

Study reveals: Corporate interests dominate EU policymaking expert groups

(18 April 2008) EPSU is part of the Alter-Eu coalition that advocates more transparency of EU policy making. The importance of transparency was revealed poignantly by a report of the coalition on the European Commission's Expert Groups. These groups play an influential role in shaping policies at EU level in the crucial early stages. They are involved in drafting and commenting on EU legislation covering a wide range of policy issues, including, for example, energy and climate change, and the import/export of dangerous chemical substances.

The composition of the Expert Groups, and the interests that are represented, will to a large degree, determine the outcome of the consultation. The input provided by such Expert Groups often forms the backbone of the Commission's proposals and through a process that often involves very little change, eventually become adopted as European legislation.

The Commission's own Register of Expert Groups states that there are more than 1,200 Expert Groups advising the European Commission. The exact number is likely to be far higher. The lack of transparency concerning their number, composition and meetings means that these powerful consultative bodies are able to operate away from the glare of public scrutiny.

Access to documents

- In 34% of all cases, the European Commission failed to provide any information about the Expert Groups;
- In 34% of all cases the European Commission only provided partial information;
- The Commission only provided a complete and satisfactory response in 32% of the cases;

- In only 36% of the cases the European Commission provided information within the prescribed 15 working days;
- In only 43% of the cases the European Commission provided names of organisations and individuals that were represented in Expert Groups.

Composition of expert groups (based on scant information provided by the Commission)

- Over 25% of Expert Groups appear to be controlled by corporate interests: more than half of all their members (including governments) are industry representatives;
- In 64% of the Expert Groups being studied, business interests appear to be over-represented: industry representatives make up more than 50% of the non-Commission and non-government members;
- Only 32% of the Expert Groups sampled appear to have a more balanced allocation of stakeholders;
- One Expert Group (4%) was unbalanced in favour of NGOs.

The study recommends

The European Commission ought to reform the mechanisms by which it accesses expertise. It should ensure such mechanisms are both transparent and operate fairly.

For the latter to be the case, different points of view must be balanced against one another where impartial scientific advice is sought in an atmosphere immune from corporate capture.

Taking the following steps in relation to the Expert Groups would be a long overdue move in this direction:

- 1.Disclosure of Expert Group membership and key documents;
- 2.Full transparency around the launch of new Expert Groups;
- 3.Open and fair processes around the application for and selection of membership;
- 4.Strong safeguards against privileged access and unbalanced composition of these groups;
- 5.Dissolution of all Expert Groups controlled by industry (or any other special interests);
- 6.A broad review on the composition of all Expert Groups by the Commission's Secretariat General.

The full study is available at:

<http://www.alter-eu.org/en/system/files/publications/expertgroupsreport.pdf>

- [Log in](#) to post comments
- [Printer-friendly version](#)

Policies

[Transparency & Corruption](#)