

# Shades of Brown:

## How Czech Politicians Advance the Fossil Lobby's Interests and What We Can Do About It





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# Summary

This report demonstrates how the fossil lobby systematically influences Czech politics, public debate, and the course of the energy transition. Fossil fuel corporations and their affiliated interest groups employ a wide range of power strategies — from direct lobbying and promoting false technological solutions to media manipulation and infiltrating key state institutions. Their activities have long hindered effective climate policy, deepened social inequalities, and undermined public trust in democratic institutions.

The report highlights three typical manifestations of fossil fuel lobbying through examples of Czech politicians. MEP Tomáš Zdechovský illustrates how the fossil fuel industry promotes false technological solutions — especially hydrogen — to delay genuine transformation. Former minister Karel Havlíček exemplifies renewed negotiations with major players in the fossil fuel sector and political support for new gas infrastructure, which locks Czechia into long-term dependence on fossil gas. Petr Macinka, a candidate for Minister of the Environment, embodies the threat of oligarchic interests infiltrating state leadership, and thus threatening its core mission.

The common denominator in these cases is the systematic blurring of the line between the public interest and the fossil business interests. Such decisions protect the profits of a narrow group of oligarchs, while the whole society bears the costs in the form of

energy poverty, the climate crisis, and the erosion of democratic solidarity.

The report therefore calls for a fundamental separation of politics from the fossil fuel industry. We propose concrete measures: clear rules against conflicts of interest, transparency of contacts and financing, the exclusion of fossil companies from decision-making processes, a ban on their advertising, and restrictions on the revolving door between politics and business. These steps are not radical — international institutions already apply similar rules, for example, to the tobacco industry.

# Introduction: The Fossil Lobby Endangers Both Climate and Democracy

Good social and environmental policies can provide remedies for many of today's societal challenges. However, effective solutions to the climate and social crises are being obstructed by those who profit from maintaining the current status quo. Behind the appealing slogans of fossil lobbyists — about gas as a “transitional fuel,” “clean hydrogen,” and “partnerships between industry and politics” — lies a carefully designed defence of the interests of major fossil fuel corporations. One of the greatest obstacles to the transition toward cleaner and more affordable energy is the enduring political influence of the fossil oligarchy and corporations whose profits depend on the continued burning of fossil fuels.

The fossil lobby — organized efforts of companies, industry associations, and their representatives to influence public policy or legislation in favour of infrastructure based on coal, oil, and gas — represents one of the most serious threats today to the implementation of coherent social and environmental policies, and the very functioning of democratic institutions.

For decades, civil society has exposed the power of corporate lobbying through campaigns addressing the entanglement of corporations and states. Among the most visible

ones is the international Fossil Free Politics<sup>1</sup> campaign, whose monitoring of the EU institutions we contribute to with Re-set. This coalition of diverse organizations rightly highlights how fossil fuel companies have for decades delayed, weakened, and blocked climate action, systematically obstructing political decisions intended to protect people and the planet.<sup>2</sup>

Similarly, the global initiative Kick Big Polluters Out<sup>3</sup> warns that these actors exploit UN climate negotiations, public institutions, and parliaments to turn politics into a tool for advancing their corporate interests.<sup>4</sup> Their influence is sophisticated: it extends beyond direct lobbying to a whole ecosystem of power and information strategies — from funding think tanks and PR agencies to exerting soft forms of pressure through the media, academia, and philanthropy.

## Fossil Lobby Against People

The fossil fuel industry wields enormous economic and political power which makes it possible to directly shape policy-making, political agendas, and strategic planning. Its influence even extends to the language used to discuss climate policy. Few people today recall that it was lob-

byists from major fossil corporations who “smuggled” the concept of carbon neutrality into the Paris Agreement to divert attention from the zero emissions goal.<sup>5</sup> While zero emissions inherently mean a complete phase-out of fossil fuels, carbon neutrality — defined as a balance between emissions and carbon capture — allows for the continued use of coal, oil, and gas under the pretence of offsetting. Fossil fuel companies continue to shape the strategic framework for thinking about the climate crisis. A telling example is the creation of individual carbon footprint calculators, first launched by the fossil fuel company British Petroleum (BP), which successfully shifted attention away from the industry’s systemic impact on the climate and toward individual responsibility.<sup>6</sup> A similar approach is now being applied in Czechia by the Solvo Institute, founded by Ivana Tykačová – the wife of coal magnate Pavel Tykač who owns the fossil fuel conglomerate Sev.en Energy – through its “individual resilience calculator”.<sup>7</sup>

Research by Corporate Europe Observatory shows that representatives of fossil corporations have regular access to senior officials of the European Commission. After the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, Commission representatives met with fossil lobbyists three times per week in average. The outcome was a situation in which most European households became poorer due to rising costs and inflation, while energy corporations reaped record profits.<sup>8</sup> The influence of the fossil lobby has rendered the European Union’s climate policy both unambitious and inequitable.

