



TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL EU

THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Lobby meetings in the
European Parliament

Transparency International EU (TI EU) is the Brussels office of the global anti-corruption movement, Transparency International. Working closely with the International Secretariat in Berlin, Germany, TI EU leads the movement's EU-focused advocacy in close cooperation with over 100 national chapters worldwide, but particularly with the 23 chapters in EU Member States. TI EU's mission is to prevent and address corruption and promote integrity, transparency and accountability in EU institutions and in EU internal and external policies, programmes and legislation.
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Authors:

Vitor Teixeira, Shari Hinds, Lucinda Pearson

Design:

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INTRODUCTION

This research brief looks at the transparency of lobby meetings in the European Parliament (EP), the powerful directly elected assembly that is responsible, together with the EU Council, for amending and approving new EU legislation.

Lobbying can be defined as any activity carried out with a view to influencing a government or institution's policies and decisions in favour of a specific cause or outcome. When it comes to level of lobby activity, Brussels ranks second in the world. Only Washington DC attracts more lobbyists and bigger budgets from interest groups looking to influence policy.

When carried out in a transparent manner, lobbying is a healthy part of the democratic decision-making process. Expert input almost always leads to better laws and regulations. But it can become problematic when carried out behind closed doors, without public scrutiny. This can lead to undue influence, where some special interests vastly outspend others, and where conflicts of interest may influence outcomes. Various mechanisms are in place in Brussels to minimise the risks of undue influence, but there are significant loopholes in the rules and the way they are applied.

In 2011 the European Commission and the European Parliament set up a joint lobby transparency register. As of October 2022, there are 13,608 entries in the register, and around 7,000 individuals are registered as having lobby accreditation to the European Parliament. But as the register remains voluntary, the true number of lobbyists active in Brussels is unknown. Recent changes to the register have also made it harder to analyse, verify and compare the financial data provided by entrants. This has been compounded by the move to online lobby meetings as a result of COVID.

In 2014, the European Commission decided that the Commissioners themselves and high-level officials must publish their meetings with lobbyists in an online register. The European Parliament reluctantly followed suit in 2019. The EP's rules require those MEPs with an enhanced role (committee chairs, rapporteurs, and shadow rapporteurs) to publish meetings held in the context of procedures in which they have such responsibilities. However, as our research shows, many of the MEPs in question still don't do this.

For MEPs who do not hold an official legislative role, publication is voluntary, and most of them don't publish their meetings. There are also no rules covering other key lobbying targets, such as parliamentary assistants and the policy advisers of political groups. This means it is not possible to form a complete picture of who lobbies who in the Parliament.

This research brief provides an overview and analysis of lobby meetings in the Parliament since the start of the current parliamentary term, based on the limited information that is made publicly available. In order to be able to provide a more complete picture of lobby meetings in the future, Transparency International EU calls on the Parliament to:

1. Start enforcing the rules that are already in place, by introducing effective oversight and imposing sanctions when the rules are breached.
2. Publish information on lobby meetings in a user-friendly online repository, in open data format, with links to relevant information from the Transparency Register and the Legislative Observatory.
3. Expand the existing publication rules to make sure they also cover lobby meetings with MEP accredited assistants and the policy advisors of political groups.

