

'Bayer's Toxic Trails', The Global Lobbying of an Agrochemical Giant. EU's Reapproval of Herbicide Glyphosate

Corporate Europe Observatory's Report on 'Bayer's Toxic Trails' Deserves the Close Attention of All those Concerned with the Safety of Food and Farming System, Including Policy Makers

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The Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) has rendered a great public service by very recently publishing a report titled 'Bayer's Toxic Trails' which reveals how the German agrochemical giant Bayer has been lobbying hard to promote glyphosate and GMOs, or trying to "capture public policy to pursue its private interests." This report, written by Joao Camargo and Hans Van Scharen, follows Bayer's toxic trail as "it maintains monopolistic control of the seed and pesticides markets, fights off regulatory challenges to its toxic products, tries to limit legal liability, and exercises political influence."

This CEO report tells us that German multinational Bayer is one of the biggest pharmaceutical and agricultural companies in the world, employing over 100,000 people globally. **Despite facing very extensive legal actions relating to very serious health problems caused by its high hazard products, it has plans "to stay afloat in a volatile future - from pushing glyphosate and new GMOs, to claiming its agricultural model is climate smart."**



Bayer's Toxic Trails

Market power, monopolies, and the global lobbying of an agrochemical giant

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Screenshot from [CEO](#)

The CEO report says on the basis of its extensive study that "the company's general modus operandi is to cosy up to different political regimes or carefully generate political pressure to push through its products and its monopoly model, using market power, size, financial

assets and lobbying as key tools.”

As the CEO report tells us, Bayer has been in the headlines again recently because of **the EU’s re-approval of the controversial herbicide glyphosate for another 10 years**. This has happened despite the fact that “Glyphosate has come under heavy scrutiny over the past decade, since the International Agency for Research on Cancer (IARC, a World Health Organization agency) [classified](#) the company’s bestselling pesticide as “probably carcinogenic to humans”. In the US Bayer has recently been ordered to pay US\$2.25 billion in [compensation](#) to a single plaintiff due to cancer linked to use of the pesticide (later cut to US\$400 million by a judge).”

“In total, so far, Bayer has [faced over 170,000 lawsuits](#) associated with its pesticide Roundup, which glyphosate is a main ingredient of. As of 2024 the company also estimates that there are still over 60,000 pending Roundup lawsuits. According to US law firm Wisner Baum, roughly 60 per cent of lawsuits have been resolved through verdicts in individual cases worth billions, or via a collective Roundup settlement agreement worth approximately US\$11 billion. As a result the company’s stock continues to fall: it has [dropped 70 percent](#) since the summer of 2018, when it acquired the giant agrochemical glyphosate producer Monsanto for [€63 billion](#).”

However, the report says,

“Bayer is pursuing a business model of increasing monopoly control over chemicals and seeds. After the Bayer-Monsanto and other mergers, just four companies ended up controlling [60 percent of the world seed market](#). Analysis shows that [Bayer is the leading company in the global seed market](#), with a 17 percent share. It is also a dominant player in [the chemical crop protection market](#). As a result, it appears determined to undermine key aspects of the EU’s beleaguered Green Deal. And even where it finds obstacles, for example when its products are deemed too toxic to sell for use in Europe, it will still produce them here and instead export the banned substances to other countries around the world, including across the global south. The company has a long history of promoting a global agricultural model that creates and perpetuates addiction to its [ever more expensive](#) products.”