In the Czech Republic, the fossil fuel industry also plays a major role in shaping how the climate crisis is framed and discussed. Most Czech media outlets are owned by oligarchs, many of whom have significant investments in fossil fuels. Roughly one-third of the Czech media market is owned by Daniel Křetínský, the owner of the EP Group, one of Europe’s largest polluters. His media outlets are known for frequent attacks on the environmental movement and on ministers who challenge his interests.<sup>9</sup> A coordinated media campaign, led primarily by these media outlets, helped block the adoption of key strategic documents on Czech climate policy.<sup>10</sup> In mid-November 2025, the aforementioned Pavel Tykač also entered the media sector by purchasing a 50% stake in MAFRA, the country’s second-largest publishing house.<sup>11</sup> His entry into the media sphere will further amplify his influence over public debate in Czechia.

Efforts to implement social policies, protect the climate, and transition to clean energy will always fall short as long as polluters maintain unrestricted access to politicians, the media, and opportunities to undermine the work of state and European institutions and manipulate public debate. Without a clear separation between the public interest and the interests of fossil corporations, no meaningful social or environmental policy can be achieved

## Fossil Lobby Endangers Democracy

The fossil industry lobby also poses a serious threat to the functioning of democracy. When companies whose profits depend directly on climate destruction enjoy privileged access to politicians, decision-making processes, and the media, it erodes public trust in social institutions. People lose faith in politics and the media when these actors defend the interests of a narrow circle of billionaires rather than the majority of society.<sup>12</sup> As a result, political decisions are guided not by facts or the public good, but by the protection of the fossil oligarchy's assets.

In 2022 alone, Daniel Křetínský's EP Group earned CZK 113 billion, tripling its profits compared to 2021. A year later, his profits rose to CZK 180 billion.<sup>13</sup> Pavel Tykač's wealth increased by CZK 100 billion, effectively doubling his fortune. Meanwhile, most people in the Czech Republic grew poorer due to inflation and the energy crisis.<sup>14</sup>

A clear example of fossil lobbying in the Czech Republic is the pressure exerted by EP Group to prevent the introduction of a windfall tax. EP Commodities threatened to relocate abroad if the tax were enacted.<sup>15</sup> The government's final decision to postpone the implementation of the tax until 2023 allowed the EP Group holding company to save more than CZK 40 billion.<sup>16</sup> At the same time, the Czech fossil oligarchy continued to receive billions of CZK in state subsidies.<sup>17</sup>

Addressing the issue of fossil lobbying therefore also means defending fundamental democratic principles such as equality in access to decision-making, transparency in public administration, and politicians' accountability to the public. Restricting the influence of fossil lobbying contributes to social justice, as it is the wealthiest who profit from prolonging dependence on fossil fuels, while households bear the costs as they face high energy bills and the escalating impacts of climate change.

### Ban on the Tobacco Lobby

There is a historical precedent for separating policy from the influence of interest groups. In 2003, Article 5.3 of the World Health Organization (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control was created, according to which all contracting states must protect public health policy-making from the influence of the tobacco industry.<sup>63</sup> In practice, tobacco companies are excluded from public health policy-making processes — they cannot be invited as stakeholders with a say in the preparation of regulations, fund research, or have a seat on expert committees that could influence industry regulation. The participation of this particular lobby in decision-making processes is therefore limited nowadays.

# Typical Forms of Fossil Lobbying

The analysis by Fossil Free Politics and Kick Big Polluters Out campaigns describe some of the frequent forms of fossil lobbying<sup>18</sup>:

**1. Direct lobbying** = face-to-face meetings with politicians, participation in working groups, financing analyses or “consulting” related to energy bills. These activities often lack transparent records and clear declarations of conflict of interests.<sup>19</sup>

**2. Political representation of the industry’s narratives** = Fossil companies and their associations create their specific language to justify continuation of fossil economy (“clean coal”, “green gas”, “technology neutrality”) which can be adopted by politicians. For example, the whole narrative of “competitiveness” is pushed through by large lobby groups in the EU.

**3. Influence on media and culture** = Ownership or funding of media, made-to-order analyses and PR campaigns that reinforce the false statement that rapid phase-out from fossil fuels is unrealistic. Examples include Daniel Křetínský’s media activities in Czechia.

**4. Revolving door effect** = Transitions from public office roles and executive positions in energy corporations (and vice versa) create a network of personal connections and loyalties. An example is former Czech Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek who began working for Daniel Křetínský’s companies after (officially) leaving politics.<sup>20</sup>

**5. Sponsorship and greenwashing<sup>21</sup>** = Companies make use of sponsoring cultural, sports and educational events to maintain public credibility and conceal real impacts of their business. Examples include greenwashing conferences organized in Czechia in the past years such as the Green Deal Summit held by the Hospodářské noviny daily.<sup>22</sup>

Together, these strategies create an environment in which the fossil fuel industry is able to continuously block the energy transition — often subtly and without the public’s awareness.

## Three Examples of Fossil Lobbying in Czechia

In the following chapters, we focus on three specific consequences of fossil lobbying as they manifest in the Czech Republic through political, institutional, and media power. To illustrate these dynamics, we present examples of three Czech politicians and their connections to fossil fuel companies.

