

# ACTIVITY REPORT 2020



**Corporate  
Europe  
Observatory**

# WHO WE ARE

Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) is a research and campaign group working to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making.



## OUR MISSION

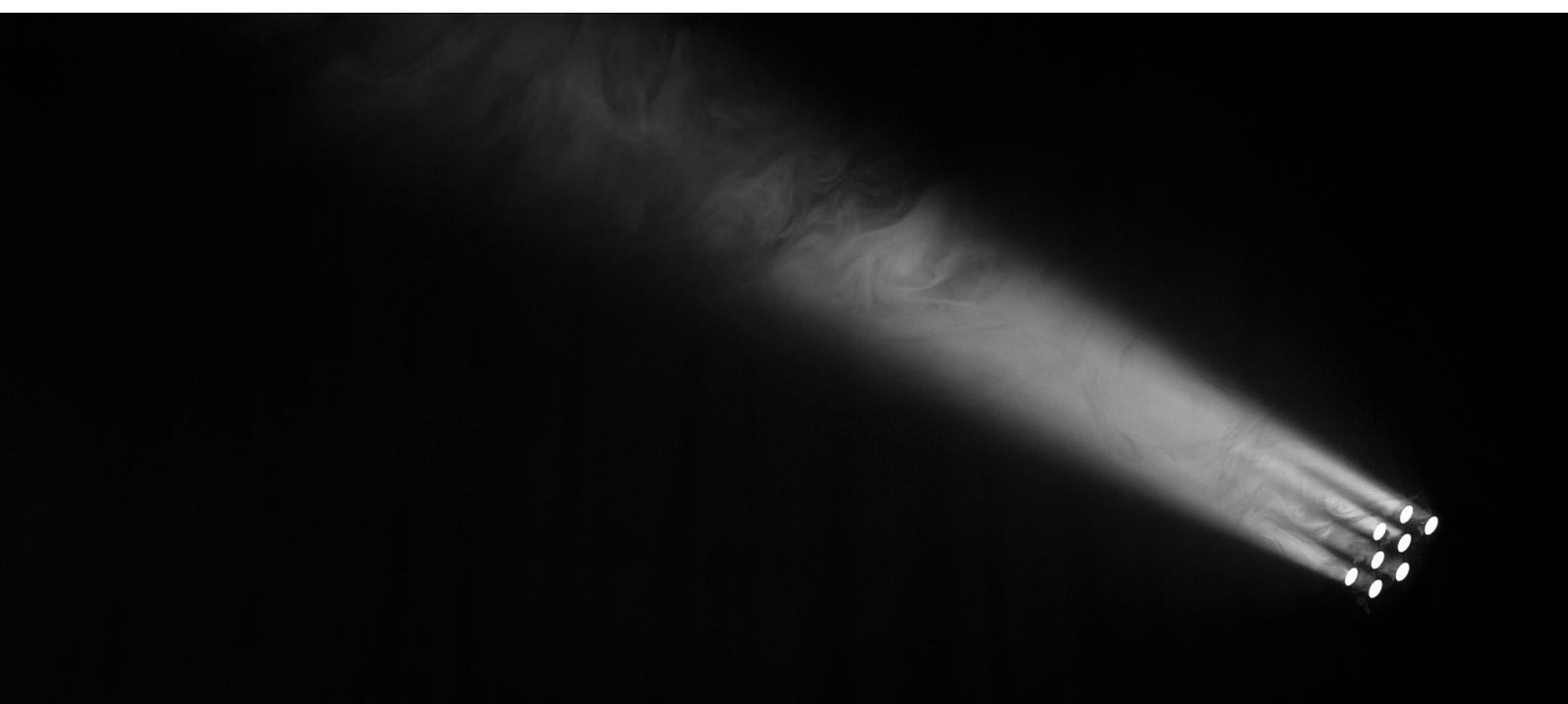
The corporate capture of EU decision-making leads to policies that exacerbate social injustice, economic inequality, climate change, and environmental destruction.

Our mission is to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making.