Further the CEO report says,

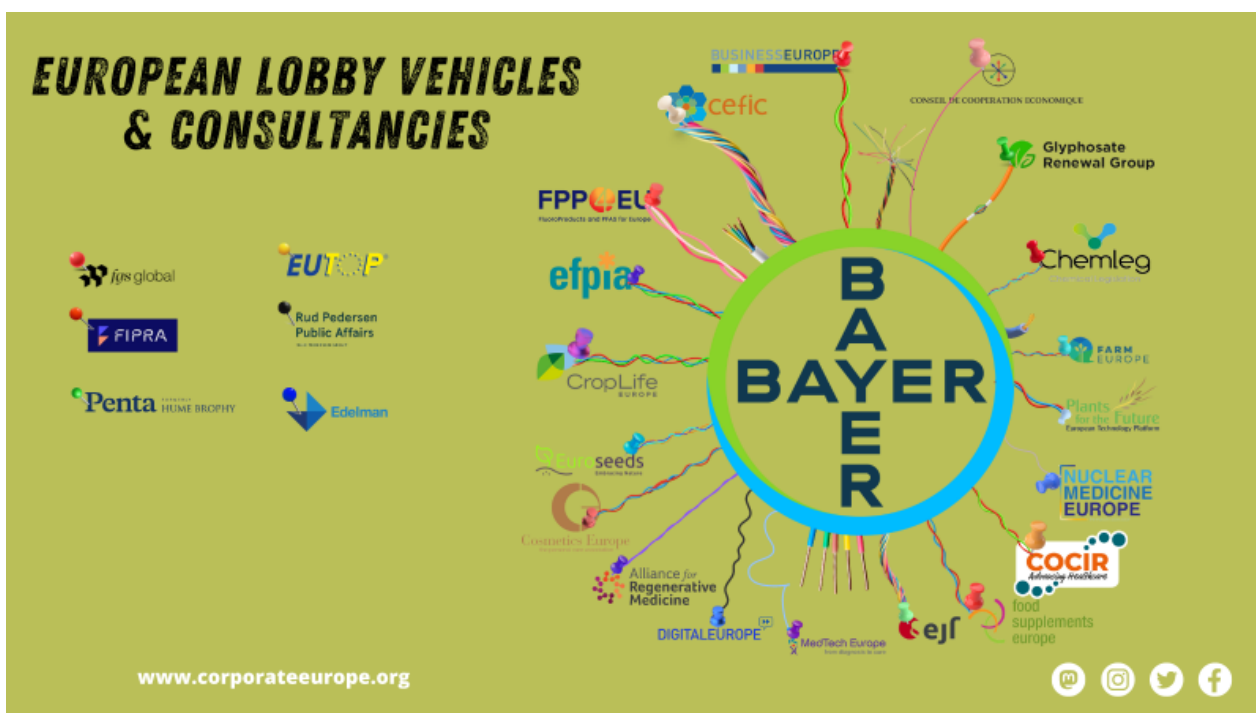
“Recent examples show the capability of the agrochemical giant to challenge or change policies and even laws in countries like Thailand, Mexico, and the US... Bayer’s plans promise a disturbing future for food, farmers, and communities – a future that undermines sustainable agriculture and real climate solutions in order to secure future corporate profits, whatever the environmental and health consequences.”

Regarding powerful lobbying efforts , this report tells us,

“Major actors in the agrochemical sector, aka ‘Big Toxics’, are currently among the [biggest lobby spenders by sector at EU level](#), jostling for the top place with Big Tech and Big Energy. According to the EU lobby register, [Bayer AG](#) spent up between 7 to €8 million in 2023 on EU lobbying, the biggest sum declared by any individual chemical company and the highest amount ever spent by Bayer on EU lobbying. To this we should add an important caveat: these are self-declared figures in a *de facto* voluntary register. In the past, Monsanto hired lobby firm Fleishman-Hillard to work on its lobby

campaign to secure the re-authorisation of glyphosate but [did not declare](#) the €14.5 million contract in the register.

“It was in the context of this glyphosate lobby campaign that Monsanto-Bayer was exposed by the publication of the Monsanto Papers. In May 2019 Bayer acknowledged that its Monsanto unit was being investigated by French prosecutors for compiling files on journalists, politicians and other influential persons in several European countries. The inquiry was opened after a complaint was filed by newspaper *Le Monde*, which alleged that Monsanto had developed and maintained a file on 200 European names, including journalists and lawmakers, in hopes of influencing their position on pesticides.”



[Source](#)

US investigative journalist Carey Gillam (who has published two books on glyphosate and Monsanto) [published an overview](#) of how the company has very actively manipulated the debate on glyphosate. According to Gillam they have done this not only by “[ghostwriting scientific papers](#) and suppressing science that conflicts with corporate assertions of Roundup’s safety”, but also via cosy relationships with regulators and lawmakers, and through strategic manipulation and intimidation of the media.

The CEO Report states further that in 2022 the US-based investigative group [US Right to Know \(USRTK\) reported that the very active ‘Genetic Literacy Project’](#) “is an influential front group that partners with Bayer and other chemical companies to promote GMO foods and pesticides and argue for deregulation. Bayer paid the Genetic Literacy Project US\$100,000 from July 2020 to June 2021 for its work “to prevent legislative overreach in genetic engineering”, according to the group’s declaration in the US regarding its lobbying there.

In its first 'Political Advocacy Transparency Report', published in December 2023, [Bayer declared spending of €49 million worldwide on lobbying \(including the pharmaceutical side of its operations\), as well as an extra €26 million on trade association fees.](#) The report indicates that Bayer spent a staggering €75 million on lobbying worldwide in 2022, (of which at least €13.5 million was spent in Europe).

Regarding new GMOs, in 2021 [Bayer proposed](#) "a new regulation (separate from GMOs) assessing whether the changes in the DNA of the new plant are similar to the ones that could have been obtained through conventional breeding methods or spontaneous mutation." This would class new GMOs as essentially the same as non-GM.

Bayer's lobbying also ignores the conclusion of scientific researchers in 2022 that we have already exceeded the [safe planetary boundaries](#) of chemicals in the environment. Target Seven of the [15th Conference of Parties on the UN Convention for Biodiversity](#) clearly outlines the imperative of "reducing the risks of pesticide use to protect a further decline of biodiversity."

Results of powerful lobbying by Bayer and others in Europe can be seen- the European Commission has proposed to deregulate new GMOs, and has re-authorized the use of the "probably carcinogenic" glyphosate for another decade, despite not having achieved the agreement of a qualified majority of member states.

