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Lobbying and transparency

Bonanza week for dirty lobbyists in European Parliament

Another plenary week, another list of successes for dirty lobbyists in the European Parliament. With the sound of popping corks ringing around the offices of public affairs and industry representatives in Brussels, let's take a look back at their 'achievements' of this week, with the help of their centre-right friends in the EP.

Fuming

Perhaps the biggest issue of the week was what was not on Parliament's agenda, as opposed to what was on there. With the help of their allies on the centre-right of the house, notably the EPP group, the tobacco industry succeeded in having a crucial vote on EU tobacco legislation postponed.

The cynical decision to postpone the vote by centre-right MEPs will potentially delay the timely adoption of this crucial public health legislation and buys them time to weaken the proposals. This even received a rare rebuke from the sitting EU presidency.

Much has been made in the press about the amount of resources major cigarette producers have poured into lobbying on the tobacco directive. The Lithuanian health minister went as far as to claim almost 1/3 of all MEPs succumbed to this intensive lobby effort.

After the mysterious circumstances in which the former responsible EU commissioner John Dalli was dismissed, this only adds to suspicions and concerns about an inordinate influence by this lobby.

Frack baby, frack

With the decks cleared of tobacco, the field was left open for other dirty lobbies to influence other key votes. Next up: the shale gas lobby. A vote on proposals to revise EU rules on environmental impact assessments, which would have ensured that they would also include shale gas exploration and extraction, was also postponed. Again, at the behest of centre-right MEPs and, again, following lobbying from the affected industry.

Whatever your opinion on shale gas, surely it is in the public interest for it to be subjected to the same assessment standards as other similar infrastructure projects? The shale gas industry thinks not. Postponing the vote is part of its strategy to ensure the proposals are weakened. The industry wants to be

exempted...perhaps because it thinks shale gas projects would have a tough time with these assessments.

Biofooled

One key vote that did actually take place was on proposals aimed at tackling problematic biofuels, which have a negative impact on the climate. While the vote took place, the outcome (which in itself resulted in insufficient provisions for preventing damaging biofuels) was also subject to centre-right chicanery.

Instead of granting the draftsperson/rapporteur a mandate to negotiate with the Council on finalising the legislation (as is standard practise), a centre-right majority ensured the legislation will go to a second reading. This effectively kicks the proposals to the long grass, as a second reading (and negotiations with the Council) will be difficult toconclude before next year's European elections...meaning a final legislative agreement could be delayed for more than a year.

Not a bad week's work for the lobbyists.

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