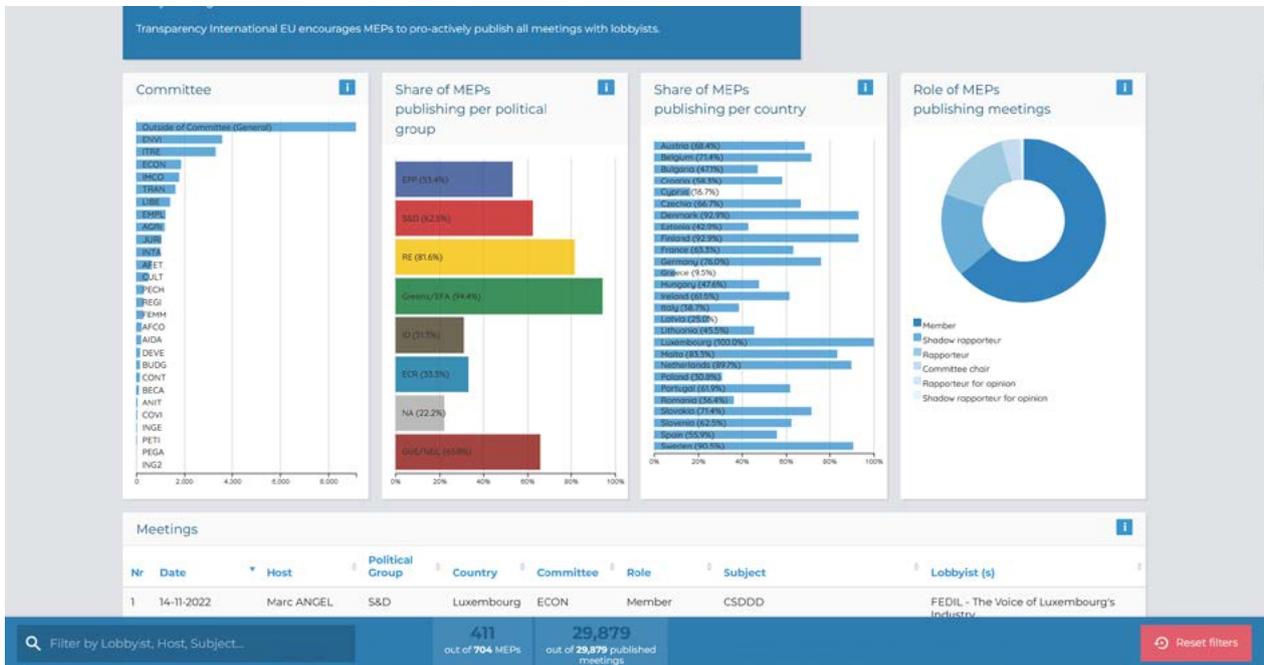
METHODOLOGY

The analysis contained in this report is based on 28,344 lobby meetings published by MEPs on their individual pages of the Parliament’s website. The dataset covers meetings declared by MEPs from the start of the current parliamentary term – when the system went live – up to the end of June 2022, a period of three years.

Committee chairs, rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs must disclose their meetings at the latest in advance of the relevant votes in committee and plenary. If the meeting(s) in question occurred close to the vote and publication is not possible

beforehand, publication should be done as soon as possible and no later than a week after the meeting took place. MEPs not covered by the obligation to publish can publish their meetings at any time.

The data used for this report was sourced from the European Parliament website on 12 September 2022. Any meeting published after this date that falls within the 36-month time frame has therefore not been included in this analysis. The most up-to-date MEP meetings dataset can be consulted on our [Integrity Watch EU platform](#) and downloaded from the Integrity Watch Datahub.



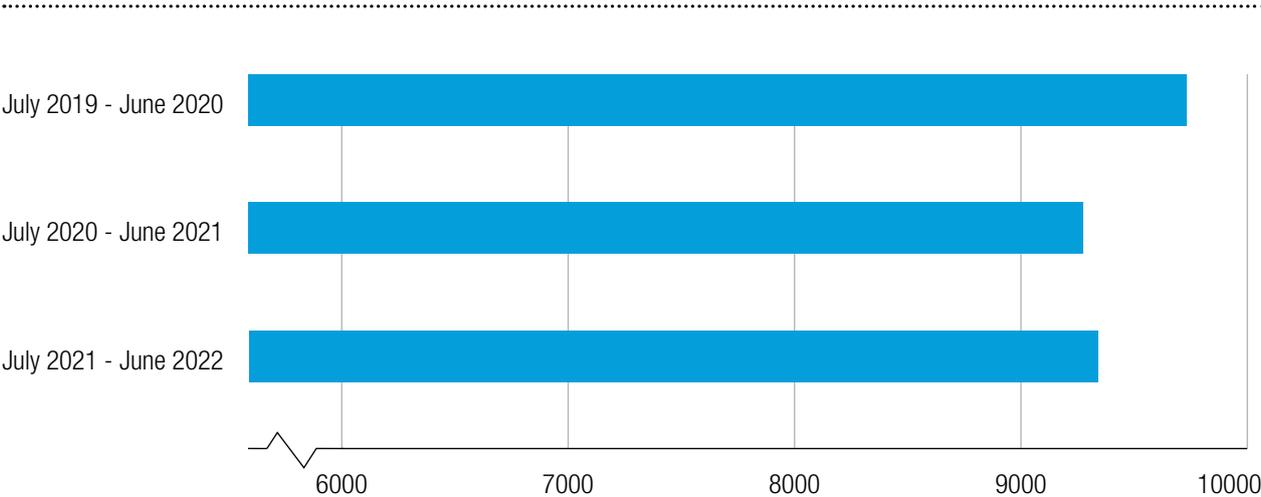
ANNUAL NUMBER OF MEETINGS PUBLISHED BY MEPs



