



## REVIEW OF “EUROPEAN LOBBYING” BY DANIEL GUÉGUEN

Daniel Guéguen is one of the great figures of European public affairs practice. He is an institution builder, a creative fixer and ruthless business operator. He has endless charm and energy and now writes beautifully clear English. His latest book, “European Lobbying” is a good read – but not a book for beginners. Read it for its anecdotes, its graphics and its occasional wonderful indiscretions. Value its insights, gasp at its sweeping generalisations and scream with fury at some of its judgements.

This is a book to remind anybody who writes on public affairs to guard against the prejudices acquired during a long career. Daniel launched himself in big agricultural trade associations in the '80s and '90s. The experience marks the whole book. During the same period I was an MEP. Reading the book I found myself mentally scanning my own writings for such career-induced prejudice. I simply do not recognise Daniel's history of European lobbying. It minimises the role of companies and national civil servants, and concentrates on trade associations, NGOs and trade unions. It is wise to write about what one knows, but not to the exclusion of all else. He writes with unrivalled expertise about the internal politics of COPA and the sugar industry. He is interesting on the decision-making processes of the CIAA and its endless internal struggles, but, needless to say he is out of sympathy with the large food companies. He is good on the structure of CEFIC, but uncomprehending of the revolution which Alain Perroy is seeking to bring about. These great trade associations have to respond to the development of European decision-making, or they will be by-passed by power. Under Co-Decision it is necessary to lobby both Parliament and Council simultaneously, so trade associations need structures that cross the divide between European and national level associations. They need to be able to call rapidly on the best expertise and personnel. The developments of the last five years from Impact Assessment to Platforms bring new pressures on the traditional trade association consensus-building mechanisms. A current ECPA Roundtable is looking at ways of improving the relationship between corporate members and their trade associations at all levels. It brings together fifteen trade association professionals and fifteen senior practitioners from companies. It is deliberately structured to compare between sectors. Success has to start with a clear definition of the current problem, rather than a detailed analysis of existing structures.

On NGOs he is good on structure and weak on intent. He understands the Civil Society Contact Group in as far as it resembles a huge and complex trade association. He has paid NGOs the compliment of studying them, but the analysis weakens when he seeks to understand what motivates them. They are simply too political for him. In public affairs ‘Empathy is all’. There is a touch of ancient French corporatism about his affection for the European Trades Union Confederation and its now largely unused relationship with BusinessEurope. If only Jacques Delors was still here ... He includes an analysis of the European public affairs structures of two ECPA companies that I know well – Unilever and Dow Chemicals – in neither case does he catch the political spirit and ethos which drives them. His French sensibilities mean that he is right about the importance of the Council Secretariat, but equally that his touch with the European Parliament is faulty.

If you take politics, ideas and passion out of the European Union, you are left with a system operating on charm, contacts and clever techniques. The book is full of great checklists. It is part biography and part advertisement. It is at its weakest when it seeks to create a theoretical framework on the basis of anecdote. The Chocolate Directive did not succeed solely because a coup in the Ivory Coast deprived Daniel of his public affairs budget. It is simply not true that “national lobbying is essentially political, whereas European lobbying is largely technical” (p 96). I do not buy the concept of ‘transversal lobbying’ even when applied to sewage sludge. I am unimpressed by Business Intelligence (BI). These are grand titles for old tactics. I do not accept that there is no French network left in Brussels (p 83). In my view networks in Brussels are fluid and inter-penetrated. It is odd to claim (p 81) that “associations and NGOs know few consultants”, when many small trade associations are run, as he recommends, by consultants.

Daniel only reaches the questions of ethics and Transparency on the last page. His witty asides throughout the book, especially on journalists and MEPs, add to the sum of human jollity, but may not do much for the reputation of public affairs practice. Read this book, but read it as autobiography not authority.



