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We analyzed and collected a great deal of data for the article on TTIP and think tanks. In this piece, Bas van Beek, Sophia Beunder, and Jilles Mast account for their choices and invite you to make use of their data.

# How we looked into think tanks and TTIP (and feel free to use our data!)

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**T**ogether with Tomas Vanheste and journalists from the Platform for Authentic Journalism, we tried to deepen our understanding of the role these think tanks in the debate on TTIP. We asked ourselves which think tanks were involved in the discussions about the proposed free trade agreement and what function they fulfil. Our goal was to discover whether think tanks really are objective, scientific and independent


organizations or whether there are other, hidden interests at play.

That resulted in the following story:

### Big business orders its pro-TTIP arguments from these think tanks

*Think tanks present themselves as independent providers of arguments, facts, and figures in the ideologically charged debate on TTIP, the pending free trade agreement between the U.S. and the EU. But is that really the case? Together with the Platform for Authentic Journalism and fellow correspondent Dimitri Tokmetzis, I investigate where think tanks get their money and whether this influences their work.*

**Read the story here**

Journalists Bas van Beek, Sophia Beunder, and Jilles Mast spent months sifting through data about the TTIP lobby and think tanks.  In this piece they explain how that works.

## Why specifically these think tanks?

The first question that we faced during this research was what a think tank actually is. How do you define something like that? After all, there are thousands of think tanks around the world that have different areas of expertise, different ways of approaching their work, and different funding models.

Of course, we're not the first to have asked this question. It's still a hotly debated topic in academic circles. After reviewing the literature, we decided it made much more sense to look at what think tanks do instead of what they are.

Two functions stand out in particular. First, think tanks deal with content. After all, r

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The more extensive a think tank's network, the better it can convey its views to the people that matter

is their business. They produce reports, provide policy recommendations, and think about social issues at an academic level. That's why think tanks are sometimes referred to as "universities without students." Their second function is to network and set up networks. The more extensive a think tank's network, the better it can convey its views to the people that matter.

Bearing this in mind, we selected seven think tanks, the most important criterion being that they were actively involved in the area of TTIP. We looked at whether the think tanks were organizing events about the agreement and whether they regularly published research on it. Six of the seven think tanks in this research are some of the ones most actively involved in the area of TTIP.

In some ways, the Centre for Economic Policy Research (CEPR) is an exception because it hasn't engaged particularly vigorously in the debate. On the other hand, it penned the most important and influential report on the agreement, which is why we decided to select it in the end.

## Collecting the data

After selecting the think tanks, we began to collect data. We used KUMU to gather our data and it turned out to be the ideal online tool for mapping out networks. KUMU uses email addresses and connections to generate results. The elements we used were people, businesses, think tanks, governments, other organizations (for example, non-governmental organizations, universities), publications, and events.

We then added connections, including information about the nature of the relationship, the role of "speaker," for example, between a person and an event, or the amount of sponsorship that exists between a business and a think tank. You can access this entire database online now.

Our research focused on four things. First, we looked at funding. Where do think tanks get their money from, and how much of it comes from the business community? We then looked at the hundreds of corporate sponsors that we retrieved from think tanks' sites next to a Corporate Europe Observatory list. This enabled us to see which of these businesses had already approached, or lobbied, the European Commission about their interest in TTIP. Because businesses also lobby through interest groups such as BusinessEurope, the European Services Forum, and the TransAtlantic Business Council, these organizations and their members were also incorporated in the analysis.

We devoted special attention to board members' connections with the business community


We then looked at the board members of the think tanks, in order to map out their networks. Who are these people and what are their backgrounds? We devoted special attention to board members' connections with the business community. Although we also introduced other kinds of connections in most cases – with universities or other think tanks for example – we examined these less rigorously. We chose this approach because the fact that a board member is the CEO of some multinational or other is in our context more relevant than whether they also serve on the board of the local hospital in their spare time – as noble as that may be.