Tomáš Zdechovský, a Member of the European Parliament for the KDU-ČSL party elected on the SPOLU ticket, represents a type of politician rare in the Czech context but common in Western Europe<sup>23</sup> Promoting false solutions to the climate crisis, he diverts attention from the need for real steps to reduce emissions. In his case, this mainly involves hydrogen technologies in the automotive and energy sectors. Since hydrogen is currently produced mostly from fossil fuels, energy companies use it to justify building new fossil fuel infrastructure and to promote a mislead-



ing narrative of a “new, green, and emission-free” source.<sup>24</sup>

Karel Havlíček of the ANO 2011 movement currently exemplifies the most widespread form of political support for the interests of fossil fuel oligarchs — the large-scale construction of new gas infrastructure. His positions are also closely tied to the activities of the fossil lobby in the Czech Republic, which we examine in detail in the respective chapter.

The final example is Petr Macinka, chairman of the Motoristé sobě party and candidate for Minister of the Environment as of November 2025. His activities reflects a revival of the influence of coal companies in the Czech Republic. In his case, the link between fossil business interests and






politics is so strong that fossil fuel companies are effectively taking over key state institutions. Here, the fossil lobbying is taken to an entirely new level.

We did not select these three politicians to question their personal integrity or to suggest that they are the only representatives of fossil interests in Czech politics. They serve as examples illustrating specific forms of fossil lobbying through the agendas they promote. Based on these findings, we formulate recommendations on how to prevent conflicts of interest and undue influence from the fossil fuel industry. Our goal is to ensure that Czech politics serves the public interest — not the interests of fossil fuels and corporations.

## What is the Fossil Lobby? <sup>64</sup>

The fossil lobby refers to all companies, organizations, and individuals whose activities or economic interests are directly linked to the extraction, processing, trade, or combustion of coal, oil, and gas. These are actors who influence public policy, regulation, or public debate in favour of continuing or expanding the fossil fuel industry. This includes not only mining and energy companies, but also their industry associations, PR and lobbying agencies, think tanks, consulting firms, and other intermediaries.

A fossil fuel company is a company that extracts, produces, processes, transports, or sells fossil fuels (coal, oil, or gas), or is economically dependent on these activities. This includes, in particular:

-  companies whose main activity is the extraction of coal, oil, or gas;
-  companies operating fossil fuel infrastructure (refineries, coal and gas power stations, gas pipelines, LNG terminals, storage facilities);
-  fossil fuel traders, if more than 51% of their annual turnover comes from fossil fuel activities;
-  energy companies that generate electricity primarily from fossil fuels;
-  subsidiaries and holding companies that are part of groups with the above activities.

# Zdechovský's False Solutions

Tomáš Zdechovský is a unique example of a Czech politician linked to the fossil fuel industry who promotes a false solution to decarbonization: “clean hydrogen”.<sup>25</sup> He has been a Member of the European Parliament for the KDU-ČSL party since 2014 and was even the party's vice-chairman from 2020 to 2022. In recent years, he has attracted attention not only as one of the most active Czech MEPs, ranked in several polls as one of the most influential voices, especially in budgetary matters, but also as a prominent voice on social media.<sup>26</sup>

A significant part of his public communication focuses on criticizing the Green Deal and European climate policies. In his speeches, he often comments on the regulation of combustion engines, energy transformation, and the creation of climate policies as such. Zdechovský styles himself as an advocate of a „realistic and rational“ approach to climate policy and has long drawn attention to the economic impact of EU measures on industry.<sup>27</sup> At the beginning of 2025, he became the Czech spokesperson for an initiative attacking civil society organizations which was led by far-right parties in the European Parliament to limit funding for the civil sector from the European budget.<sup>28</sup> Although he is not one of the many far right politicians who directly question the existence of the climate crisis, Zdechovský has long been undermining possible measures and attacking organizations that want to address this problem.

Since 2020 (coinciding with the onset of pressure from fossil corporations to promote hydrogen technologies in the EU), there has been a significant shift in Tomáš Zdechovský's communication. His social media posts, official statements, and interviews show a marked increase in support for the use of hydrogen, especially in transport.<sup>29</sup> He describes hydrogen as a zero-emission alternative to combustion engines and puts it in direct opposition to the electrification of transport.<sup>30</sup> He is calling for greater financial support from public sources for the development of hydrogen technologies, which is one of the main goals of the fossil fuel companies promoting these technologies. However, he does not distinguish between the types of hydrogen involved: whether it is green hydrogen produced from renewable sources, or hydrogen produced from gas, which is currently the dominant source of hydrogen. In most cases, Zdechovský voted in favour of EU legislation that enables the development of hydrogen infrastructure.<sup>31</sup>



**Tomáš Zdechovský** @TomasZdechovsky · Sep 28, 2021

Snahu vynutit přechod na bezemisní vozidla direktivně považuji za nešťastnou. Za lepší řešení považuji vsadit na podporu rozvoje více typů bezemisních motorů, které by dokázaly cenou i výkonem konkurovat spalovacím. Alternativou může být vodíkový pohon.

[zdechovsky.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=77...](https://zdechovsky.blog.idnes.cz/blog.aspx?c=77...)

