



UNDER — THE INFLUENCE:

**IS FRANCE'S EU PRESIDENCY
ALREADY CAPTURED BY
CORPORATE INTERESTS?**



**Corporate
Europe
Observatory**

**OBSERVATOIRE
DES MULTINATIONALES**
SOCIAL, ÉCOLOGIQUE, POLITIQUE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2022 France will take the Presidency of the Council for a period of six months. France's Presidency of the EU will be politically significant, as it coincides with national elections in April-May 2022, in which Emmanuel Macron will seek a new term in office. His administration has an ambitious agenda for the EU Presidency including: defending the sovereignty of Europe, learning the lessons from the Covid crisis, boosting the continent's economic recovery, and ensuring its strategic autonomy in the face of international competition, all while bringing the EU and its institutions closer to European citizens. At the same time, given the way France has been preparing its Presidency, there are increasing reasons for concern over how its vision for the future of the EU will play out in practice. Under the pretext of European sovereignty, it seems to be pushing for ever greater government subsidies and support to a handful of corporate champions, and for an ever greater role for big business in policy-making.

THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY OF THE EU IS BEING PREPARED IN CLOSE COLLABORATION WITH CORPORATE INTERESTS, WHILE THE PUBLIC IS KEPT AT BAY

Core findings of this report include:

- ▶ The French Presidency is being prepared in close collaboration with French corporate interests, through lobbying meetings, public events, and seeking contributions from industry groups and think tanks (closely linked to big business), with little transparency, while civil society and the wider public are kept at bay.
- ▶ The French Government has gone as far as co-organising lobbying events with firms and trade groups, and looks set to organise more in the coming months.
- ▶ France has not ruled out the possibility that its Presidency of the EU will be sponsored by corporations, as has unfortunately often been the case with previous Presidencies.
- ▶ There are numerous examples of revolving doors in the Paris-based team in charge of preparing the Presidency and in the French Representation in Brussels. These risk conflicts of interest and widespread, confusion of public and private interests.

The stakes are high. A number of legislative proposals and policies crucial to the future of Europe will be adopted or examined during the French Presidency, including the Green Deal, the 'Fit for 55' climate package, legislation on the digital sector, and the future of the recovery funding and NextGeneration EU.

But it is not too late. If the French Government is serious in its claims about promoting European democracy, it should reverse course and protect its Presidency of the EU from corporate capture. ■



FRANCE AND THE EU: A HIGH-STAKES PRESIDENCY

In January 2022, France will take the helm of the EU Council for a period of six months. During its Presidency of the Council, France will play a key role in setting the political agenda in Brussels and at the EU level. It will also have a significant influence on the progress of critical EU legislation through its role in chairing discussions within the Council. Even though most public attention is directed at the more visible European Parliament and the European Commission, the Council, where member states are directly represented, is perhaps the most powerful of the EU institutions.

platform workers, health and pharma-related initiatives following from the Covid crisis, a European minimum wage, and the use and future of recovery funds. It will be worth monitoring the French Presidency's position on these files, which will affect industries and sectors where there are influential French business interests.

Member state governments are always keen to defend their own domestic economic interests at the EU Council, and when they hold the rotating Presidency of the Council, they are often tempted to use it as an opportunity to promote their

corporate sector and its lobby groups, new policy and funding instruments such as 'Important Projects of Common European Interests' (IPCEIs) are being developed to achieve these objectives.

The slogan of the French Presidency will be "*relance, puissance, appartenance*", that is, "revival, power, belonging". All three terms are variations of the concept of sovereignty, which has become a recurring theme in everything France has to say about Europe. Unfortunately, the French Government seems to be pushing a very particular, corporate-led version of "sovereignty". In the name of promoting Europe's autonomy in the face of growing global risks and increasing international competition, France seems to be pushing for ever greater public funding and political support (through IPCEIs, recovery funds and a revision of competition rules, for instance) to a handful of European corporate "champions" in key industrial sectors, including hydrogen and nuclear, the car and aeronautics industries, health and biotechnology, batteries and semiconductors, the circular economy, the emergence of European digital champions, and of course the defence and security sector.

