

# THE EU'S 2026 CORPORATE LOBBY LEAGUE



# CONTENTS

<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Who are the biggest lobby spenders – and what to do about them .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>2. What do the major EU lobby league players want? .....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>I. AS BIG TECH’S LOBBY BUDGETS SOAR, DIGITAL RIGHTS ARE UNDER PRESSURE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>II. FINANCE INDUSTRY LOBBIES TO DITCH CONCERNS FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>III. BIG ENERGY USES IRAN WAR AND DEREGULATION WAVE TO CASH IN.....</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>IV. BIG TOXICS DEMAND LOOSER RULES ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>V. CROSS-SECTORAL BUSINESS GROUPS’ DEREGULATORY DREAMS COMING TRUE.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>3. Can we trust commercial interests to declare their full lobby budgets? .....</b>	<b>20</b>

# SUMMARY

## THE EU CORPORATE LOBBY LEAGUE 2026: BIG BUSINESS SPENDS MORE ON LOBBYING THAN EVER

Corporate spending on lobbying the EU keeps on rising – and the lobbyists are getting bigger results than ever before.

The 2026 EU corporate lobby league reveals that the top industry lobbyists (all those with €1 million-plus influencing budgets) are spending almost €381.75 million annually on lobbying the European Union institutions. That is 50% more than in 2020; and the number of registered industry organisations with this spending level has risen by nearly 30% in the same time period.

And it's paying off: in the era of the von der Leyen 2 European Commission – and a right-wing majority in the European Parliament – politicians are delivering industry-friendly policies at an unprecedented rate.

Our analysis looks at the self-declared annual lobby expenditure of today's 173 biggest industry lobbyists, defined as those that declare a lobby budget of €1 million or more. By sector, it reveals:

- The highest-spenders within the tech industry have the biggest annual lobby spend overall at €73 million, which is used to oppose strong rules to protect our digital rights.
- Energy industry giants (€52 million annual lobby budget) are using geopolitical crises such as the Iran war to lobby for a resurgence of fossil fuels, as well as to rebrand false solutions to the climate crisis as sustainable.
- The biggest chemical corporations and their trade associations are spending big lobby budgets (totalling €46.5 million) on weakening rules to protect citizens from harmful chemicals and pesticides.

**Meanwhile instead of defending the public, the politicians are offering the biggest industry lobbies an open door.**



*All in all we are witnessing corporate lobbyists with bold and increasing powers to influence policy, a public that is largely in the dark about what is happening, and the biggest deregulation wave ever seen in the EU.*



# 1. WHO ARE THE BIGGEST LOBBY SPENDERS – AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT THEM

The analysis is in (full data available here). Corporate spending on lobbying the European Union is bigger than ever before, and this sheer lobby firepower is rewarding industry with big political results. All in all we are witnessing corporate lobbyists with growing powers to influence policy, the biggest deregulation wave ever seen in the EU, and a public that is largely in the dark.

Corporate lobbyists' influence on decision-making impact us in multiple ways, affecting everything from the cost of living, to worsening climate disasters, from rollback of chemicals regulations and our digital rights, to loosening AI guardrails.

The biggest industry lobbyists in the EU are spending €381.75 million annually on lobbying the EU institutions, according to their own declared budgets. The 2026 EU lobby league has calculated this total by collating the 173 companies and industry associations which declare annual spending of €1 million or more on lobbying in the EU lobby transparency register, according to LobbyFacts. (Please note the true sum of all corporate spending on EU lobbying, including those with spends below €1 million would, of course, be much higher.) Among them are many of the world's most powerful corporations.

This 2026 lobby spend is €27.55 million more (+7.78%) than the very same companies and associations declared one year ago and €125.28 million more (+48.85%) than they declared spending on EU lobbying in 2020. In 2026, 39 more lobby players (+29.1%) declare a €1 million+ budget than in 2020.

Our analysis confirms the rise and rise of Big Tech as the sector throwing most resources at the EU lobby machine. The biggest companies and associations from the tech sector collectively declare by far the highest annual lobby budgets: €73 million per year. Compare that to €66.75

million from the finance sector, €52 million from the energy sector, or €46.5 million from the chemicals and agri-business sector, and you get the idea of just how much money companies like **Meta**, **Amazon**, and **Apple** put into EU lobbying. More analysis per sector is available in section 2.

According to our analysis, while Big Tech actors that top the register have not increased in number between 2020 to 2026, their collective lobby budget has increased in absolute terms more than any other sector, by €26.74 million. The highest absolute declared lobby budget increases since 2020 are for Amazon (+€7.25 million to €9 million declared annual spend), Apple (+€6 million to €8 million declared annual spend), Meta (+€5.75 million to €10 million+ declared annual spend) and **Qualcomm** (+€3.25 million to €4.5 million declared annual spend).

Beyond the tech sector, our analysis shows that Hydrogen Europe posted the highest absolute budget increase at a whopping €2.25 million between 2025 and 2026. Other million-plus increases in the past year come from a variety of sectors: Amazon (+€2 million); Association for Financial Markets in Europe (+€1.5 million); Samsung (+€1.5 million); US Chamber of Commerce (+€1.25 million); Fédération bancaire française (+€1.25 million); Investment Company Institute (+€1.25 million); Novo Nordisk (+€1.1 million); Apple (+€1 million); Google (+€1 million); and Bristol-Myers Squibb (+€1 million).

There is no surprise that some of the biggest corporations lobbying in Brussels – and their allied trade associations – are posting above-inflation increases in their declared EU lobby spending. We are living through a corporate lobby bonanza and these steadily-rising budgets show that companies regard this as a worthwhile investment that is paying off.

Earlier this year *Table.media* **reported** that “**The volume of meetings between companies and cabinet members of EU Commissioners was highest in 2025 [since 2014, when records began].** 40% of all meetings were with company representatives. 29% of meetings were with representatives of business



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associations and 16% with NGOs”. The industry-friendly nature of this Commission is reflected in the fact that, as *Table.media* notes, “**NGOs appear to have significantly less access to the new Commission**. Their share of meetings with cabinet members has fallen from 22% in [von der Leyen’s first Commission] to 16% in [von der Leyen’s second Commission].”

