

European lawmakers have held four times as many meetings with tobacco and nicotine lobbyists in the past two years compared with the entire previous parliamentary term. Since the current European Parliament took office in the summer of 2024, more than 400 meetings have been declared, against roughly 100 across the full 2019-2024 term, according to analysis of Transparency Register data by the Smoke Free Partnership, a coalition of public-health NGOs. MEPs are required to log such contacts. The surge coincides with the EU's effort to overhaul key rules on tobacco products, advertising, and taxation at a moment when novel nicotine products have proliferated and the Commission aims for a "tobacco-free generation" by 2040 under the Beating Cancer Plan.

The figures are conservative. Declarations can be vague or later removed for insufficient detail, and undeclared contacts have been documented in past investigations of Commission departments, particularly DG TRADE. Even so, the volume marks a sharp intensification. Philip Morris International accounts for at least 178 of the meetings—more than any other single manufacturer—while British American Tobacco accounts for about 60. Transparency International EU data place PMI fourth overall among companies for meetings with MEPs and their staff, behind only Meta, Google, and Apple. Italy, the EU's largest tobacco-leaf producer, features in more than one in five declared encounters, with Italian MEPs and companies such as Manifatture Sigaro Toscano prominent; German lawmakers have also met frequently with PMI.

Tobacco lobbying in the Parliament skews right

The bulk of the meetings lawmakers declared to have held with tobacco lobby groups since July 2024 were with MEPs in the center-right European People's Party, the right-wing Conservatives and Reformists and the far-right Patriots for Europe groups.

By meetings total By MEP

Declared meetings Tap a group for details

Roughly 75 percent of the meetings this term have been with lawmakers from the center-right European People's Party, the right-wing European Conservatives and Reformists, and the far-right Patriots for Europe. Top individual recipients include Patriots MEP Auke Zijlstra (14 meetings), ECR's Pietro Fiocchi (nine), and several EPP members with eight each, among them Jessica Polfjård and Elena Nevado del Campo. Meetings have clustered around concrete files: the Tobacco Taxation Directive advancing in the Council, Commission drafting of revisions to the Tobacco Products Directive and advertising rules, and non-binding reports on cardiovascular disease and cancer. "Harm reduction" appears repeatedly as a declared topic.

This pattern reflects the industry's strategic pivot. Traditional cigarette volumes are under pressure from higher taxes, plain packaging, and smoking bans. Companies have redirected resources toward heated tobacco products, e-cigarettes, and oral nicotine pouches, arguing these are lower-risk alternatives that can help adult smokers switch. Industry spokespeople emphasize compliance with existing rules, economic contributions, and a transformation toward a "smoke-free future." BAT's head of fiscal affairs has said the company has "legitimate experiences and arguments" grounded in on-the-ground observation and that the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control has been misquoted; the framework, in the industry's view, focuses on products made from tobacco leaf. PMI stresses science, facts, and democratic dialogue.

Public-health advocates and many left-leaning MEPs reject this framing. They point to Article 5.3 of the WHO FCTC, which obliges parties to protect public-health policies from the commercial and vested interests of the tobacco industry. Implementation guidelines call for limiting interactions to what is strictly necessary for regulation and ensuring full transparency. Greens MEP Tilly Metz has called the volume of meetings "scandalous and shocking," arguing that regular contact is incompatible with work on health files. Socialists and Democrats MEP Nicolás González Casares has linked the pattern of meetings to specific dilutions of language: in a summer 2026 non-binding cardiovascular strategy report, EPP amendments replaced wording that nicotine products should face the "same" regulation as

tobacco with a call for “appropriate rules.” WHO Europe’s regional adviser on tobacco control notes that the treaty’s objectives explicitly include preventing and reducing nicotine addiction, not merely traditional tobacco consumption; Conference of the Parties decisions address novel products.

The imbalance in access is stark. During comparable periods, public-health NGOs, including the Smoke Free Partnership representing dozens of European organizations, have secured far fewer meetings—sometimes a dozen or fewer with influential MEPs—while PMI alone has logged more than a hundred. Industry lobbying expenditure is estimated in the range of €8–14 million annually, supporting more than 100 registered lobbyists plus external firms, consultancies, and newer “harm reduction” groups (eight of 15 such organizations created in the last three years, according to one report). By contrast, NGO operating grants have faced pressure, constraining counter-advocacy. A December 2025 report by STOP and Contre-Feu identified 49 organizations linked to industry interests, 139 people, and nearly €14 million in annual spend, along with undeclared Commission contacts.

Legislative outcomes illustrate the stakes. In June 2026 the European Parliament rejected both the Commission’s original Tobacco Taxation Directive proposal and a watered-down ECON committee report (rapporteur Tomáš Kubín of Patriots for Europe) that had embedded “less harm, less tax” elements and lower rates or longer transitions for novel products. The vote was 439 against to 181 in favor on the Commission text; the absence of a Parliament opinion left the file stalled in the Council, where unanimity is required. Health groups such as the Smoke Free Partnership viewed rejection of the weakened text as preferable to endorsement of industry-aligned framing, while noting the missed chance for stronger public-health amendments. On the products and advertising side, the Commission published an evaluation and launched a public consultation that drew more than 41,000 submissions (overwhelmingly from citizens opposing tighter rules). A legislative proposal for the revised Tobacco Products Directive is expected by the end of 2026. Eight member states have written to the Health Commissioner urging a market freeze on new nicotine products, strict

nicotine caps, broad flavor bans, and standardized packaging—measures industry opposes as overly restrictive.

Earlier attempts to impose sector-specific restrictions on tobacco lobbyists' access to MEPs failed. In June 2026, a cross-party push led by Metz and González Casares did not win support in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs; coordinators concluded that MEPs should decide for themselves whom they meet, provided transparency-register and logging rules are followed. Critics argue this falls short of FCTC obligations; industry and some center-right MEPs counter that blanket exclusion raises constitutional issues and that a 2022 European Court of Justice judgment confirms the treaty does not prohibit all industry participation, only undue influence on tobacco-control policies.

The political geography of the meetings is not accidental. The current Parliament has a stronger right-wing presence than its predecessor. Industry has long targeted EPP members, especially from tobacco-growing regions, while newer right-wing groups have proved receptive. Zijlstra has said engaging with affected sectors is part of the job and that “there are a lot of consumers out there,” urging NGOs to request more meetings. Health advocates counter that resource asymmetry and the industry's documented history of delaying or diluting regulation make unrestricted access a structural risk to the Beating Cancer Plan and related strategies.

Transparency rules have improved—all MEPs and assistants must now declare meetings—but the absolute volume and the concentration among certain political groups and companies remain points of contention. Declared meetings are a minimum; past reports have documented under-reporting, particularly outside core health directorates. The industry's simultaneous participation in dozens of public consultations and roadmaps further multiplies its formal inputs.

As the Commission finalizes proposals for the products and advertising directives and the

Council continues to wrestle with taxation, the intensity of access will shape the outcome. Higher minimum taxes, broader product coverage, flavor restrictions, and independent traceability systems would raise costs and constrain marketing of novel products; lighter-touch rules framed around relative risk would preserve growth avenues. The documented quadrupling of meetings does not prove causation on any single amendment, yet it demonstrates the scale of the industry's effort to define the terms of the debate—harm reduction versus addiction prevention—while public-health voices operate with far thinner resources. Whether EU institutions treat the FCTC's protective obligation as a binding constraint or as flexible guidance will determine how far the rewritten rules move Europe toward its stated 2040 goal. The data make clear that the industry is treating the present parliamentary term as a decisive window.