This political agenda will not contribute to making the EU more democratic, more safe, or more responsive to the needs and aspirations of European citizens for example by tackling inequality, or the climate crisis. The French Government has consistently pushed back against efforts to improve lobby transparency and accountability within the EU Council. There is a strong risk that its upcoming Presidency will only result in an even closer alignment between the EU agenda and corporate interests, an even greater collusion between governments and the private sector, and even less democratic accountability. ■

IMPORTANT PIECES OF EU LEGISLATION AND POLICY-MAKING THAT WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF EUROPE WILL BE ON THE AGENDA DURING FRANCE'S PRESIDENCY

The French Presidency of the EU is likely to be consequential in many aspects. Firstly, it will coincide with national elections in France – presidential elections in April-May 2022, followed by Parliamentary elections in June – where Emmanuel Macron will seek a second term for himself and his political party La République en Marche. Faced with adversaries on the left and the (far) right that are critical of the EU for different reasons, he is likely to make Europe – or at least his own vision for Europe – a central topic in the campaign, raising the stakes for France's EU Presidency.

On the other hand, important pieces of EU legislation and policy-making that will shape the future of Europe will be on the agenda during France's Presidency, including the Green Deal, the 'Fit for 55' climate package, the Farm to Fork strategy', legislation on digital issues and on the rights of

own national corporate 'champions'. Too often member states act as middlemen for corporate interests in the Council. France will likely be no exception. In fact, it has a long history of seeing the EU as a source of funding and of political support for its own corporate and economic priorities including, for instance, the nuclear sector, agribusiness, and the arms industry.

This agenda has been gaining momentum in recent years. Already, 'sovereignty' and boosting Europe's defence has featured high on the Commission's agenda under President Ursula von der Leyen. With the Covid crisis and the unprecedented amount of public money channelled through the NextGeneration EU recovery plans, there is more emphasis than ever in Brussels on the need to ensure the continent's "strategic autonomy" and to protect its industry. With the active support and involvement of the



PRIVILEGED ACCESS FOR **INDUSTRY** AND LITTLE TRANSPARENCY

Even though the French Presidency of the EU only starts officially on 1 January 2022, its preparation began long before. In Paris, it is supervised by Clément Beaune – Secretary of State for European Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs – and his team, alongside the General Secretariat of European Affairs (SGAE), with a direct line to the presidential palace. The French Representation to the EU – the voice of Paris within EU institutions – is in charge of organising it in Brussels. There has been little public disclosure about this preparatory work, but there are worrying signs that business interests were involved early on in the process while public awareness was low and citizen consultation non-existent.

After some initial procrastination, and in accordance with EU rules, the French Permanent Representative has been publishing a list of his lobby meetings, and that of his deputy, since 1 July 2021, six months before the Presidency starts. They also agreed to only meet lobbyists who are members of the EU's lobby transparency register.

At the time of writing, this list is still relatively short, since it covers a period of three months including the summer break.¹ But it already shows a heavy bias in favour of corporate interests. Of the twelve meetings disclosed so far, four were with representatives of French corporations (twice with energy company EDF, highly invested both in nuclear energy and in fossil fuels, and once with arms and aeronautics firm Dassault and with maritime transport giant CMA-CGM), four with French lobby groups

and trade associations, one with a EU level industry group, one with a think tank funded by global multinationals² and a Brussels-based PR firm, one with a public consultative body, and one with a civil society organisation (representing disabled people). We don't know anything more about these meetings, as the French Representation to the EU has refused to disclose any more details, not even the subject of these meetings (which is routinely disclosed by EU bodies), let alone minutes.

