

# Shining a full light on Brussels's lobbies

*Vicky Cann*

**I**t is over four years since the acrimonious departure of European Health Commissioner John Dalli from the European Commission in October 2012. He left following an investigation by the EU anti-fraud office, after a tobacco company alleged that a close associate of Mr Dalli had asked for €60 million to set up meetings with the commissioner and rival companies, with a view to changing tobacco legislation in its favour.

Many of those involved in what became known as the Dalligate scandal were absent from the EU lobby transparency register, a tool created to open up lobbying activities in Brussels. With around 30,000 lobbyists based in the EU capital, transparency is key to exposing the excessive industry lobbying that can, and many times has, distorted EU policy-making processes, putting

private profit over public interest.

But four years after the scandal that rocked the Brussels bubble, not much has changed.

In its current form the EU lobby register is deeply flawed. It is voluntary, plagued with inaccurate or misleading data, and some key players still refuse to sign up. This is deeply problematic. Lobby transparency is an important tool in the fight for public-interest decision-making and an effective register should tell us who is influencing EU decision-making, on whose behalf, and with what budgets.

Now, under the watchful eye of the Maltese Presidency, there is the chance to improve the lobby register. Negotiations will shortly start between the European Commission and the European Parliament (the current parties to the register) who together with the Council, represented

by Malta, will seek to revise the register.

The negotiations will be based on a Commission proposal and unfortunately the list of positives in this proposal is outweighed by the negatives. On the plus side, the Commission wants to introduce a rule to prevent members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from meeting with lobbyists who are not in the register, and will revise monitoring and sanctions to try to drive up the quality of the data being posted. On the minus side, the Commission will still allow the vast majority of its own officials (including those who draft legislative proposals) to meet unregistered lobbyists; the definition of what is and isn't to be counted as 'lobbying' could be weakened; and the register will remain voluntary only, which rules out the possibility of introducing fines or criminal prosecutions for lobbyists who don't follow the rules.

So the ball will be in the court of the Maltese Presidency, working with the European Parliament, which generally supports better lobby transparency, to negotiate an improved register and persuade the other 27 EU member states

to get on board. An impressive first signal of intentions by the Presidency would be if Malta and its officials in Brussels voluntarily signed up to the EU transparency rules.

The Maltese Parliament is currently debating a Standards

***The Maltese presidency will soon start negotiating on behalf of the EU Council on a new lobby transparency register and it is time to get tough on lobbyists who wish to stay in the shadows***

in Public Life Bill, and both here and across the EU, including in Brussels, more work is needed to prevent conflicts of interest; block the revolving door which sees personnel move too easily between public institutions and industry; open up decision-making to wider scrutiny; and crucially, to end the cosy relations which too often develop between politicians and decision-makers on the one hand, and corporate interests on the other.

Of course, transparency is no panacea for the declining faith of citizens in governments and institutions across Europe, but the creation of a strong lobby register by EU politicians would send the right message to citizens: we recognise your right to know which lobbyists we speak to and what we speak about.

We hope that the Maltese presidency takes up this challenge.

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# Opportunities for Gozitans in Gozo



*Ryan Mercieca*

**P**hilosopher Friedrich Nietzsche once said, "I'm not upset that you lied to me, I'm upset that from now on I can't believe you." This very aptly applies to the present administration's lack of good governance and transparency, which has eroded its credibility. And whatever degree of trust the electorate still had in it must have evaporated with the latest "scandal" involving the GWU in connection with the jobless scheme, which will leave the same GWU better off with something like €8.5m from our taxes.

A first of a series of regional employment statistics was published by the NSO, which uncovers a reality that this government has been trying to hide and deceive people with the impression of a feel good factor and the cliché of a growing economy, which also applies to Gozo.

This report, which can be easily accessed through the NSO website, clearly confirms that the government has failed in its most prominent of the electoral promises to the Gozitans, that of creating jobs for Gozitans in Gozo. In 2015 the Gozitans commuting to work in Malta numbered 2,768, an increase of 668 from the 2,100 commuters in 2013 onwards.

Another important conclusion from this report that deserves attention is that on average one out of every five employed persons resident in Gozo works in Malta. This highlights that Gozo and the Gozitans are dependent of the Maltese economy but are not an integral part of it. Gozo deserves to be a mainstream in the national economy.

The report underlines that the workforce in the Gozitan private sector has been decreasing since 2013, the main reason being the

scheme that recently has been in the news. Genuine Gozitans are being deceived. They are being promised that if they leave the private sector and participate in this scheme in the run up to the election they will be given a permanent job within the public sector. In other words Gozitan workers are being enticed to give up better paid jobs in the private

***The government has failed to create the right opportunities for the Gozitans in Gozo***

sector and opt for the minimum wage under the scheme.

To be clear, the blame here is not of the Gozitans as it's their right to strive for better job conditions and wages. The reality of the Gozitan economy is that it has a small private sector and this restricts job mobility. Thus the

blame is with the government which has failed to create the right opportunities for the Gozitans in Gozo.

The success of the Gozitan economy should not be measured through the number of people crossing the Channel, the vast majority of whom are Gozitans commuting to work, but on the number of high value added careers created in Gozo for those who would like to work in Gozo irrelevant of being Gozitan or Maltese.

Gozitans deserve equal opportunities and equal standards of work and living and this call is not only one of social justice but a sine qua non for national development. Investment in Gozo is investment in Malta. A future for Gozo is a future for Malta.

The report further shows that the biggest sector in the private industry in Gozo is the wholesale and retail trade, showing that the Nationalist Party vision to revitalise this sector with a number of proposals through the 'Policy for Retailers' document is a vision that reflects the Island's needs and ambitions.

The present small private sector in Gozo shows the need for an

increase of incentives in this private sector to encourage expansion of operations and new start-ups. With the right framework of incentives including a next generation taxation philosophy, the correct mindset and a political entrepreneur, Gozo has the opportunity to become a niche for start-ups and one of the best livable places not only in Europe but in the world.

One has to keep in mind that Gozo is another centre of our national life and not just a peripheral district; in simple words it is a distinct region in a culturally rich archipelago. Gozo is not only one of the 13 electoral districts but one of two inhabited islands in our archipelago. I firmly believe in an economy for the people and not for numbers. If we invest in our people the numbers will grow sustainably, but if we consider people as numbers, the result will be a zero sum game where our country will have lost its moral fibre, social conscience and any ethical consideration.

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