, there is a decisive shift in terminology and also function with respect to civil society organizations which are now primarily perceived as "interested parties" or "interest groups" setting them on the same level as any other pressure group. Secondly, while underlining the importance of the openness and accessibility of European policy making the focus of this paper is on regulation. In other words, the Communication is "a direct contribution to the 'Action Plan for Better Regulation' “ (Communication 2002: 1.). Nevertheless, the Communication acknowledges a "specific role of civil society organizations" within European policy making and within the Commission's consultation processes respectively. In accordance with the documents previously discussed, the Communication refers to the encompassing definition of civil society organizations, which originally has been worked out by the EESC. Furthermore, the Communication underlines the function of civil society organizations as "facilitators of a broad policy dialogue". Accordingly, the Commission perceives civil society "as offering a good platform to change

policy orientations and society... and (as) a real change to get citizens more actively involved in achieving the Union's objectives and to offer them a structured channel for feedback, criticism and protest". In other words, tackling the "lack of democracy" in Brussels is the prime rationale for the integration of civil society organization in European policy making. While arguing along this line, the Commission is in accordance with the particular concept of civil society supported and worked out by Jürgen Habermas which puts dialogue and "problem-solving discourses on questions of general interest within the framework of the public" (Habermas 1992: 443) on the fore. Despite the fact that the Commission argues vigorously in favor of increased accessibility and improved transparency of the policy process, the Communication, nevertheless, introduces various modes of regulation, thus limiting accessibility to policy making. First and foremost, the Communication distinguishes between an "open and a focused consultation process". The key question that is attached to this distinction is which organizations are eligible to the "focused consultation". Besides the already institutionalized bodies which assist the European Institutions, namely the Committee of the Regions (CoR) and the Economic and Social Committee (EESC), the Communication recommends to consider the establishment of a systematic dialogue with national associations of regional and local governments. Discussing which civil society organization should be eligible to take part in the "civic dialogue" the Communication refers to the so-called eligibility criteria set-up by the EESC. According to this list organization preferred are those which among other criteria "exist permanently at Community level, ... have authority to represent and act at European level ..., have member organizations in most of the EU Member States (and) provide direct access to its members' expertise" (Communication 2002: 2. Footnote 15). Those criteria are specifically tailored to the so-called Euro-Feds, which are umbrella organizations of nationally bound associations representing specific concerns such as environmental care or consumer rights. In other words, in order to be eligible for "focused consultation" civil society organizations have to form institutionalized alliances and stable networks in Brussels with other civil society organizations fighting for similar issues but coming from different EU countries. In the following chapter we take a look at organized civil society in Brussels.

3. Who are they? Civil Society Organizations in Brussels

As a preliminary note we have to mention that in respect of interest representation the economic sector is dominant in Brussels. According to Eising, 740 or 82% of the organizations listed in the Commission's association register can be defined as entrepreneur

or employer organizations (Eising 2001:300). In relation to this, religious, social, human rights, consumer, and environmental interests are still underrepresented in Brussels, though meanwhile they account for approximately 18% of EU-specific interest groups (Eising 2001:304). There are different reasons for the comparatively low representation of third sector interests in Brussels. As already mentioned - apart from development aid politics - policies which are not closely connected to mainstream economic politics and thus are representing so-called "weak interests" which constitute the great bulk of the third sector advocacy groups, were not among the EU-policy canon until approximately the mid-1980s. Together with the increase of EU-competencies and the diversification of responsibilities especially in the areas of social policy, labor market policy, employment policy as well as environmental policy, third sector's interest in the EU as financier of policy-specific programs on the one hand and as addressee for lobby activities on the other hand began to rise.