In the USA, "because of the avalanche of litigation unfolding as a result of the toxic nature of glyphosate and the fact that the labels of products that contain glyphosate have not warned users of its potential dangers, Bayer [wants to change US law](#). Bayer has also been lobbying lawmakers in three US states to pass legislation which would provide legal protection for the company from future lawsuits." [As AP reported](#) "nearly identical bills introduced in Iowa, Missouri and Idaho this year - with wording supplied by Bayer - would protect pesticide companies from claims they failed to warn that their product causes cancer." Experts warn that this could have huge consequences - extending to US product liability laws and providing corporate immunity for lawsuits.

The CEO report says,

"Despite the adverse health and scientific findings, Bayer isn't giving up one inch on maintaining its glyphosate production and market. It is simply an extremely profitable chemical, with annual market revenue of US\$10 [billion in 2023](#)."

This means "ignoring and dismissing [the wealth of scientific evidence](#) and the [work of the IARC on glyphosate](#), which has despite enormous pressure not changed its scientific findings."

This is being resisted. In September 2023, [185 US environmental organisations sent letters to the House and Senate, urging both chambers](#) to reject these legislative proposals whose aim is to pre-empt existing state and local laws and ordinances which are in place to safeguard communities from the harmful impacts of toxic agricultural pesticides. The dubious track record of the [EPA on glyphosate and other substances](#) has already been widely documented and exposed by the publication of the Monsanto Papers.

The CEO report says,

"Ever since taking on Monsanto and adding glyphosate-based RoundUp to its list of

troublesome products, it has taken many hits. Sales have continued to decline in its crop science and pharma segments, and a further slash in its 2023 revenue [directly connected to a drop in glyphosate demand](#) is creating pressure for change.”

Bayer [had announced](#) that it would take glyphosate for residential use out of the US market in 2023, although its massive agricultural use will be retained.

A [class action against Bayer was opened by non-Hodgkin Lymphoma patients in Australia](#) – over 800 people allege their cancer was caused by glyphosate and Roundup in particular, spelling more trouble on the horizon. In Missouri, the company was [condemned to pay US\\$1.56 billion](#) for more cancer cases connected to Roundup.

The CEO report tells us further that Bayer has been looking into alternatives to glyphosate for some time.

“In March 2024 the company announced that such a product [would be publicly available in 2028](#). At the beginning of this year, in Brazil, [Bayer presented two new herbicides](#) in this vein: Icafolin and Convintro. The Convintro herbicide contains PFAS diflufenican and endocrine-disrupting metribuzim, two substances which are bound to raise serious environmental and health issues.”

The CEO report adds,

“An even more business-friendly and Bayer-friendly German government in 2025, such as one led by the former director of BlackRock Germany (one of Bayer’s biggest shareholders) – and current CDU leader in the Bundestag – Friedrich Merz, might improve Bayer’s prospects. With a rise in conservative and far-right elected representatives in the EU, Bayer and its toxic lobby will likely realign for new political scenarios.”

Expressing shock the CEO report says,

“It is astonishing to see how far Monsanto’s (subsequently Bayer’s) lobbying has sunk its teeth into public decision-making across the world. Bayer’s lobby tactics continue to capture public policy-making, and in doing so hollow out democracy. A perverse symbiosis between corporate lobby groups and decision-makers has been actively created through its economic weight and large investments in many corners of the world, and this consistently leads to crucial decisions being made in favor of industry profits, rather than public interest.”

Further, this report adds,

“companies like Monsanto/Bayer have for many years managed to influence, design and change national policies on the use of pesticides and biotechnology in food production, leading to significant and long-lasting environmental and health harm. But if Bayer were to now succeed in changing US law on labelling, and thus to de facto achieve immunity from further litigation related to its toxic products, that would still be a new low for democracy and for policies to improve public health and preserve biodiversity.”

According to the CEO report,

“Some things are really hard to change. As with the three other ‘horsemen of the agrochemical apocalypse’ – Syngenta, Corteva, and BASF – the dire climate situation of food chokepoints internationally offers the opportunity for corporations like Bayer to hold more power over governments and farmers who are subject to significant socio-economic pressures, deploying patented products, crops, and technologies controlled almost exclusively by them. These companies are privatising life and food itself, with patented seeds and the coupled use of pesticides, to maintain and further lock in an agro-industrial model that produces mainly commodities.”

This report strongly asserts,

“Companies such as Bayer have left a toxic trail all around the world and all through their long history. Bayer’s model of production, and many of its products, have been a past, present, and future threat to people and planet,– Bayer’s modus operandi is not to work in the public interest, but rather to capture public policy to serve its private interests and dividends of its shareholders, all while ignoring the public health and environmental impact of its activities.

“In the short term, we need a firewall between decision-makers on the one side, and Bayer and its lobby representatives on the other. Much as we need toxic-free food and a toxic-free environment, we desperately also need toxic-free politics...We need to urgently kick big toxic polluters out of the places where they exercise their poisonous political influence.”

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