The first twelve months of the parliamentary term saw a surge in the publication of lobby meetings. But it immediately decreased – perhaps in part due to COVID – and it has never recovered. Although the graph below shows the number of meetings

from the second to the third year remaining stagnant, a much more complex picture emerges when we break down the publication of meetings by political group, as the drop did not occur across the board.

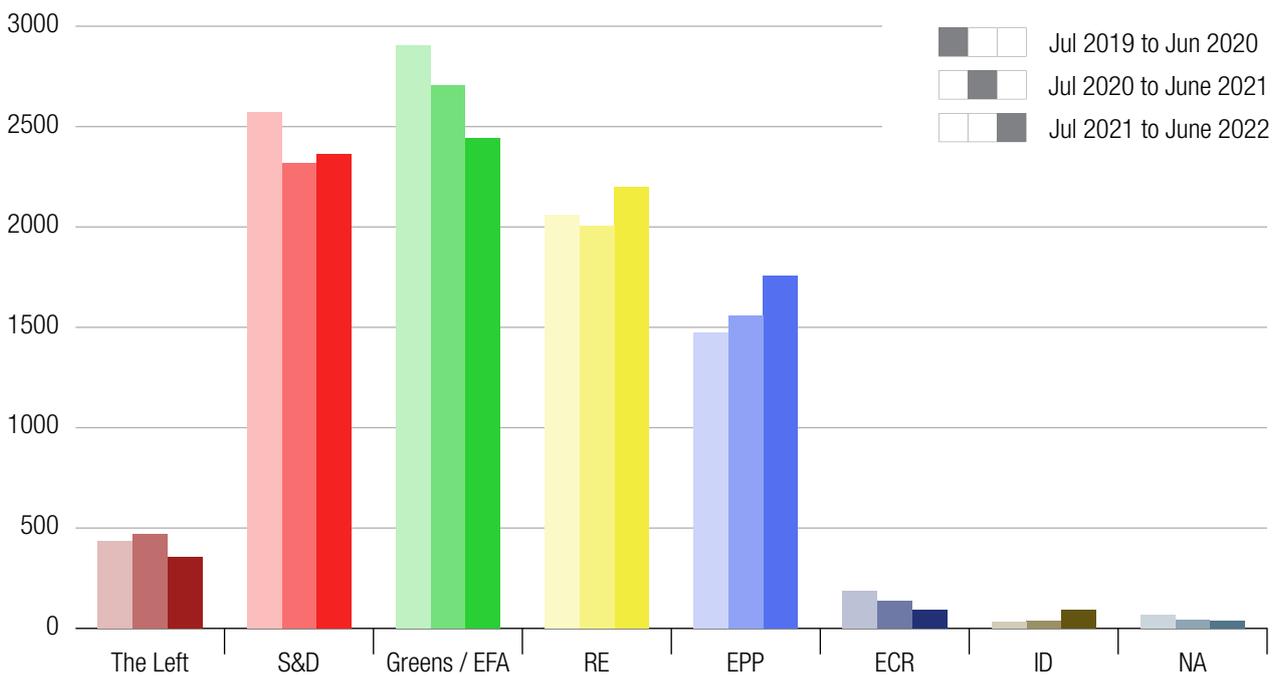
Figure 1. Total number of meetings published per parliamentary year



Some political groups have seen a drop in the number of meetings published after the initial 12 months. Others have remained relatively stable, and some have increased. The drop is most significant for the Greens/EFA and Socialists and Democrats

(S&D) groups, while Renew (RE) remains relatively stable. European People's Party (EPP) MEPs have published more meetings each year, but they continue to publish considerably fewer meetings than other, smaller groups.

