



European Public Affairs Consultancies' Association

### **EPACA Statement – 15/12/2020**

#### **Reaction to the political agreement on a Mandatory Transparency Register**

[EPACA](#) congratulates the inter-institutional negotiators for coming to an agreement on this matter in such a short time. As an association, EPACA is a proponent of increased transparency, and this inter-institutional agreement shows a willingness to move towards a more transparent EU affairs space. The adoption of a mandatory inter-institutional agreement is a significant step, and although there are certainly elements of the agreement that fall short of our hopes, we are happy to see that progress has been made. Any and all steps towards a more transparent public affairs sector are welcomed.

We are happy to see that a broad definition of lobbying has been adopted, which includes all those who conduct European public affairs activities. Indeed, our view is that the issue of whether activities should be covered by the transparency register should be defined by the influencing activities undertaken, not the type of interests they represent – we feel it is important to stress that all voices in a policy debate have the right to be defended as long as they speak and act in an ethical manner.

As the representative trade body of European public affairs consultancies, the inclusion of activities carried out for third countries is also positive to see, especially as most of our members have already been committed to doing this. It is important that the same rule will now be applied to all those working in European public affairs, once again helping to create a level playing field in the sector.

While we are happy to see that the Council is joining the EU transparency framework, we feel there is a missed opportunity to significantly expand the use of the 'no registration, no meeting rule' across the signatories of the IIA. Good practice must become the norm in order to improve transparency and enhance a level playing field in EU public affairs. Therefore, we feel it is important that there are sufficient incentives to ensure all lobbyists sign up to this *de facto* mandatory register. We await further details on how the conditionality principle will be applied in the each of the three institutions, particularly as EPACA strongly believes that EU policymakers should only meet with registered lobbyists.

Furthermore, we believe that the potential for expanded resources with the addition of the Council to the agreement will be particularly valuable for the ongoing excellent work carried out by the Joint Transparency Register Secretariat. This is especially important for ensuring a fair complaints procedure, including the right to appeal, as the consequences of a wrongful decision could have extremely damaging impacts on our member consultancies.