

Block the revolving door!

An executive summary

November 2011

The “revolving door” – which appears to link the EU institutions directly to the private sector, allowing employees to move almost effortlessly between the two – is at the heart of the close relationship between the EU institutions and Brussels’ lobby industry.

As the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) highlighted in a report earlier this year, a number of former European Commissioners have recently gone through the revolving door; that is they have moved straight from public office into lobbying jobs. This raised serious questions about potential conflicts of interest.

The phenomenon of officials working in the EU institutions, especially in very senior policy or decision-making roles, also going straight into an industry or corporate lobby job is less well known. But it is not uncommon, with senior policy officials often moving to work on issues closely related to their former public role.

Such job moves create conflicts of interest, and allow officials to potentially abuse their inside knowledge of European decision-making and their access to former colleagues for the benefit of their new corporate employers or clients. There is also risk that the prospect of going through the revolving door could influence officials while in public office, leading them to act, not in the public interest, but in the interest of future employers or clients.

Thomas Lönngren was Executive Director of the European Medicines Agency (EMA) until December 2010. In January 2011, he set up his own consultancy and joined the NDA group, which specialises in advising the pharmaceutical industry. EMA only imposed restrictions on Lönngren after NGOs complained about the conflicts of interest provoked by these new jobs.

The ALTER-EU report includes details of 15 cases of senior EU officials who have moved through the revolving door. The EU institutions have rules to govern the revolving door, but these are weak and are poorly implemented. In the cases documented in this report, many officials were allowed to move into lobbying jobs without any restrictions being imposed. In other instances, the rules appear to have been ignored entirely, until civil society groups and the media raised the cases. Overall, between January 2008 and July 2010, only one official was prevented from taking up a new position under the revolving door rules, out of 201 requests made.

Mogens Peter Carl was Director-General at DG Trade and then at DG Environment, until 2009. Just six months later, Carl became senior adviser to Kreab Gavin Andersen, one of Brussels’ biggest lobby consultancies which represents chemical producer ICI and vehicle company Scania, among others. The Commission did not impose any cooling-off period.

Brussels-based lobby firms actively recruit from among the ranks of European Union officials, allowing firms to bolster their prestige and claims of ‘insider access’, which can help their corporate clients achieve their EU policy objectives. Research by ALTER-EU shows that over half of the lobbyists at four well-known Brussels lobby consultancies have previous experience inside the EU institutions.

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



It is clear that this situation needs to change – and urgently. New rules need to be developed which properly protect the public interest. In relation to the revolving door this would require a mandatory cooling-off period, effectively banning all officials from moving into lobbying jobs, or any other job which provokes a conflict of interest for officials working for European institutions and agencies for at least two years. Other loopholes in the current rules should also be closed, such as the immunity of EU staff on (temporary) contracts from systematic consideration under the regulations, and the lack of vetting and monitoring of those who enter an EU institution from a lobby job.

The Commission is far too secretive and complacent about the revolving door, refusing repeated requests, including from MEPs and from ALTER-EU members, to pro-actively publish information about who has gone through the revolving door. This needs to change as it is clear that external monitoring can only take place when there is full transparency.

Derek Taylor was a senior energy adviser working for DG Energy who moved to lobbying consultancy Burson-Marsteller to work as an energy adviser within weeks of retiring from the Commission. Yet Taylor's move was not authorised by the Commission at the time; permission only appears to have been sought retrospectively (in September 2011) after ALTER-EU raised the case with the Commission.

*In 2010, **Mårten Westrup** moved from DG Enterprise to BusinessEurope and lobbied former colleagues on climate change issues on behalf of BusinessEurope's interests. Yet under the current rules, his job move did not require approval from the Commission because of a loophole which excludes staff on contracts from systematically requiring authorisation. Westrup has now gone back through the revolving door and can be found working in DG Energy.*

As the report shows, the revolving door creates serious conflicts of interest, and undermines confidence in the probity and impartiality of decision-making in Brussels. Failure to fix the revolving door risks further undermining the independence and democratic legitimacy of the European institutions across EU member states. A review of parts of the staff regulations is already underway, led by Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and is expected to be completed in 2012. It is imperative that the issue of the revolving door is included within this review and that the rules are substantially strengthened.

ALTER-EU demands:

- ▶ **A mandatory cooling-off period (or ban) of at least two years for all EU institution staff members entering new posts which involve lobbying or advising on lobbying, or any other role which provoke a conflict of interest with their work as an EU official**
- ▶ **Tackling the loopholes in the current rules including the exclusion of staff on (temporary) contracts**
- ▶ **Scrutiny of all staff joining EU institutions for potential conflicts of interest. Where there is a potential conflict of interest between their old job and their new EU role, those persons must recuse themselves from such matters**
- ▶ **Ensure sufficient resourcing to be able to investigate and monitor revolving door cases**
- ▶ **Publish a full and updated list of all revolving door cases on EU institutions' websites**



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
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