The growing access that corporate lobby interests enjoy to the high levels of this Commission is both a cause, and a reflection, of the EU’s agenda. The second von der Leyen Commission has committed to industry-serving so-called “**competitiveness**”, and a **deregulation agenda** (masquerading as “simplification”) which is swiftly and systematically slashing hard-won rules that exist to protect social and environmental concerns. Making it easier to use carcinogens in cosmetics for longer, or removing the time-limits on pesticide approvals, are just some of the expected outcomes of this deregulation push. In recent years, corporate lobbyists have been heavily lobbying for these kinds of false solution to the multiple crises. Now they are are pushing at an open door.

In particular the Commission’s deregulation agenda has delivered 10 so-called omnibus proposals (these are single, sweeping legislative packages that amend or cut several existing EU laws and regulations at once). They cover many topics of central importance to the biggest corporate lobby sectors featured in this league including business sustainability rules (omnibus 1), investment (2), agriculture 3), chemicals (6), data (7), industrial emissions (8), and pesticides (10).

In addition the EU **proposal** for a so-called 28<sup>th</sup> regime (aptly called EU Inc), will make it easier for companies – including the very largest – to side-step national rules upholding workers’ rights, while the Commission’s ‘One Europe, One Market’ **roadmap** lists a huge number of future problematic deregulatory, competitiveness-related initiatives, such as further omnibus packages on energy and taxation, and a new banking deregulation package to be adopted before the end of 2027.

Further deregulation of **permitting procedures** (eg for permits to build polluting projects such as mines, data centres, chemical plants) are also in the pipeline. Meanwhile the Commission recently **promised** a new ‘Action Plan on Regulatory Deep Cleaning’, an avalanche of further deregulation in 12 different policy areas, including taxation, agriculture, transport, energy, climate, digital matters, housing, and permits, and other measures which

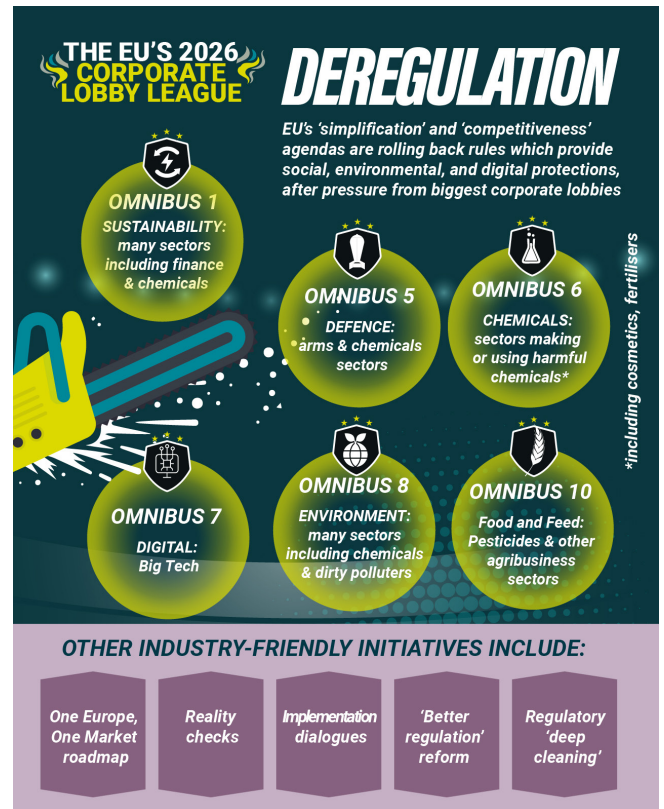
risk curtailing the democratic right of national governments to regulate in order to solve social and environmental problems.

Furthermore, as Corporate Europe Observatory has recently **documented**, the Commission has directly invited industry to steer this agenda, opening up new channels of ‘consultation’ (including ‘reality checks’ and ‘implementation dialogues’) which are cementing industry’s influence at the heart of Commission decision-making.

As LobbyControl pointed out in its **EU Lobby Report 2024** corporate lobbyists use numerous persuasion techniques including face-to-face meetings, exclusive events, commissioned studies, covert influencing through front groups, and micro-targeted advertising. They recruit former politicians with valuable contacts via the ‘revolving door’. Their vast resources and nuanced strategies raise concerns about the EU institutions’ ability to resist undue influence.

That’s why the EU institutions need to urgently rethink their lobby rules. It’s clear that some parts of EU decision-making are being steadily captured by corporate interests at the expense of the interests of citizens. This analysis reinforces the case for lobby firewalls to protect public decision-making from commercial interests. The EU institutions are already committed to protect their decision-making from tobacco lobby influence, and although this is very imperfectly implemented, it shows officials understand there is a clear and justifiable precedent for firewalls against lobbying which harms the public interest. The rationale to extend such a lobby firewall approach to protect action on the climate and environmental pollution crises, and to preserve our digital rights in the face of the threat from Big Tech, is compelling.

As a first step the Commission should stop providing privileged access to industry lobbies and ensure that other voices, for example from the general public, civil society, and independent scientists and researchers, are heard loud and clear. As Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl have



**Parts of EU decision-making are being steadily captured by corporate interests at the expense of the interests of citizens**



pointed out for years, the current transparency and accountability tools at the EU level, as well as their practical enforcement, are inadequate.

The flagship instrument, the EU Lobby Transparency Register, run by the Commission, Parliament, and the Council, remains riddled with inaccurate data, with staffing levels to verify lobby data too low. As detailed below in section 3, the ongoing concern about possible under-reporting lobby expenditures by some of the Brussels bubble's bigger corporate lobby groups again reflects the lack of scrutiny by policy-makers. Meanwhile within a complete dataset of 189 declared corporate spenders of €1 million or more, we have identified at least 16 where that level of lobby spending seems implausibly high.

