



The 'Clean' Industrial Deal: a year of dirty lobbying

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On the first anniversary of the European Commission's Clean Industrial Deal it's clearer than ever that it's not so clean and definitely not green. We track the very heavy industry lobbying involved, the result of which is a focus on deregulation, a discarding of climate solutions, and the throwing of public money at some of the continent's most polluting companies.

Introduction

On 25 February 2025, the European Commission launched its flagship Clean Industrial Deal (CID) with much fanfare. A blueprint written by and for industry, it covered everything from critical raw materials and the circular economy to carbon border taxes, affordable energy and low-carbon hydrogen. Framed as a cornerstone of the EU's

'competitiveness' agenda, the Commission declared it would resuscitate the continent's ailing industrial base by providing cheap energy, access to raw materials, and a pathway to decarbonisation, thereby meeting the EU's climate commitments and boosting its clean tech sector.

However, a year later it is clearer than ever that in reality it is more of a Dirty Industrial Deal. It is championing the weakening of regulations (known as 'simplification') that protect the public and the environment, while creating a myriad of less than 'simple' mechanisms to throw money at some of the EU's most polluting companies. Worse, the 'decarbonisation' part has been substantially downgraded, although support for so-called climate solutions like carbon capture and storage and fossil hydrogen still are on course to prolong keep the continent on fossil-fuels.

On the CID's one-year anniversary, Corporate Europe Observatory takes a closer look at what lobbying has taken place around it.¹ We found more than **750 meetings** with top-level Commission officials, across a staggering **16 different departments** (DGs). That's more than three meetings per working day. What's more, **90 per cent of them were with business interests**, while only **eight per cent were with civil society organisations**.





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A year of lobbying for a Dirty Industrial Deal

Because the CID promised to introduce, alter or accelerate whole swathes of new and existing acts, packages, plans and initiatives, it has been a key target for dirty industry lobbying. Almost **500 different business groups** and their representatives met the Commission to discuss its contents. Highly active industry lobbies include **ArcelorMittal** (18 meetings) and French nuclear giant **EDF** (12 meetings).

While business interests accounted for 90 per cent of all meetings, **NGOs made up just over five per cent**, and **trade unions a paltry one per cent**. That's particularly worrying, given how aggressively business has been lobbying to weaken protections for workers and the environment, and is sidelining those who are supposed to defend those interests. However, it reflects the broader pro-business bias that has been baked into this Commission.





Top files targeted by lobbyists

CEO investigated lobby meetings directly about the CID, but also on the acts, packages, plans and initiatives it mentioned across its 25 pages. Here are its top five files targeted by lobbyists (business and civil society alike), as well as a quick description of what they are:

- **The Clean Industrial Deal – 162 meetings** – the EU Commission’s flagship programme for 2025-2029, which claims to make Europe competitive by supporting heavy industry and clean tech. Europe’s biggest polluters have lobbied to ensure it includes an array of handouts for technologies that will lock in a fossil-fuelled economy, such as carbon capture.
- **The Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM) – 145 meetings** – a carbon border tax intended to ensure EU companies investing in low-carbon production don’t get undercut by cheaper and more polluting imports. The CID said it would “substantially simplify” CBAM by reducing how many companies it covers and their

reporting requirements, which duly happened. It is still the subject of fierce industry lobbying to weaken it further.

- **The Circular Economy Act – 65 meetings** – reducing, reusing and recycling materials as part of a circular economy (and reducing dependence on China, which has a near-monopoly on rare earth metals refining, and many other critical raw materials), was a key plank of the CID, which also pledged to launch a new Clean Industrial Dialogue on Circularity to gather input for the upcoming Act.
- **The Industrial Accelerator Act – 53 meetings** – a core part of the CID, which initially promised to accelerate the decarbonisation of European industry, but is clearly focused on reindustrialising the EU by slashing permitting regulations, with decarbonisation an additional goal (the word “decarbonisation was dropped from its name in October 2025). It wants to introduce voluntary green labelling schemes for low-carbon versions of products like steel or cement, but is letting industry design them and self-report. The Act has been repeatedly delayed due to controversy over its ‘Made in Europe’ local content provisions.
- **Automotive Action Plan – 45 meetings** – the first industry-specific action plan outlined in the CID, intended to halt the decline of Europe’s car industry as China outcompetes it. Supposedly focused on electric vehicles and domestic battery production, it has also seen vehicle emissions targets weakened - it's unclear how prolonging fossil fuelled cars will help the EU compete with the Chinese market.





