

Oil, gas giants spend 250 mn on EU lobbying: green groups

24 October 2019, by Patrick Galey



The EU is seen as one of the global leaders when it comes to climate action, and negotiates as a single bloc during annual United Nations climate summits

The five biggest publicly listed oil and gas companies and trade groups representing them spent more than 250 million euros lobbying the European Union to influence climate action since 2010, environmental groups said Thursday.

Research showed that BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil, Shell and Total, as well as trade groups acting on their behalf, have held at least 327 high level meetings with European Commission officials since Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker took office in 2014—an average of more than one a week.

The findings came from publicly listed documents, and companies who responded to requests for comments said there was no conflict of interest in their executives meeting high-level EU policymakers.

But green groups said the money spent on access to officials showed to what extent oil and gas firms were seeking to influence decisions in Brussels.

"This is part of a long trail of the fossil fuel industry delaying, weakening and torpedoing much-needed climate action," Pascoe Sabido, a researcher and campaigner with Corporate Europe Observatory, told AFP.

The EU is seen as one of the global leaders when it comes to climate action.

But there are fears its member states are not phasing out fossil fuels quickly enough to comply with the 2015 Paris climate accord, which commits nations to limit warming to "well below" two degrees Celsius (3.6 Fahrenheit).

A Commission spokeswoman told AFP it was "good practice that politicians and officials meet with external actors".

She added that "some meetings" with oil and gas representatives focused on "renewables and the ways to decarbonise our economy".

Last year the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) called for a radical drawdown in fossil fuel use to hit the safer 1.5C cap laid out in the Paris deal.

Yet global emissions are rising year on year, and environmental groups fear major EU gas infrastructure projects in the pipeline could lock the continent into fossil fuels well beyond the IPCC's deadlines.

'Support Paris'

The investigation by Corporate Europe Observatory, Food & Water Europe, Friends of the Earth Europe, and Greenpeace EU looked at companies' own declarations and the EU's lobby transparency register and published meetings.

It found that the five firms declared spending of 123.3 million euros (\$137 million) on EU lobbying

between 2010-2018. Trade associations representing them spent an additional 128 million euros in that period.

In April the watchdog Global Witness calculated that oil and gas majors were planning to spend \$5 trillion (4.5 trillion euros) on new exploration by 2030, a figure it said was "poles apart" from the Paris goals.

A spokeswoman from Total told AFP that the figures contained in Thursday's report "in no way reflect" what the group spends on lobbying.

"Total is convinced that a collective approach is necessary to respond to the magnitude of the climate issue," she said.

An ExxonMobil spokesman said the giant "complies fully with the requirements of the EU Transparency Register."

"ExxonMobil believes that climate change risks warrant action and it's going to take all of us — business, governments and consumers — to make meaningful progress," he told AFP.

A spokeswoman for Shell said it "firmly rejected" the report's premise.

"We are crystal clear about our support for the Paris agreement... everything we do is to advocate for good policy outcomes to that end."

BP and Chevron did not respond to requests for comment.

'Firewall'

The green groups called for a "firewall" to protect EU officials from fossil fuel representatives to avoid conflicts of interest.

"Tackling the climate emergency means leaving the vast majority of known fossil fuel reserves under ground and that is incompatible with the future projections of these firms who are going to massively increase their production over the next 10-20 years," Sabido said.

Myriam Douo, from Friends of the Earth Europe, said citizens could no longer afford the "delay tactics" of fossil fuel producers.

"We must listen to the millions of young climate protesters on our streets and cut fossil fuels out of our politics now."

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