

Dear MEP,

Transparency International EU, Society of European Affairs (SEAP) and European Public Affairs Consultancies' Association (EPACA) are writing to you today to ask "why are you so concerned about a little more transparency?" We are talking about the proposed changes to the way the Parliament works, or to be more precise, the amendments to the report on the Revision of the Rules of Procedure that will go to vote on 6 December in AFCO Committee. From where we stand, these amendments can only bring benefits to you and the way lobbyists operate in Brussels.

We appreciate that 'Rules of Procedure' does indeed sound technical and conjures images of unnecessary obstacles to how you conduct your work, but these amendments could make a real difference to trust, transparency and the participation of your constituents in EU politics.

Firstly, we would like to weigh up the pros of voting in favour of these amendments. The first amendment states that Rapporteurs, Shadow Rapporteurs and Chairs shall only meet registered lobbyists, and the second calls for these meetings to be published online. Some of your colleagues already publish their meetings. Entire parties and delegations have been putting them online since 2009, something which has not impeded them in their daily work. It has given the public a chance to see who their parliamentarians are meeting and who has possibly fed in to the drafting of legislation.

These amendments could be the biggest transparency reform of the current Parliament's legislature. We actually believe it would be the biggest step forward for transparency since the launch of the Transparency Register itself. Further to that, these small amendments could be make or break for the negotiations on lobby reforms that, back in 2015, all the institutions agreed were a priority. If these negotiations fail, meaningful lobbying reform may have to wait another five years.

We would like to highlight how these amendments could help your constituents participate in the work that you do on their behalf in Brussels. We believe that it is impossible for citizens to participate fully in a democracy if information is not readily available to them. Should someone want to see exactly which organisations or individuals have given input into law and regulations being discussed, they would have to go to your individual websites, which are in different languages and various formats. They first have to find out if you even publish your meetings, and for the most part they would come away empty handed, with no further insight into who you discuss the regulations that affect them with. This contrasts with how easy professional lobbyists on the ground in Brussels can access this information through formal and informal means. In this case, transparency means levelling the playing field for Brussels insiders and concerned citizens alike.

Contrary to public perception the EU's main representative bodies of lobbyists are also in favour of more transparency, not less. Members of SEAP and EPACA are already registered in the EU Transparency Register and abide by its Code of Conduct. Yet, we feel that equal rules should apply to all lobbyists.

We believe that all MEPs should only meet registered lobbyists, but we accept that the appetite for this solution is limited within the European Parliament. Therefore, this is the least we can do together and these amendments are a well-needed step in the right direction towards transparency and accountability. It is a way to retain the trust of EU citizens and signal to the public in advance of the European elections that the Parliament takes role in transparency seriously. This is why Transparency International EU, SEAP and EPACA are calling on members of the AFCO Committee to vote in favour and allow these amendments to pass to the plenary level, not only as a way to regain some of the trust of EU citizens but also an opportunity to give them the tools to participate in political processes that affect their everyday lives.

The Parliament has long been a champion of transparency, participatory politics and citizen engagement. Now more than ever we need a strong, credible and accountable Parliament to be the counterweight to illiberal and anti-democratic forces across Europe. These small steps toward greater transparency will go a long way to enhancing that credibility and accountability.

We are willing to support you in enhancing transparency in the European Parliament and remain available to answer and questions or concerns you may have.