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New EU lobbying rules are timid and cosmetic

Daniel Freund · Wednesday, September 28th, 2016

“Timid, cosmetic changes” – Transparency International EU’s verdict on proposed new EU lobbying rules

Today, the European Commission published its [proposal](#) to revise the EU Transparency Register to make the register mandatory and extend it to the Council. However, the proposal fails to achieve these aims and is a missed opportunity to increase lobbying transparency, according to Transparency International EU. Despite recent scandals concerning former EU Commissioners, the EU has failed to show that it is committed to clean lobbying, the group said.

“After the Kroes and Barroso scandals, the Commission had the chance to prove it is committed to more transparency and better ethics. Instead they’ve come up with timid, cosmetic changes,” said Daniel Freund, Head of Advocacy EU Integrity at Transparency International EU. *“Citizens and lobbyists are demanding stricter rules for lobbying the EU, but the institutions are not listening,”* said Freund.

The Commission adopted new rules in December 2014, which allow only registered lobbyists to meet with Commissioners and their closest advisors and for those meetings to be published online. The reform is one of Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker’s 10 priorities and the main proposal under the “transparency and democracy” heading. The aim of the new register had been to extend this logic to the European Parliament and Council, the two institutions adopting EU legislation. However, today’s proposal only makes timid suggestions in that direction.

Over 75,000 citizens have signed an [online petition](#) in favour of Transparency International’s reform proposals and many more expressed their support during the Commission’s own public consultation. The main associations representing EU lobbyists have also shown their support for a mandatory register and meaningful reform in a [joint letter](#) that was sent to the Commission in June.

According to Transparency International EU, the European Parliament and the Council is where the resistance to reform is coming from. To date, national governments have not joined the voluntary register and have clearly indicated that any proposal that would include Member States’ permanent representations in Brussels would not be up for debate.

The European Parliament has also opted not to take a stance by indefinitely postponing a vote

on its transparency report, initially scheduled for 12 September. Under these circumstances the weak Commission proposal risks being watered down further in the negotiations with the Parliament and Council.

“From TTIP to the Volkswagen scandal, citizens are asking for more information and more checks on corporate influence. If the EU institutions are serious about transparency, they must shine a light on lobbying,” concluded Freund.

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TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL EU

For further information please contact:

ALEX JOHNSON

Communications Officer

+32 (0)2 893 24 66

ajohnson@transparency.org

DANIEL FREUND

Head of Advocacy EU Integrity

+32 (0)4 8958 71 40

dfreund@transparency.org

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