



To: Commission President José Manuel Barroso
From: Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU)
Date: Brussels, 3 June 2008
Subject: Concerns over the Commission's new register for lobbyists

Dear President Barroso,

On 13 February the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU) wrote to you to raise concerns about the possible exclusion of individual lobbyists' names and meaningful financial data from the forthcoming Commission's register for lobbyists.

We are writing to you again as we feel our concerns have not been given due consideration by the Commission. The Secretariat-General, which is directly responsible to you, is planning to go ahead with the launch of the register even though this vital information is not included.

Without individual lobbyists' names and detailed financial information, the register will fail in its objective to improve transparency. As a result, the Commission risks being perceived as having failed to meet the expectations it has raised during three years of debate over the European Transparency Initiative.

With this letter ALTER-EU urges you, as President of the European Commission, to intervene and ensure that the register for lobbyists will deliver genuine transparency on the activities of the 15,000 or more lobbyists currently targeting the EU institutions and their policies.

If indeed the register does not include the names of individual lobbyists, conflicts of interest will go unnoticed, as will unethical behaviour by individual lobbyists. Similarly, the absence of detailed financial data will make it impossible to identify the main drivers behind lobbying activities.

It is particularly worrying that the proposed register treats different lobbyists in different ways. The financial data required from each category of lobbyist is different, and meaningful comparisons are not possible. NGOs, for example, have to declare their total annual budget, but do not have to say how much of that is used for lobbying. NGOs should be required to declare lobbying expenditure as well. Equally, lobby consultancies and trade associations should declare their total annual budget as well as total lobbying budget.

Whereas NGOs and think tanks are required to provide financial information on their income sources in absolute numbers, lobbying consultancy firms only need to give the most relevant information – the amount they get from each client – in very vague terms. They can even opt to declare funding from their clients only in 10% steps relative to their total lobbying income. This favours bigger lobby firms who will need to be less transparent about their clients than smaller firms. These differences in treatment undermine, rather than promote, transparency.

It is the right of every European citizen to know who is trying to influence policy processes in Europe, on whose behalf and with what resources. Launching a register that is a token gesture, rather than a serious step towards securing transparency around EU lobbying, will put the credibility of the Union's approach to transparency, and the legitimacy of EU decision-making, at risk.

We therefore call upon you to intervene and strengthen the transparency requirements of the planned register in relation to these fundamental issues, particularly in light of the recent resolution of the European Parliament that clearly calls for a mandatory system of registration, including the names of lobbyists and detailed financial information.

The Commission should follow suit and ensure that the register will indeed contain the names of individual lobbyists and meaningful, comparable financial data, disclosing lobbying expenditure in ranges of €10.000.

We look forward to hearing from you how you plan to ensure that the Commission's register for lobbyists will get off to a good start.

Yours sincerely,

The ALTER-EU Steering Committee:

Paul de Clerck (Friends of the Earth Europe)
William Dinan (Spinwatch)
Marc Gruber (European Federation of Journalists)
Ulrich Müller (LobbyControl)
Jorgo Riss (Greenpeace European Unit)
Erik Wesselius (Corporate Europe Observatory)

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU)
www.alter-eu.org / info@alter-eu.org