Who was lobbying for a Dirty Industrial Deal?

The most intensive lobbying over the past 12 months, with 39 meetings, was conducted by **EUROFER**, the European Steel Association. While itself a modest actor – reporting spending of less than a million on EU-level lobbying per year and employing eight staff members – it represents some of Europe’s industrial giants. These include Germany’s ThyssenKrupp, whose subsidiary is a key part of the country’s arms industry, and Luxemburg-based mining and steel giant ArcelorMittal, which is one of Europe’s most polluting – and publicly subsidised – companies.

Steel has been a hot topic in Brussels over the past year, with the EU introducing its Steel and Metals Action Plan in March 2025, delaying its phase-out of combustion engines in exchange for the automotive industry making emissions cuts through so-called “green steel”, and more recently trying to protect domestic producers through local content requirements for public procurement under the Industrial Accelerator Act. The steel lobby has been busy.

ArcelorMittal has its interests well represented by EUROFER, where it is Vice-President, but it is also number two on the list of most frequent visitors to the Commission, with 18 meetings. Despite backtracking on its own climate commitments, it continues to push for more support from the EU. A theme across many steel producers, which laud “green steel” and local content requirements as a means of revive the industry, but currently the bill for the green “premium” looks to be falling on taxpayers through public procurement.

Third is French nuclear energy giant **EDF** (12), followed by the trade association **European Aluminium** (11), and **Cement Europe** (11). A key topic for all of them was the EU’s carbon border adjustment mechanism (see above), which the CID pledged to “substantially simplify” so it wasn’t a “burden” for industry.



Frequent visitors behind the Dirty Industrial Deal

More than 40 lobby groups had at least five meetings with senior Commission officials in the year following the release of the EU's Clean Industrial Deal

Metal
& Mining
41%



Metals and mining interests only made up 30% of the lobby groups but were over represented: they accounted for 41% of meetings and 6/10 of the top ten most frequent visitors

Energy
13%



Auto-
motive
11%



Meetings by sector

NGOs in the cold

they accounted for
4%
of meetings

trade associations open doors

Industry trade groups
accounted for
63% of all meetings with
the frequent visitors

No trade unions

they were not among
the frequent visitors

Frequent visitors

Looking at all lobby groups that had at least five meetings with senior Commission officials in the year following the CID's release, there are some clear takeaways:

- The **metals and mining** sector dominated: it accounted for **41 per cent of meetings**, 136 in total, despite accounting for just over 30 per cent of organisations lobbying; it also made up **6 of the top 10** most frequent visitors.² It has been a big backer of the

CID and how it can help weaken environmental standards in the name of building more polluting projects. CBAM was its number one concern.

- The **energy sector** was the second biggest (**13 per cent** of meetings), followed by the **automotive sector (11 per cent)**. However, despite only accounting for 11 per cent of meetings, organisations from the automotive sector had the biggest lobbying firepower, employing 190 lobbyists and declaring a combined yearly lobbying budget of almost €15m. As well as lobbying for more protection from Chinese competition, which it is getting via the Automotive Action Plan, the industry has successfully lobbied to delay the ban on combustion engines. This will not only increase air and climate pollution, but also see the industry fall further behind in the technological race with China, undermining its own Action Plan.
- **Trade associations** proved once again to be key to lobbying in Brussels, accounting for almost **two thirds of meetings** with senior EU officials. EUROFER (38), European Aluminium (11), and EUROMETAUX (10) took three of the top four spots, while chemicals industry association CEFIC, a key protagonist behind the competitiveness agenda and the Clean Industrial Deal itself, had eight meetings.
- **NGOs** made up just **four per cent** of the most frequent visitors, with Transport and Environment, on 9 meetings, one of only two to make the cut.



