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Report on revolving doors in the fossil fuel industry reveals widespread potential for conflicts of interest to undermine climate policy

Conflicts of interest in climate policy

If we are to be serious about meeting the goals of the Paris climate agreement, we must tackle conflicts of interest in climate policy-making now

[A report published today](#) by the Greens/EFA Group on revolving doors between the public sector and the fossil fuel industry in Europe concludes that there is a widespread problem when it comes to the potential for conflicts of interest to dominate climate policy-making.

Taking thirteen European countries as case studies, the report finds that the lines between the regulated and regulators are continuously and consistently blurred and that there are inadequate legislative provisions in place to prevent conflicts of interest from contaminating the policy-making process.

The report focuses specifically on climate policy-making, as an ambitious response to one of the greatest and most urgent challenges of our time is desperately needed, yet reports from insiders state that the EU and its Member States have actively tried to block any discussions around conflicts of interest from appearing on the UN climate negotiations' agenda.

The report, launched this week during the Climate Change Conference in Bonn because discussions are finally scheduled to take place on conflicts of interest, questions whether the EU's position is a result of the cosy relationships built up over the years between the fossil fuel industries and governments across Europe.

Vested Interests

For too long, the same fossil fuel companies that have downplayed, rejected, or only paid lip service to the effects of climate change have been given a disproportionate role during the UNFCCC negotiations. This has led hundreds of civil society organisations and almost 70 countries to call for a conflicts of interest policy to ensure that private companies with a vested interest in weak climate policy are not given a dominant role in climate policy-making. The Greens/EFA Group are strongly in favour of this proposal and we believe that conflicts of interest policies are necessary at all levels of decision-making: regional, national, European Union, and UNFCCC.

Weak oversight of revolving doors

Of the countries studied, Austria, Hungary, Sweden and Denmark do not regulate the issue of revolving doors, so there are no restrictions on moving between the public and private sector. Belgium, Czech Republic, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom do have some provisions on revolving doors, although these vary significantly in scope and effectiveness.

However, despite the existence of legislation, our study still finds 88 cases of revolving doors between the public sector and the energy industry, showing that gaps in the legislation remain, enforcement mechanisms are weak or inexistent, and/or that the rules can be easily flouted. Most of the cases involve Ministers and Secretaries of State, advisors, cabinet officials and other high-level civil servants. There are also instances of former Prime Ministers and regulators.

Although more research is needed before a definitive link can be made between weak conflicts of interest rules and low ambition on climate change, one thing is clear: the fossil fuel industry's modus operandi would be severely limited if climate ambition were adequately ramped up, and maintaining close relationships with high level decision-makers passing through the revolving door is another avenue for private interests to influence policy-making in their favour. To avoid any risk that public policy-making is beholden to private interests, the Greens/EFA Group urgently calls for the following:

- a clear definition of what constitute conflicts of interest at the UNFCCC level
- the introduction of a conflicts of interest policy for policy-makers on how to engage with different kinds of stakeholders at the UNFCCC
- robust conflicts of interest policies to be implemented at all decision-making levels, regional, national, EU, and UNFCCC.
- a minimum cooling-off period of 3 years between positions in the public and private sectors.

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