A legally-binding lobby register is the only way to deliver meaningful sanctions for posting inaccurate data and to therefore drive up the overall quality of the lobby data on the EU register. This legally-binding register is long overdue.

## DEMANDS

**Parts of EU decision-making are being captured by corporate interests**

**It is urgent to:**

**Implement lobby firewalls** to protect action on climate & environmental crises from polluters + to preserve digital rights from Big Tech

**Stop providing privileged access to industry lobbies** + ensure that civil society & communities are heard loud & clear

**Introduce a legally-binding lobby register** with real sanctions for inaccurate reporting

**THE EU'S 2026  
CORPORATE  
LOBBY LEAGUE**



The full dataset is available here and all data was correct as of 11 May 2026.

## 2. WHAT DO THE MAJOR EU LOBBY LEAGUE PLAYERS WANT?

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### I. AS BIG TECH'S LOBBY BUDGETS SOAR, DIGITAL RIGHTS ARE UNDER PRESSURE

Big Tech has set its eyes on the EU's digital rulebook. While the EU passed key pieces of legislation to rein in Big Tech during the last parliamentary mandate, that legacy is now under threat. The sector has very deep pockets (the biggest 23 companies collectively declare €73 million, an increase of 57.8% since 2020) to expand its influence in Brussels further. Crucially, tech executives have weaponised the Trump administration to target the EU's digital rulebook.

Ever since Commission advisor Mario Draghi – in his September 2024 report on the EU's competitiveness – singled out data protection and the Artificial Intelligence Act as targets for deregulation, digital legislation has been high on von der Leyen's so-called 'simplification' agenda. This looks set to lead to a massive watering-down of the rules designed to keep the powerful tech monopolies in check.

Big Tech lobbyists quickly caught on to the new political wind in Brussels. Less than two weeks after the Draghi report, Meta (which posts the largest EU lobby spend of any company at €10 million+, an increase of 135.29% since 2020) coordinated a deceptive campaign called '**EU needs AI**'. While its open letter claimed to represent European businesses, in reality at least one-third of the supporters were either employed or financed by Meta, or had a close partnership with the company.

When the Trump administration took office in January 2025, tech companies took advantage to intensify their lobbying, using the US Government to put pressure on EU digital rules. At the Munich Security



Conference in February 2025, senior Meta lobbyist Joel Kaplan **said** that the company would enlist Trump's help whenever it feels 'discriminated against' by EU regulations. Just a week later Mark Zuckerberg, Meta's Chief Executive Officer, **lobbied US senators** to push back against laws like the EU's Digital Services Act, which seeks to hold social media companies to task for things like misinformation and harmful speech. At the top of the tech companies' agenda however, was AI, with data privacy via the GDPR (General Data Protection Regulation) close behind. The Center for Data Innovation – a Big Tech-funded think tank – used a blog-post to **rail** against the "EU's disproportionate obsession with American tech companies" for fining Big Tech firms under the GDPR and called on the Trump administration to "fight back against EU laws".

And it seems the lobbying pressure is paying off. At the end of November 2025 the European Commission published the **Digital Omnibus**, a package that threatens to severely weaken the AI Act and data protection rules under the GDPR and the ePrivacy directive in what civil society organisations have **called** "the biggest rollback of digital fundamental rights in EU history". The Commission relied heavily on input from the tech industry when drafting the omnibus. Of the 138 attendees to 5 Commission 'reality check' workshops, there were 114 companies and only 9 civil society organisations.

The Commission's capitulation to lobbying pressure from Big Tech will have far-reaching consequences on digital rights. An **analysis** by Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl reveals how the Digital Omnibus closely mirrors key lobby demands from Big Tech and affiliated business associations such as the Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA) and Dot Europe.

However, tech companies are aiming for even more. In a **lobby paper** for the upcoming Irish Presidency, for example, Meta states that the Digital Omnibus "falls significantly short", calling for a "complete overhaul of Europe's digital rulebook" and a "pause on the implementation of the pipeline of digital laws".

The ripple effects of the Commission's deregulation agenda go further still. Upcoming legislation such as the **Digital Fairness Act**, designed to tackle addictive design in tech platforms and the use of dark patterns (deceptive designs to manipulate users), is already **under severe lobby pressure** to be scrapped entirely, even as the World Health Organisation **warns** of a sharp rise in online addiction.

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*the Digital Omnibus threatens to severely weaken the AI Act and data protection rules and is "the biggest rollback of digital fundamental rights in EU history"*

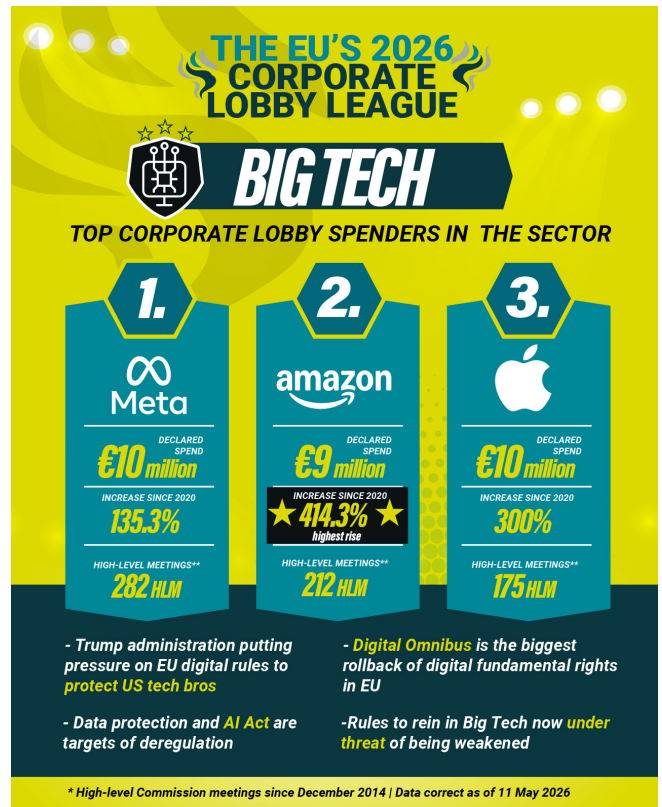
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Additionally, environmental permitting rules for data centres are expected to be **severely weakened**, with Microsoft (declared EU lobby spend of €7 million, an increase of 40% since 2020) **calling** the ‘streamlining’ of permitting procedures a “strategic priority” for the company in an email to the Commission (see section below on Big Energy). This is despite the intense negative impacts of data centres on communities, such as driving up electricity prices and depleting water resources.

