



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
SECRETARIAT-GENERAL

Directorate C - Transparency, Efficiency & Resources  
**The Director**

Brussels  
SG.C.1/MO

Olivier Hoedeman

Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and  
Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU)

*Sent only by email to:*

[coordinator@alter-eu.org](mailto:coordinator@alter-eu.org)

Dear Mr Hoedeman,

President von der Leyen would like to thank you for your letter on behalf of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) entitled ‘Unbalanced lobby meetings and corporate influence’ as well as for your warm congratulations on her appointment as President of the European Commission. She has asked me to reply on her behalf – please accept our apologies for the delay in doing so.

At the outset, it is worth recalling that the Political Guidelines for the European Commission 2019-2024<sup>1</sup> include a Chapter entitled ‘A new push for European democracy’. It stresses that ‘citizens should know who we, as the institutions who serve them, meet and discuss with and what positions we defend in the legislative process’. The Commission considers that being open to outside input is fundamental to the sound development of its policies.

This approach is also a legal obligation as enshrined in Article 11 of the Treaty on the European Union. This openness allows all stakeholders to present their views during the decision-making process on proposals that may affect them and hence contribute effectively to the evidence base on which policy proposals are made. At the same time, the Commission is convinced that lobbying activities should be based on the principles of transparency, integrity and equality of treatment, in order to protect the general interest of the Union.

In this respect, I should emphasise that the Commission does not share ALTER-EU’s views about ‘privileged access for corporate lobbyists to the Commission’. In the

---

<sup>1</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024_en)

Commission's understanding, achieving balance and representativeness in the stakeholders we interact with means ensuring that all societal voices concerned are heard when debating, formulating or implementing EU policy.

Our Better Regulation Agenda provides opportunities to be informed and to contribute to at all stages of the EU policy-making cycle. Civil society organisations, for instance, do interact regularly with the Commission not only via bilateral meetings but also at various other fora and during the implementation of EU-funded projects.

From the Commission's perspective, the most promising approach in achieving a sound lobbying regulatory framework lies in adequately implementing the above-mentioned principles of transparency, integrity and equality of treatment whilst being mindful of special cases such as the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. The Commission Proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register, when adopted, will further strengthen our policy on relations with interest representatives.

You also raise the issue of 'revolving doors'. With regard to former Members of the Commission, the Commission strictly applies the high ethical standards set out in Articles 245 and 339 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU as well as in the strengthened Code of Conduct for the Members of the Commission from 2018<sup>2</sup>. As far as staff are concerned, the Commission is bound by the Staff Regulations, which contain a comprehensive ethical framework, which was reinforced in the area of post-employment restrictions by the 2014 reform. The current legal framework and management tools therefore already provide solid instruments, as confirmed by the European Ombudsman.

As to the specific case of Mr Farkas, the decision has been taken by the European Banking Authority's Board of Supervisors, a body with legal personality responsible for the implementation of the applicable rules and for adopting individual decisions concerning their staff.

With its revised horizontal rules on expert groups<sup>3</sup>, the Commission has confirmed its commitment to strive for a balance in their composition, whilst taking into account the specific tasks of every individual group, the type of expertise required, as well as the number and quality of responses received to calls for applications. The role of the Real Driving Emissions (RDE) sub-group, which was set up in 2011, is to provide expertise on all the technical aspects related to RDE test. This includes ensuring that the accuracy and replication of the new measurement systems is appropriate. Such technical expertise is mostly available in the automotive industry, but also in measurement system manufacturers and academia/research centres, and less so in NGOs and EU Member States' authorities, which are nonetheless represented in the sub-group. The Commission

---

<sup>2</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018D0221\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:32018D0221(02))

<sup>3</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/PDF/C\\_2016\\_3301\\_F1\\_COMMISSION\\_DECISION\\_EN.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/PDF/C_2016_3301_F1_COMMISSION_DECISION_EN.pdf)

has always ensured that participants have an equal chance to express their views and that different interests are counterbalanced.

Yours sincerely,

Tatjana VERRIER