

Brussels/Cologne, 15 July 2024

High time to act on enforcing lobbying rules

Dear Commission President von der Leyen,

Democracy at the heart of Europe has never been as threatened as it is today. From outside the EU, authoritarian states are aiming to destabilise the EU institutions. Far right political parties with authoritarian agendas now hold one quarter of the seats in the European Parliament.

At the same time, the number of lobbyists from inside and outside Europe is growing, spending ever-more money on lobbying the EU institutions. Some of these lobbyists take advantage of poorly enforced EU transparency obligations, and many of them are trying to block or water down policies that are intended to protect the livelihoods of citizens in Europe and around the world.

The last years have shown that the European Union is not well prepared to defend its democracy from this kind of undue influence. Qatargate and other scandals have demonstrated this very clearly. Transparency and ethics rules, which are fundamental to preventing corruption, are ineffectual as long as they are not properly enforced. As a case in point, the Transparency Register has proven to be dysfunctional. The register still contains large loopholes, and the lack of monitoring, resources and enforcement make it unfit to help detect undue influence on the political process.

Lobbying regulation therefore plays a crucial role in protecting our democracy, but during the last electoral term, the European Commission failed to take any meaningful action to strengthen its own transparency and ethics system. Failure to act on the EU Transparency Register after the Qatargate scandal represented a major missed opportunity. It is now high time to act.

We therefore call for the following reforms to be implemented quickly:

- A functional lobbying transparency register deserving of the label of “de-facto-mandatory”. This should include improved disclosure requirements and a working oversight body commanding sufficient resources to properly investigate and sanction non-compliance.
- The obligation to only meet with registered lobbyists should be expanded to all EU officials to increase compliance among lobbyists. Furthermore, proactively disclosing meetings with lobbyists should be expanded to include all officials down to heads of unit.
- Transparency and ethics rules: the systems of self-policing per institution have been

shown to be dysfunctional. The EU institutions must finally deliver on enforcing their ethics rules. The Ethics Body, which is tasked with establishing ethics frameworks for nine EU institutions, should have the necessary resources and powers to monitor and enforce these rules.

- Further, we urge you to ensure the protection of democratic policymaking on climate, the European Green Deal and other key public interest policies. Undue influence and policy capture by corporations must be prevented. We cannot risk the policies aimed to ensure our long-term prosperity for shortsighted gains and profit objectives. The dominance of corporate interests in advisory groups, lobby meetings or elsewhere in the political process must be prevented.

These reforms must be introduced as soon as the new Commission enters office.

We are looking forward to your answer and would be happy to discuss this further in a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

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Olivier Hoedeman, Corporate Europe Observatory

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Alberto Alemanno, The good lobby