And while the **Digital Services Act (DSA)** and the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)** appear to be officially untouched for the moment from the EU deregulation agenda, their enforcement is being substantially delayed and weakened. In March 2026 von der Leyen **intervened** to postpone a €1 billion fine for Google’s non-compliance with the DMA, reportedly to avert retaliatory measures from the US. The Commission has also **set up a ‘dialogue’** with the Trump administration that would give the US Government a say in how EU tech rules are being implemented in exchange for lower tariffs on European goods.

Worryingly, the Digital Services Act is also being targeted **by a well-funded network of far-right think tanks** increasingly active in Brussels, and which have close ties to far-right parties in the EU Parliament. These organisations – including the Heritage Foundation (of Project 2025 fame), Alliance Defending Freedom, and MCC Brussels – act as an echo chamber for the Trump administration’s talking points about ‘online censorship’, and push an aggressive lobbying narrative about how the Digital Services Act supposedly undermines ‘free speech’.

With the EU Commission nominally aiming for ‘tech sovereignty’, it is clear that weak digital rules strengthen the power of Google, Microsoft, Meta etc, and jeopardise the goal of becoming more independent from Big Tech and the US.





“Policy should not be driven by a dogmatic faith that deregulation will always and inevitably liberate innovation,” Johnny Ryan from the Irish Council for Civil Liberties and Georg Riekeles from the European Policy Centre wrote in [an op-ed](#) in *The Guardian* in November 2025, as a response to the Digital Omnibus proposal. However, it is precisely this misguided idea, that deregulation will unleash AI innovation, that has become the focus of the EU’s agenda, opening the door widely to aggressive Big Tech lobbying.

## II. FINANCE INDUSTRY LOBBIES TO DITCH CONCERNS FOR PEOPLE AND PLANET

The von der Leyen 2 Commission is already delivering deregulation for financial sector lobbyists. In 2025, attempts to make the sector more sustainable – for example by taking into account factors like climate change, and by introducing general obligations for the financial sector to exert due diligence to avoid supporting environmental destruction – were rolled back. Finance lobbyists managed to remove a recently-agreed obligation by the Commission to consider rules to secure [a sustainable path for finance](#) in the Corporate Sustainability and Due Diligence Directive, via [omnibus 1 on sustainability](#).

Generally the financial sector has an ambitious agenda in the EU’s current deregulation wave. In May 2025 the Commission suggested ditching no less than **115 proposals** to regulate finance more effectively, a move frequently praised by [lobbyists from the sector](#). A broad package of measures has been announced, that will scale down on measures taken, in the aftermath of the financial crisis in 2008 to prevent a repetition, Finance Watch writes. The Commission is scheduled to publish a **banking deregulation package** in early 2027 to include things such as lower capital requirements for EU banks and easing up reporting and compliance, both reversals of the kinds of measures that were tightened up in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. Lobby demands likely to be reflected in the package include making EU banks more ‘competitive’, ‘simplifying’ EU banking rules, and boosting the single market in banking. This attempt to go back on earlier decisions to tighten regulation to prevent a repetition of the financial crisis has already begun. On 4 June this year, the Commission

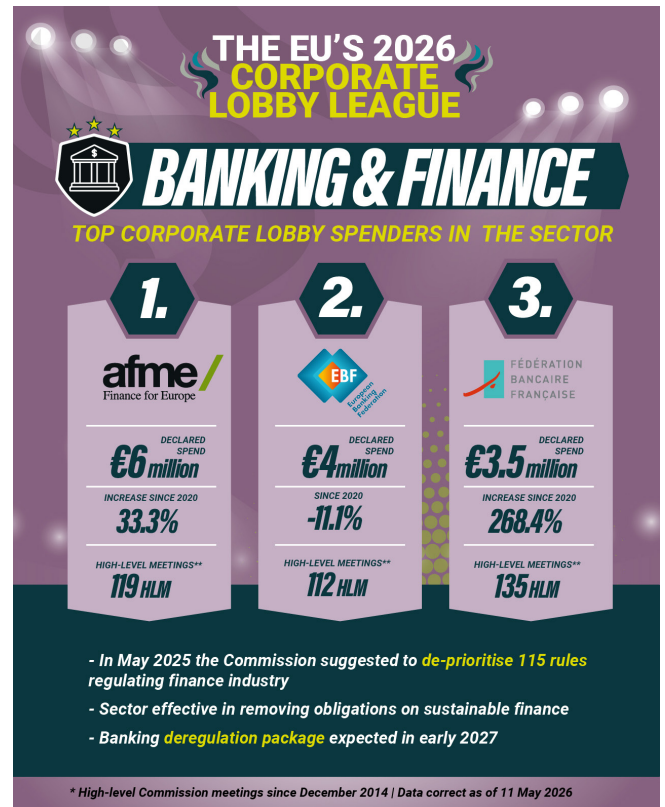
decided to postpone for three years some important measures to keep banks' resilient.

The most important finance lobby organisation is the Association for Financial Markets in Europe (AFME), and its massive increase in declared spending by €1.5 million to €6 million since last year is a real sign that the sector is dealing with big stakes. And this figure doesn't even tell the whole story. That's because the biggest financial institutions tend to be involved in multiple lobby groups that work on different aspects of financial markets. For instance the **International Capital Markets Association (ICMA)** with a focus on shadow-banking (ie the vast network of financial intermediaries that are not banks), has scores of members in common with AFME. Today ICMA declares spending seven times as much on lobbying the EU (€2.5 million in 2026) than in the year 2020 (€350,000).