Meanwhile, there are plenty organizations - titled NGOs in Brussels - advocating the concerns of "weak interests". The spectrum covers highly professional lobbyists, ad-hoc coalitions and loosely coupled groups which nevertheless are steadily working together. The puzzling picture of civil society organizations being based in Brussels can be differentiated either according to the specific field of activity, i.e. NGOs working in foreign aid or environmental issues, the degree of inclusion, i.e. how many organizations are associated, or finally according to the degree of "horizontality" which refers to the interstate nature of the specific organization, i.e. how many European countries are represented. As the EU lobby expert van Schendelen mentions there is indeed an enormous variety of organizations, institutions, and groups which are engaged in interest representation in Brussels. The Commission's data base (CONECCS)³, which was established in accordance with the ideas of the White Paper on Governance provides a first glance on the diversity and variety of the representation of third sector interests in Brussels. The data base offers access to a linked index of Brussels based NGOs. It serves as an information pool particularly for advisory bodies of the Commission. The setting up of CONECCS was announced in the White Paper "European Governance". Considering the afore discussed documents it has to be mentioned that quite a few of the Brussels based civil society organizations have originally been set-up by the Commission. A case in point is the European Women's Lobby, a lively organization fighting for women's rights which is primarily active at the European level of policy-making. Moreover, for most of these organizations EU-funding is of pivotal importance. Only a few of the Brussels based

NGOs are exclusively financed by dues of their associated membership organizations. There is no doubt that funding is a central issue particularly for advocacy groups in Brussels. Compared to business associations their difficult economic background puts them in a weaker position.

As already mentioned, the Commission would like to see a broad representation of nation-based civil society interest in Brussels. Therefore, as already outlined with respect to the European Women's Lobby, the Commission and also the other EU institutions prefer to work together with so-called NGO-families or Euro-Feds. Even before the Prodi Presidency the Commission used to consult some of these Euro-Feds on a regular basis e.g. the forerunner of Concorde. In accordance with the White Paper this process is supposed to be re-organized guaranteeing eligibility and transparency. Since it is quite clear that the "big players" which are able to establish further alliances particularly with organizations from many European countries are more influential in Brussels than "individualists", we will draw your attention to some selected Euro-Feds. We chose these organizations intentionally because they are representing different facets of civil society. Moreover, looking back at the history of one of the oldest Euro-Feds makes clear that it is not an easy task to set-up and to sustain an advocacy umbrella organization with a multi-national membership. Finally, the example of CEDAG also shows that Europe has not yet developed a core civil society identity. Core beliefs and identities which are nationally embedded are still very prominent in Brussels. The following organizations will be presented next:

- CONCORD (CLON) - European NGO Confederation for Relief and Development: www.concordeurope.de
- Green Group of Eight: <http://www.foeeurope.org/publications/green8.pdf>
- Platform of European Social NGOs: <http://www.socialplatform.org/code/en/hp.asp>
- Permanent European Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual societies, associations and foundations/ Conférence Européenne Permanente des Coopératives, Mutualités, Associations et Fondations (PEC-CMAF) <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enterprise/entrepreneurship/coop/ccmaf/pec-cmaf.htm>

Until 2001, the **CONCORD** forerunner organization - the Liaison Committee of Development NGOs- which was established in 1976, represented 930 European NGOs that

³ "Consultation, the European Commission and the Civil Society"
(http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/civil_society/index_de.htm)

work in the areas development politics and humanitarian aid. EU-development politics and development aid was worked out and implemented in close cooperation and consultation with the Liaison Committee. The establishment of the Committee was largely an EU initiative, resulting from the European Development Fund. Comparable structures in member states were the force behind its establishment (details see Kendall/Anheier 1999:298 ff). Despite this success story the Committee was dissolved due to internal disputes in 2001. However, CONCORD or CLON which is the commonly used term for the organization in Brussels suffers from the very same problems and internal disputes as the Committee. CLON is highly dependent on European funding. Furthermore, it burns down to the fact that safeguarding funding for its membership organizations, which with respect to specific funding lines, such as humanitarian aid, are entangled in a fierce competition among each other, constitutes the prime purpose of CLON despite its self-image as an organization working primarily for the better understanding between the South and the North.

The “Green Group of Eight”, also called “**G8 Environmental NGOs**”, is a loose association of large European environmental protection organizations.⁴ Active lobbying for the environment and a sustainable development are its central issues. Here, the group does by all means address “hot topics”. During the Consultation Stage of the European Convention, for example, the G8 proposed the abolishment of the -in their opinion- outdated European agricultural policy as well as the European nuclear policy by suggesting to abolish the Euratom Treaty. Due to the fact that "big players" such as Greenpeace are members of the G8 the Group is less dependent from Commission funding. In the meantime environmental policy at EU-level is considered to be one of policy fields in which NGOs are accepted partner having been able to get their foot into the door (van Schendelen 2002).

