

Right wing MEPs protest against lobbying...by Fairtrade International

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Rather than fighting child labour, MEPs are pushing to stop campaigns that inform European citizens about the responsibilities of European multinationals

Fairtrade International and 21 of its partner organizations received a grant worth €5.8 million from the European Commission's Development Education and Awareness Raising and SwitchAsia programs for a three-year project [1] entitled "Trade Fair — Live Fair," which will be used to lobby MEPs and "EU policy makers." According to **Sergi Corbalan**, director of the Fair Trade Advocacy Office (FTAO), the project will "provide financial support to more than 20 Fair Trade movement organizations across Europe," helping them to "better [coordinate] advocacy and public mobilization work" and "build [their] collective capacities to advocate for Fair Trade and more sustainable consumption and production patterns."

EU funding for NGO lobbying: FTAO — one of the grant recipients — says on its website that "the EU has failed so far to move away from its 'business as usual' approach to trade policy" and that it therefore "engages with the EU Institutions to ensure that the EU political recognition to Fair Trade is translated into coordinated specific policies in support of Fair Trade." FTAO's entry on the Transparency Register [2] says it has five people with access to the European Parliament with a lobbying budget of €346,945 — of which around 44 percent comes from the European Commission's development department. It also says that it "works closely with other NGOs and wider civil society loose networks related to the issue" including trade unions, cooperatives and the International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance.

"A violation of the rule of law": Markus Pieper, a center-right MEP who wrote a controversial resolution on the EU's funding of NGOs that's currently on hold in the Parliament's budgetary control committee, slammed the move. **"If the Commission were in fact to use taxpayers' money to influence MEPs in its interest, this would be a violation of the European rule of law,"** he said. **"There is a reason why there is a separation of powers, according to which the Commission and the Parliament must act independently of one another."** Elmar Brok, a senior member of the European People's Party who headed the Parliament's foreign affairs committee, described it as **"a scandal,"** saying **"it must be ensured that public money goes straight into advancing sustainable consumption and production — and not into lobbying MEPs."**

How fair is fair trade? In November last year, a cross-party group of MEPs sent a written question [3] to the Commission citing TV documentaries saying that "EU-funded coffee and cocoa certifications such as 'Fairtrade,' 'UTZ' etc. contribute to poverty and hunger and hurt innocent children" and that "these so-called certification schemes receive millions in EU funding, allowing multinationals to buy coffee and cocoa for less than they cost to produce, while deceiving EU consumers with false claims."

Commission reacts: “Raising awareness about fair trade is important,” said a Commission spokesman. “This is why the EU had launched a call for proposals for projects that would raise public awareness about these issues. The selected projects ... aim to make citizens, as well as other stakeholders like MEPs or NGOs, aware of the impact that their choices have on others.”

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<https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/politico-brussels-influence/politico-brussels-influence-presented-by-eui-stg-eu-funded-fair-trade-campaign-wealthy-lobbyists-rise-of-the-robots/>

Footnotes

[1] <http://bit.ly/2Erzd9n>

[2] <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/displaylobbyist.do?id=20744335040-66>

[3] <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+WQ+E-2017-007124+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>