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## Big business enjoys 'significant access' to Irish officials in Brussels



Tuesday, March 29, 2016

John Carthy

Big businesses have significant access to Brussels-based officials of the Irish Government to promote their

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corporate agenda, according to transparency campaigners.



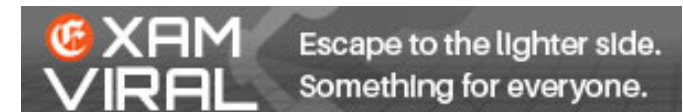
The first study on lobbying at national government offices in Brussels has revealed the majority of contacts with senior Irish diplomats is with corporate lobbyists.

Over a recent 12-month period, the two most senior members of Ireland's permanent representation to the EU listed a total of 123 meetings with large multinational firms, professional lobbyists, representative bodies and journalists.

The research by the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (Alter-EU) into the level of lobbying with the high-powered permanent representation of the 28 EU states showed Ireland's head of mission, Declan Kelleher and the deputy permanent representative, Tom Hanney, met with senior executives of many large firms including Amazon, Bank of Ireland, Deutsche Bank, Google, Morgan Stanley, Ryanair, Shell, Uber, and Zurich Insurance during 2015.

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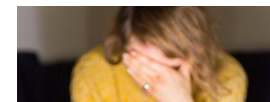
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They also met representative groups including Ibec, the Irish Offshore Operators' Association, and the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU.

Alter-EU claim non-governmental organisations had considerably less access to permanent representations than corporate lobbyists.

“The dominance of corporate interests in interactions with the Irish permanent representation is clear and raises questions over the ability to ensure balanced input into EU decision-making processes,” the report stated.

Ireland was praised as one of only four of 17 EU states along with Romania, the Netherlands, and Poland which provided the requested information, despite the fact that all EU countries with the exception of Cyprus have some type of freedom of information legislation.

However, the Irish Government limited the disclosure of information to the work diaries of its two most senior officials in Brussels rather than a list of lobby meetings held by all staff.

Ibec, the employers' representative body, had the most meetings with Irish officials in Brussels – a total of seven.

Three meetings each were held with representatives of Google and Teneo Holdings, a US-based global advisory firm headed up by Declan Kelly, whose brother, Alan, is environment minister.

Bank of Ireland, Morgan Stanley, VIP Electronic Cigarettes, and the American Chamber of Commerce each held two meetings.

Alter-EU said the report showed lobbyists are able to exploit a loophole in EU transparency rules which



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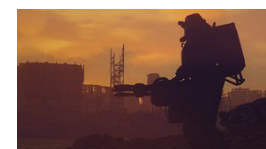
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enables them to lobby permanent representations of EU states in Brussels without being registered.

At least one in five meetings was with companies and organisations that were not listed on the current EU register of lobbyists.

In addition, any party which is based outside Ireland and only lobbies the government's permanent representation in Brussels is not strictly obliged to register with the new register of lobbyists introduced in Ireland last year.

The Alter-EU report also highlighted a lack of record-keeping about lobbying meetings which it claimed made it difficult for citizens to find out whom their governments were meeting on the development of key EU policies.

When asked about its meetings with the International Emissions Trading Association and the Irish Offshore Operators' Association, the Irish permanent representation said it had not kept any minutes.

"A lack of record keeping means it is difficult for citizens to follow the influence of private interests in decision making and hold public representatives accountable," the report said.

Vicky Cann of Corporate Europe Observatory, a member of the Alter-EU steering committee, said the report exposed the inadequacy of the current EU lobby transparency regime

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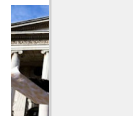
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