Figure 2. Number of published meetings by each political group

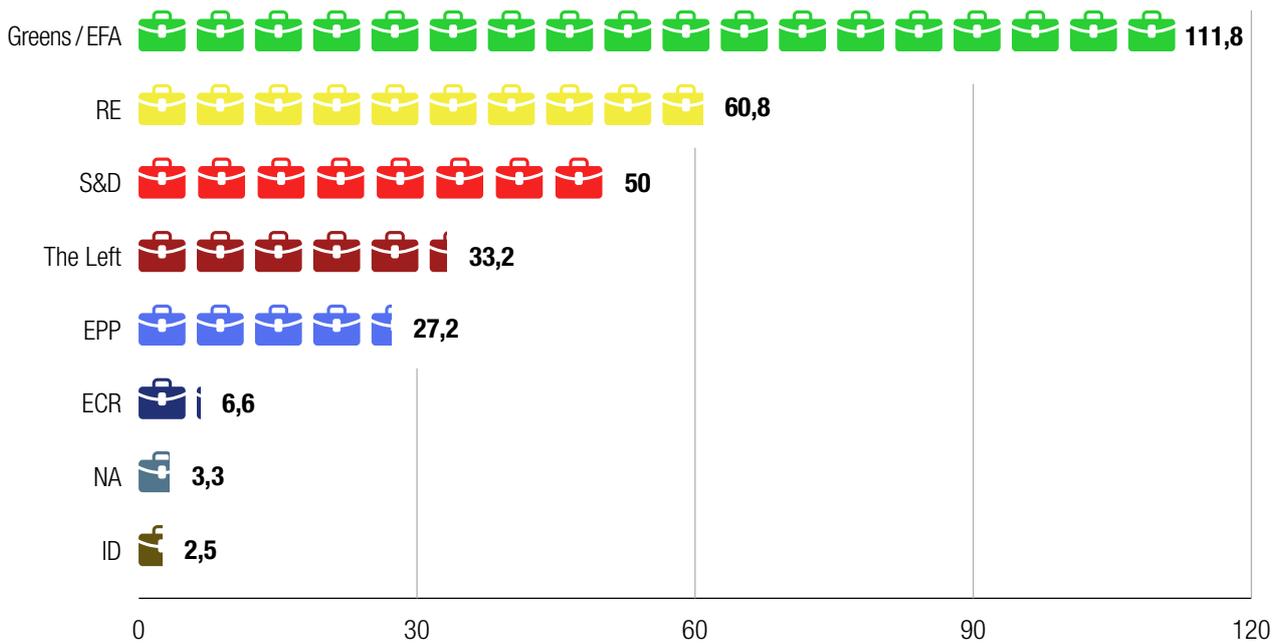


AVERAGE NUMBER OF MEETINGS PUBLISHED

Of the MEPs who publish meetings, Greens/EFA MEPs publish the most meetings per MEP on average, with Identity and Democracy (ID) trailing

in last place with an average of 2.5 published meetings per MEP per year.

Figure 3. Average number of meetings published by an MEP between July 2019 and June 2022



