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## Malta EU Permanent Representation refuses to grant information on meetings with lobby groups

Helena Grech

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Last update: about 9 months ago



A report penned by the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) revealed that Malta was one of two EU Member States who refused a Freedom of Information Request on meetings between Maltese permanent representation in Brussels and lobby groups.

In the request, a list of meetings which took place over the past 12 months along with the lobby groups' names were sought. Malta and the United Kingdom were the only two countries to flat out refuse request.

This report was flagged by deputy chairperson of *Alternattiva Demokratika* Carmel Cacopardo, who has written a number of pieces on the importance of transparency with regard to lobby groups.





"The Standards in Public Life Bill has been pending in Parliament for the past two years, and it does not tackle lobbying," said Mr Cacopardo in comments to this newsroom.

"The issue of lobbying is very important," he emphasised. In a previous piece written by the deputy chairperson and published by this newsroom, he stressed that lobbying is not necessarily an unfavourable thing – and that anybody from citizens, NGOs to business can do so. The crux of the matter however, is that "lobbying requires a considerable dose of transparency," he said.

Giving examples, he said that while lobbying can be used by NGOs and charities to make authorities more informed in their decision, multinationals can also take advantage of this practice and try to influence how EU directives are implemented in a Member State.

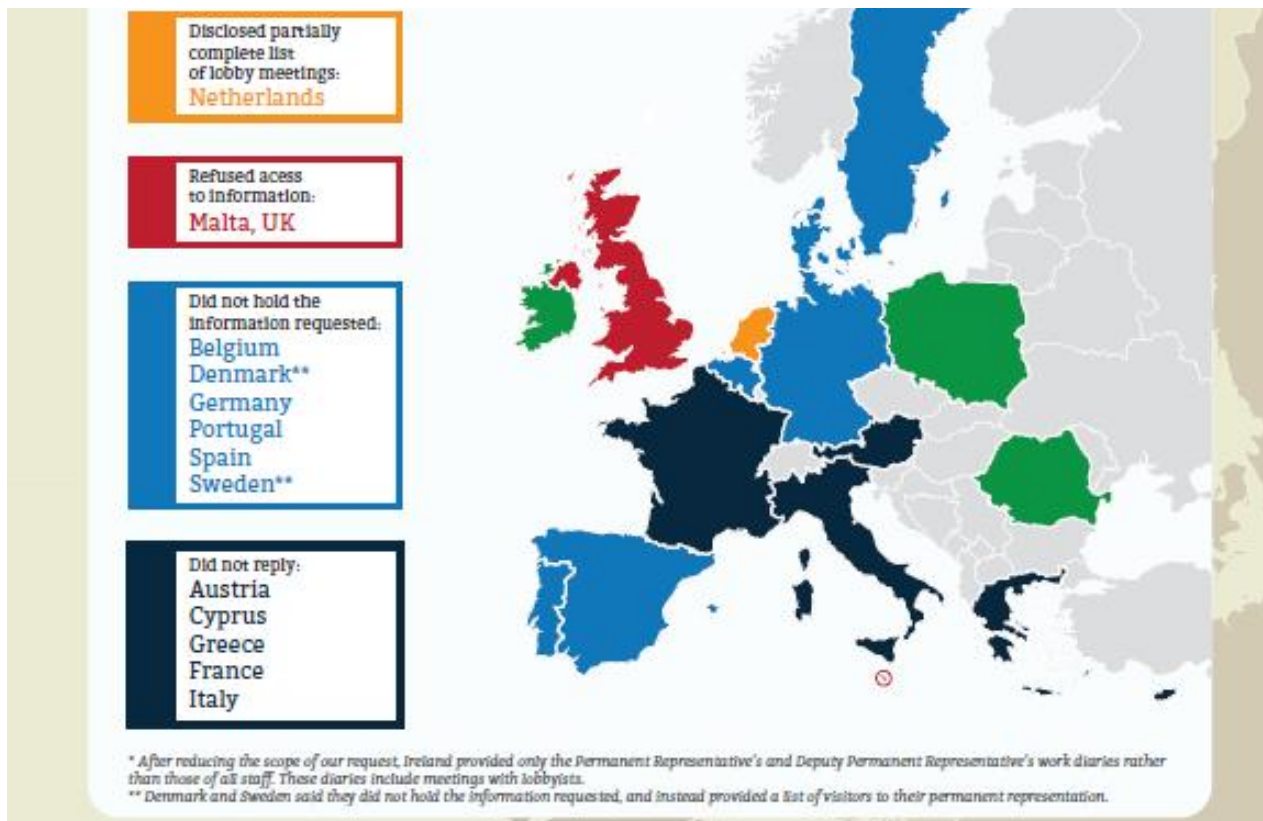
In a blog post about the report, Mr Cacopardo questioned what Dar Malta, the island's permanent representation in Brussels, is hiding.

In its report, ALTER EU gave a country-by-country description of their requests for lobby-meeting information. In the case of Malta, a request was sent on 6 July 2015, with a follow up e-mail on 21 July 2015. An acknowledgment of receipt and a statement saying that the Permanent Representation will be looking into the request was sent on the same day.

## National Representations in Brussels

Disclosed complete list  
of lobby meetings:

Romania  
Poland  
Ireland\*



ALTER-EU then had to send another follow up e-mail on 15 September 2015, “referring specifically to the Maltese access to information law.” They received acknowledgment of receipt on 22 October 2015, and were eventually refused on 1 December 2015.

The reason sent to the transparency group by the Permanent Representation was that “due to Part V or Part VI [of the Freedom of Information law,] there is good reason for withholding the document requested.”

In another attempt to get the information, the group asked for an internal review of the decision on 12 December 2015, however on 4 January 2016 they were informed that the decision to reject the request still stands.

In total, ALTER-EU requested the information from 17 EU Member State countries. Out of the 17, Romania, Poland and Ireland disclosed the complete list of lobby meetings, the Netherlands disclosed partially complete list of lobby meetings, Malta and the UK refused access to information, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Portugal, Spain and Sweden did not hold the information requested, and finally Austria, Cyprus, Greece, France and Italy simply did not reply.

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So an honest refusal (with reasons) is worse than claiming (very improbably) a lack the required information?

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No surprises there. We experience it on a daily basis.

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What we have come to understand as 'transparency' !

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So in reality only 4 countries disclosed information. 2 disclosed everything, 1 only disclosed partial information, Ireland only disclosed information regarding its permanent representative and his deputy but not the rest of the staff, and of the rest 2 refused, 5 did not bother to answer and another 6 claimed that they did not have the information requested( a likely story). Hang on, that is only 17 countries, I thought that there are 28 countries in the EU.

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It is not Dar Malta that is hiding anything. Dar Malta is following instructions received from Malta. At least, that should be the case in a properly-run diplomatic mission.

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