Corporate
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Welcoming hosts

Which Commissioner and cabinets had the most meetings on the Dirty Industrial Deal in the year since the CID was launched?

Stephane Séjourné
DG Internal Market



Wopke Hoekstra
DG Climate



Jessika Roswall
DG Environment



Dan Jørgensen
DG Energy



Teresa Ribera
DG Competition





Welcoming hosts

Public records show 16 different EU departments were subjected to lobbying over the CID, including the office of President Von der Leyen. This spanned Commissioners, their cabinets, Director Generals, their deputies, and heads of unit. However, this is merely the tip of the iceberg, as lower-level staff – often the target of lobbying operations – are not obliged to disclose their meetings.

Who were the most welcoming Commissioners and cabinets?

- First place, Executive Vice-President for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy Stéphane Séjourné and his cabinet: together they had **131 meetings** with 192 different lobby groups on the CID and related files. This shouldn't be a huge surprise, as Séjourné oversees DG GROW and is responsible for the CID and many of its related files such as the Industrial Accelerator Act.
- Second place, Commissioner for Climate, Net Zero and Clean Growth, Wopke Hoekstra: along with his cabinet he had **60 meetings**.

In contrast, the Executive Vice President for a Clean, Just and Competitive Transition Teresa Ribera, who is supposed to jointly coordinate work on the Clean Industrial Deal, had less than 15 per cent of the meetings held by Séjourné. She and her cabinet were in fifth place, with **20 meetings**, only a third of those held by Hoekstra and his cabinet.

Conclusion

One year on, and it's clear that lobbying around the EU's Dirty Industrial Deal has been dominated by the same big polluters that crafted the initial proposal. It was already intended to serve the interests of Europe's heavy industry, but the lobbying that has taken

place in the year since its launch has ensured it is even dirtier, undermining the rights of workers, public health and nature. Civil society is barely at the table, while industry enjoys an open door. This is in part due to the ideological commitment of this Commission in conflating the industry interests with the public interest, but also reflects the gaping difference in resources between Europe's biggest corporations and a civil society sector increasingly under attack – financially and politically. To create an industrial policy that serves all Europeans and respects planetary boundaries means listening to those most impacted and not those narrowly focused on profit making.

Methodology and disclaimer

The data used for this article is publicly available across multiple European Commission websites, but has been extracted and compiled from two separate lobbying databases that both aggregate the information: [LobbyFacts.eu](#) and [EU Integrity Watch](#).

The data covers meetings between 26 February 2025 - 3 February 2026. However, many meetings that took place in early 2026 were not yet publicly disclosed so were not included in the data.

For more information on the data collation, please contact ceo@corporateeurope.org.

Footnotes

1. CEO looked into the lobby meetings on the CID directly, as well on those initiatives mentioned in [The Clean Industrial Deal: Affordable Energy Action Plan](#); Automotive action plan; Bioeconomy Strategy; Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism; CfD; Chemicals Industry Package; Circular Economy Act; Clean Industrial Deal; Clean Industrial Deal State Aid Framework; Clean Trade and Investment Partnership; Critical Raw Materials Act; Ecodesign; Energy taxation; EU content requirements; Foreign Subsidies Regulation; General Block Exemption Regulation; Greening corporate fleets; Grids Package; Industrial (Decarbonisation) Accelerator Act; Industrial Decarbonisation Bank; Lead markets; Low-carbon hydrogen Network Charges; Permitting; Power Purchase Agreements; Quality jobs roadmap; Revision of Public Procurement Directives; Skills Portability Initiative; Social leasing; Steel and metals action plan; Sustainable Transport Investment Plan; Union of Skills
2. The ten most frequent visitors were: The European Steel Association (39); ArcelorMittal (18); EDF (12), European Aluminium (11); Cement Europe (11); EUROMETAUX (10); Transport and Environment (9); Outokumpu Oyj (9); BUSINESSEUROPE (9); Thyssenkrupp Steel Europe (8)

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