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## Business access to Irish EU officials queried

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Monday, March 28, 2016

Sean McCarthaigh

Big businesses have significant access to Brussels-based officials of the Irish Government to promote their corporate agenda, according to transparency campaigners.

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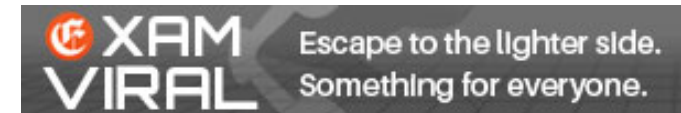
The first-ever study on lobbying at government offices in Brussels has revealed the majority of contacts with senior Irish diplomats is with corporate lobbyists.

Over a recent 12-month period, the two most senior members of Ireland's permanent representation to the EU listed 123 meetings with large multinational firms, 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 member 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. They also met representative groups including IBEC, the Irish Offshore Operators' Association and the American Chamber of Commerce to the EU.

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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,” the report stated.

Ireland was praised as one of only four of 17 EU member 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 acting 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 enables them to lobby permanent representations of EU member states in Brussels without being registered. At least one in five meetings was with companies and organisations 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 obliged to register with the register of lobbyists introduced in Ireland last year.

The Alter-EU report also highlighted a lack of record-keeping about lobbying meetings. When asked about



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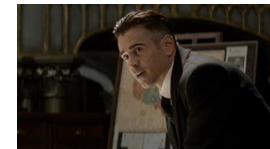
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its meetings with the International Emissions Trading Association and the Irish Offshore Operators' Association, the Irish permanent representation said it had not kept any minutes.

"A lack of record keeping means it is difficult for citizens to follow the influence of private interests in decision-making," it said.

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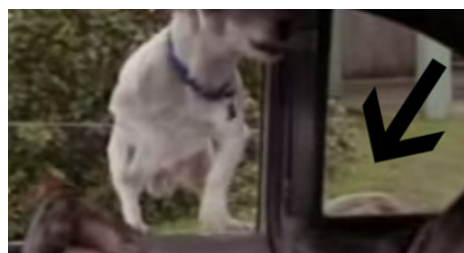
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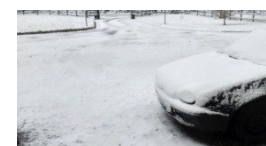
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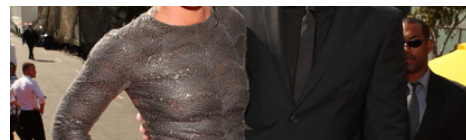
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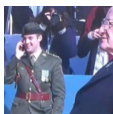


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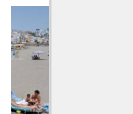
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