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Ombudsman recommends full transparency of tobacco lobbying

Alex Johnson · Monday, October 5th, 2015

Transparency International welcomes the European Ombudsman's recommendations to increase the transparency of the European Commission's meetings with tobacco lobbyists. In the recommendations published today, which echo concerns about tobacco lobbying that led to the resignation of Maltese Commissioner John Dalli in 2012, Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly calls for pro-active publication of meetings and relevant minutes for all interactions with tobacco organisations. Transparency International further recommends extending these disclosures to the European Parliament and EU Council, and to implement a [legislative footprint](#) for all EU legislation.

"Meetings with lobbyists as well as their written input should be published so that the public – citizens, journalists or civil society – can monitor their influence and spot potential conflicts of interest or undue influence," says Daniel Freund from Transparency International EU.

A [complaint](#) from Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) revealed 14 undisclosed meetings between top Commission officials and tobacco representatives. The Commission keeps records of these meetings and should have proactively published them. Since December 2014, Commissioners and their closest advisors already publish all their meetings with lobbyists online and it should have been relatively easy to include lower-level meetings with tobacco lobbyists in the same manner.

"Full lobby transparency should apply to all EU decision-making and ensure that legislation has the public interest at heart and that the risks of corruption, conflicts of interest and regulatory capture are kept to a minimum," said Freund.

Special transparency provision for the tobacco industry stems from a UN framework that applies to all EU institutions. These rules and guidelines from the UN World Health Organisation (WHO) are aimed to put in place additional safeguards against undue influence by tobacco lobbying. In light of the 700,000 Europeans that prematurely die each year from smoking strict transparency provisions are clearly necessary. However, the EU also regulates other areas that have a major impact on human health. The European Environment Agency estimates that there are [430,000 premature](#) deaths a year related to air pollution, **including 5,800** deaths from diesel car emissions in the UK alone. In the wake of the Volkswagen scandal, reports have highlighted the extensive lobbying by the car industry against stronger EU emissions standards. Full lobby transparency should also be introduced in this and other

areas.

Transparency International also welcomes the Ombudsman's request for speedy reform of the EU's lobby register that would make it mandatory instead of the current voluntary system. It is essential that the Commission implement these reforms, if they are to live up to their [commitments to transparency](#).

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