

## Lobbying in the EU

### Parlez vous Lobby?

*In Brussels, lobbying has become a real industry. The French moan that they have not been so skilled in this work as the British, who, on the other hand, point out that the Gallic more than compensate for this by their presence in the internal structure of the Union...*

In Brussels, lobbying is – industry. More than 4,500 professional groups, representatives of enterprises and trade unions, non-governmental organizations, consultant's and lawyer's offices, which employ thousands of people, are involved in lobbying in this European capital – says Malfa Dos Santos, the editor of the yearbook "The European Public Affairs Directory" which features references of all European lobbyists.

**INDUSTRY:** *In Brussels, lobbying is - industry*

Besides, some branches of industry are extremely powerful and with strong presence, like the European Chemical Federation, which employs 140 people. It is important to emphasize that lobbyists have to obey "The Code of Conduct", drawn up at the beginning of 1990, which obligates them in advance to work openly, to respect the confidentiality of collected information, as well as not to commercialize collected documentation.

#### "Bureau for corruption"

It was quite hot last summer in the Brussels office of Antoine Winckler, a well-known lawyer for French "business transactions". He was appointed to convince the EU competition commissar, Mario Monti, that the acquisition of Vivendi Universal Publishing did not pose a problem. Namely, the commissar

#### Alstom

**OPERATION:** France organized a rescue plan worth 2.8 billion euros for this famous constructor of TGV. It was approved to increase the capital by a half of the 600 million euros capital, guaranteeing this by certain claims, and the other 300 million euros taken as liabilities.

**PROBLEM:** This 31.5 per cent invested in Alstom is not the only help provided by the state, they said in the Government, but its Commission points out that it has to make sure this plan is not jeopardized by competitors like Siemens or ABB.

**DUE DATE:** During September, the EU Commission, headed by Mario Conti, "hastely" decides to start a detailed investigation.

#### Bull

**OPERATION:** The state approved an advance of 450

ordered a "detailed investigation" into this fusion project and is waiting for it to be completed at the end of the year.



**NEAR?:** *"We have to be in Brussels, not in its vicinity," Ivon Thiec*

"France needs lobbying, not only to convince the commissar Monti but also for other people who make decisions – decisions that are extremely important for strategic business of French enterprises and the government itself," points out this well-known lawyer. However, "lobby" is a concept that the French find rather unclear. Anyway, it is - "bad". For most of those who adopted it, it is a "pressure group in the occult" or, even worse, "bureau for corruption".

Anyhow, nearby Brussels is now, right after Washington, the second city in the world by the number of lobbyists and lobby-organizations. Their task is to constantly assess the preparation of certain decisions made by the EU Commission that can jeopardize business or harm industrial sectors whose interest they represent, or which can cause various difficulties to their client-companies in non-observing anti-monopolistic business regulations.

For this very reason, lobbyists have knocked at the door of those directly responsible for certain issues in the EU and also of the experts directly engaged in making certain decisions. They are equally engaged in round table meetings which usually come before making decisions. It should be underlined that with seven out of 46 members of the European Round Table, the lobbyists of great patrons, the interests of France are least represented. However, there are also

million euros from the treasury to this IT company for the period from the end of 2001 to March 2002 so it would "buy time" needed to find rescuers from the private sector.

**PROBLEM:** Bull had already inherited several "operations of public rescue" and can no longer receive state assistance until 2004. The company had to return the 450 million euros till June 17, 2003.

**DUE DATE:** The EU Commission decided to deliver the file to the EU Court of Justice during October.

### **France Telecom**

**OPERATION:** In December 2002, in order to help this telecommunication operator with the problems caused by overindebtedness, the state made available the so-called "stockholders' advance" of nine billion euros. Meanwhile, it was approved to increase the capital by the same amount.

**PROBLEM:** The EU Commission opened an investigation in January in order to see whether this "advance" was really accepted as an act of private investors, as Paris put it, or, it was actually "state assistance".

**DUE DATE:** The Commission, which had engaged several external legal and financial experts, scheduled a joint meeting for November 2003.

some encouraging moves.

### **Super-Hachette**

**OPERATION:** The fusion of two companies attracted great attention. Acquired by Hachette group (Grasset, Calmann-Levy, Stock, Fayard itd.), Vivendi Universal Publishing (Plon Robert Laffont, La Découverte etc.) gives birth to a new publishing giant.

**PROBLEM:** This new association will control several publishing and literature sectors: 80 per cent of pocket editions and school textbooks and 70 per cent of total book distribution network in France.

**DUE DATE:** The EU Commission decided that a detailed investigation should start at the beginning of September. The final decision is expected, in the best case, until the end of the year.

### **Schools for lobbyists**

One of the most influential British lobbyists, Stanley Crossick, the founder and president of the European Policy Centre, a respected British "think-tank", does not really believe in this public "weakness" of the French and in his personal opinion Anglo-Saxons are "stronger lobbyists", but, referring to his personal experience in Brussels from as early as 1978, he underlines very strong French influence in the political world of the Union internal system.

What is certainly in favor of France is the fact that there is a secondary, "100 per cent French school for public business" as well as the Institute for Public Management and Politics, which has been in France since 1998 and produced managers of great European companies. The director of the institute Lauren Lemuzi notes that "70 per cent of our students finds job in the public sector in the European Union".

The fact that more lobbying should be done on the spot, when talking to the experts whose opinion is respected in the European Parliament, is confirmed by one of rare female French lobbyists in Brussels, Ivon Thiec, who said: " The fact that it takes only hour and a half to get from Brussels to Paris is completely irrelevant when you want to do something for better positioning of French capital and French companies. Therefore, we should be in Brussels, not in its vicinity."

**Mirjana Prljevic, Paris**

**Ekonomist magazine, no. 181, November 10, 2003**