A third lobby group that requires a special mention is the **Institute of International Finance (IIF)**, which despite its academic-sounding name is really the lobby group for the biggest banks on the planet. Since last year, the IIF doubled its EU lobby spend (from €500,000 to €1 million).

Overall there are now many more players from the finance sector than in 2020 (37 now, 27 in 2020) spending €1 million or more on EU lobbying – at least in part a reflection of how much it is gunning for in the push for deregulation. This sector also has more registrants in this lobby league than any other.

Meanwhile the potential impacts of **financial deregulation** on the public – and the planet – are high stakes. For example European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde herself warned that that slashing financial and environmental reporting requirements via this deregulation wave would make it much harder for central banks and market participants to adequately measure and price climate-related risks. And overall, the finance sector's push for deregulation makes us vulnerable to future crises and costly



*The finance sector's push for deregulation makes us vulnerable to future crises and costly bailouts,*



bailouts, as Europe discovered during the 2008 economic crash – with losses borne by the public and far-reaching consequences that still affect us today.

### III. BIG ENERGY USES IRAN WAR AND DEREGULATION WAVE TO CASH IN

Last year's Clean Industrial Deal – more accurately described as a 'Dirty Industry Deal' – was shaped by lobbyists from Europe's biggest polluters. Their lobbying locked us further into fossil fuel use for the future, with a deal that promised **political and financial support** for false solutions that give the oil, gas, and energy-intensive industries a free pass to continue business as usual, rather than driving a rapid and equitable fossil fuel phase-out.

Since then, the EU has **rushed to make it easier** (and more profitable) to build infrastructure for repeatedly-failed and costly green-washing technologies such as carbon capture and storage (CCS) and fossil-based hydrogen (deceptively called 'low carbon'). These have long been **core demands** of Big Oil lobbyists like Shell, which tops the list of highest-declaring lobby spenders in the energy sector at €4.5 million. Clearly, spending big pays off: Shell is **involved in** 12 planned CCS and "low-carbon" hydrogen projects that have received about €5 billion in public subsidies from the EU, member states, and Norway.

Meanwhile, oil firms profit from the war in Iran. As *The Guardian* recently reported, Shell's profits for the first three months of 2026 more than doubled to US\$6.9 billion. People and the planet suffer the consequences of war and climate breakdown, while Big Energy protects its profits by lobbying against measures such as windfall taxes and **energy price caps**, and exploit the crisis to accelerate deregulation.

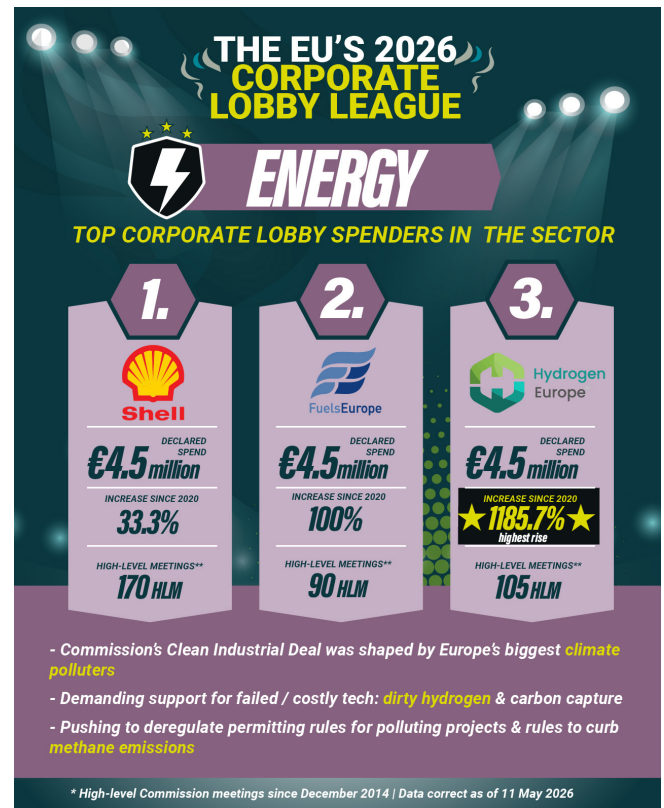
Take the **EU Methane Regulation**, designed to curb methane emissions from the production and transport of fossil gas and LNG production. FuelsEurope (sharing the top energy lobby spend with Shell and Hydrogen Europe, at €4.5 million), **Equinor** (which spends €2.5 million), IOGP (the International Association of Oil & Gas Producers, a newcomer to the €1million+ spenders league), and **other** fossil fuel lobbyists have been

**pushing** for the EU to weaken or dismantle the law. They're vocally supported by Trump, and US oil giants like **ExxonMobil** (which declares €4 million on EU lobbying) which **has labelled** the Methane Regulation an "anti-competitiveness" policy. The Commission recently announced that it will not fine companies that breach the regulation, but industry groups are now demanding a complete "stop the clock" suspension. With an upcoming **Energy Omnibus** and several key energy laws included in the Deep Regulatory Cleaning plan, the pressure for further rollbacks is only intensifying.

Hydrogen Europe – the EU's most influential hydrogen lobby group, with members including Shell, BP, Eni, Equinor, Repsol, and TotalEnergies – massively increased its lobbying expenditure by €2.25 million to €4.5 million in the last year. It previously used the Covid crisis and Ukraine war to promote hydrogen as a climate solution, helping secure unrealistic EU targets for green hydrogen produced from renewable electricity. Now, it is using the latest crisis to strip away those 'green' requirements in a kind of dirty energy bait and switch – which was arguably the plan all along – by urging governments to accelerate hydrogen produced from fossil gas with CCS (falsely labelled 'clean').

**AccelerateEU** – the EU's response to the Iran war – presents hydrogen as a "clean, homegrown" energy source capable of replacing oil and gas. Yet over 99% of global hydrogen production still comes from fossil fuels, and Hydrogen Europe is working hard to keep it that way. The Commission has already announced a review of **low-carbon hydrogen rules**, followed by a broader **review of the EU hydrogen strategy**.

