

By the numbers

# The new EU power source: Energy-efficient lobbying

The Commission's interactions with lobbyists show how the debate takes shape.

By Laurens Cerulus and James Panichi

Updated 10/16/15, 6:22 PM CET

It's been a hot year for energy lobbying — gang style.

With fewer than 50 days until the climate change summit in Paris, European energy interests have been banding together to make their points. More than any other sector, networks of NGOs and business representatives use this safety-in-numbers strategy to land meetings with Commission officials.

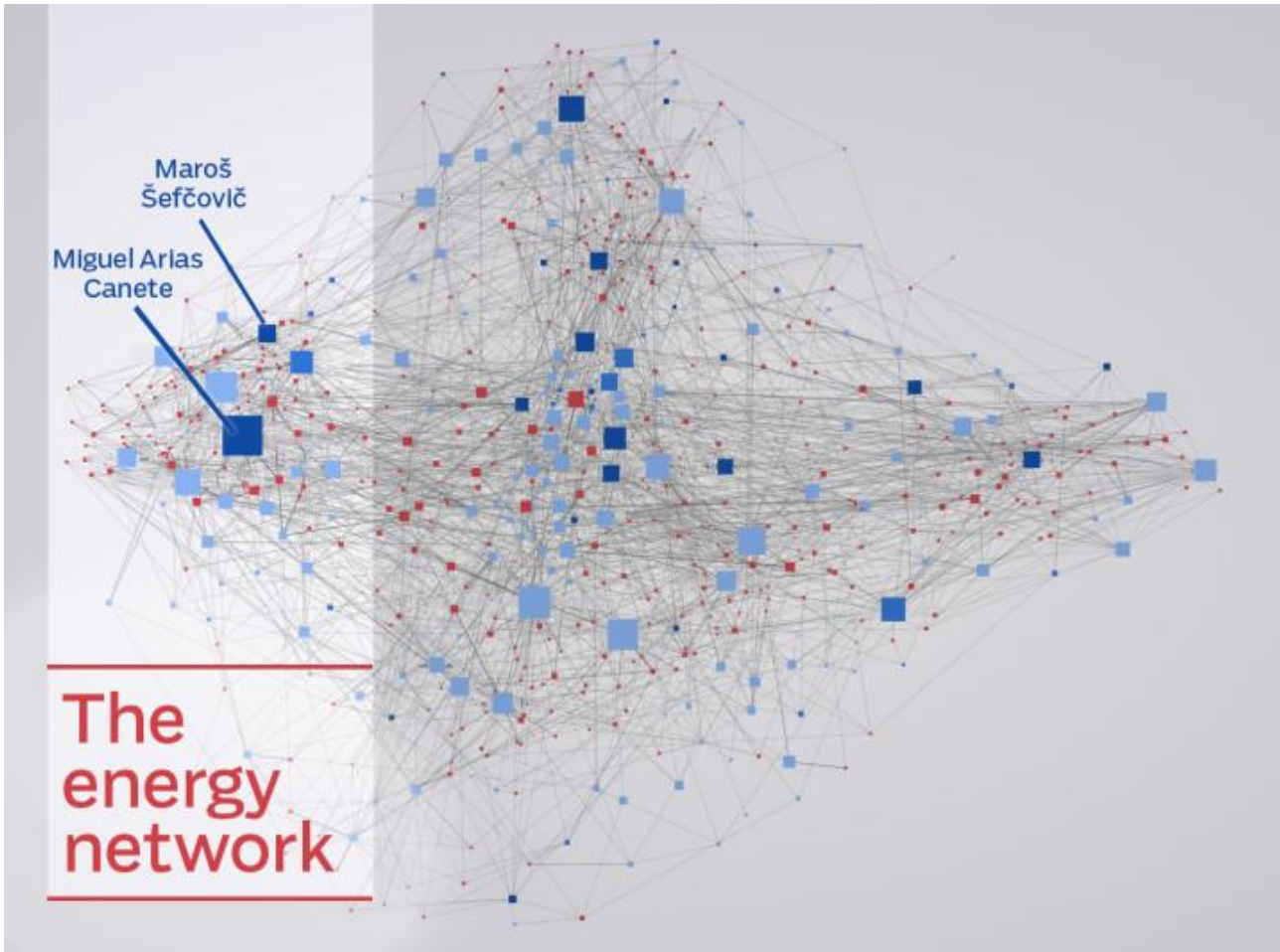
The group approach is, in part, a response to the Commission's desire to meet a cross-section of interests without wasting too much time. But it is also in keeping with a broader European culture of political consensus-building.

Unlike his predecessor, Climate Action and Energy Commissioner Miguel Arias Cañete seeks to meet with a group of key NGOs at least quarterly, rather than inviting them alone. And on the industry's end, it's the energy trade associations that meet with policy makers, not their member companies.

"This is the way we work: We find synergies among organizations," said Natalia Alonso, the deputy director of advocacy and campaigns at Oxfam. "There might be issues in which we are not 100 percent on the same page ... We discuss them and find a way through."

Energy and environmental policy was the topic at more than [500 meetings](#), or over 11 percent of all sessions between lobbyists and Commission officials held since December 2014 — dwarfing the amount of meetings called on the digital single market, the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, finance and health policy.

“Energy lobbying groups are highly connected. You can spot them close to Commissioner Cañete, Vice President Maroš Šefčovič and the officials that work with them,” said Christian Gulas, data scientist at [FASresearch](#), a research organization and consultancy which compiled the data for POLITICO.



