



Greens/EFA group initiative on lobbying transparency: Automatic publication of meetings with lobbyists

PRESS BRIEFING

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The Green/EFA group in the European Parliament is now the first political group to automatically publish lists of meetings held with lobbyists on our websites.

On the anniversary of the European Commission's policy of listing lobby meetings held by Commissioners, Directors General and their cabinets, the Green/EFA group is pushing for further action in the field of EU lobbying transparency.

The state of play on lobbying transparency in the EU

The lobby register

The European Commission made lobbying transparency one of its priorities when it first took office, and it promised to put forward, in early 2015, an inter-institutional agreement for a mandatory lobby register that would replace the current voluntary system and also cover the Council.

However, Frans Timmermans, the European Commissioner in charge of transparency, has failed to abide by this promise: in fact, the inter-institutional agreement has now been pushed back into the 2016 work programme.

The European Parliament has repeatedly made calls for the current Transparency Register to be strengthened and made legally binding. The Green/EFA group has made transparency and democracy one of our priorities, and we have set up a specific internal working group on these issues.

We are also taking the lead on the European Parliament's draft own-initiative report on transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institutions. Our rapporteur, Sven Giegold, has recommended in the draft a large number of strong incentives to lobbyists for registration to achieve a de facto mandatory register. We later propose that the EU register be backed up with "a legal act to close all loopholes and achieve a fully mandatory register for all lobbyists."

The Green/EFA group has also recommended in the draft report that the European Parliament's Code of Conduct be amended so that rapporteurs and Committee Presidents are bound to refuse meetings with unregistered lobbyists and to be transparent about all lobby meetings.



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Transparency of meetings with lobbyists

The lobby register puts the burden of transparency on third parties that are external to the EU institutions, but we believe that as elected representatives, we have a strong duty towards our electorate to be transparent about how we interact with lobbyists, and how their views are taken into account during the decision-making process.

Before the European elections, a number of our MEPs signed pledges by transparency groups that we would be open about our meetings with lobbyists and publish a "legislative footprint". We are now delivering on this promise by automatically publishing on our websites information about meetings with lobbyists.

Enabled by a new software tool developed on the initiative of MEP Julia Reda (Pirate Party) and in collaboration with Transparency International, the data about our MEPs' lobby meetings is taken directly from our calendars and published on our websites the following day, thus virtually eliminating the administrative burden that many claim to be a barrier to transparency.

It is also important to note that analyses by NGOs of the meetings data published by the European Commission has revealed that well-funded industry groups have disproportionate access to the European Commission's high-level decision-makers, despite Juncker's instructions that Commissioners, Directors-General and their cabinets should ensure balance in their meetings. Furthermore, the current transparency measures only cover around 300 officials, which is only 1-3% of the Commission staff. To mention one salient example, none of the lead negotiators for the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) are covered by transparency requirements.

The Green/EFA group is committed to ensuring that all relevant stakeholders are met and that civil society groups are taken seriously as stakeholders in the decision-making process. Keeping a public record of our lobby meetings will help us, and our electorate, to objectively ensure that we do that. We are committed to fulfilling our Treaty obligations to ensure that all citizens are equal and that all stakeholders have equal access to power.

The Green/EFA group is now calling on the European Commission to extend its lobby transparency policy to all staff involved in drafting EU legislation and negotiating trade agreements.

We also invite other political groups in the European Parliament to follow our example, noting that many members also signed transparency pledges prior to the European Parliament elections in May 2014. The draft report on transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institutions also calls for a mandatory requirement that lead MEPs such as rapporteurs and shadows drafting EU laws, as well as committee chairs, publish a legislative footprint or otherwise lose their special position.

More detailed information

About the LobbyCalendar tool

- The LobbyCalendar tool harvests information from Outlook, Google or Zimbra calendars. To mark a meeting for publication, one only needs to invite LobbyCalendar as a "virtual attendee" within the calendar software.
- Information is then automatically published online the day after a meeting takes place. This information can be embedded into any website, with optimised plug-ins available so far for sites powered by WordPress or Typo3.
- The software is open source and is freely available for anyone to use, re-use or adapt to their liking.
- Information about meetings held with lobbyists are gathered in a database which can be publically accessed, so that even MEPs that do not have a website are able to log their meetings.



- All information is made available as machine-readable open data through the LobbyCalendar API to enable automated analysis and other re-use.

About the transparency, accountability and integrity report

The European Parliament's own initiative report on transparency, accountability and integrity was drafted by Green rapporteur Sven Giegold. The draft was opened for public consultation via an online web platform, and it will be presented to the Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) committee of the European Parliament on 3rd December. The deadline for amendments as well as the votes in AFCO and plenary will follow in 2016.



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