THERE HAS BEEN LITTLE PUBLIC DISCLOSURE ABOUT THIS PREPARATORY WORK, BUT THERE ARE WORRYING SIGNS THAT BUSINESS INTERESTS WERE INVOLVED EARLY ON IN THE PROCESS WHILE PUBLIC AWARENESS WAS LOW

We have no information about the lobby meetings which took place before 1 July 2021 (even though social media records suggest that there were some),³ nor the lobby meetings held by the other numerous officials within the French Representation to the EU other than the Representent and his deputy,⁴ nor about the lobbying meetings of the Paris-based officials and ministers in relation to the preparation of the French Presidency – information that was disclosed by some other member states when it was their turn to hold the EU Presidency.⁵ From the current list of meetings and from other indications described in this report, we know that business interests have been closely associated with the preparation of

the French Presidency of the EU. But we know nothing more. In contrast to industry, the public seems to be deliberately kept at bay.

Throughout the preparation of the Presidency, there is a disturbing pattern of secrecy and a lack of accountability that does not bode well for France's conception of 'European democracy'. For instance, Clément Beaune and his team have refused to disclose the contributions they have received from think

tanks to prepare the Presidency (see next section). And in early June, there was a hearing at the French National Assembly of key officials about the French Presidency. Unusually, it was held behind closed doors, and when we asked the Parliamentary Commission on European Affairs why that was the case, they did not respond.⁶ ■



THINK TANKS: CORPORATE INTERESTS BEHIND A VEIL OF OBJECTIVITY?

In preparation of France's Presidency of the EU, Clément Beaune invited a number of think tanks to contribute ideas. Those contributions were not made public. Clément Beaune had a meeting with the think tanks in April 2021,⁷ and another in September. According to *Politico*, some of the same think tanks were invited for the latter meeting behind closed doors

Delors, Fondation Robert Schuman, and the European Council on Foreign Relations, as well as French think tanks such as Institut Montaigne, Institut français des relations internationales, Terra Nova, IDDRI and Fondapol, as well as new players such as Renaissance numérique, a think tank in the digital sector. They all have one thing in common:

ranked fourth in the 2020 index of Top Think Tanks in Western Europe, features virtually all of France's corporate champions, including TotalEnergies, Airbus, EDF, Engie, Michelin, Sanofi, and Vinci.¹⁴ TotalEnergies' head of public affairs sits on its strategic council, and its board includes the CEO of L'Oréal and executives from Rothschild and Plastic Omnium.¹⁵

THINK TANKS COULD BE SEEN AS A CONVENIENT LOBBYING VEHICLE FOR CORPORATE INTERESTS

at the Elysée Palace to discuss the French Presidency of the EU as well as the topic of 'sovereignty'.⁸ On this occasion the French Government even suggested it might provide funding to a few select think tanks to help with its EU Presidency.

Think tanks tend to present themselves as impartial purveyors of ideas, seeking to contribute to the public good through analysis and proposals. Even though they are outside of academia, they carry an aura of intellectualism and neutrality. In reality, they could be equally seen as a convenient lobbying vehicle for corporate interests. The vast majority of think tanks active in Paris or Brussels are funded by corporations (who often get tax rebates for it) or have corporate executives in their boards or strategic councils.⁹

The think tanks which contributed inputs to the French Presidency include well-known Brussels stalwarts such as Confrontations Europe, Institut Jacques

their close connections to major French corporations.¹⁰

The corporate funders of Confrontations Europe, for instance, include banks such as BNP Paribas, construction firm Bouygues, telecom giant Orange, and car-maker Renault.¹¹ Its President is a former executive of Enedis, a subsidiary of the national energy company EDF, while one of the vice-presidents is BNP Paribas' chief Europe lobbyist.¹² The former director of the think tank came from rival banking group Société Générale. As an example of its activities in the perspective of the French Presidency, in June 2021 Confrontations Europe published a policy paper on the need to build the 'Europe of health', co-signed by an executive of the French pharmaceutical firm Sanofi, a professor, an MEP, and a partner from an e-health start-up.¹³