The **Platform of European Social NGOs** is also considered having developed into an influential player in Brussels. The Platform was established in 1995 and bands together more than 40 European NGOs, federations and networks active in the policy fields of poverty relief, social services and health. The Platform stands very much for the development of a social Europe. Among others, members are the Red Cross, Caritas Europe and the Anti-Poverty Network. Besides contributions of its members the platform is financially supported by the European Commission. The Platform keeps close connections to the European Economic and

⁴ Birdlife International (European Community Office), Climate Network Europe, European Environmental Bureau, European Federation of Transport and Environment, Friends of the Earth Europe, Greenpeace Europe, International Friends of Nature and WWF European Policy Office.

Social Committee, and it tries whenever possible to form alliances with ETUC - the Federation of European Unions in Brussels. The Platform enjoys already a privileged status among the Euro-feds because it is considered to be an important organization within the Civil Dialogue. Against the background that the European Economic and Social Committee currently lobbies to be acknowledged by the Commission as the "voice" of the civil society in Brussels, the Platform argues definitely against this standpoint put forward by the ESC by defending the "openness" of the consultation procedures.

PEC-CMAF, the **“Permanent European Conference of Cooperatives, Mutual societies, associations and foundations”** looks also back on an interesting history. It had two forerunner organizations the "Informal Consultative Committee" from 1994-1998 and the formal "Consultative Committee for Cooperatives, Mutuals, Associations and Foundations" from 1998-2000 which was closely linked to the DG Enterprise and thus headed by the Commission. The committee consisted of 48 representatives from social economy umbrella organizations. Highly integrated in the Commission by so-called formalized consultation the Committee was the prime advisory body for policies connected to the social economy. However, the reorganization of the DG Enterprise resulted in the break-up of the Consultative Committee in 2000. It was superseded by the autonomous "Permanent European Conference of Co-operatives, Mutual Societies, Associations and Foundations", which without institutionalized contacts to the Commission supports the same aim as its predecessor. Thus, its focus is to support and to lobby for the social economy which - consisting of mutuals and co-operatives - is conceptualized as a "middle ground" between Anglo-Saxon capitalism and a classical, and thus centralized socialist approach. The social economy concept is highly acknowledged in France as well as in Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain but not in Northern and particularly not in the Eastern countries of the EU. Moreover, whereas in many of the aforementioned countries co-operatives and mutuals are not considered to belong to the organized civil society/or to the third sector, in France these economically very powerful organizations are regarded to be a genuine part of the sector. In other words, PEC-CMAF is primarily representing core beliefs towards the sector embedded in the francophone tradition. Interestingly enough PEC-CMAF was primarily founded by a French initiative and received its privileged status within the DG Enterprise under the Santer Presidency.

These examples show that “organized civil society” in Brussels is a many-faceted phenomenon. Up until now it has not developed into a unitary partner of the European

Institutions. And there are many doubts whether this will ever be the case. This very heterogeneous field of interest representation brings us back to our starting question: How is the civil society discourse linked to mainstream research analyzing polity, politics and policies in Brussels? Here the focal point of discussion is the topic of integration. Along this line of argumentation we can reframe our question in the way asking if, how and to what extent are civil society organizations able to contribute to further European integration that in a way translates also into a deepening of democracy in Europe.

4. Organized Civil Society and Mainstream EU-Research

By evaluating the set of EU documents it became quite clear that particularly the Commission acknowledges the concept of a third sector whose organizations differ from both the market and the state. Furthermore, the documents are specifically referring to the fact that civil society organizations are multi-tasking entities fulfilling a variety of functions within modern societies. Among those there is the capacity to give people a voice by participating in agenda-setting and policy formulation. Civil society organizations are perceived as lobbyists striking for the right "issues" such as the protection of the environment or the improvement of living conditions for those in need. Moreover, particularly the Commission emphasizes that civil society organizations are capable of providing expert knowledge on controversial topics and issues. In this line of argumentation civil society organizations are perceived similar to any other association or lobby group operating in Brussels as a "pool of information" which enables Brussels bureaucracy to keep business going. However, there are two specific functions, which makes civil society organizations different from straightforward lobbyists in Brussels and which were also highlighted in the aforementioned documents. Firstly, again particularly the Commission highly appreciates civil society organizations as partners of European policy implementation. Within the context of a wide spectrum of European policy programs such as the Employment Act or the National Plans for Social Inclusion special reference is given to civil society organizations as facilitators of grass-roots politics. As partners of European programs civil society organizations are preferred to public entities, thus enabling the Commission at least to a certain extent to bypass national policy routines. Secondly, the Commissions again and again stresses the importance of civil society organizations for the further integration of Europe by providing channels of communication which are bridging the multi-tiered levels of the European polity. In sum, there are two types of reasons which are put forward in EU-documents why co-operation with civil society organizations is advisable and useful. One set of reasons is closely linked to economic

