

Anti-palm oil lobbies bending the EU's will

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Youssef Kobo explains how anti-palm oil lobbies are hurting the environment and the EU's poorest members



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Some EU lobbies are protecting unsustainable industries at the expense of free trade, citizen interest and poverty alleviation.

Just like some lobbies ran wild to support Brexit to the expense of citizens everywhere, the same is happening with EU trade - palm oil in particular.

But unlike Brexit, there is still time to change approach and build a stronger union.

The EU pays lip service to free trade and is susceptible to lobbying by major corporations.

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The European Commission recently ruled bio-based biofuels as unsustainable, which means they cannot be counted towards EU renewable energy targets.

While the public line is that this will help to preserve the climate, experts clearly point out the paradox.

In 2018, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature issued a [landmark report](#) [6] warning that because palm oil uses less land to produce greater oil than soy, rapeseed or sunflower, the ban will lead to greater land-use and drive up rates of deforestation in Latin America.

According to Professor Martin Persson, co-author of the Global Environmental Change study, banning these commodities, as the EU has done, is not the answer.

Instead, producers must be pressured and incentivised to change.

“Just closing the door on any particular commodity runs the risk of moving to another commodity or another producer,” says Persson.

“In theory, there is plenty of already cleared land to grow commodities like palm oil and soy, or to host cattle—so we need incentives and regulations to ensure that companies adhere to proper sustainability criteria” **Professor Martin Persson**

“As long as the demand is there, then a ban would simply displace production somewhere else.”

“We need to create incentives to make production better,” he explained.

So why is the EU bending to the will of lobbies?

Veteran environmentalist Sir Jonathan Porritt, and former chair of the UK government’s Sustainable Development Commission, says that the EU’s palm oil boycott is a [result of the influence](#) [7] of “two very powerful lobbies.”

Porritt says these are “trade associations seeking to protect EU-based producers of rapeseed oil and sunflower oil” regardless of their involvement in massive deforestation, and some “environmental NGOs” funded by the EU.

Instead of supporting free trade and helping EU citizens, lobbies are winning.

And this is despite palm oil being a net-net winner for the EU.

As Professor Persson noted, “palm is actually a fantastic crop in principle. It uses far less land than other vegetable oils.”

“Using ‘sustainability’ as a crutch hurts our credibility in negotiations and creates tit for tat trade wars that hurt EU citizens”

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However, the EU’s approach in other areas, like timber imports, provides a useful model and includes stricter rules and regulation monitoring as well as safety precautions.

In addition, the EU can agree voluntary partnership agreements with countries to assist them in meeting appropriate sustainability criteria.

But using ‘sustainability’ as a crutch hurts our credibility in negotiations and creates tit for tat trade wars that hurt EU citizens.

We already have a roadmap that lifts citizens out of poverty and we must return to it.

About the author

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