Energy officials and lobbyists are left in the web, centered around Miguel Arias Cañete and Maroš Šefcovic. Network shows all meetings registered between lobbyists (in red) and Commission officials (in blue) from December 2014 to July 2015 | Data & visualization: FASresearch/POLITICO

While the cabinets of President Jean-Claude Juncker, Vice-President Frans Timmermans or commissioners Cecilia Malmström or Margrethe Vestager get more lobbying pressure from different sides of the web, the energy and climate crowd is more of a community on its own.

“Interest groups often show up together, bundling their lobbying potential,” Gulas said. “It differs from other sectors, where lobbyists meet with the Commission on their own more often.”

Much of the activity is focused on the office and staff of Cañete. He registered more contacts with lobby organizations than any other Commission official — bar none.

The Commission declined to comment on the number of meetings attended by individual commissioners, but a spokesperson said that all interaction with lobbyists meets transparency requirements and that the Commission “strives to make fair proposals balancing all viewpoints.”

Yet the number of meetings and the list of players tell only part of the story.

[A network analysis tool developed by FASresearch](#) shows the extent to which lobbying networks dominate the landscape, with industry players and NGOs respectively pooling their resources to boost their chances of success.



Click on the picture to go to the interactive Map

<http://www.politico.eu/interactive/lobbyists-brussels-social-network-meetings-commission-strategy/>

The top industry lobbyists on energy and environment, ranked by the number of meetings, are the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC), the European Wind Energy Association (EWEA), and Eurelectric, the European electricity industry association.

The first energy company to appear in its own right is General Electric, which comes in at No. 5 on the list, while Italian energy giant ENEL and the French ENGIE are also less prominent in their lobbying activities than the umbrella organizations of which they are members.

A recent report by InfluenceMap suggested trade federations play an important role in influencing climate policy, especially on the European stage.

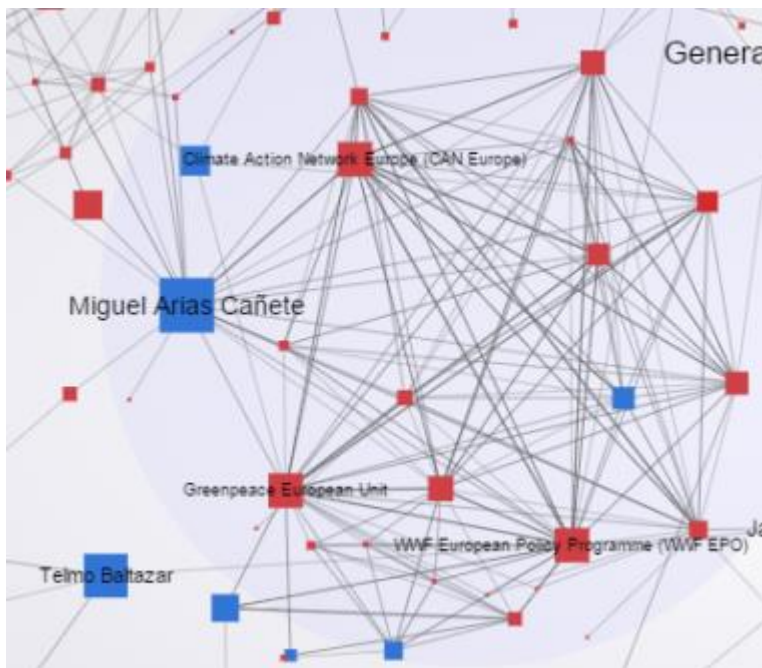
“Companies are lobbying just as hard as their trade association,” said Thomas O’Neill, research director for InfluenceMap, a U.K.-based NGO. “However, our research shows the associations are very important. They can have strong opposition to certain legislation that companies can’t have because of their profile.”

Pro-environment NGOs work in loose coalitions and often find ways to sit around the same table. They achieve this with ad hoc alliances as well as lobbying platforms, such as Climate Action Network (CAN Europe).

Many of their joint efforts to shift policy involve taking part in roundtable discussions.

“It’s a good place to flag issues — very early in the policy process or very late,” said Manon Dufour, who heads the Brussels office of E3G, an NGO working on sustainable development and a CAN Europe member.

This pattern is repeated across the policy spectrum. For example, AGE Platform Europe, an umbrella group representing older Europeans, is most often part of roundtable meetings, while Google was reported to have only one-on-one meetings with Commission officials — 35 in total.



The network of climate and environment NGOs sitting in roundtables with Commissioner Cañete. Red nodes are lobby organizations, connections represent meetings attended together | FASresearch

The Commission said that there is nothing unusual about choosing to meet lobbyists individually or in clusters, saying the format was “variable, depending on the

commissioner's/vice-president's availability." The Commission said it had held both one-on-one meetings with NGOs and business interests.

But Cañete's popularity is also linked to his ability to take meetings in clusters. For example, he may invite a full field of NGOs for a one-hour discussion on climate change or to test the waters ahead of Paris summit.

When you compare Cañete's approach to that of Šefčovič, who has responsibility for energy union, the difference is striking. On energy-related issues, Šefčovič reported just four meetings with NGOs, versus nine with companies and 15 with trade and business associations.

"Cañete is clearly more approachable," said Wendel Trio, director of CAN EuropeTrio. "We've had one meeting with Vice President Šefcovic so far. We don't get rejections as such, but often hear it's 'maybe possible to meet next week'."

Find out more: [Interactive tool "Lobbyists in Brussels - The social network"](#)

Authors: Laurens Cerulus and James Panichi

Link: <http://www.politico.eu/article/lobbyingnet-web-of-influence-brussels-lobbying-energy-commission-transparency/> (20151021)