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Transparency International EU report on big tech lobbying in Brussels reveals higher spending and inadequate rules

Lucinda Pearson · Thursday, February 25th, 2021

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Transparency International EU (TI EU), the Brussels office of the global anti-corruption network, has released brand new research on the lobbying efforts of big tech since 2014. The new report, *Deep pockets, open doors*, focuses on Amazon, Apple, Google, Facebook and Microsoft and their activities in Brussels, Paris, Dublin, and London.

“It is clear that tech giants devote significant resources to influencing European Union policy. For example, Google’s in-house Brussels lobbying budget has increased by 360 per cent since 2014 and we continue to see big tech companies ranking among the lobbyists with the most high-level meetings with the European Commission.” said Raphael Kergueno, Policy Officer at Transparency International EU and lead author of the report.

Aside from high numbers of meetings, big tech firms also often make extensive use of professional consultancies and external lobbyists. TI EU’s research found that 26 consultancies and law firms present on the EU Transparency Register receive between 3 million and nearly 8 million euros per year from the big five, which is not automatically included in their in-house total. The companies also spin their web through sector associations and think-tanks, with the five corporations studied declaring memberships of 66 organisations in this category.

However, patchy lobby transparency and ethics rules across the institutions make it impossible to paint a full picture of how any interest representatives really shape our legislation. Members of the European Parliament have declared 153 lobby meetings with the big five, but not all MEPs are required to publish meetings (only 48% of them have). The Council and permanent representations of Member States currently have no obligation to publish meetings. Commission meeting transparency rules only cover the most senior officials.

Toothless revolving door rules also jeopardise transparent policy making, with three of Facebook’s five registered lobbyists working in the EU institutions until just before they joined the company.

“This research makes it blatantly clear that the current rules and bodies that supposedly ensure the integrity of our institutions and legislative processes are weak and ineffective. The EU desperately needs a truly independent ethics body common to all its institutions. This body must be capable of ensuring respect for the Union principles of transparency and accountability, meaning it should be able to initiate its own investigations and issue penalties when rules are breached.” concluded Vitor Teixeira, EU Political Integrity Coordinator at Transparency International EU.

The report also notes that lobbying of the Commission on tech issues is skewed heavily towards the corporate sector.

[Download the full report here.](#)

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