Big Energy is also pushing to deregulate EU permitting rules for their polluting projects, by slashing the hard-won social and environmental protections that underpin them. Thanks to **corporate-captured advisory structures** and skewed consultations, fossil fuel lobbies like IOGP have secured the Commission working on a law to ease permitting for



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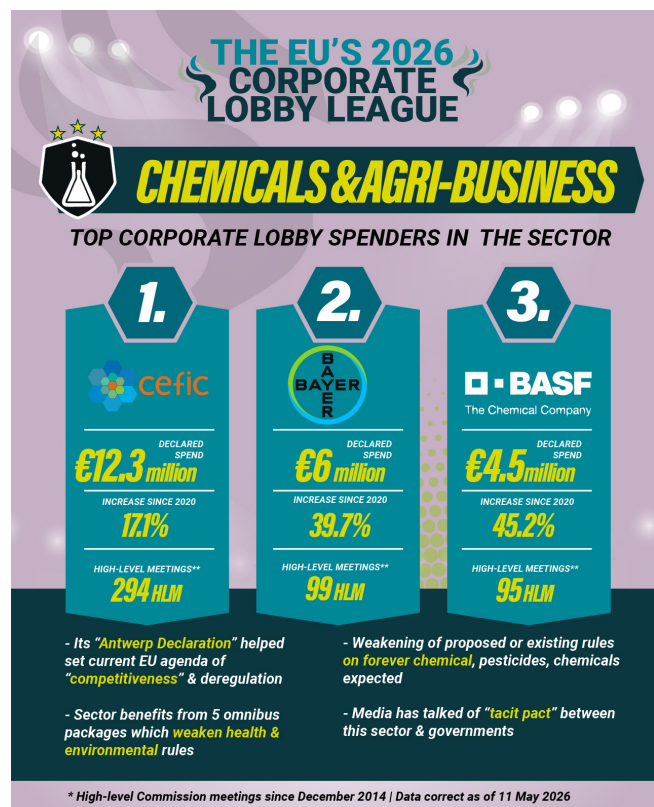
**dangerous CO2 pipelines**, as part of the build out for CCS.

**Permitting deregulation** has already been included in the Environmental Omnibus and Grids Package, as well as the Industrial Accelerator Act, following an industry-only “reality check” involving Shell and Eni. Still not satisfied, IOGP has now teamed up with the mining industry to call for a “permitting Omnibus”. In other words, a deregulation package to align permitting rules “with Europe’s competitiveness goals” (read: subsumes all priorities to business interests).

In sum, the very companies that have spent decades delaying climate action and keeping Europe hooked on oil and gas are now increasing their lobbying expenditures – €20 million more for these top actors in 2026 than in 2020 – to ensure the EU maintains a carbon welfare system that enriches polluters while accelerating the destruction of the planet – and our way of life along with it.

## IV. BIG TOXICS DEMAND LOOSER RULES ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The chemicals and agri-business lobbies have been big winners of the Commission’s deregulation agenda thus far. They look set to benefit from at least **five deregulatory omnibus packages** which will weaken the health and environmental rules concerning harmful substances (the packages are sustainability (omnibus 1), defence (4), chemicals (6), food and feed (8), and the environment (10)). Notably the **chemicals omnibus** – while still being finalised by the EU institutions – is likely to weaken the rules on the labelling of harmful substances in products and allow carcinogens in cosmetics for longer before they need to be phased out. Meanwhile the **food and feed omnibus** proposes scrapping the regular renewal process for most



pesticide authorisations, and to make it more difficult for new evidence of harm from pesticide products to be acted-upon by EU member states.

This industry is closely-aligned with the political-right across the EU institutions (whether in the college of Commissioners, MEPs, or member states) and between them they have been able to wage an offensive against progressive proposals and laws to regulate their toxic products. This includes the **universal PFAS restriction** (where indications are that the Commission will propose a much weaker regulation on these toxic forever chemicals than originally envisioned); an ambitious revision of the flagship **REACH chemicals rules** (which has now been abandoned); the **current pesticide legislation** that the EU Green Deal promised to strengthen with binding reduction targets but is now at risk of being much weakened; or the proposed ban on the **export of already-banned pesticides and chemicals** (which also looks at risk). Meanwhile the deregulation of **new genetically modified crops** is likely to receive the approval of all three EU institutions in the coming months.

CEFIC, the **European Chemicals Industry Council** and the chemicals industry's main mouthpiece, has long topped LobbyFacts as the highest-declaring lobby spender at the EU level at €12.29 million (this figure is specified in the detail of its declaration, out of its total organisational budget of €47.3 million), and its fingerprints are on many of these lobby topics. Indeed, with its **Antwerp Declaration** it helped set the Commission's current industry-friendly agenda of so-called '**competitiveness**' and **deregulation**.

**Correctiv** recently reported an industry-insider talking about the "**tacit pact**" between chemical companies and the German and European governments. This pact apparently prioritises the interests of German industry through "fewer regulations, fewer controls, no new limits", with health concerns about their substances and products "hardly ever discussed" at high-level meetings. This might explain why the second, third, and fourth highest lobby spenders in this sector are, respectively, **Bayer**, **BASF**, and **Verband der Chemischen Industrie** – all based in Germany. Notably Bayer (+€1.71 million or 39.7% since 2020) and BASF (+€1.4 million or 45.16% since 2020) have significantly increased their EU lobby spend since 2020.

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## V. CROSS-SECTORAL BUSINESS GROUPS' DEREGULATORY DREAMS COMING TRUE

Cross-sectoral lobby groups are those in which big business bands together across sectors, and tend to be heavy hitters in terms of political impact and access to the highest-ranking decision makers.

It is of note, then, that in 2026 the 15 largest cross-sector industry lobby groups have increased their spending by 38.9% since 2020, to €32.5 million in the last year. This includes the lobby giant BusinessEurope (declaring at least €6 million) which has had more high-level meetings (around 600) with the Commission since 2014 than any other single lobby group, as well as impeccable access to von der Leyen herself.

