

The “revolving door” between politicians and the fossil fuel industry has long been a concern in U.S. politics. Perhaps the most “blatant” case, as Kelle Louaillier pointed out in an Alternet article published by EcoWatch, was former Secretary of State Rex Tillerson, who was appointed by President Donald Trump to the post after serving as the CEO of ExxonMobil. But it was a problem during the Obama administration, too. A report published in 2014 found that the turnover between public servants and fossil fuel industry workers facilitated four permits for liquified natural gas export facilities.

Now, a May 2018 report reveals that it’s not a problem unique to this side of the pond. The report, “Revolving Doors and the Fossil Fuel Industry: Time to Tackle Conflicts of Interest in Climate Policy-Making,” was commissioned by the Green/European Free Alliance group in the European Parliament. It found 88 cases of the revolving door phenomenon between fossil fuel companies and the public sector in the 13 European countries it studied. According to the Executive Summary, the Green/EFA group undertook the report in response to claims that members of the European Union were not engaging seriously with other countries who wanted to draft a conflict of interests policy for the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change.

“Perhaps the extent of the revolving door phenomenon across Europe is one of the reasons why the European Union and its Member States have been siding with other large polluting economies such as the USA and Canada in their attempts to block discussions on conflicts of interest, despite the fact that governments from across the globe have raised this as an issue at the UN level,” the report’s introduction said.

The report also expressed concern about the impact of fossil fuel lobbying on climate change policy overall.

“[I]t is hard to deny that the fossil fuel industry has been fiercely fighting effective climate policies over the past couple of decades. This industry is not only highly influential, but it is also an effective recruiter of former regulators in the energy sector, as shown in this report. And its political influence stands out,” the report’s introduction said.

The report found that the revolving door operated differently in different countries. In Spain, Austria and Denmark, the fossil fuel sector tended to hire high-level politicians. For example, in 2016 in Spain, 26 former ministers and senior party officials had jobs in private energy companies.

In other countries, like the UK, France, Belgium and Norway, companies tended to hire ex-policy advisers.

For example, in the UK, Patrick Erwin went from head of Energy Markets and Infrastructure Strategy and Programme Office at the Department of Energy and Climate Change to

working for the biggest UK fracking company, INEOS shale.

Overall, 28 of the cases found by the report involved former ministers or secretaries of state, 28 involved high-placed civil servants or cabinet members, 22 involved members of parliament and 10 involved former members of government regulatory agencies.

The report said that it was beyond its scope to assess the impact of these revolving door instances on climate change policy overall and called for more research to be done.

It recommended European countries adopt a three-year “cooling off” period before any former public servant took a job in a sector they formerly regulated, publicly available “lobbying transparency registers” so that citizens could track potential influence in politics, “machine readable declarations of interest” published by new office holders detailing past careers and financial interests and “codes of conduct” that would prevent public servants from having any conflicts of interests while serving.

The report further backed the creation of a UNFCCC conflict-of-interest policy.

Source: ecowatch