POLITICAL GROUP LOBBY TRANSPARENCY

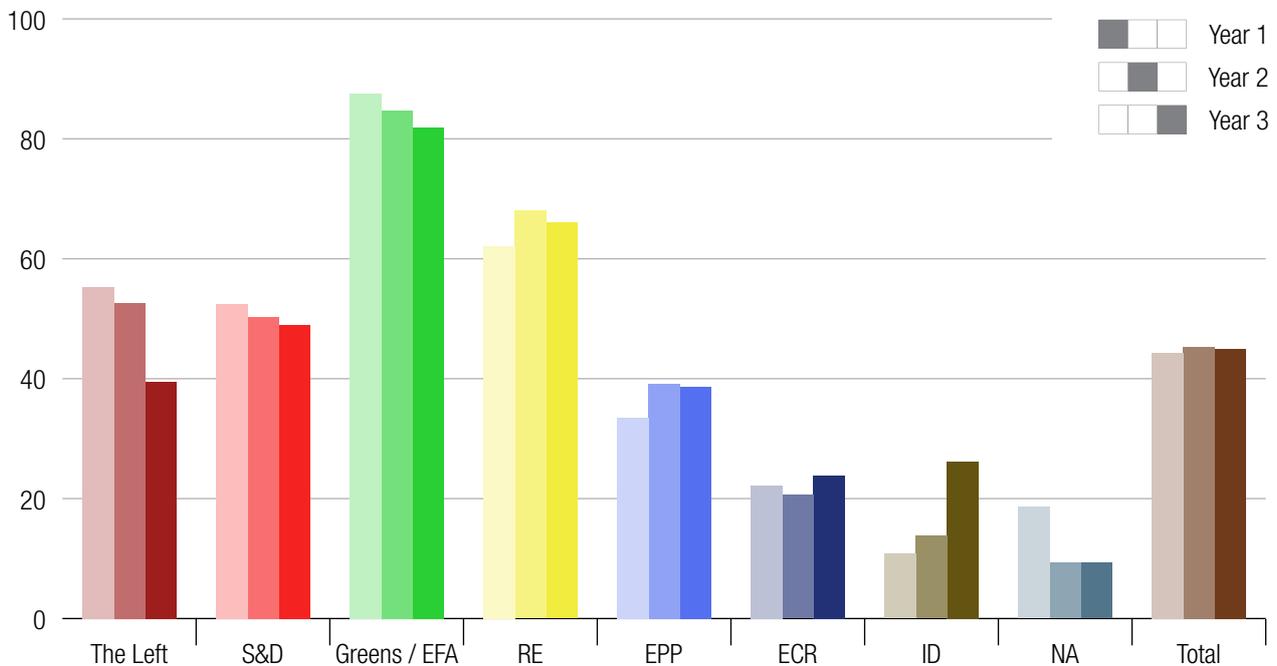
Moving beyond the basic number of meetings published, the next step in our analysis is to look at the number of MEPs in each political group who have published meetings. Even when we set the lowest bar possible – at least one meeting published each year – the data is not encouraging.

We looked at the number of MEPs per political group who published at least one lobby meeting. All of the major political groups have seen either slight

drops or stagnation in numbers of MEPs publishing over the last three years. The Left Group has seen the biggest reduction in these figures.

The percentages reflect the number of MEPs in each political group who have published at least one meeting per year. The difference between the groups is considerable. Only the Greens/EFA and Renew passed the 50% mark in the last year analysed.

Figure 4. Percentage of MEPs who published at least one meeting each year



When looking at MEPs' commitment to lobby transparency through a national lens, we see some clear trends. The heatmap below shows meeting publication by MEPs from each member state. This time we are looking at the publication of a single

meeting in the entire three years. Again, the data is not encouraging. Nordic countries have quite a high level of publication, while Greece, Cyprus, Latvia and Poland have very low rates.

Figure 5. Share of MEPs in each Member State who have published at least one meeting between July 2019 and June 2022