Among other high-spending cross-sectoral business groups are two German players, Deutsche Industrie- und Handelskammer (the Chamber of Commerce) and the Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie (the Federation of Industry), declaring at least €4 million and €3.5 million respectively. Also included in this top 15 are industry lobby groups from France, the Netherlands, Denmark, Austria, Ireland, and Estonia.

Besides the many trade associations for specific industry sectors demanding deregulation (see above for example chemicals, energy, finance etc), many of these general business lobby associations have also been pushing the cause. Indeed, they are now seeing long-held deregulatory dreams being fulfilled. For instance many of their priorities for social and environmental rollbacks are currently being implemented via **omnibus packages and other EU deregulation initiatives**. This includes BusinessEurope which actually published what it calls an 'Omnibook' this year, which lists almost 140 deregulation demands for omnibuses to fulfil! They are also lobbying for the **28<sup>th</sup> regime** (which would help corporations bypass member state rules such as labour laws) and to remove social and environmental protections in the EU's single market.

Two cross-sectoral groups representing US multinationals – the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU and the Chamber of Commerce of the

US – are also on the list, spending €1.5 million and €3 million respectively. Under Trump, the US trade agenda with the EU has been dominated by **tariff rows** and cross-Atlantic pressure to deregulate to make it easier for US corporations to do business in Europe. That battle has been particularly aggressive and vocal in the area of Big Tech but also affects other issues of public concern such as weakening food and chemical safety rules.



*Many of these general business lobby associations have also been pushing the cause. Indeed, they are now seeing long-held deregulatory dreams being fulfilled.*

- BusinessEurope had more **high-level meetings** with Commission since 2014 than any other lobby
- Cross-sector lobby pushed heavily for **deregulation** which is now being implemented via omnibus packages & other initiatives
- US lobby pressurises to deregulate to **benefit American corporations** in Europe



### 3. CAN WE TRUST COMMERCIAL INTERESTS TO DECLARE THEIR FULL LOBBY BUDGETS?

This is a portrait of corporations and their lobbyists getting more powerful in Brussels. But it is a partial portrait. That's because the EU Lobby Transparency Register is not legally-binding and the absence of effective sanctions means the quality of the data is only as good as that which the registrants voluntarily provide.

Concerningly, there appears to be a significant problem of corporations under-reporting their lobby budgets. This means any registrant declaring under €1 million, but whose actual lobby spend is higher, would have been missed from our list of the biggest spenders. That is why we believe the total lobbying budget figure of €381.75 million for these high spenders is likely to be an under-estimate.

Some examples of possible corporate under-reporting follow, which we believe merit investigation by the EU lobby register secretariat (more examples are available on data sheet C):

- **Danone** – a food company with a presence on many European breakfast tables – apparently manages to run a Brussels office, at least 2.5 full-time equivalent lobbyists, and affiliations with numerous trade associations, all on a budget of €50,000-€99,999. Confusingly it also states that it spent €50,000-€99,999 on the services of lobby consultancy **Acumen Public Affairs** during 2025, although Danone does not appear on Acumen's registration for the same period. Danone's previously declared lobby budget was €400,000-€499,999 annually, but in February 2026 its registration suddenly dropped to one eighth of that.
- **KLM airlines** runs a Brussels office, 3 full-time equivalent lobbyists, and various trade association affiliations including to **BusinessEurope**, all on a declared lobby budget of only €100,000-€199,999 which seems too low.
- **Leonardo**, the major Italian arms manufacturer, declares an annual

lobby budget of €300,000-€399,999 but claims it employs 7 full-time equivalent lobbyists, and runs a lobby office in Brussels. It has held over 100 high-level Commission meetings since 2014, including 12 in the first 5 months of 2026, on topics including “missile production in Europe”. It is likely to be very active currently, given it declares that it works on “EU activities related to Aerospace, Security and Defence”, a busy topic given the momentum of **ReArm Europe which is recklessly pushing member states to spend an extra €800 billion on EU defence.**

The lobby registration of the **Aerospace, Security and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD)** also raises doubts. It has a lobby office in Brussels, and declares 2.25 full time equivalent lobbyists, yet it holds 14 European Parliament access passes. It states that “18 members of the ASD Secretariat have it in their remit to engage in dialogue with the EU institutions on behalf of the Association. They spend between 10 and 50% of their working time in advocacy activities.” Even with this explanation, is its registration of an annual lobby budget of €300,000-€399,999 plausible? Interestingly, back in 2011-12, it declared a lobby budget of over €1.5 million, but since then its declaration has hovered around the €300,000 mark. It is currently very active having held 7 high-level Commission lobby meetings since the start of 2026.

The **European Biogas Association** also has a confusing entry. On a lobby budget of €50,000-€99,999 in 2024 (its most recent budget) it says it has 12 full-time equivalent lobbyists and 10 European Parliament lobby passes. It breaks this down to: “CEO: 1 full time; Policy: 7 full time, 1 50%; Technical: 1 full time, 1 50%; Communication: 1 full time, 2 50%”. Incredibly, this corporate lobby group also declares spending €156,000 on 3 lobby intermediaries which it describes as “guidehouse 55k, common future for bip 75k, common futures eba 26k”. It is very disappointing that the register secretariat has not already picked up on this implausibly low and contradictory declared lobby budget, which has been in the register since at least November 2025.

None of the above entities appear in our analysis of registrants declaring more than €1 million annual EU lobby expenditure because they declare substantially less than that. But we have real doubts about their lobby declarations. These are just a handful of potential examples of what we consider to be a significant problem of corporate under-reporting of EU lobby spend. The rules for reporting lobby spend to the EU Lobby



Transparency Register are available [here](#).

