

Dear all,

My name is Isabelle De Vinck and I am on this panel on behalf of EPACA, the European Public Affairs Consultancies' Association, to represent the industry's views on the transparency debate.

I want to thank all attendees for being here today, as it shows how important this debate is to the general public. I also want to thank the representatives of the EU institutions for taking the time to share with us their own views, each based on their separate institutional realities. I also want to thank the organizers for granting me with the opportunity to provide for the closing remarks for this event.

It is often assumed that lobbyists are against transparency and that the industry actively lobbies to avoid stricter transparency rules. Some activists often claim that lobbyists thrive in obscurity - that we prefer to operate in the shadows and that the lack of transparency rules makes our lives as professional lobbyists easier.

EPACA represents professional lobbyists and we are most definitely in favour of transparency, and as the president of EPACA, I often get asked the question why. Well, the obvious answer would be that I do not believe that we have anything to hide. But for me, the virtue of being transparent goes beyond having nothing to hide. In fact, at EPACA we believe that ethics and transparency are necessary in order to legitimize the role we as lobbyists play in the democratic decision-making process.

The dialogue between those who make decisions and those who are affected by the consequences of those decisions is one of the fundamental principles of any democracy. As facilitators of this dialogue, it is therefore important that we lead by example and act in transparent manner at all times – this means; being open and honest about the interests we represent, not disseminating false or misleading information, not obtaining any information by dishonest means, and last but not least, being on the transparency register.

As president of EPACA, I can assure you that our members go to great lengths to achieve transparency. However, as long as the EU Transparency Register remains voluntary by nature, not all lobbyist will abide to the same rules and standards. Best practices need to become practices if we want to make progress on lobby transparency in the EU. That is why EPACA has been actively advocating to expand the EU Transparency Register's scope and make it mandatory, as these measures would strengthen the incentives to sign up to the register and improve the level playing field.

So does more transparency make the lives of professional lobbyists more difficult? No. Much to the contrary: transparency is our license to operate. It demystifies what we do and allows us to be proud of the role we play in the democratic process. More transparency, however, should not become an undue burden. To that end, we ask for an IIA in which the system is more accessible, usable and steers away from putting up unhelpful administrative obstacles. EPACA is open to maintaining a regular and open dialogue with the EU institutions on how this can be achieved

I want to conclude by warmly thanking Transparency International EU for co-organizing this event with us and for the great partnership we have built over the years. I think this is a great example of how industry representatives and NGOs can join forces, side by side, while asking for change.

Warm regards,

Isabelle De Vinck  
EPACA Chair