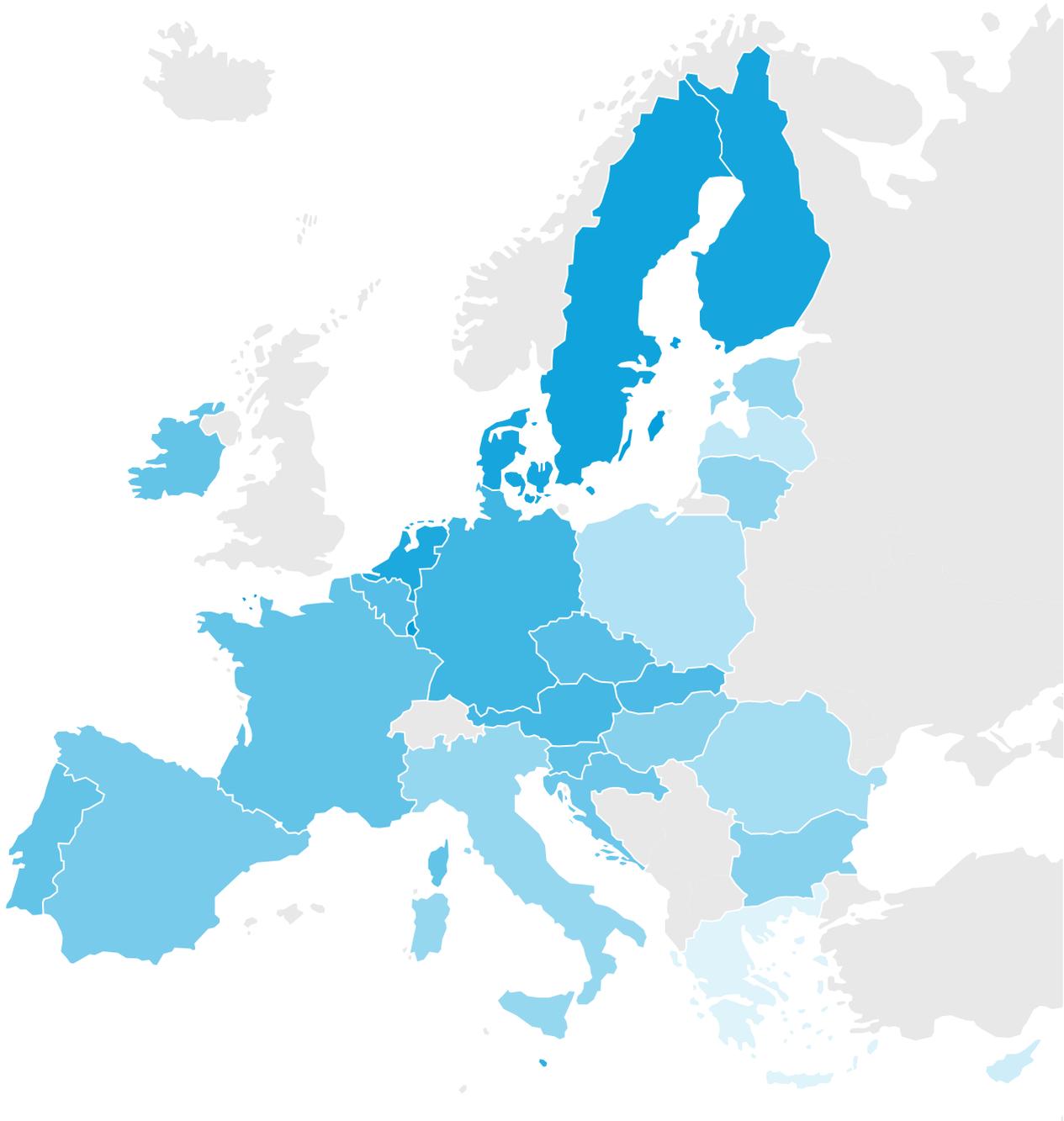


Table 1. Share of MEPs in each Member State who have published at least one meeting between July 2019 and June 2022