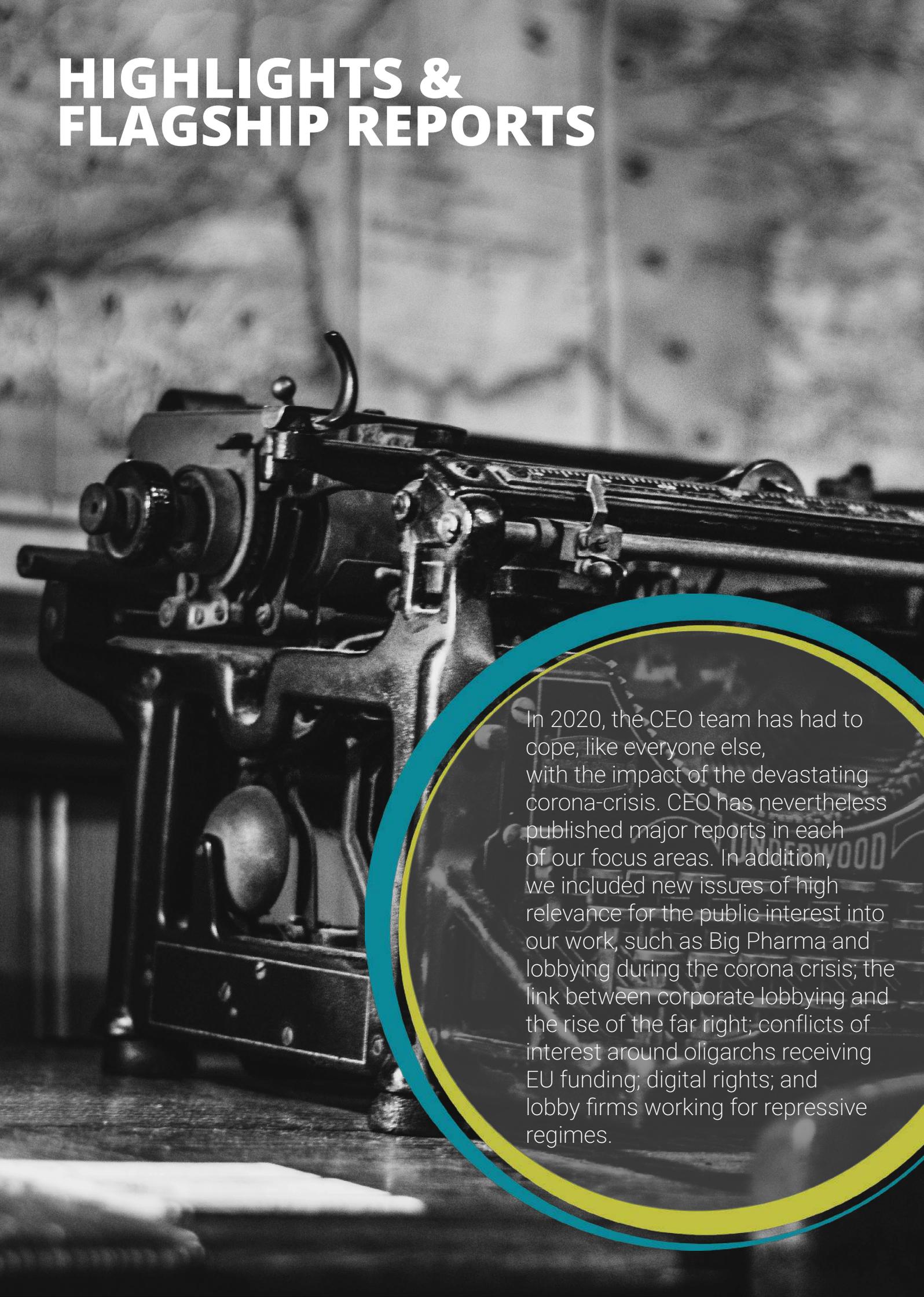
# WHAT WE DO

Corporate lobbies like to act in secrecy, so we expose what they do, increase public awareness, and build momentum to curb corporate influence over EU policy-making by:

- Revealing the tactics, financial firepower, privileged access and connections of corporate lobby actors – and their negative impact on public-interest policy-making.
- Exposing revolving door scandals, which see (former) EU politicians joining the private sector as lobbyists – and vice versa.
- Promoting lobbying transparency at the EU level and empowering citizens to partake in EU politics through petitions, public consultations, citizens' initiatives.
- Campaigning with allied NGOs and civil society coalitions against (proposed/ draft) EU policies skewed in favour of corporate interests.
- Highlighting the dominance of corporate interests in European Commission advisory groups, which set the direction for many EU policies.
- Campaigning for stricter EU lobby regulation.



# HIGHLIGHTS & FLAGSHIP REPORTS

A vintage typewriter is the central focus of the image, set against a dark, textured background. The typewriter is shown from a side-on perspective, highlighting its intricate mechanical parts like the carriage, typebars, and paper support. A large, semi-transparent circular graphic with a teal and yellow border is overlaid on the right side of the typewriter, containing a block of white text. The overall aesthetic is industrial and historical.

In 2020, the CEO team has had to cope, like everyone else, with the impact of the devastating corona-crisis. CEO has nevertheless published major reports in each of our focus areas. In addition, we included new issues of high relevance for the public interest into our work, such as Big Pharma and lobbying during the corona crisis; the link between corporate lobbying and the rise of the far right; conflicts of interest around oligarchs receiving EU funding; digital rights; and lobby firms working for repressive regimes.

# AGRICULTURE & FOOD SAFETY

CEO exposes the biotech, food, chemicals, agrofuels, and pesticide producers and their lobby groups which target decision makers to weaken regulation of their activities. We campaign to make the EU body evaluating the safety of all food products in the EU (EFSA) independent from the food industry, with a special focus on pesticides and GMOs.

## FEBRUARY 2020

Toxic residues through the back door: Pesticide corporations and trade partners pressured EU to allow banned substances in imported crops

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## MAY 2020

Research & Destroy: The factories of the industrial bioeconomy threaten the climate and biodiversity

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## OCTOBER 2020

CAP vs Farm to Fork: Will we pay billions to destroy, or to support biodiversity, climate, and farmers?

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



# ENERGY & CLIMATE CHANGE

The European Green Deal (EGD) is a major new plan for the EU that seeks to make its economy 'climate-neutral'. A seemingly positive step, but is the deal really "climate proof"? The fossil fuel industry's fingerprints can be seen all over it. Carbon trading will continue, emissions reductions targets are too modest and too slow, fossil gas is kept as a transitional fuel, and public money will finance 'false solutions'. CEO revealed the lobbying impact.

## MAY 2020

The future according to Shell: Climate rhetoric and fossil fuel expansion

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

## JULY 2020

A Grey Deal?  
Fossil fuel fingerprints on the European Green Deal

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

## DECEMBER 2020

The Hydrogen Hype:  
Gas industry fairy tale or  
climate horror story?

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

# TRADE & INVESTMENT

In recent years CEO has uncovered and challenged the corporate bias of and secrecy around neoliberal EU trade deals like CETA and the investor-state dispute settlement system (ISDS), both of which threaten social and environmental justice and enshrine corporate power. In 2020 CEO focused on the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT), which gives foreign investors sweeping powers to sue states over government actions that have supposedly 'damaged' their investments.

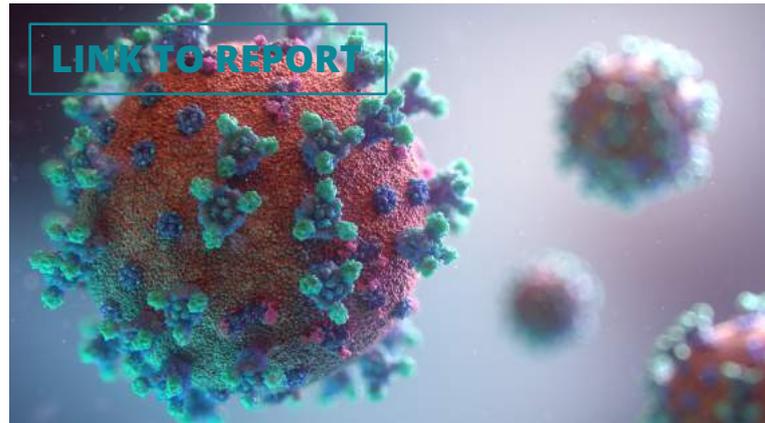
## APRIL 2020

Silent Expansion: The Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) is becoming increasingly controversial