The list of funders of Institut français des relations internationales (IFRI),

Meanwhile, Fondapol is a conservative think tank presided over by an executive from the luxury group LVMH, with a board that's a who's who of key players in France's highest business circles.¹⁶ It has published its recommendations¹⁷ for the French Presidency of the EU, many of which are in alignment with Emmanuel Macron's priorities, such as public support for key industrial sectors, promoting European digital platforms or relocating supply chains in the near vicinity of Europe (such as in North Africa). ■



COSYING UP IN PUBLIC: LOBBYING EVENTS CONVENED BY GOVERNMENT

Efforts by big business to influence the French Presidency of the EU started well ahead of 1 January 2022. For months, Paris- and Brussels-based lobbying firms have been very busy facilitating contacts between officials and industry representatives, through public conferences, and private, members-only conversations.

One such lobbying consultancy firm is Athenora. Athenora offers French companies the possibility to exchange with key decision-makers through its 'Cercle des Réseaux Européens' (Circle of European Networks), whose members

with the director of the Breton cabinet, Valère Moutarlier, on 16 March 2021.²¹ Breton is the French Commissioner (see below). This meeting did not appear, at the time of writing, on the Commission website,²² despite current rules.

Other lobbying consultancy firms have already started to organise events with high-level company and political representatives. On 2 July 2021 for instance, lobbying consultancy firm FIPRA – representing BASF, AstraZeneca, Bayer, Huawei,²³ among others – organised an event with Clément Beaune, the Secretary of State in charge of European Affairs and Pierre

press contact for this event was Bertrand Deprez, the Head of Schneider Electric's office in Brussels – even though the corporation, a key proponent of electrification and digitalisation as solutions to climate change, was not officially listed as a sponsor.²⁶ Speakers included a representative of MEDEF,²⁷ the most powerful French business group and a representative from the EU Commission's DG Competition.

In the same vein Scale-Up Europe – a Macron-initiated group of 150+ European leading tech founders, investors, researchers, corporate chief executives (such as Airbus, Sodexo, Accor, BMW, SAP, BASF, BNP Paribas and Air Liquide), and government officials²⁸ – was invited to present its recommendations on how to create European tech giants, including tax credits and a special status for tech workers, during an event on 15 June 2021 at the Elysée Palace, in front of a panel of EU leaders. Some of those recommendations are poised to be included in the priorities of the French Presidency of the EU.²⁹

THE FRENCH REPRESENTATION ORGANISED AN EVENT WITH TWO LOBBY GROUPS, WITH THE HEAD OF SCHNEIDER ELECTRIC'S OFFICE IN BRUSSELS AS PRESS CONTACT

include the biggest French companies such as TotalEnergies, Orange, Bouygues, Renault and AirFrance-KLM, among others.¹⁸ To influence the priorities and positions of the French Presidency, corporate members of the 'circle', thanks to Athenora, have had confidential meetings with Xavier Lapeyre de Cabanes, the Secretary General of the French Presidency of the EU on 18 May 2021¹⁹ and a confidential training on the French Presidency with Sandrine Gaudin, the Secretary General of the European Unit of the French Prime Minister, on 30 March 2021.²⁰ Not directly related to the French Presidency, but to be mentioned, French corporations also had a meeting

Gattaz, the president of BusinessEurope, the main business lobby in the EU, to discuss the policy expectations and priorities of the French Presidency.²⁴

Some events are even co-organised by the French Government itself with French big business. For instance on 6 July 2021, the French Permanent Representation to the EU organised an event 'EU Forum 2022 Working together to help the success of the French Presidency to the EU',²⁵ together with two lobby groups: France Industrie (one of the three main French big business associations), and TECH IN France/Syntec Numérique (the French digital business lobby). The