There is a further suspicion that trade associations only declare a fraction of their real spending on influencing the EU institutions. For example, Croplife EU, the European pesticide lobby, declared a lobby spend of up to €1.5 million in 2025. It states that the “vast majority” of its overall budget is dedicated to, among other things, non-lobbying activities such as “advising members, “conducting scientific studies and analysis of all fields of interest to the crop protection industry”, or “activities such as the promotion of open debate”, yet some of these could still plausibly relate to influencing EU affairs, because the register uses a very wide definition of lobbying including indirect lobby activities like these. Croplife EU declares hiring no less than 14 lobby intermediaries in 2025.

There is also a substantial problem of over-reporting lobby budget data. Out of the original 189 entries declaring a €1 million+ lobby budget, we removed 16 entries where that level of lobby spending seemed implausibly high, giving us the final 173 entries analysed in this briefing. See data sheet D for more information.

Last year, following the launch of the [first EU lobby league table](#), we made a **complaint** to the lobby transparency register about suspected cases of both under- and over-reporting. The register secretariat investigated and **concluded** that there had been **substantial under-reporting of annual lobby spend by nine corporate lobbies** which then updated their registrations (including **Nestlé** which updated by €850,000 and **Yara** which updated by €600,000). In total, **changes worth €47,745,000 to financial declarations** in the register resulted from the complaint. These included €2,450,000 of additions to entries, €23,145,000 of reductions to entries, and €22,150,000 of entries which were removed.

Once again we will report our concerns about new examples of suspected under- and over-reporting to the EU Lobby Transparency Register secretariat so that they can be investigated.

Lobby transparency is a prerequisite for public interest decision-making. The current imperfect voluntary EU register needs to become legally-binding, with effective sanctions for those who post inaccurate data. We also need more comprehensive disclosure requirements so that the register data becomes an accurate reflection of lobbying in Brussels.

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***We consider there is a significant problem of corporate under-reporting of EU lobby spend.***

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# APPENDIX: HOW WE COLLATED THE FIGURES

When reading this briefing it is important to bear in mind the following points about **EU lobby transparency data**:

- The data used in this analysis comes from LobbyFacts, a joint online database project by Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl. Since 2012 LobbyFacts has been collecting daily data from the EU Lobby Transparency Register. The LobbyFacts' archive is unique and enables comparisons in declared lobbying across periods of time (whereas the official register does not log historical data in the same way). We first compiled the top lobby spenders in February 2025; the original EU lobby league table is available [here](#).
- It is important to note that the total declared EU lobby spend by corporate interests will be far larger than that indicated by this analysis, which only looks at the 173 registrants plausibly declaring €1 million or more. In 2024 LobbyControl reported that EU lobbyists collectively spent €1.3 billion on EU lobbying – money which is largely spent by companies and their associations. In total the EU lobby register includes over 8250 companies and trade associations out of 17,500+ lobby organisations in total. There are less than 4750 NGOs.
- Since September 2021 EU lobby registrants which consider themselves to be “non-commercial” can no longer provide a lobby budget. These non-commercial entities must instead provide a whole budget and a list of major funders. That means there are several different types of financial data declared within today's register: lobby budgets (from companies, trade associations) and whole budgets (from NGOs, think-tanks). There are some entities which may have wrongly declared themselves to be non-commercial and which therefore do not declare a lobby budget. Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl consider that all registrants should be required to provide the same financial information, including a lobby budget. A third category are intermediaries such as lobby consultancies and law firms, which this analysis doesn't look at. These organisations are required to report the sums they receive for lobbying activities per client.
- EU lobby register entries are required to be updated at least once per year and this should include a new set of financial data for the most recent year. However, there is no set date on which registrants must complete this update which means that the register data is changing all the time. It is possible that some lobby data may have been updated by the registrants since 11 May 2026 when this report was finalised. Furthermore, the EU register's declared lobby budgets are historical in that they reflect declared lobby spend from the most recent year cited, not necessarily lobby spending on today's date.
- The EU Lobby Transparency Register remains voluntary; it is not legally-binding on registrants, although there are incentives in place to encourage lobbyists to join, and data quality checks in place. Nonetheless Corporate Europe Observatory and LobbyControl have long argued that the absence of effective sanctions such as fines (only possible under a legally-binding register) significantly reduces the quality of the data that registrants provide. This analysis indicates that there continues to be a significant issue of both over- and under-reporting EU lobby spend. As a result we prefer to talk about “declared” rather than actual lobby spending.

To conduct this analysis we used the following **methodology**:

- We used LobbyFacts to produce a data sheet for all company and trade association registrants declaring an annual EU lobby spend of €1 million or more as of 11 May 2026 and the same
- registrants on the same date in 2025 and 2020. See data sheet B. As explained above, it is possible that some lobby data may have been updated by the registrants since 11 May 2026.
- We did not include lobby firms and law firms – even though they almost exclusively work for business clients – to avoid any risk of double-counting.
- We included 7 registrants from other categories which we felt should be included in our analysis as they appear to be trade associations, marked in green on data sheet B.
- We removed 16 entries from the original 189 dataset as we consider that they are over-reporting their lobby spend, as detailed in datasheet D. Unlike almost all other lobby players declaring €1 million lobby spend or more, these registrants do not seem to be well-known actors in the Brussels bubble. None had a Brussels office, nor any European Parliament access passes. Most had had few or no high-level lobby meeting with the Commission, and most declared minimal lobby staff numbers. Some reported a massive increase in spending in just a short period with no evidence of a corresponding growth in lobbying activity, indicating that an error could have been made when updating their entry.
- We then categorised the major lobbyists into industrial sectors, using previous analyses by Corporate Europe Observatory and / or LobbyControl, or through individual analysis of a registrant's areas of work. A number of the registrants analysed could have fitted into 2 or more industrial sectors, but we used common sense to allocate according to the core work. For example the European Chemical Industry Council (CEFIC) is very active on energy matters as fossil fuels are a feedstock for many chemicals and chemical plants tend to be intensive-energy users, but logically CEFIC fits best within the chemicals category.
- All figures declared to the EU lobby register are declared in bandwidths, such as €100,000-199,999 or €500,000-599,999. We have used the lower figure in each bandwidth, unless otherwise specified, indicating a further reason why all given totals are likely to under-estimate the true picture of corporate lobby spending.



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