

# LETTERS

International Press Centre Résidence Palace,  
Rue de la Loi 155, Box 6, 1040 Brussels, Belgium  
Fax: +32 (0)2 540 9071 • Letters: [evletters@europeanvoice.com](mailto:evletters@europeanvoice.com)  
Website: [www.europeanvoice.com](http://www.europeanvoice.com)

We will accept letters in all EU official languages. Letter-writers by post, fax or email are requested to provide their name, address and telephone numbers. We will consider withholding name and address details, but this information must be provided. Letters may be edited for length and clarity.

## A mandatory register is the only solution

While lobbyists cannot, of course, be held responsible for MEPs' bad behaviour, arguing as you did in last week's editorial that "the current register could, for the moment, remain voluntary" fails to draw the right lessons from the 'cash-for-influence' scandal ("Reform of MEPs' interests is in interest of all", 7-13 April).

Indeed, the scandal directly highlights the need for mandatory registration and reporting by lobbyists.

Ernst Strasser, one of the three MEPs caught on tape agreeing to submit amendments in return for promises of cash, was already being paid to lobby for industry clients, through his job as a consultant. Accepting the money offered by the undercover journalists was simply adding another company to his portfolio of clients.

The Austrian press had already carried reports about Strasser's lobby work, including allegations that he had used his status as an MEP to arrange meetings at the European Commission for industry clients. Strasser denied those allegations, but



**CAUGHT OUT** Ernst Strasser, an Austrian centre-right MEP, resigned over the 'cash-for-influence' scandal. REUTERS

the *Sunday Times* videos challenge his claims.

If the European Parliament had had a mandatory lobby-transparency system in place, Strasser's lobby consultancy firm would have had to register itself, to disclose its clients, the amounts received, the issues lobbied on and the names of its lobbyists, including Strasser. Such a register would have brought Strasser's scandalous behaviour out in the open sooner, and measures would have been taken.

In the US, mandatory registration and reporting have helped the Department of Justice discover corruption scandals involving numerous lobbyists and lawmakers, including the lobby consultant Jack Abramoff and Congressman Bob Ney, both of whom were given prison sentences.

A voluntary lobby-transparency register does not provide enough information for proper public scrutiny, and does not reveal unethical practices. Those who have

something to hide will simply choose not to register or not to disclose relevant information. For these and many other reasons, Jerzy Buzek, the Parliament's president, was right when, last month, he called upon MEPs to "establish a de facto mandatory register of our own, as a stepping stone towards a formally mandatory register across the institutions".

**Olivier Hoedeman**  
Corporate Europe Observatory  
Brussels

## Rules of conduct for MEPs must be strict



You were right to say in last week's editorial ("Reform of MEPs' interests is in interest of all", 7-13 April) that "getting rid of corporate retainers would be a sensible start" to changing the culture within the European Parliament that led to the 'cash-for-influence' scandal.

This would go beyond the proposals made last week by Jerzy Buzek (pictured), the European Parliament's president, to avoid a repeat of the scandal, which involved MEPs accepting money in return for filing amendments to legislative proposals.

Alter-EU, which lobbies for transparency, welcomes his proposal to create an independent ethics committee to look into rule breaches and possible conflicts of interest. We support Buzek's proposal to ensure that there is more up-to-date information about MEPs' financial interests and regular checks on the validity of this information. We welcome the creation of a working group to propose changes to MEPs' rules of conduct by the end of July. And we also believe he was right to stress the need for a mandatory register of lobbyists.

The Parliament is currently discussing the intro-

duction of a voluntary joint register with the Commission; Buzek's working group should, in our view, produce detailed proposals about how this register could be made mandatory. If the Commission does not agree to a joint mandatory register, the Parliament should look to make its own register mandatory.

However, such steps to increase transparency will not be sufficient to avoid conflicts of interest. To eliminate this risk, MEPs should not be able to take on any additional jobs that have any lobbying element. Being an MEP is a responsible and full-time job, and MEPs do not require any additional income.