Third, we focused on events organized by these think tanks. Because think tanks like to flaunt their contribution to the debate, we looked at the speakers who were invited to events. Who are these people and who do they represent? These meetings are also important for maintaining the networks of the think tanks. Meetings remain an important way of exerting influence, and these kinds of events, especially the closed ones, provide the opportunity to do so.

The fourth part of this research is about the publications put out by these think tanks. Sometimes they are weighty tomes, other times they are policy recommendations only a few pages long. The primary aim here was to show that these think tanks regularly put out publications on TTIP. We subsequently analyzed in more detail precisely what they p

## What problems did we encounter?

The biggest problem that we encountered was the result of having initially chosen the tool to map out the network. We started by using detective.io, created by a French company that has since gone bankrupt. After a few months of encountering numerous other, similar problems, it became clear at a certain point that this software simply couldn't handle large quantities of data. So we essentially wasted many hours of work. Our advice to anyone intending to conduct this kind of data research is to take the time to choose the right tool. We certainly can recommend KUMU for similar projects.

The think tanks' websites, which is where we ultimately gathered much of our information, posed another problem. These sites were often difficult to search, hard to scrape , incomplete. We also had to deal with updates, which sometimes caused us to lose the data we had collected. For example, the Center for Transatlantic Relations' schedule of events for the past three years vanished at a certain point. We had to retrieve the information about events that they had organized from Facebook and Twitter. Four months prior to the publication of our article, the Atlantic Council think tank updated its entire list of members, right after we had entered, checked and double checked this list.

Information about think-tank sponsorship was also incomplete. In the case of the Center for Transatlantic Relations, we were eventually sent a list of sponsors, but it didn't mention much they had contributed. ECIPE has an agreement with its sponsors that their support will never be made public. We were unable to overcome this problem, so as a result our analysis of the money flows from the business community to think tanks is on the conservative side.

One final comment: The think tanks in question differ significantly from one another. The Atlantic Council, for example, has dozens of board members, most of whom are from the business community, while the Center for Transatlantic Relations doesn't have a board. Or take CEPR: it didn't organize a single TTIP event, whereas the German Marshall Fund

organized as many as 38.

**A selection of our results:**

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**Key data for the German Marshall Fund**

Events organized	38
Publications on TTIP	11
Sponsors	26
Sponsors that lobbied for TTIP	13
Board members from the business community	17 out of 21

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*Key data for the German Marshall Fund*

# Sponsors of the German Marshall Fnd

Sponsor	Amount
Cheuron	\$500,000–\$999,999
Daimler AG	\$250,000–\$499,999
Airbus Americas, Inc.	\$100,000–\$249,999
BP	\$100,000–\$249,999
Eli Lilly & Company	\$100,000–\$249,999
Fundación BBVA	\$100,000–\$249,999
Deloitte	\$50,000–\$99,999
Deutsche Post - DHL	\$50,000–\$99,999
Solvay S.A.	\$50,000–\$99,999
Total	\$50,000–\$99,999
Ford Motor Company	\$25,000–\$49,999
Audi AG	\$10,000–\$24,999
Ericsson Inc.	\$5,000–\$9,999

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*Sponsors of the German Marshall Fund*

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# Key data for the European Centre for International Political Economy

Events organized	11
Publications on TTIP	9
Sponsors	1
Sponsors that lobbied for TTIP	1
Board members from the business community	18 out of 52

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*Key data for the European Centre for International Political Economy*

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## Key data for the Center for Transatlantic Relations

Events organized	14
Publications on TTIP	21

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*Key data for the Center for Transatlantic Relations*

## Sponsors of the Center or Transatlantic Relations

Sponsor	Amount
Airbus Group	Not available
AmCham EU	Not available
AT&T	Not available
Bayer AG	Not available
Electricité de France (EDF)	Not available
Eli Lilly & Company	Not available
Hill & Knowlton	Not available
Microsoft	Not available
Pfizer Corporation	Not available
Proctor & Gamble	Not available
Telefónica	Not available
Transatlantic Business Council	Not available
UPS	Not available
Verizon Communications	Not available