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An example of MEP Zdechovský's on-line communication:

*I find directive attempts to impose a transition to zero-emission vehicles unfortunate. A better solution is to support the development of various types of zero-emission engines which can compete with combustion engines in both price and efficiency. Hydrogen engines seem to be a suitable option.*

## Contacts with Fossil Industry

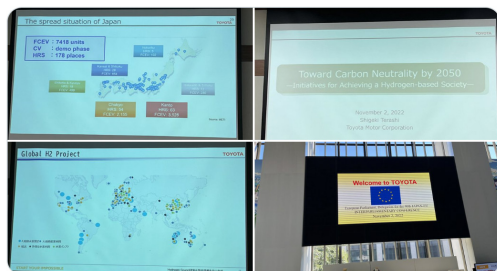
To analyze these relationships, we can draw on the register of meetings the MEP has been required to maintain in accordance with the EU transparency rules.<sup>32</sup> Since August 2022, nine meetings with representatives of the fossil industry have been recorded. In addition to meetings with representatives of Czech energy companies such as ČEZ, the register also includes meetings with major European organizations representing fossil fuel interests — Liquid Gas

Europe and Fuels Europe — as well as with consulting firms linked to the fossil fuel sector, such as Rasmussen Global. These institutions form part of a powerful network promoting the development of hydrogen technologies within EU institutions.<sup>33</sup> Compared to other Czech MEPs, Tomáš Zdechovský, together with Ondřej Krutílek (ODS party), ranks among those who meet most frequently with fossil lobbyists.<sup>34</sup> However, the actual number of meetings may be even higher, as some MEPs provably fail to record all of their interactions in the official register.<sup>35</sup>



**Tomáš Zdechovský** @TomasZdechovsky · Nov 5, 2022

Automobilka @ToyotaMotorCorp vsadila na **vodík** jako na pohon budoucnosti. Hovoří, že do roku 2050 bude tzv. vodíková revoluce s tím, že by měl být využitelný ve všech typech dopravy včetně osobní. V Japonsku už nyní jsou stovky míst kde se dá natankovat **vodík** a vznikají další.



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*Toyota Motor Corp automotive company relies on hydrogen as the fuel of the future. They say there will be hydrogen revolution by 2050 making it usable in all forms of transportation including the individual one. In Japan, there are hundreds of hydrogen stations and many more are to be introduced.*

An example of MEP Zdechovský's on-line communication.<sup>65</sup>

During the same period, Zdechovský also actively cultivated contacts with representatives of the automotive industry, which may help explain his consistent support for hydrogen technologies in the transport sector. In total, five documented meetings illustrate his regular engagement with the fossil lobby — engagement that contributes to shaping dysfunctional approaches to the climate crisis. Meetings with representatives of countries dependent on fossil fuel exports, seeking to expand their influence in Europe, were also relatively

frequent. International analyses have even described Zdechovský as an individual directly lobbied by the United Arab Emirates.<sup>36</sup>

His public appearances in the media further reflect these positions and link him with fossil lobby interests. Zdechovský frequently appears on platforms associated with the commentary scene around Info.cz, a media outlet owned by the Czechia's largest fossil fuel oligarch, Daniel Křetínský, owner of the EP Group energy conglomerate.<sup>37</sup>

### Hydrogen Types<sup>66</sup>

**Grey hydrogen** = mostly produced from fossil gas using the steam reforming process without CO<sub>2</sub> capture; this is currently the most common form of production.

**Blue hydrogen** = made from fossil fuels (e. g. fossil gas), but using the CCS (carbon capture and storage ) or CCU (carbon capture and utilization) technologies.

**Green hydrogen** = produced in water electrolysis, with the use of power from renewable sources (wind, solar).

## The Role of False Solutions

This form of fossil lobbying — conducted through cultivating relationships with specific MEPs — poses a serious threat as it systematically strengthens the interests of industrial groups at the expense of the public good and genuine socio-ecological transformation. MEP Tomáš Zdechovský serves as a conduit through which the fossil fuel industry influences both policy-making and public debate – for example, by promoting

hydrogen technologies without distinguishing between genuinely sustainable and fossil-based variants. His strategy creates the illusion of a “clean solution,” while in reality delaying transport electrification and the transition to renewable energy.

Another clear threat lies in the systematic promotion of narratives that question or undermine the effectiveness of climate policies, coupled with active attacks on civil society organizations working to address these issues. Such actions erode public trust in the political system,

weaken pluralism, and diminish democratic oversight of decision-making processes. Politics are thus in danger of becoming a tool of corporate power rather than an instrument for

protecting the public interest. As a result, the fossil lobby can significantly slow down or distort climate policy that is vital for our collective future.

## Hydrogen as False Solution

Hydrogen is often presented as a clean fuel of the future. In reality, however, it currently functions more as a technology that effectively prolongs the fossil fuel era: almost all hydrogen — up to 99 percent — is still produced from fossil fuels, most commonly from fossil gas.<sup>67</sup> Energy companies promote new gas projects as “hydrogen-ready”, even though the use of gas infrastructure for hydrogen transport and combustion faces numerous technological challenges.<sup>68</sup>

In its current form, hydrogen is an energy-inefficient solution. A large share of energy is lost during production, storage, and transport — the efficiency of the entire cycle from production to final use can in some cases fall below 20%.<sup>69</sup> Despite this, energy and automotive companies continue to promote hydrogen even in sectors where it makes little sense, such as transport or home heating,<sup>70</sup> where direct electrification is both more efficient and more affordable.

