

YOUNG FRIENDS OF THE EARTH EUROPE

WE WILL LOBBY BACK

A youth manifesto written by Young Friends of the Earth Europe

Science has never been clearer, the urgency has never been more absolute and the warnings have never been louder: the climate crisis is happening now. However, in Europe, climate legislation has been under fire, instead of being strengthened. Policy that we have spent years campaigning and negotiating for is suddenly being weakened, destroyed, or abandoned completely. Deregulation, not simplification, has become the defining word of this political moment, whilst the consequences of the climate crisis grow more catastrophic every day, right in our backyard (POLITICO Research & Analysis Division, 2025).

We are watching targets being reduced, timelines being pushed back. Rules and regulations meant to protect us and future generations that once seemed permanent are now being demolished, hidden behind closed-door negotiations. This is not happening because of new scientific research or a true change of public will. It is the outcome of something far more worrisome.

We, the young citizens of Europe, will not stay silent.

CORPORATE CAPTURE: THE LOBBY THAT IS SO EFFECTIVE

The world's biggest polluters have gone far beyond influencing policy changes: they are driving them, undercutting every pillar of democracy along the way. Companies in the oil and gas industry are among the giants who have spent decades blocking essential climate legislation - they are spending millions trying to shape the very rules that are supposed to hold them accountable for their pollution. Rather than taking accountability for their actions, these companies exert their political influence to ensure they never have to reform their destructive practices (De Leth, 2025). Corporate capture is a systematic and consistently escalating threat to democratic governance.

Corporations like ExxonMobil and TotalEnergies, whose business models depend on the never-ending extraction of fossil fuels, are not simply observers in this crisis—they are among its key perpetrators. Research by independent organisations such as CEO disclosed the reach and scale of their political influence: CEO found that 90 per cent of lobby meetings around Europe’s clean industrial deal covered business interests asking for deregulation instead of green policy, opposing the mere 8 per cent of meetings that were with NGOs (Corporate Europe Observatory, 2026). The presence of polluters in policy conversations is so strong that their demands are copied and pasted into policy proposals. Lobbying through close relationships, corporate-government revolving doors, and business organisations to ensure the corporate voices are always the loudest in every room (Influence Map, 2023).

DEMOCRACY: THOSE AT THE TABLE

New evidence has confirmed what we have already known: big polluting companies were invited to many private conversations with European policymakers to discuss the very climate regulations that have since been weakened. Meanwhile, there were no public consultations and no open hearings where we could make our voices heard (Abnett, 2025). While polluters had a seat at the table, citizens and civil society organisations were kept completely in the dark.

We never voted for the CEO’s of major polluting companies, yet they seem to be the ones writing our legislation. When they are given the right to shape EU climate policy that is meant to regulate their harmful behavior, it fundamentally opposes our democratic processes. These companies do not speak for the European public or for future generations. They represent their shareholders and their profit. Allowing them to dictate the terms of their own regulation is not just undemocratic - it’s lethal (Corporate Europe Observatory et al., 2021). At a time when ecosystems are collapsing, and people are being forced out of their homes or worse because of climate change, it is existentially dangerous. A democracy that listens to the wishes of polluters and silences its citizens is not a functioning democracy at all.

YOUTH ENGAGEMENT: THE MISSING VOICES

Our generation will live the longest with the consequences of climate decisions being made today, in closed-door meetings that we are not allowed to enter. We will be the ones to see firsthand the devastating results of climate policies being

weakened and demolished, the targets that are quietly pushed back or forgotten, the protections that are being exchanged for corporate credit. Young people living in Europe did not fuel this crisis. We did not lobby for deregulation. We are the ones left out of policy-making processes, whilst polluters design the rules that shape our future (Helliesen, 2023).

This is not just a question of youth representation. It is an issue of basic justice, of intergenerational and intersectional fairness. Young European citizens are not an interest group. We are the biggest stakeholders in climate outcomes. Our exclusion from lobby invitations is not neutral. It determines the results and our future. When the sole voices in the room are those with a financial interest in delay and breakdown, delay and breakdown is inevitably the result.

OUR DEMAND

Every time a company, a representative of a company, or a business organisation acting on behalf of companies, is invited to a lobbying conversation about climate policy, or succeeds in inviting itself to one, at least one young European must have a seat at the table too. Not as a token. Not solely as a decoration in a picture for the press. But as an honest participant, with equal access to information, equal speaking time, and an equal say in the decision-making process.

This is not a radical claim or ask. It is the bare minimum required for democratic accountability. Policymakers and politicians must recognise that the people who will inherit the consequences of these climate conversations deserve to be a part of them, more so than corporate interests.

We will organise. We will expose. We will demand transparency.

Ergo, we will lobby back.

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