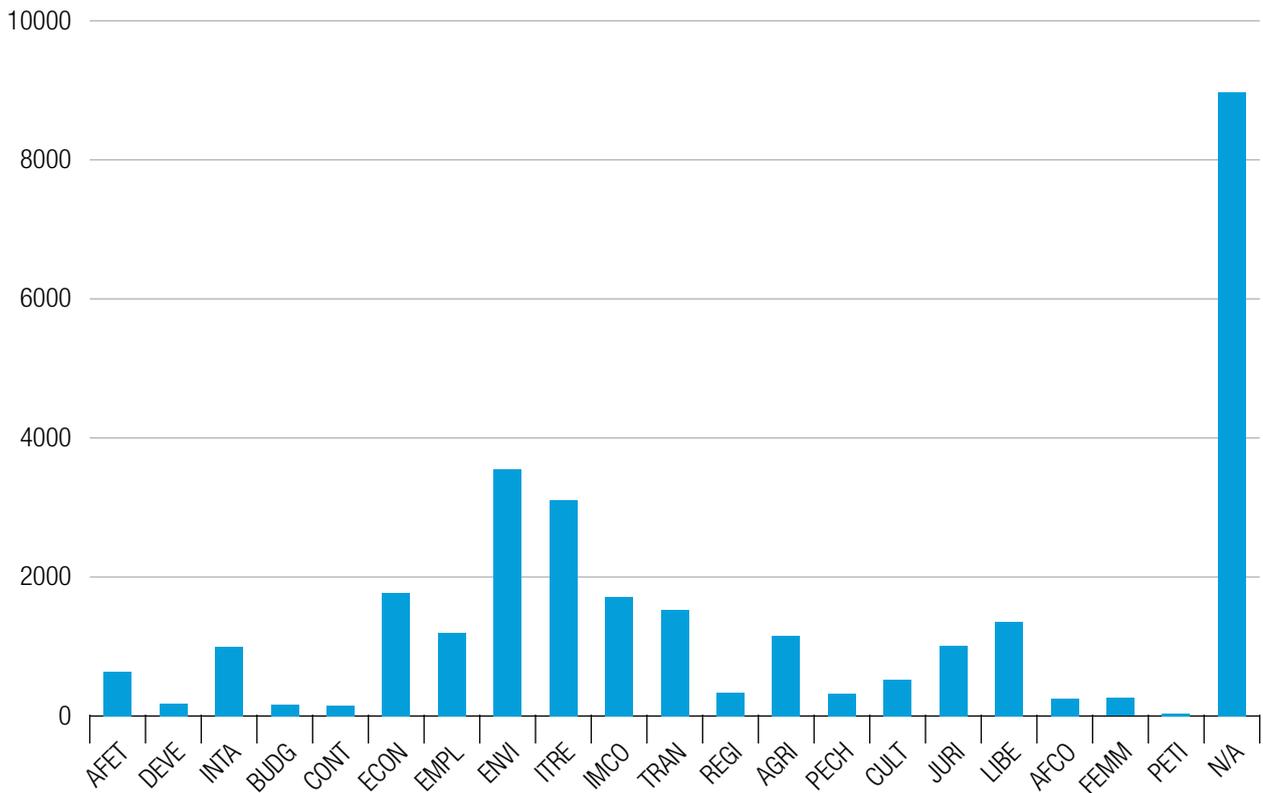
Country	Percentage of MEPs who published
Luxembourg	100%
Sweden	95%
Denmark	93%
Finland	93%
Netherlands	90%
Malta	83%
Germany	76%
Austria	74%
Slovakia	71%
Belgium	67%
Czechia	67%
Slovenia	63%
France	62%
Ireland	62%
Portugal	62%
Croatia	58%
Spain	54%
Hungary	48%
Bulgaria	47%
Lithuania	45%
Estonia	43%
Italy	42%
Romania	36%
Poland	31%
Latvia	25%
Cyprus	17%
Greece	10%

LOBBY MEETINGS BY COMMITTEE

Based on the data analysed, the Environment Committee is the committee that attracts most lobby meetings, closely followed by the Industry, Research and Energy Committee. This is probably a reflection of the fact that these committees deal with some of the most politically salient policy files.

A large number of lobby meetings are not attributed to any particular committee, which could be due to registrations being incomplete and/or meetings not being linked to the committee membership of the MEP in question.