However, hydrogen can be used for genuinely beneficial purposes. In countries such as Czechia, it could serve as a means of seasonal energy storage — storing surplus electricity from renewable sources produced in summer and converting it back to energy in winter. Yet such technologies remain extremely expensive and are not currently a policy priority.<sup>71</sup>

Hydrogen strategies continue to divert attention and public funding away from real solutions — namely, the development of renewable energy, reduced consumption, and energy decentralization. This is precisely why hydrogen has recently been most vigorously promoted by business organizations such as The Hydrogen Council and Hydrogen Europe, both of which primarily represent the fossil fuel industry.<sup>72</sup> The recent “hydrogen fever” within EU institutions is therefore largely the result of intense lobbying by fossil corporations seeking to maintain access to public investments and subsidies.

# Karel Havlíček: Czech Gas Policy Pragmatist

Karel Havlíček is a Czech politician, entrepreneur, and member of the ANO 2011 party currently (November 2025) mandated to form the Czech Government. Havlíček served as Minister of Industry and Trade and Minister of Transport in the previous ANO government (2019–2022) and is likely to hold similar positions in the next cabinet. During his first term in office, he gained a reputation as a strong advocate for the expansion of gas infrastructure.<sup>38</sup>

Representatives of the ANO 2011 party belong to the Patriots for Europe faction in the European Parliament — a grouping co-founded by party chairman Andrej Babiš. This far-right faction is known primarily for its attacks on environmental initiatives and civil society organizations, its open questioning of climate policies, and its systematic efforts to weaken regulations targeting the fossil fuel industry.<sup>39</sup> Havlíček's public statements and political positions in recent years have been largely aligned with the Patriots' political agenda.



Karel Havlíček  
@KarelHavlicek\_



Show translation

Zkapalněný zemní plyn LNG je pro nákl. dopravu palivem budoucnosti. Technologie pro jeho zkapalňování, skladování, distribuci nebo odpařování projektuje a vyrábí děčínská firma Chart Ferox, která v ČR zaměstnává 600 pracovníků 👍. Tour po severních Čechách končíme v Děčíně.



5:58 PM · Sep 18, 2019

*As Minister of Industry and Trade, Karel Havlíček had regular meetings with fossil industry representatives.*

*An example of online communication:*

*„LNG is a fuel of the future for freight. Technologies for its liquefaction, storage, distribution and re-gasification are made by the Děčín based company Chart Ferox which employs 600 workers in Czechia (...)”*

In the Czech Republic, the former minister has positioned himself as one of the most vocal proponents of gas infrastructure.<sup>40</sup> He regularly criticizes climate policies and sharply questions the economic impacts of regulations aimed at reducing emissions. Nevertheless, he presents

himself as a pragmatist: echoing the fossil fuel industry's rhetoric, he describes gas as an essential transitional fuel and, at times, even portrays it as a sustainable source.<sup>41</sup>

In 2021, the Ministry of Industry and Trade — under his leadership — pub-



lished the Czech Republic's Hydrogen Strategy for Czechia, a document that effectively serves as a tool for fossil fuel companies to further expand gas infrastructure.<sup>42</sup>

## Links to Fossil Industry

By European standards, the Czech approach to lobbying remains highly non-transparent: the lobby register is still in its infancy, and Havlíček's contacts with fossil fuel companies are not publicly disclosed. Nevertheless, his public appearances, social media activity, and participation in industry association events suggest that he is a frequent guest at meetings organized by representatives of the gas and energy sectors.

Based on social media and other public sources, we can identify eighteen meetings or conference appearances since 2020 involving representatives of Czech fossil fuel companies or business organizations representing

the interests of coal, gas, and oil infrastructure owners. He frequently attends conferences and events organized by the Confederation of Industry of the Czech Republic, the Czech Gas Association, Chart Ferox, and General Electric Company.<sup>43</sup> As Minister of Industry and Trade, he even presented awards to major fossil fuel companies as part of the Czech Top 100 Awards in 2021.<sup>44</sup>

Havlíček regularly takes part in meetings, conferences, and informal gatherings with leading figures from the domestic fossil fuel industry. These events often serve as networking opportunities and help legitimize state support for the projects of these companies. It could be argued that, as Minister of Industry and Trade, such interactions were a standard part of performing his official duties — meeting key industry players to discuss regulations and strategic developments.



 **Karel Havlíček**   
@KarelHavlicek

 Show translation

@skodacz je CZECH TOP 100. Vede žebříček 100 nejvýznamnějších firem české ekonomiky. Na 2. místě je Energetický a průmyslový holding, 3. příčka patří @SkupinaCEZ. Velmi rád jsem ocenění předal a všem velká gratulace!  [czechtop100.cz](https://czechtop100.cz) 



6:04 PM · Jun 17, 2021

Karel Havlíček gave business awards to companies ČEZ, Škoda Auto and EPH (currently EP Group) owned by Daniel Křetínský, commenting on his social media: "I'm genuinely delighted to give awards to these companies, congratulations to all of them!" EPH (dnes EP Group) Daniela Křetínského. Na sociálních sítích vyjádřil upřímnou gratulaci a radost z předání ceny.