thinking highlighting gains of efficiency and effectiveness by the integration of civil society organizations in the policy-process. In sharp contrast to the efficiency line of argumentation the second set of reasons is linked to the world of ideas of democratic theory and thus to the civil society discourse. Indeed, at least from a theoretical point of view this set of organizations provides the opportunity to combine policy making with elements of participatory democracy that makes them very attractive for any approach trying to strengthen "democratic governance". However, this exactly was Romano Prodi's agenda for his Presidency. He represented the idea of being a "People's President, a crusading leader determined to democratize the EU and bring it to the people" (Greenwood 2001: 424). Therefore, particularly the Commission highlighted the multi-tasking character of these organizations and their ability to be both organizations engaging in advocacy and lobbying activities on behalf of their constituencies and at the same time providing efficient channels for policy implementation. Up until now, however, it has not yet been proven that the organizations are able to meet all those expectations, which are ascribed to them particularly by the Commission.

There is considerable lack of empirical research analyzing whether, how, and to what extent civil society organizations are indeed able to further democracy and integration in Europe. Whereas there are many case-studies researching the power of business associations operating in Brussels, with the exception of environmental policy those policy fields which are genuine playing grounds of civil society organizations, such as health care, social services, the arts and culture, recreation and leisure or education and research, have up until now not been targeted by experts of policy analysis focusing on Brussels. If at all, civil society organizations operating in Brussels are covered as lobbyists operating in alliance with other groups and associations in order to influence policy-making (van Schendelen 2002). What comes out of this research is that only those organizations which are highly professionalized and preferably multi-national players, such as Greenpeace, have the potential and the necessary resources to be an independent and influential "policy-player" in Brussels.

While policy-analysis and especially lobbying is by far the most developed field of research including civil society organizations (van Schendelen 2003; Greenwood 2003/chapter; Rucht 2001; Helferrich/Kolb 2001), the most underdeveloped areas are firstly the empirical backing of the concept of "associative and participatory democracy" which from a theoretical point of view is put to the fore by among others Cohen and Rogers (Cohen/Rogers 1995) and secondly

the topic of Europeanization and domestic change that translates into the question whether and how civil society organizations operating at the national level are significantly affected by "the emergence and development at the European level of distinct structures of governance" (Risse et al 2001: 3). Therefore, what has to be done in order to investigate whether civil society organizations indeed contribute to the deepening and further development of European democracy boils down to the analysis of the internal structures and communication procedures within civil society organizations. Against the background that the European Union is a multi-tiered polity, participatory democracy asks for a close linkage of the various organizational levels of those civil society organizations which are engaged in EU policy-making. Again, this is a classical field for case-study analysis.

Finally, EU-research is up until now pretty much dominated by political scientists and has not yet been discovered as a field of research from a sociological perspective. However, if we look at the EU not as a unique institutional arrangement neither correctly characterized as a federal state nor as a confederation the societal dimension of the EU comes to the fore. Step by step Europe is also developing into a societal space which is kept together by feelings of belonging and togetherness. Looking at Europe from this perspective the cultural dimension of the European integration process is highlighted. However, there is a very close linkage between culture as a set of beliefs, values, and normative concepts and the very core of civil society/nonprofit organizations which are first and foremost mission-based entities. How and in which direction civil society organizations as upholders of belief systems and as such highly responsible for the normative underpinning of the European societies contribute to the societal integration of Europe is a research question which still needs to be discovered (Risse 2001; Delhey 2004).

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