Other high-level political events before and during the French Presidency are planned, notably on defence,³⁰ and digital sovereignty.³¹ In the past, some governments chairing the EU Council have partnered with powerful industry groups to organise events. One example is the Portuguese Presidency which organised an event on the trade agreement between the EU and the Mercosur trade bloc with the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission and BusinessEurope, in April 2021.³² Will France follow this pattern? ■



SPONSORSHIP: TAKING FAVOURS FROM CORPORATIONS

Corporate sponsorship has become a stain on the EU Council presidency. Whether it's in the form of cash donations, or goods and services as freebies, almost all recent presidencies have taken sponsorship from the likes of Coca-Cola, Microsoft, BMW, or numerous other global or national companies. From fossil fuels, to monoculture plantations, to airlines, there have been no restrictions on the kind of companies accepted as sponsors of the EU Presidency for environmental

Despite Beaune's attempt to downplay sponsorship, this remains a deeply problematic practice. MEPs,³⁴ the European Ombudsman,³⁵ and civil society³⁶ have all raised concerns about these private deals, which provoke serious questions of conflicts of interest.

Take Beaune's specific example: the EU car industry has been mired in scandal and is notorious for its ongoing lobbying to minimise pollution reduction targets and regulations. Dieselgate revealed

ture (at the expense of measures to reduce the need for individual vehicles, for instance),³⁸ while new vehicle pollution targets are on the agenda in Brussels.³⁹ It is not difficult to imagine how the 'loan' of a few electric cars to a Council presidency would be a very useful element to add to a much wider strategy by the car industry to influence EU policy-making.

It is remarkable that such sponsorship continues, and even more remarkable that, when given a chance to do the right thing and ban all sponsorship agreements, governments instead decided to stubbornly continue with it. Earlier this year member states in the EU Council debated a set of guidelines on this topic but some, including the French Government,⁴⁰ were strongly opposed to a full ban and instead voted through weak guidelines which keep decisions about whether to take sponsorship as purely a national decision.⁴¹

But opposition is mounting, not least from President Macron's own MEPs. In May 2021, *Politico* reported that the Renaissance delegation in the European Parliament, part of the liberal Renew group, had warned the French Presidency to be "attentive to the public's perception" and that it "should not resort" to corporate sponsorship.⁴²

It remains to be seen whether the French Presidency will heed this advice and follow in the footsteps of the German Government, which, when it took the helm of the Council in the second half of 2020, rejected all sponsorship. ■

ALMOST ALL RECENT PRESIDENCIES HAVE TAKEN SPONSORSHIP FROM THE LIKES OF COCA-COLA, MICROSOFT, BMW, OR NUMEROUS OTHER GLOBAL OR NATIONAL COMPANIES

or other reasons. In return sponsors get their logos plastered on official presidency websites, and / or their products and services promoted to important decision-makers and officials.

Regrettably, the upcoming French Presidency is considering taking sponsorship too. In March 2021 *Mediapart* quoted Secretary of State Clément Beaune on the issue of "material support" for the Presidency, saying: "I'll take a very concrete example: a French car manufacturer lending electric cars for an event, because this is also in line with our priorities for the climate. This is the maximum we would allow ourselves, in terms of involvement of the business world."³³

how the EU industry had been installing software in vehicles designed to cheat emission tests, with French carmakers Citroën, Peugeot, and Renault among those now facing legal action.³⁷ While such companies are surely keen to maximise their influence and boost their reputations, they are surely a dubious 'partner' for any presidency.

