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Spring cleaning? Time for transparent lobbying

Yannik Bendel · Tuesday, March 1st, 2016

Spring is around the corner, or so they keep saying in spite of the cold and the grey. It's the time of year for a spring clean, when we do away with the cobwebs and dust in dark corners. Today the European Commission is looking into doing its own spring cleaning for lobbying. The Commission after much delay has launched [a public consultation](#) on a "mandatory Transparency Register" for the European Union. A mandatory register would mean that everyone who seeks to influence EU laws would need to adhere to certain transparency rules for the sake of fairness, openness and accountability. So to help the Commission's spring clean we are [launching a petition](#) to call for more transparent EU lobbying.

Lobbying is essential to any healthy democracy. Policy-makers rely on technical expertise and innovative ideas from the outside world in order to make informed and adequate decisions. It's vital that all interests are represented when it comes to the shaping of regulations which affect business, civil society and more than 500 million citizens. But lobbying is also a huge industry, at least [€1.5 billion](#) a year is spent on lobbying the EU institutions and more than 25,000 lobbyists work in Brussels.

However, there is an unhealthy side to lobbying. The [VW emissions scandal](#) is just one example of where behind the scenes lobbying can affect us all, down to the air we breathe. Pharma lobbying has kept dangerous drugs [on the market](#). While the sugar, alcohol and tobacco lobbies have all managed to delay restrictions on some of their products which can damage your health.

Undue influence by lobbyists, whereby they gain unfair or excessive access to policy-makers, can skew laws in favour of corporate interests and those with the most to spend. Our analysis of more than [7,000 meetings](#) of the European Commission also shows that 75% of those meetings are with corporate or industry lobbyists.

Reforming the voluntary lobby register had been one of Commission President [Juncker's 10 priorities](#) when he took office in November 2014. He had promised that this Commission would be the most transparent ever.

The current voluntary system to provide information on EU lobbying doesn't cut it. Information on the register has frequently proven to be unreliable and out of date. In September last year we submitted [complaints](#) against more than half of all lobby organisations in Brussels, with incomplete or inaccurate entries. In comparison with Canada, the United States and several member states of the EU such as Ireland and the UK, which all have mandatory lobby

registers the EU is lagging behind.

That's why we have been calling to make the Transparency Register mandatory for the three main EU institutions for over ten years now. The best way to prevent undue influence and corporate capture is to have full transparency in all EU institutions and binding rules which apply to all lobbyists. We also need a robust monitoring system and sanctions for those lobbyists who do not play by the rules.

It's vital that Juncker and other EU politicians live up to their promises for a mandatory register. As the Commission launches its public consultation we want to keep up pressure for a mandatory register. That's why today we're launching petition for more lobby transparency in Brussels.

Help us to make the EU Institutions more transparent, more open for citizens and to prevent undue influence by lobbyists. [Sign our petition](#) and call for an effective mandatory lobby register.

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