

Issue Paper

Project - Regulating Lobbying in the Czech Republic and the Visegrad Four
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Project Issue

Lobbying of the members of the legislative and executive branches of the government is aimed at influencing public policy-making. As such, lobbying could be considered as a part of democratic participation in the process of decision-making. It is one way how mostly interest groups can convey their preferences to politicians and political appointees in order to gain outcomes these groups consider positive and beneficiary. It is also a way how sometimes important information, which was previously not included or available, is inserted into the decision-making process.

These possible advantages notwithstanding, lobbying is often perceived as a form of corruption, bribery and unfair political practices. This is doubly so especially in an environment where there is a little understanding of who the lobbyists are and how does lobbying work together with short or no history of transparent and fair public policy-making. The Czech Republic fits this description rather well. Lobbying is in no way formally recognized and regulated. Taking place mostly as a PR activity, it carries with it a baggage of negative connotations. Another problem with lobbying is the unfairness that a preferential access to politicians and officials arguably carries with it. In other words, those who can “purchase” their way to decision-makers are likely to find more decision being reached in their favor.

Project Objectives

This project therefore examines the way lobbying works in the Czech Republic and aims to formulate policy recommendations that would help politicians, lobbyists, journalist, non-governmental activists or scholars as well as the general public in better understanding and coping with the issue of lobbying. It does make a difference for the

transparency and accountability of the democratic governance whether it is known with whom the decision-makers have met in discussing a future policy or not.

While the project focuses primarily on the Czech Republic and possibilities there, the research work is set in a larger Central European context and includes the other three countries of the Visegrad Four (Hungary, Poland, Slovakia). These countries have faced much of the same problems in the realm of public policy-making and can potentially provide very useful insights. Foremost this applies to Slovakia where a law on lobbying is currently under discussion in the National Council (Parliament).

Closely related to the strategy of using the four Central European countries as comparative cases is the goal to establish research and advocacy networks concerned with lobbying both in the Czech Republic and throughout the region. The research work done by the author will put in touch various previously unconnected researchers and advocacy groups that have been pursuing a similar agenda.

Project Results

The project foresees three main outputs: 1) Policy study; 2) Policy briefing paper; 3) Policy articles. Each of the three will serve different purposes and will target a different public. The subject of the policy study will be a somewhat thicker description of the situation of lobbying in the Czech Republic and a detailed outline of possible regulative mechanisms that could/should be enacted. The policy study will also provide rationales for these mechanisms. Its primary readers should be non-governmental activists, scholars and/or political advisors. The policy briefing paper will be a concise shorter document that will be circulated among politicians and lawmakers. It will briefly outline the issue, the possibilities and policy recommendations. Finally, policy articles will serve the primary purpose of making public aware of the issue of lobbying and possible ways how to deal with it. In this sense, these policy articles will fulfill the role of public advocacy of the issue.

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