

Block the revolving door!

Frequently Asked Questions

November 2011



Block the revolving door:
why we need to stop EU
officials becoming lobbyists

Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU)
November 2011



The term ‘revolving door’ refers to the easy passage of staff from public sector positions to jobs in the lobby world, and vice versa. The major concern about the phenomenon of the revolving door are the potential conflicts of interest that can arise. When this happens, corporate groups gain inside know-how, vital contacts, and above all, powerful influence. As a result, Brussels becomes even more industry-dominated and more remote from citizens’ concerns and the public interest.

What do we mean by conflicts of interest?

The OECD’s definition of a ‘conflict of interest’ is: “a conflict between the public duty and private interests of a public official, in which the public official has private interests which could improperly influence the performance of their official duties and responsibilities”. This definition is increasingly in use by public authorities. In relation to the revolving door, there are four distinct types of conflicts of interest which might arise:

1. **Abuse of office** – where an official might use their influence while in office to shape a policy or decide to ingratiate themselves with future employers or clients who might hire them.
2. **Undue influence** – where an ex-official influences their former colleagues to favour their new employer or client.
3. **Switching sides** – where an ex-official working for a new employer or client opposes their previous institution on an issue where they used to represent the institution.
4. **Regulatory capture** – where officials are overly sympathetic to the industry they must regulate because they used to work in that industry.



Who decides on the rules which regulate the revolving door?

The current (inadequate) rules which regulate the revolving door are contained within the Staff Regulations for Officials of the European Communities. This document is the result of negotiations by the Commission with staff trade unions, and is approved by the Parliament and the Council. The rules apply to all staff working across the European institutions, including the agencies.

What is the timetable of the current review of the staff regulations?

Consultations are already underway on a review of the staff regulations, based on a draft proposal which covers a number of topics such as staff working hours, pension and pay levels. This review will be complete in 2012. The revolving door is not currently on the agenda of these negotiations, but ALTER-EU thinks it should be included.

But we do not want EU institutions which are only full of career-officials who have never had real-life experience?

Of course, it is important that the EU institutions benefit from a workforce who bring with them experience from many different walks of life. The European institutions should include people who have had experience of working in the public sector, private sector and civil society. But it is also important that the EU institutions are vigilant in preventing conflicts of interest which occur as a result of the revolving door and they need new rules to do this.

Will new revolving door rules just block the future career opportunities of EU staff?

Tough revolving doors rules would not prevent staff joining and leaving the institutions, but they would regulate those who wish to join, or who come from, specific categories of jobs ie. lobby jobs or those jobs which provoke conflicts of interest. There will be many other kinds of jobs which would not be affected by effective revolving door rules.

Is this only about big business lobbying? What about NGOs and trade unions?

Of course NGOs and trade unions carry out lobbying activities, although in truth their numbers are far smaller than the number of industry lobbyists in Brussels. A particular concern for ALTER-EU is the direct revolving door between the EU institutions and the lobby consultancy industry in Brussels. Nonetheless, the revolving door rules which ALTER-EU proposes would cover lobbying carried out by all types of organisations.

If the EU institutions publish a full list of revolving door cases, will this not infringe data protection rights for those individuals?

Publishing a list of revolving doors cases will not infringe individuals' privacy or their right to data protection. We do not want to see personal data such as dates of birth or home addresses published. In the UK, a monthly list is published of revolving doors cases which simply lists: the official's name, their old and new job titles and organisations, the dates of the move, and what the authority has decided about that role. This seems adequate.

Will new rules regulating the revolving door lead to a huge administrative burden for the EU institutions?

There are revolving doors rules in place at the moment, but they are not effectively implemented and these rules include various loopholes. Improved rules with better implementation processes might increase the administration work for the institutions, although the development of common procedures and clear definitions should also help to make them efficient. However, a small increase in administration seems like a small price to pay for tackling the big problem of the revolving door, and moving towards EU institutions which are free of conflicts of interest.

Aren't cooling-off periods really expensive because we will have to pay people leaving the EU institutions a lot of money if they are not allowed to work?

While ex-Commissioners and former MEPs are entitled to a transitional allowance after they leave office to help them to move on from their EU career, and so that they are not forced to accept jobs which might provoke a conflict of interest, this does not apply to officials. Thus the institutions will not incur expensive costs of paying ex-officials after they have left their employment. Former officials will not be "not allowed to work", but some may be prevented from accepting a limited category of jobs for a period of time.

For more information on all of these issues see: <http://www.alter-eu.org/revolving-doors>



The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) is a coalition of about 200 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms concerned with the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe. Specifically, we oppose the resulting loss of democracy in EU decision-making and the postponement, weakening, or blockage of urgently needed progress on social, environmental and consumer-protection reforms.

For more information on these issues, please contact ALTER-EU coalition coordinator: Koen Roovers
Tel: +32-2-8931062 - Email: koen@alter-eu.org - Website: <http://www.alter-eu.org/>
ALTER-EU, Mundo B, Rue d'Edimbourg 26, 1050 Bruxelles