Overall the EU car industry spends millions of euros a year in influencing decision-makers in Brussels and in member state capitals, and there are several hot topics on their lobbyists' agenda. The EU's Covid recovery plan is looking to support a major expansion of electric vehicle production and charging infrastruc-



CONFUSED LOYALTIES: REVOLVING DOORS BETWEEN FRENCH OFFICIALS AND INDUSTRY

Another key lobbying tactic is for corporations and lobby firms to recruit former EU or French officials working on EU policies to get political access and insider know-how, that is, knowing whom to contact and when for key political decisions. This phenomenon, commonly described as 'revolving doors', contributes to blurring the distinction between public and private interests. Revolving doors pose risks of conflicts of interest which in turn can undermine

public trust and democratic, public-interest decision-making. This is a widespread phenomenon in national capitals and especially in Brussels; infamous examples

include former head of the EU Commission José Manuel Barroso joining Goldman Sachs, and former Commissioner Nelly Kroes joining Uber. ▶▶▶

REVOLVING DOORS POSE RISKS OF CONFLICTS OF INTEREST WHICH IN TURN CAN UNDERMINE PUBLIC TRUST AND DEMOCRATIC, PUBLIC-INTEREST DECISION-MAKING

REVOLVING DOORS





▶▶▶ French decision-makers are also in no way immune. The team of the French Secretary of State for European Affairs Clément Beaune includes some high-pro-

Clément Beaune's Head of Cabinet since August 2020, was previously Deputy Director of Labour Relations for MEDEF, the biggest business lobby in France, for

THE FRENCH REPRESENTATION IN BRUSSELS IS EFFECTIVELY A BREEDING GROUND FOR REVOLVING DOORS

file examples. For instance, his press and communications advisor was a consultant in lobbying and public relations with Image Sept up until 2021, for more than five years.⁴³ Image Sept is a leading communications and lobbying firm in France working for big businesses such as Accor, Goldman Sachs, EDF, individuals such as former Renault boss Carlos Ghosn, and the governments of Niger and Ivory Coast.⁴⁴

more than three years before advising the French Labour Minister in 2017.⁴⁵

The French Representation in Brussels is effectively a breeding ground for revolving doors – yet another example of the deeply ingrained confusion between public and private interests among French officials at EU level. Some French civil servants working in Brussels on EU policies come

directly from the private sector, including two advisors on EU energy policies who previously worked for TotalEnergies,⁴⁶ and Veolia.⁴⁷ Conversely, former energy advisors at the French Permanent Representation can now be found in strategic positions in French energy companies. Engie's current EU Affairs Director for instance was an EU energy advisor for the French Government in Brussels for eight years.⁴⁸ ArianeGroup's Commercial Director for space launchers held the same position for three years.⁴⁹

This might explain why France has been so keen to push key industry demands such as the inclusion of gas in the Green Taxonomy⁵⁰ or stronger public support for hydrogen.⁵¹ But doors don't only revolve with the energy sector. The Head of the Brussels office of Orange, the French telecommunications giant, was an advisor in the French Permanent Representation in Brussels for more than seven years on EU policies related to digital and postal services.⁵² One of his former colleagues, who was a high-level advisor on financial and monetary policies at the French Permanent Representation for more than five years, left his job in 2014 to become the Deputy Director of Fédération bancaire française, the French bank lobby group.⁵³

There are also revolving doors at the highest level. Pierre Sellal was the Ambassador of France to the European Union twice, between 2002 and 2009 and between 2014 and 2017. He has been called "the most knowledgeable man in France on the details of European reality".⁵⁴ The year after he left office, Pierre Sellal went on to work as a Senior Advisor for August Debouzy, a leading law firm whose clients remain unknown. He also sits on the board of French companies Areva (nuclear energy) and EDF. Since January 2021, he is the President of the Siècle, an elite network of key politicians, journalists, and corporate leaders in France.⁵⁵ ■

THIERRY BRETON, THE PUBLIC-PRIVATE COMMISSIONER

In 2019, with the support of Macron Thierry Breton was nominated for the position of Commissioner for Internal Market. This is one of the top positions in the European Commission. Breton came directly from his position as Chief Executive of Atos, a French tech, digital, and consulting firm, to the Commission. It is the first time that a serving corporate chief was chosen to join the College of Commissioners.⁵⁶ This raises several issues in terms of conflicts of interest.

