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Watchdog demands changes in the EU transparency register

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Leonardo Alles June 2, 2016 EU No Comments

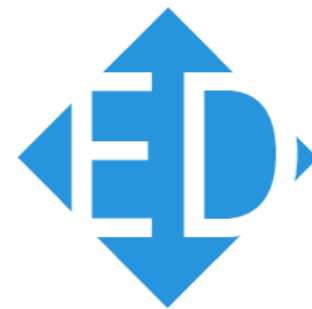
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On May 31 the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) released a report entitled '[Lobbying law firms – unfinished business](#)' which demonstrates that many law firms based in Brussels chose to not comply with the [EU lobby transparency register](#). Although not mandatory, the absence of important actors displayed the shortcomings of the system.

While the number of registered firms rose from 43 in 2012 to 1043 in 2016, the quality of data provided by them is still poor. The report names and shames international law firms that were unable to populate the register with either accurate or updated data. The watchdog ALTER-EU explains the situation as follows:

There is a grey area when it comes to the question of where legal advice ends and advocacy or lobbying begins and many law firms argue that they cannot join the lobby register because either their work does not constitute lobbying or because they would not be able to disclose their clients because of legal client confidentiality. But of course, while



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ould be noted that these firms have operations in the United States, notably in Washington. There they are obliged to comply with the compulsory [US lobby register](#). That's the main criticism made by ALTER-EU, which calls European authorities to enforce a globally-binding platform.

The report was published as a way to influence European lawmakers taking into account that the EU Commission just closed a [Public Consultation on a proposal for a mandatory Transparency Register](#) (June 1st). Increasing transparency in Brussels is one of the goals of the Juncker administration.

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Changing the status of the register from non mandatory to compulsory would be a first step to be followed by sanctions against firms that are not complying with rules. Such measure could also tackle conflict of interests on how special advisers are nominated for public positions.



Emily O'Reilly, the European Ombudsman, issued a [press release](#) in which she states:

[...] the Register should provide as comprehensive picture as possible of how exactly a particular organisation seeks to influence policy-makers. The Register should reveal not only how much money is being spent on lobbying but details such as what expert group an organisation has sat on; who its representatives met and about what; and what public consultations it contributed to [...] in future the Register should be more firmly grounded in legislation and include the possibility to impose financial sanctions on organisations, in the meantime I welcome this revision.

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Brussels became the capital of European politics, it needs to...
The Transparency Register should be object of a new...
proposal later this year, taking into account the results of the public...
consultation. Policymakers might suggest turning it into a...
transparency hub, a comprehensive platform that will allow to track...
who met with whom. Lobbying will remain an important part of...
democracy, however it should be monitored by the EU and civil...
society to prevent abuses, a measure what will help increasing...
public trust.

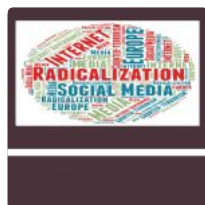
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