

PRESS RELEASE

In Runup to Brexit Negotiations, Secretly Funded Groups Spend £22 Million to Distort UK Politics

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www.transparify.org

Secretive think tanks spend over £22 million a year to influence British public opinion and lobby politicians in Westminster, a study released today shows. According to data compiled by Transparify, a global transparency initiative, at least two of these financially opaque groups are predominantly funded by donors in the United States and the Persian Gulf, raising concerns that foreign vested interests are seeking to distort democratic debates and decision-making in the UK. The study documents incidences in which opaque think tanks have failed to disclose funding sources, advocated policies that favoured their hidden donors, presented flawed evidence, and generated fake news.

Dr Till Bruckner, Advocacy Manager, Transparify, said:

“Brexit will entail thousands of policy decisions that will shape the future of the country for decades to come. This creates an unprecedented opportunity for undercover lobbyists masquerading as think tanks to manipulate democratic processes by churning out biased studies and generating fake news. Politicians, the media and the public should ignore this small group of fake tanks and their propaganda. Most think tanks in Britain are financially transparent. If we want intellectually independent policy advice, we should trust only genuine experts who have nothing to hide.”

Duncan Hames, Director of Policy, Transparency International UK, said:

“Amidst concerns over ‘fake’ news, we lament the absence of evidence from public discourse. There’s a genuine need for objective work by truly independent think tanks. The power we entrust to these experts should also come with accountability, and that requires transparency about their funding. Whether it’s research into healthcare reform or military spending, decision-makers need to know that what they’re reading is impartial and authoritative advice, not the promotion of vested interests before that of the public.”

Keith Burnet, Director of Communications and Publishing, Chatham House, said:

“In today’s political climate there is an urgent need for think tanks to help prioritise, understand and resolve the most pressing global and domestic policy challenges. At Chatham House we are as determined as ever in our commitment to providing objective, rigorous analysis, open debate and new ideas and by being as transparent as possible about our sources of funding to underscore the credibility of our work.”

Transparify assessed the financial transparency of 27 leading UK think tanks, finding that 17 are transparent about who funds them. Transparify’s data shows that British think tanks collectively employ over 1,200 staff and spend over £120 million a year.

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