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

## MAY 2020

Cashing in on the pandemic: how lawyers are preparing to sue states over COVID-19 response measures

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

## DECEMBER 2020

Busting myths around the Energy Charter Treaty

[LINK TO REPORT](#)

# ECONOMY & FINANCE

We expose the great leverage of banking and other financial industry lobbies, the failure of the EU to better regulate the sector since the financial crisis, and the extent to which big banks and the financial industry continue to set the European agenda on for example sustainable finance.

## JANUARY 2020

European Banking Authority disregards conflicts of interest

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## JULY 2020

Time to block BlackRock: Why did the European Commission hire a major fossil fuel investor as key advisor on 'sustainable finance'?

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## NOVEMBER 2020

The BlackRock Model: How the EU is choosing the wrong path on banks and climate change

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



# BIG TECH

CEO invested in exposing increasing 'digital lobbying'. Big Tech firms are spending more and more lobbying in Europe – a clear sign of the industry's growing power. Its increased lobby spending also reflects the importance of key upcoming policy battles. Yet, excessive influence and lack of transparency remains.

## SEPTEMBER 2020

Big Tech Lobbying: Google, Amazon & friends and their hidden influence

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## OCTOBER 2020

From Facebook friends to lobby consultants: Revolving door scandals show the weakness of EU staff rules on officials becoming private lobbyists

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## DECEMBER 2020

Big Tech brings out the big guns in fight for future of EU tech regulation

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



# EU LOBBYING REGULATION

CEO continued to highlight the many gaps in and shortcomings of EU lobby transparency tools and underline how they must be addressed in order to curb corporate influence over policy-making and improve public scrutiny of EU decisions and the accountability of Members of the European Parliament, politicians, and desk staff at the EU institutions and affiliated EU bodies.

## JANUARY 2020

Banking regulator scores another own goal: The European Banking Authority chose to nominate a director who used to be a lobbyist for the finance lobby group AFME

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## JUNE 2020

Tainted Love: Corporate lobbying and the upcoming German Presidency

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## DECEMBER 2020

NGOs demand Portuguese EU Presidency puts public interest centre stage

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



# HEALTH SECTOR

From tobacco companies lobbying EU officials in the light of the upcoming revision of the Tobacco Products Directive, to chemical companies trying to influence a roadmap for how the EU is to regulate toxic chemicals, CEO exposed the fact that it is high time the EU meets its obligations to ensure that lobbying by the tobacco and chemical industry faces tighter scrutiny and pro-active transparency.

**JULY 2020**

Chemical industry cheerleader: how DG Grow puts industry above public interest regulation



**SEPTEMBER 2020**

Smoke and mirrors: Weak EU transparency rules allow tobacco industry lobbyists to dodge scrutiny



**SEPTEMBER 2020**

Power and profit during a pandemic: Why the pharmaceutical industry needs more scrutiny not less



# SPECIAL FOCUS BIG PHARMA

In 2020 CEO started new research into how the EU is dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic and why there seems to be a deep love affair with Big Pharma. CEO exposed how public-private partnerships of the European Commission are largely corporate driven. This resulted in several breaking publications in 2020. These showed the EU has a very eurocentric way of dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, and it persists in complete secrecy on how it negotiates with powerful pharmaceutical companies.