## Normalizing Contacts Between Politics and Fossil Industry

However, this prominent politician does not criticize polluters in his public statements; on the contrary, he takes pride in his connections with them. Contacts between politics and business are thus being normalized — without public oversight or documentation. A minister of a responsible government should transparently disclose his meetings, including their content, and should certainly avoid adopting the polluters' narrative. Ideally, he should counter the objectives of the fossil fuel industry — whose role in driving climate disruption is well-documented — by working to phase out all fossil fuels as swiftly as possible. The current setup gives polluting companies an exceptional opportunity to shape policy in their own interests and to reinforce narratives that delay solutions to the climate crisis.

Havlíček's approach illustrates a deeper structural problem. It reflects the consolidation of ties between senior politicians and representatives of the fossil fuel industry, resulting in strong links across key

ministries and weakening their capacity to respond effectively to the climate crisis. When interactions between politicians and business are presented as a pragmatic necessity, the boundaries of what is considered acceptable begin to shift. Politicians such as Karel Havlíček help create an environment in which the interests of fossil fuel corporations become a legitimate part of public policy. His public statements routinely echo the main talking points of the fossil fuel industry and, from his position as a leading political figure, lend them legitimacy.

Public debate led by figures like Karel Havlíček has become increasingly dominated by advocacy for so-called transitional solutions such as gas and hydrogen. This framing is beneficial to representatives of the fossil fuel industry because it delays the necessary steps toward decarbonization while simultaneously diverting public funds that could support sustainable and socially just solutions instead. When leading politicians maintain direct ties with the fossil fuel industry and publicly adopt its arguments, politics ceases to defend the public interest and becomes a tool of private influence.

### Fossil Gas – False Solution to Climate Crisis

In recent years, fossil gas has been portrayed as a reliable partner to renewable energy or as a bridge between coal and a clean future. This narrative has been promoted by energy corporations and lobbying groups seeking to preserve their business models in the face of coal's decline. In reality, however, gas is a dangerous and dirty fossil fuel: it makes a significant contribution to the climate crisis and can seriously slow down efforts to resolve it.<sup>73</sup>



Fossil gas consists primarily of methane — a greenhouse gas 28 times more potent than CO<sub>2</sub> over a 100-year horizon. While burning gas produces roughly half the emissions compared to coal, the actual climate impact is almost identical if methane leaks during extraction and transport are taken into account. A leakage rate as low as 3% is enough to eliminate any advantage gas has over coal.<sup>74</sup> Moreover, research shows that oil and gas companies have systematically concealed the true extent of methane leaks, deliberately creating the impression that gas is a cleaner alternative.<sup>75</sup>

The construction of new gas infrastructure — pipelines, LNG terminals, and power stations — creates a lock-in effect, i. e. long-term dependence on the new fossil infrastructure.<sup>76</sup> Once such infrastructure is built, it becomes extremely difficult, both politically and economically, to decommission. Gas therefore acts as a competitor rather than a complement to renewable energy sources, diverting public and private funds away from genuine solutions. Energy corporations use gas to maintain a centralized and highly profitable model — one that hinders the democratization of energy and slows progress toward effective climate policies.

Dependence on gas also brings serious geopolitical risks, including reliance on authoritarian regimes such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Egypt.<sup>77</sup> What we need instead is a rapid and socially just transition to a carbon-free energy system — one based on substantial reductions in consumption, the expansion of renewable sources, modernization of energy grids and storage, and public control over temporary backup gas capacities.

## **Petr Macinka: Coal Oligarchs' Servant**

The most striking example of the intertwining between fossil lobby interests and politics is Petr Macinka, chairman of the Motoristé sobě (“Motorists for Themselves”) party and, at the time of writing, candidate for the post of Minister of the Environment of the Czech Republic. As part of a new generation of politicians influenced by the American far-right MAGA movement and Russian disinformation networks, Macinka is reviving the denial of scientific facts about the

climate crisis.<sup>45</sup> He reinforced these positions during his long tenure as spokesperson for the Václav Klaus Institute, a think tank named after the former president and historically the most prominent denier of scientific evidence on the climate crisis in the Czech Republic.<sup>46</sup>

The Václav Klaus Institute is generously funded by coal magnate Pavel Tykač, owner of Sev.en Energy, one of the largest coal companies in

Czechia.<sup>47</sup> After years spent working within influential structures connected to the fossil fuel industry, Macinka decided to enter politics directly. In 2022, he became chairman of the Motoristé sobě party, which presents itself as the voice of drivers, opponents of regulation, and critics of the European Union's climate policy. Outwardly, he builds the image of an irreverent rebel, yet his political positions and media strategy closely align with the interests of the fossil fuel industry. These include rejecting emissions reductions, defending combustion engines, attacking renewable energy sources, supporting delays in the coal phase-out, and denying scientific evidence about the climate crisis.<sup>48</sup>