First, Breton is now responsible for EU laws on cybersecurity, defence, data, artificial intelligence, industrial policy, tech, space, and 5G, etc. which have a direct impact on the operations of his former company. Second, the recruitment of Breton happened without any cooling off period. Breton came directly from Atos to the Commission, along with the Head of Public Relations of Atos who became his communication advisor.⁵⁷ And last but not least, Breton is still in contact with Atos. Breton has met twice, on 16 December 2020,⁵⁸ and on 7 May 2021,⁵⁹ with a group of companies which included representatives from Atos, in order to discuss the creation of an industry alliance which could lead to Atos potentially receiving millions of public money for its research activities.

Before he was the Chief Executive of Atos, Breton was France's Minister for the Economy (2005-2007), and before that, Head of Orange (then France Télécom). He is a living illustration of France's tradition of revolving doors between the public sector and state-owned corporations. He is already playing a key role in helping the French Government and French big business push their agenda at EU level. He has met with some corporations, think tanks, and lobby groups but the level of transparency about the objectives and minutes of some of these lobbying meetings has been generally low.⁶⁰



PRIORITISING THE PUBLIC INTEREST IN FRENCH DECISION-MAKING ON EU AFFAIRS

The Council is arguably the EU's most powerful institution; its legislative and policy-making role means that it has a real impact on the day-to-day lives of EU citizens. Yet the absence of genuine transparency and accountability of member states' ministers and officials who participate in Council deliberations has long been a cloud hanging over its work. Despite recent reforms, it is still not possible for journalists and civil society organisations, let alone citizens, to know the positions that individual member state governments argue for inside the Council on emerging legislation, or which lobbyists are seeking to influence them.

When decision-making occurs behind closed doors, and when accountability mechanisms are weak, there is a major risk that well-resourced corporate lobbies will take advantage – and that policy-makers will let them. The Council and member state governments who participate in it have fallen into this trap and are increasingly seen as providing a channel for corporate interests.⁶¹ As just one example, Corporate Europe Observatory has recently exposed how a secretive Council working party, which fails to publish any minutes of its meetings, allows corporate lobbyists around the table to present lobby demands whilst public interest voices are effectively shut out.⁶²

Disappointingly the French Government has repeatedly placed itself on the wrong side of the debate on Council trans-

parency and accountability. In 2017, Macron asserted that “the essence of the European project is democracy”. He also said “we must stop being afraid of the people. In terms of our approach, we must simply stop building our Europe in isolation from them.” Yet his admin-

istration has failed to deliver on this. In 2019 the French Government refused to join an initiative by 10 other member states which put forward proposals to improve the “current disconnection between the EU's transparency policy and citizens' expectations”.⁶³ The Macron Government was also among the most reluctant of member states to publish more documentation on Council deliberations on legislative proposals and when the Council prepares to finalise new EU laws with other institutions (the so-called trilogue process).⁶⁴

THE COUNCIL AND MEMBER STATE GOVERNMENTS WHO PARTICIPATE IN IT HAVE FALLEN INTO THIS TRAP AND ARE INCREASINGLY SEEN AS PROVIDING A CHANNEL FOR CORPORATE INTERESTS

The French Government's retrograde approach in Brussels is mirrored in Paris. French decision-making in Brussels – for instance the positions it will take in the EU Council – is decided by the government and the Élysée, without transparency and accountability mechanisms. Sometimes French representatives vote differently

from how they were officially instructed, as part of wider compromises in the Council.⁶⁵ Very problematically French MPs are not consistently informed about the positions of the French Government and Representation on upcoming EU legislation, and have no binding power

to influence them,⁶⁶ in contrast to MPs in Denmark,⁶⁷ Sweden,⁶⁸ Finland, and the Netherlands.⁶⁹ And unlike their counterparts in Germany,⁷⁰ French MPs are not given automatic access to key documents, making it very hard to hold the French Government accountable for its EU decision-making.