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# Key data for the Centre for European Policy Studies

Events organized	11
Publications on TTIP	19
Sponsors	128
Sponsors that lobbied for TTIP	53
Board members from the business community	6 out of 14

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# Sponsors of the Centre for European Policy Studies

Sponsor	Amount
Alcoa	€6,000–€30,000
Allianz SE	€6,000–€30,000
Alstom Power	€6,000–€30,000
Association des Constructeurs Européens d'Automobiles (ACEA)	€6,000–€30,000
Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Argentaria (BBVA)	€6,000–€30,000
Bayer AG	€6,000–€30,000
Bundesverband der Deutschen Industrie e.u. (BDI)	€6,000–€30,000
Business Europe	€6,000–€30,000
Confederation of Swedish Enterprise	€6,000–€30,000
Confindustria	€6,000–€30,000
Covington & Burling LLP	€6,000–€30,000
Dansk Industri (DI) Confederation of Danish Industry	€6,000–€30,000
Deloitte	€6,000–€30,000
Deutsche Bank	€6,000–€30,000
Deutsche Telekom	€6,000–€30,000
Electricité de France (EDF)	€6,000–€30,000
ENEL	€6,000–€30,000
Eni	€6,000–€30,000
ExxonMobil	€6,000–€30,000
Fleishman-Hillard	€6,000–€30,000
Foreign Trade Association	€6,000–€30,000
Google Inc	€6,000–€30,000
Hill & Knowlton	€6,000–€30,000
Huawei	€6,000–€30,000
Hyundai	€6,000–€30,000
JP Morgan	€6,000–€30,000
JTI	€6,000–€30,000
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### Key data for the Centre for Economic Policy Research

Events organized	0
Publications on TTIP	2
Sponsors	18
Sponsors that lobbied for TTIP	2
Board members from the business community	4 out of 11

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*Key data for the Centre for Economic Policy Research*

## Sponsors of the Centre for Economic Policy Research

Sponsors	Amount
Citigroup	€10,000–€20,000
JP Morgan	€10,000–€20,000

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*Sponsors of the Centre for Economic Policy Research*

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## Key data for the Bertelsmann Foundation

Events organized	13
Publications on TTIP	16
Board members from the business community	4 out of 8

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## Key data for the Atlantic Council

Events organized	17
Publications on TTIP	6
Board members from the business community	45 out of 49
Sponsors	151
Sponsors that lobbied for TTIP	32

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# Sponsors of the Atlantic Council

Sponsor	Amount
Airbus	\$250,000–\$999,999
Chevron	\$250,000–\$999,999
Central Europe Energy Partners AISBL (CEEP)	\$100,000–\$249,000
Google	\$100,000–\$249,000
Saab	\$100,000–\$249,000
Thomson Reuters	\$100,000–\$249,000
Zurich Bank	\$100,000 and higher
BlackRock	\$50,000–\$99,999
Pfizer	\$50,000–\$99,999
Safran SA	\$50,000–\$99,999
BP	\$50,000–\$99,000
ExxonMobil	\$25,000–\$49,999 and \$50,000–\$99,000
General Electric	\$50,000–\$99,000
McGraw Hill Financial	\$50,000–\$99,000
PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP	\$50,000–\$99,000 and \$100,000 and higher
Standard Chartered Bank	\$50,000–\$99,000
Shell	\$25,000–\$49,999
Statoil	\$25,000–\$49,999
United States Chamber of Commerce	\$25,000–\$49,999
Allianz SE	\$25,000–\$49,999
ENI	\$25,000–\$49,999 and \$50,000–\$99,999
FedEx Corporation	\$25,000–\$49,999
Microsoft Corporation	\$25,000–\$49,999
OMV Petrol Ofisi A.S.	\$25,000–\$49,999
STFA Holding A.S.	\$25,000–\$49,999
Thales USA	\$25,000–\$49,999 and \$50,000–\$99,999
Thermo Fisher Scientific	\$25,000–\$49,999
Caterpillar Inc.	\$10,000–\$24,999