As party chairman, Macinka promotes a programme that diverges sharply from any long-term vision of a just transition. The party opposes European emission standards, the development of renewable energy sources, and support for the electrification of transport. He has become known in Czech media for a number of strongly critical statements about the environmental movement, for example declaring that, as Minister of the Environment, he would lead a counter-revolution and abolish most environmental regulations.<sup>49</sup> He has also claimed that once he takes office, “green blood will be shed,” and that environmental organizations will be prosecuted as terrorists.<sup>50</sup>

## Tykač's Man Against Environmental Protection

Petr Macinka's tenure at the helm of the Ministry of the Environment would most likely open the door to advancing the interests of Pavel Tykač and other fossil fuel oligarchs. Tykač's Sev.en Energy empire has seen its coal profits decline in recent years as a result of climate commitments and increasing pressure to decarbonize.<sup>51</sup> It is precisely this dynamic that the influential “Motorist” could help to mitigate. It can be expected that the ministry, under his leadership, would allow Tykač to save half a billion CZK in reclamation costs — funds the oligarch currently refuses to allocate to North Bohemian municipalities suffering from the consequences of coal mining.<sup>52</sup> The ministry might also help divert European funds toward Tykač's companies<sup>53</sup> and, in extreme cases, push for direct subsidies for the loss-making coal business. The upcoming government's policy statement explicitly allows for such a possibility.

The former Václav Klaus Institute manager exerts influence over environmental policy even beyond the climate agenda. His party has proposed abolishing the Soutok Protected Landscape Area in the Břeclav region, which safeguards unique floodplain ecosystems. The proposal would open the area for expanding road infrastructure and more intensive agriculture — activities directly connected to billionaire František Fabiřovic, a major sponsor of the Motoristé sobě party.<sup>54</sup> These close ties to the fossil industry also fuel Macinka's public attacks on environmental



organizations, which he labels as enemies of freedom and eco-fanatics. He reinforces the narrative of the climate crisis as a culture war — a framing long used by fossil fuel companies to divide society and obscure the underlying issues of power and wealth distribution.

This story is more than just a personal career trajectory; it is a textbook example of how the fossil fuel industry is literally taking over key state institutions that are meant to regulate polluters.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of the Ministry of the Environment is to balance the interests of big industry, defend nature, and uphold people's right to live in a clean and healthy environment. Yet through their networks of contacts, financial power, and media influence, major fossil fuel players are now able

to place their representatives in positions from which they can shape public debate, influence legislation, and paralyze the very institutions designed to hold them accountable. This situation represents nothing less than an institutional capture of the state by the fossil lobby — shifting decision-making on the climate crisis into the hands of those who have a direct economic interest in preventing real change. This is not an anomaly but a symptom of a broader system in which fossil capital joins forces with the far right to defend corporate interests at the expense of society as a whole. In Petr Macinka, we are witnessing a new phase: the fossil fuel industry succeeding in placing one of its own at the head of a key state institution.

## **Conclusion: How to Break the Fossil Lobby's Power and Promote Policies in the Public Interest**

Our analysis has revealed three consequences of fossil lobbying that systematically distort public debate and climate policy-making in the Czech Republic: the promotion of false solutions, the consolidation of the position of existing major players, and the takeover of state institutions by representatives of fossil fuel companies. The examples of Tomáš Zdecho-vský, Karel Havlíček, and Petr Macinka show that the line between defending the public interest and defending the fossil business is dangerously blurred

in Czech politics. These politicians serve as examples of the structural failure as climate policy-making is influenced by companies whose profits are directly dependent on the continuation of the climate crisis. Experience from Czechia, the European Union, and around the world confirms that without a clear separation of politicians' decision-making from private interests, it will not be possible to achieve real socio-ecological transformation.<sup>56</sup>

The fossil lobby manifests itself not only through overt pressure, but also through the sophisticated reshaping of the language of climate policy. To break this dynamics, we need to build a wall between politics and the interests of the fossil fuel industry. Without strict regulation of conflicts of interest, mandatory transparency, and the exclusion of fossil fuel representatives from key decision-making processes, it will not be possible to achieve a socially just end to coal, oil, and gas as a prerequisite for solving the climate crisis.

There are clear ways to limit the influence of the fossil lobby and enforce the public interest. One inspiring example is the Accountability Framework promoted by civil society organizations within the UN: transparent rules, mandatory conflict of interest declarations, exclusion of the fossil fuel industry from key decision-making processes, and strengthening the voice of the public interest and vulnerable groups.<sup>57</sup> This would not be the first regulation of its kind, as the UN takes the same approach to the tobacco industry which was prevented from influencing public health policy decisions.<sup>58</sup>

To limit the influence of the fossil lobby, we propose the following measures:

### **1. Establish clear rules against conflicts of interest in the energy sector**

We find it essential to adopt legislation that clearly defines conflicts of interest in climate and energy policy. Every politician, adviser, or expert working in the energy sector should be required to disclose any ties to the fossil fuel industry — whether financial, consulting, PR-related, or through donations. This information must be made publicly available.

