

Romania



Summary of Findings

1. INDUSTRY PARTICIPATION IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The tobacco industry (TI) has a long history of interference in policy development in Romania, especially during the years when the tobacco control civic movement was less organized. The interference still persists and there is a lack of government action to counteract such practices. The industry in Romania continued to focus and strengthened the concluded partnerships with fiscal and customs authorities, which allowed them to severely tamper policy development. The interference of the TI at the policy development level in the Romanian Parliament became even more intense in 2021-2023, focusing on the new tobacco products and attempts to block and delay related policies on these. During 2021-2023, Romania saw an increase in the number of industry-supported front groups that advance their interests in policy development.

2. INDUSTRY CSR ACTIVITIES

Tobacco-related CSR activities are not banned in Romania due to inadequate implementation of the WHO FCTC, although transposed into a law in Romania in 2005. Generally TI contributions to different governmental agencies are “masked” into operational support or directed through third parties/ front-groups.

British American Tobacco (BAT) has entered into a partnership with District 3 Bucharest City Administration on green energy and sustainability. In November 2021, their campaign announced the installation of 5 solar trees (for charging electronic devices) and free Wi-Fi in key areas of the city.

3. BENEFITS TO THE INDUSTRY

The TI constantly lobbies for preferential treatment from the government in the form of exemptions or benefits, or through delaying the adoption or implementation of specific policies as well as through the preferential taxation regime for new tobacco products (heated tobacco products, e-cigarettes). Although Romania is part of the European Union, the government still gives subsidies for tobacco farming, albeit very limited.

4. UNNECESSARY INTERACTION

Despite frequent changes of governmental structures over the last few years, the TI maintains a constant pace of engaging with top government officials. Existing finance and customs partnerships allow direct involvement at the highest level; participation in events and high-level meetings. Also, there were frequent instances and events organized through third parties, most of the time “disguising” the real purpose of the event behind different concepts. All the 3 big transnational tobacco companies (PMI, BAT, JTI) meet with senior officials on a regular basis, although these ongoing interactions are never made public.

5. TRANSPARENCY

None of the interactions with the TI were made in a transparent manner. Moreover, specific attempts of the civic society in 2018 and 2019 to set transparency rules for engagement with the tobacco industry at least at the Ministry of Health level were not implemented. During 2021-2023, there was an extensive engagement of the TI with the Ministry of Finance, Internal Affairs and Parliament of Romania.



6. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Political parties' funds are rarely scrutinized by the public or media. In recent years, there has been an increase of civil society focus on these, however, they never focus on commercial interests or the links between specific industries' contributions and advancing the interests of such industries. Due to significant TI investments in media channels specific investigations are very rare.

A significant conflict of interest directly linked with the TI is the case of Teodor Meleşcanu, former minister of External Affairs 2017-2019 and president of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament of Romania in 2019, who has relatives in high executive positions in the TI (later lobbying for TI). The current Corporate Affairs Director of BAT Romania held a cabinet position in the government prior to the appointment.

7. PREVENTIVE MEASURES

There is almost no action taken to prevent and regulate the interference of the TI in policymaking. No proactive approach nor any willingness to accept civil society proposals to regulate TI interference. The government generally views the TI as a reliable and trustworthy business partner, holding frequent engagements and commitments to act to advance its interests.

Recommendations

1. There should be a code of conduct for public officials, health institutions and health professionals to guide them when dealing with the TI. This code should provide a procedure to limit the interactions with the TI to only when strictly necessary. It should further provide a procedure to ban any financial or non-financial support from the TI, as well as any engagement with the TI.
2. The government has to put in place a program to consistently raise awareness on policies relating to WHO FCTC Article 5.3 to ensure all units of the government are aware of TI interference and to reduce unnecessary interactions.
3. The government has to require the tobacco companies to report on the various aspects of their business including marketing expenditures, revenues, lobbying and philanthropy.
4. The government must re-install its transparency registry.