But while MPs and citizens are shut out of French decision-making on EU policy, it appears that corporate interests are not. A recent exposé by *Contexte*, for instance, revealed how a French government position paper on new EU tax transparency rules was in fact based on a paper by MEDEF's leading tax expert.⁷¹ ■

CLIMATE ACTION, GREEN DEAL AND RECOVERY PLANS, REGULATION OF THE DIGITAL SECTOR, HEALTH... MANY CRUCIAL PIECES OF EU LEGISLATION WILL BE DECIDED DURING FRANCE'S PRESIDENCY OF THE EU IN 2022. THIS IS WHY IT'S MORE IMPORTANT THAN EVER TO PROTECT EU DECISION-MAKING, FROM CORPORATE CAPTURE, INCLUDING AT THE LEVEL OF THE COUNCIL.

TAKE ACTION!

Take action today to send a clear message to President Macron to say NO to dodgy sponsorship deals! Corporate Europe Observatory and Observatoire des multinationales along with foodwatch have launched a petition calling on Emmanuel Macron and the French Government to forgo all corporate sponsorship for its Presidency of the EU:

<https://corporateeurope.org/en/no-sponsorship-deals-french-eu-presidency>



RECOMMENDATIONS: WHAT THE FRENCH PRESIDENCY SHOULD DO

1. Lobby groups:

- ▶ Ensure transparency of all meetings with lobby groups related to the preparation and organisation of the Presidency of the EU, including minutes and access to official documents.
- ▶ Avoid privileged access for corporate interests and those who seek to represent them.
- ▶ Stop meeting with any fossil fuel industry representatives because this industry's interests are incompatible with the public interest in tackling the climate crisis.

2. Think tanks:

- ▶ Disclose the contributions think tanks have made to the French Presidency, and oblige them to disclose the source of their funding and their conflicts of interests.
- ▶ Be transparent about any public funding it will provide to think tanks before or during the Presidency.
- ▶ Avoid subsidising think tanks which are largely funded by corporate interests or which promote a corporate-friendly agenda, especially those with close connections to the fossil fuel industry.

3. Corporate events and sponsorship:

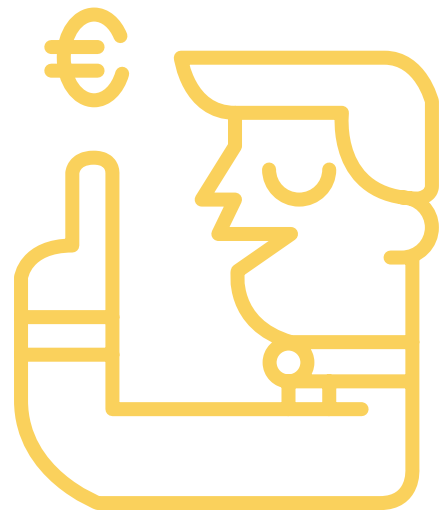
- ▶ Avoid events with corporate partners or which promote a corporate agenda, including with the fossil fuel industry.
- ▶ Corporate sponsorships of EU Presidencies in any form are not acceptable.

4. Revolving doors:

- ▶ Introduce stronger rules to prevent revolving door moves which provoke conflicts of interest. This includes significant 'cooling-off' periods and bans on contacts with lobbying former colleagues or on working on certain files where there is a potential conflict of interests.
- ▶ Avoid and address potential conflicts of interests among officials in the preparation and management of the French EU Presidency.

5. Transparency and accountability:

- ▶ Introduce rules to prevent privileged access to ministers and officials by corporate interests.
- ▶ Transform decision-making so that MPs are consulted on government positions on EU matters.
- ▶ Ensure that there is effective MP scrutiny after EU discussions and votes.
- ▶ Present an agenda to open up Council deliberations, especially working party meetings and trilogues.



NOTES

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