Figure 6. Published lobby meetings by committee



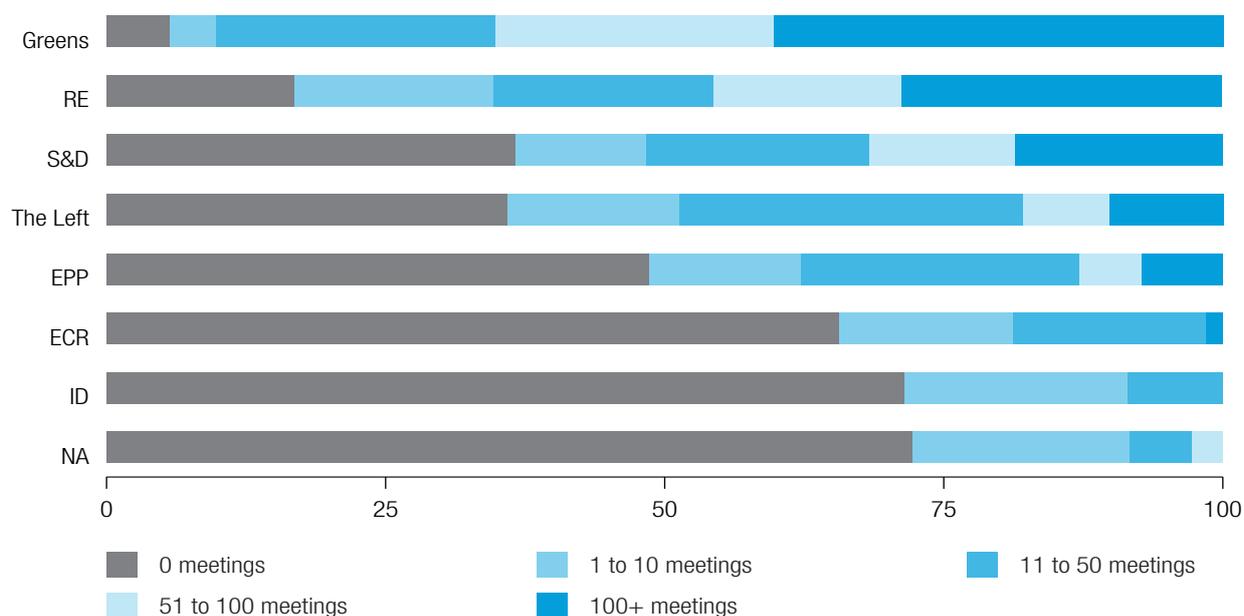
Note: As meetings may be registered under more than one committee, the total number of meetings in this figure exceeds the total number of actual meetings reported

LEVEL OF COMMITMENT TO PUBLISHING MEETINGS

The chart below segments MEPs in each political group based on the number of meetings they have published. Once again, the Greens/EFA and Renew take first and second place, respectively. The S&D takes third place with The Left following suit. This is an interesting finding, as figure 4 shows

that a higher percentage of Left group MEPs have published at least one meeting. In other words, S&D MEPS are less likely to publish a meeting, but those that do, tend to publish more meetings than their Left group peers.

Figure 7. Share of MEPs according to the number of meetings published between July 2019 and June 2022



THE 15 MEPs WITH THE MOST PUBLISHED MEETINGS

Looking at individual MEPs, seven out of the top 15 MEPs in terms of published lobby meetings are from the Greens/EFA group. The others are EPP (four MEPs), S&D (three) and Renew (one).

It is interesting to note that while Renew ranks second when measured in terms of MEPs who have published at least one meeting in three years (see fig. 4), as well as in the number of MEPs who have

published more than 100 meetings (see fig. 7), only one of their MEPs appears in the top 15.

This is not by definition a ranking of the most transparent MEPs; it is a ranking of MEPs who publish most meetings. It may well be that MEPs high up in the ranking do not publish all of their meetings, and that others who are much further down the list, do.

Rank	Name	Country	Group	Meetings
1	Reinhard Bütikofer	Germany	Greens/EFA	514
2	Niklas Nienaß	Germany	Greens/EFA	389
3	Fabienne Keller	France	Renew	358
4	Henna Virkkunen	Finland	EPP	349
5	Tiemo Wölken	Germany	S&D	348
5	Ville Niinistö	Finland	Greens/EFA	348
7	Jutta Paulus	Germany	Greens/EFA	325
8	Daniel Freund	Germany	Greens/EFA	315
9	Jens Gieseke	Germany	EPP	305
10	Michael Bloss	Germany	Greens/EFA	303
11	Heidi Hautala	Finland	Greens/EFA	292
12	Sirpa Pietikäinen	Finland	EPP	291
13	Bernd Lange	Germany	S&D	290
14	Tom Berendsen	Netherlands	EPP	287
15	Andreas Schieder	Austria	S&D	271

TRANSPARENCY INTERNATIONAL EU

Rue du Commerce 31
1000 Brussels, Belgium

brussels@transparency.org
www.transparency.eu



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