## MAY 2020

In the Name of Innovation: Industry controls billions in EU research funding, de-prioritises the public interest

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## JUNE 2020

Unkept promises on flucytosine: EU research funds for helping people living with HIV in Africa appear to have only helped Sanofi's profits

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



## SEPTEMBER 2020

Power and profit during a pandemic: Why the pharmaceutical industry needs more scrutiny not less

[LINK TO REPORT](#)



# CAMPAIGNS, OUTREACH & PUBLICATIONS

Corporate lobbies like to act in secrecy, so we expose what they do, increase public awareness, and build momentum to curb corporate influence over EU policy-making by producing:

- 42 publications (articles and reports) in 2020;
- 15 episodes of our podcast EU Watchdog Radio;
- Participating in campaigns, petitions, open letters and webinars;
- Several cooperations and contacts with investigative journalists and investigative platforms like Investigate Europe, Apache, Follow the Money, and Mediapart.

## EXAMPLES \*CLICK TO VIEW

- Taking action to stop corporate tax dodging
- European Commission: Take action to stop revolving doors
- NGOs demand Portuguese EU Presidency puts public interest centre stage
- Don't let industrial farming and corporate lobbies use the COVID-19 crisis to defend continued pesticide use, sign the Save Bees and Farmers petition!
- Wakeup call for the European Commission in its failed power grab over local services - Commission continues deregulation push, targeting Spanish island Formentera's efforts to limit harmful impacts of mass tourism

# MEDIA OUTREACH

Corporate lobbies like to act in secrecy, so we expose what they do, increase public awareness, and build momentum to curb corporate influence over EU policy-making by achieving coverage in:

- 500+ publications in major newspapers from all over Europe and beyond: New York Times, The Guardian, Le Monde, TAZ, Der Spiegel, De Standaard, NRC Handelsblad, Wall Street Journal, De Tijd, Financieel Dagblad, Eldiario, El Pais,...
- 20+ Opinion Articles in various EU news outlets.

## EXAMPLES \*CLICK TO VIEW

### NEW YORK TIMES

- Big Tech Turns Its Lobbyists Loose on Europe, Alarming Regulators

### THE GUARDIAN

- Exclusive: big pharma rejected EU plan to fast-track vaccines in 2017

### LE MONDE

- Un soutien public massif va continuer de financer le gaz fossile... via l'hydrogène!

### DE STANDAARD

- De 'fake politics' van de Europese politieke families

### NRC HANDELSBLAD

- Farmaceuten voorkwamen onderzoek naar epidemieën

## DER SPIEGEL

- Pharmaindustrie blockierte schnellere Impfstoffentwicklung

## SUDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG

- “Das war für die Pharmaindustrie finanziell nicht interessant”

## EL DIARIO

- Agenda propia y daño al clima: la bioindustria redefine las prioridades de la entidad público-privada de la UE

## L'ESPRESSO

- La ricerca in Europa è ostaggio di Big Pharma. Che usa i soldi pubblici solo per fare profitti

## POLITICO

- Big Pharma rejected vaccine prep efforts, watchdogs say

## EU OBSERVER

- Backroom deal will make CAP reform a catastrophic failure
- To beat cancer, Commission must first beat chemicals lobby

## EURACTIV

- ‘New GMOs’: Kyriakides gets off on wrong foot with biased consultation

## OPEN DEMOCRACY

- How the fossil fuel lobby is hijacking the European Green Deal
- On climate change, don't believe Europe's hydrogen hype

# BRUSSELS: A LOBBY PLANET IN THE **EU** NIVERSE

Please also take a look at our guide on the corporate lobby scene in Brussels: The 'Brussels Lobby Planet' is available in **English, French, and German**, and provides a thorough and thought-provoking introduction to corporate lobbying and its impact on the EU's ability to pass policies in the public interest.

# SECRETARIAT & CONTACT

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# BOARD & ADVISORY COUNCIL

CEO's board consists of three members:

**Analía Penchaszadeh**  
(The Netherlands/Argentina)

**Brid Brennan**  
(The Netherlands/Ireland)

**Adam Ma'anit**  
(UK/US)

Our advisory council includes the board members, as well as:

**Pratap Chatterjee**  
(India/US)

**Jakub Patocka**  
(Czech Republic)

**Saskia Ozinga**  
(Belgium)

**Thomas Wallgren**  
(Finland)

