

Lobbyists for Transparent Lobbying

This letter is to express our support for a mandatory EU Lobby Register. It's time for a robust and credible transparency regime. With signals from within our society suggesting a decreasing trust in the EU institutions and the European project itself at stake, we simply cannot afford to further delay reforms and go on with business as usual.

Lobbying and democracy

Interest representation is a vital part of any healthy democracy and we need the input and technical expertise of professional lobbyists. Lobbyists come in many forms as diverse as environmental NGOs or multinational companies. Expertise is provided to policy makers on a daily basis by professional consultancies, law firms, industry associations, labour unions, NGOs, think tanks, religious communities and embassies.

We see, however, that the misbehaviour of a few can discredit an entire profession. The risk of undue influence and corruption in the political process seriously undermines the functioning of a democracy. Interest representation must be regulated by a robust and credible transparency regime. To achieve this, clear and effective standards for all are needed, complying with due process standards.

As registrants to the current EU Transparency Register, we, the undersigned, are committed to professionalism in interest representation. We try to lead by example when it comes to filing complete, accurate, meaningful and up-to-date information on the register. Unfortunately, our commitments to transparency and accountability are not yet shared by all.

Next steps for the Register

The new Inter-Institutional Agreement (IIA) reviewing the functioning of the EU Transparency Register is a unique opportunity for substantial and ambitious reform in this area. The undersigned thus urge the three EU institutions involved – the European Commission, European Parliament and the Council – to fulfil their political promises to address the urgently needed and broadly supported reforms.

Keeping in mind the progress that has been made since the first European Commission Transparency Initiative in 2005, we strongly encourage the EU institutions and their representatives in the high-level working group leading the negotiation of the IIA to **make the register mandatory** by:

- Putting in place an effective system to **motivate all organisations influencing EU decision-making to sign up** to the EU Transparency Register. Unregistered lobby organisations should, for example, no longer be able to meet officials, organise events, and participate in hearings or expert groups.
- Ensuring that the new **Transparency Register covers all EU institutions** involved in the political decision-making process: this means a new effort is required to include the Council. Politicians and high-ranking civil servants from these institutions should no longer meet with unregistered lobbyists and should publish their meetings online.
- Designing a robust system with **better legal definitions, monitoring procedures and an enforcement mechanism with sanctions** in the form of withdrawal of rights encouraging registrants to provide accurate information. Organisations that do not comply with the rules should be sanctioned subject to due process, including an **independent body** to rule on alleged violations and an appeal procedure.

In achieving the above it is essential that any further reform imposes the smallest possible administrative burden on registrants, while making the EU Transparency Register a “one-stop shop” for information on EU lobbying. This reform is both desirable and achievable and we urge immediate progress: **all** lobby organisations influencing EU decision-making must sign-up to the Register, file their declarations with the necessary diligence and abide by the basic set of rules laid out in the Code of Conduct.

Authors/Signatories: Transparency International and the major associations representing EU public affairs professionals (SEAP), consultancies (EPACA) and lawyers (CCBE). The letter is also supported by umbrella groups such as the European Youth Forum and Social Platform.