Prescrire International Editorial

Translated from *Rev Prescrire* **February 2016; 36 (388): 131**

Intense pharma lobbying in the EU

The institutions of the European Union (EU) make numerous decisions that affect the daily lives of people living in Europe. A study conducted by the non-profit organisation Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) in the pharmaceutical field reveals the intense lobbying of EU institutions by drug companies and the many channels of influence they use (1).

Tens of millions of euros spent on EU lobbying. According to this study, based in particular on data from the EU "Transparency Register", pharmaceutical companies, their trade associations, and the top 10 lobbying firms they employ, declared having spent nearly 40 million euros on lobbying in 2014 (1). The declared lobbying spend of the 40 pharmaceutical companies identified on the Transparency Register totalled 23 million euros.

This is considerably more than the combined lobbying expenditure declared by non-governmental organisations that work in the field of medicines and public health (2.7 million euros) (1).

Extensive contacts, permanent access. These 40 pharmaceutical companies declared a combined total of 108 full-time lobbyists, including 89 with access passes to the European Parliament. In addition, 18 pharmaceutical industry trade associations declared 68 full-time lobbyists, including 24 with European Parliament access passes (1).

During a 5-month period at the start of the new Juncker Commission, GlaxoSmithKline met once with the Directorate-General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs and 14 times with the Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (1).

Furthermore, drug company employees sit on the European Commission's Expert Groups that shape European policy, sometimes (rather dubiously) appointed in their "personal capacity" (1).

CEO also points out that the patient advocacy groups in most frequent contact with EU institutions, such as the European Patients' Forum and Eurordis (European Organisation for Rare Diseases), are funded in part by drug companies (1).

Unbalanced representation. According to the EU institutions, "*Citizens can, and indeed should, expect the EU decision-making process to be as transparent and open as possible. The more open the process is, the easier it is to ensure balanced representation and avoid undue pressure and illegitimate or privileged access to information or to decision-makers*" (2).

The Transparency Register, where lobbying activities directed at EU institutions are published, shows that, in 2016, the service provided to European citizens falls far short of the mark.

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Selected references from Prescrire's literature search.

1- Corporate Europe Observatory "Policy prescriptions. The firepower of the EU pharmaceutical lobby and implications for public health" 2015: 44 pages.

2- "Transparency Register". http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/ accessed 10 December 2015.

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