We also propose that there should be:

- Strict rules to ensure that MEPs do not receive money, gifts or hospitality above €50 from lobbyists;
- Effective prosecution of corruption;
- Elimination of the 'revolving door', with a two-year cooling-off period for MEPs once they have left the Parliament.

**Paul de Clerck**  
Alter-EU  
Brussels

## Supporting Montenegro's 'Facebook' president

Montenegro's prime minister, Igor Lukšić (pictured), has a tremendously challenging job ahead of him ("Young pretender", 7-13 April). Moving Montenegro from 'MS DOS'-style to 'Facebook'-style transparency is an enormous task. Lukšić will certainly need all the support he can get from

Europe and, unfortunately, a great deal of luck.

If the short history of new media teaches us anything, it is the power of the 'domino effect'. So investment in bringing transparency to Montenegro and also actively supporting the education of talented young people would bring

benefits beyond Montenegro's borders.

The EU should act swiftly and provide Lukšić with tangible support. These kinds of 'investment' opportunities do not present themselves too often.

**Željko Bošković**  
Bar, Montenegro



EuropeanVoice EuropeanVoice.com

### STAFF

**PUBLISHER**  
Jürgen Debusmann

**EDITOR**  
Tim King

**NEWS EDITOR**  
Simon Taylor

**FEATURES EDITOR**  
Andrew Gardner

**ASSOCIATE EDITOR**  
Peter O'Donnell

**REPORTERS**  
Constant Brand  
Jennifer Rankin  
Toby Vogel  
Ian Wishart

**PRODUCTION EDITOR**  
Jarle Hetland

**SUB-EDITOR**  
Paul Dallison

**GRAPHIC DESIGNER & SUB-EDITOR**  
André Dael

**CARTOONIST**  
Marco Villard

**FINANCIAL CONTROLLER**  
Richard Langrish

**JUNIOR BUSINESS ACCOUNTANT**  
Alison Hardy

**SALES DIRECTOR**  
Bianca Opris

**ADVOCACY SALES CO-ORDINATOR**  
Christine Coudour

**SALES CO-ORDINATOR (education, recruitment and publications)**  
Murat Dogru

**ADVOCACY SALES EXECUTIVE**  
Blanche Eglin

**CORPORATE SALES EXECUTIVES**  
Ludwig Eickemeyer  
Nicholas Bruneau

**MARKETING DIRECTOR**  
Michel Deurinck

**EVENTS DEVELOPER AND CO-ORDINATOR**  
Lorenzo Morselli

**EVENTS & MARKETING EXECUTIVE**  
Christina Gennet

**OPERATIONS DIRECTOR**  
Anne Marchadier

**HUMAN RESOURCES & ADMINISTRATION ASSISTANT**  
Sylvie Delmarcelle

**CIRCULATION ASSISTANT**  
Laurent Falise

**CIRCULATION & MARKETING CO-ORDINATOR**  
Etienne Bauvir

### SUBSCRIPTIONS

Telephone: +32 (0)2 540 9090 Email: [evsubscriptions@economist.com](mailto:evsubscriptions@economist.com)

One-year subscription rates: Europe: €193.  
Paid subscribers qualify to receive e-news service each Thursday of publication and free access to our online archives at [www.europeanvoice.com](http://www.europeanvoice.com)

© European Voice All rights reserved. Neither this publication nor any part of it may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of European Voice.

European Voice is published by The Economist Group but has complete editorial independence. The views expressed may differ from those in other publications in The Economist Group.

For reprint information, please contact:  
[annemarchadier@economist.com](mailto:annemarchadier@economist.com)

Printed by: Corelio Printing, Keerstraat 10,  
B-9420 Erpe-Mere, at the coldset printing department of VUM - Groot-Bijgaarden, Brussels.  
European Voice is printed on recycled paper.

An Economist Group business