### **2. Restrict the fossil fuel industry's access to energy policy-making**

Politicians and public officials must not normalize the participation of representatives of companies whose profits depend on burning fossil fuels in working groups, advisory councils, or international delegations (including COP). The World Health Organization applies a principle of non-cooperation with entities whose interests directly conflict with public health — a similar principle should apply to the fossil industry. Prohibiting fossil fuel companies from participating in government or international delegations, climate negotiations, and political trade missions is essential for ensuring a just transition.

### **3. Ensure transparency of contacts and financing**

Politicians and public officials should be required to disclose all meetings with representatives of energy companies, their associations, or their PR agencies. Similarly, the sources of funding for think tanks and research institutions commenting on energy policy must be made transparent.

#### **4. Strengthen safeguards against the revolving door**

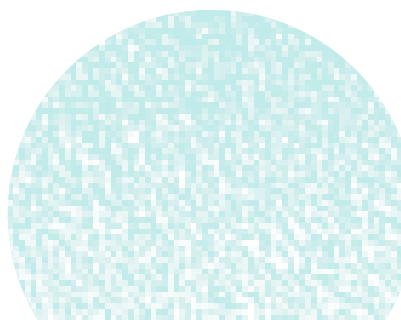
Rules regulating the movement of individuals between public office and the private energy sector — known as the revolving door — should be significantly tightened. Politicians should face mandatory cooling-off periods during which they may not work for fossil fuel companies: for example, five years for standard officials and ten years for ministers. The same restrictions should apply to secondary activities or side jobs of members of parliament, public officials, and civil servants if these activities benefit companies profiting from fossil fuel extraction or combustion.

#### **5. Ban fossil fuel advertising**

All advertising, promotion, and marketing communications by companies that extract, process, or sell fossil fuels, including their subsidiaries and PR agencies, should be banned. The prohibition should fall under the same legal category as tobacco advertising, with the goal of protecting public health, the climate, and democracy from manipulative campaigns.

#### **6. Support democratic and civic oversight**

The role of civil society organizations, watchdogs, and independent media in monitoring corporate influence over politics must be strengthened. Civil society must have equal access to information and decision-making processes, which are currently often monopolized by the energy lobby. Watchdogs and academic institutions should be actively involved in verifying public statements and claims related to energy policy.



# More Reading About Fossil Oligarchy

In Re-set, we have been covering the topic of fossil oligarchy in detail on a long-term basis.

## Fossil Hyena:

How Daniel Křetínský's EPH Destroys Climate, Profits from Energy Poverty and Threatens Democracy



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## Fossil Hyena: How Daniel Křetínský's EPH Destroys Climate, Profits from Energy Poverty and Threatens Democracy (2022)<sup>59</sup>

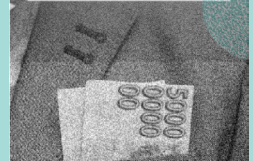
The text focuses on the business of Daniel Křetínský who owns the Energy and Industry Holding (EPH). We perceive the EPH and Křetínský's other companies as a significant threat for the future of Czechia, Europe and the whole world.

His business contributes to energy poverty and economic inequalities, destroys the planet's habitability and living conditions, and threatens democracy in Czechia and Europe. The report provides a comprehensive description of Křetínský's business model.

## Freeloaders: How Public Money Endows Coal Tycoons' Private Profits (2025)<sup>60</sup>

This report monitors how business empires owned by Daniel Křetínský (EP Group) and Pavel Tykač (Sev.en Energy) draw on public funding in the Czech Republic and across Europe. Both oligarchs present themselves as independent entrepreneurs operating in the „free market.“ However, our analysis shows that their business model largely depends on subsidies, public funds, and state compensation.

**Freeloaders:**  
How Public Money  
Endows Coal  
Tycoons' Private  
Profits



## His Profits, Our Loss:

How Daniel Křetínský's EPH Keeps Profiting from Poverty and Climate Collapse



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## His Profits, Our Loss: How Daniel Křetínský's EPH Keeps Profiting from Poverty and Climate Collapse (2024)<sup>61</sup>

How has Daniel Křetínský become the second richest person in Czechia? How much has he earned on energy crisis? How does his company conceal a half of its greenhouse gas emissions? Why does he still concentrate on Russia? And how does the Czech oligarch use his media against competitors? Daniel Křetínský has seen an unprecedented boom of his empire that

has been built on Russian gas import and recently supported by high energy bills. It was us as the whole company who had to pay them. This report shows how the oligarch keeps contributing to climate crisis and degradation of European democracy.

## **Behind the Mask: Investigating EPH's Coal Exit Claims (2025)<sup>62</sup>**

This report is based on an investigation carried out by researchers at FIND (fi-nd.org) and commissioned by Beyond Fossil Fuels. It looks at the relationship between the sister companies EPH and EP Energy Transition, both of which are owned by Czech billionaire Daniel Křetínský. The research was commissioned due to concerns over the companies' restructuring being used to mask continued investment in coal while presenting a "cleaner" energy profile to investors and policy makers.



At Re-set, we develop and popularize concepts for a social, ecological and democratic economy. We investigate causes of social and ecological problems, and we look for solutions. Publishing is an integral part of our activity, and all our reports are available for free download at our website.

For more reading, visit our publication section at <https://re-set.cz/publications>.

# Imprint

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