



ALTER-EU media advisory

Transparency campaigners appeal to Barroso to fix flawed lobbyists' register

Brussels, 3 June 2008 – The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU) has today written to Commission President Barroso urging him “to intervene and ensure that the Commission’s new register for lobbyists will deliver transparency”. The appeal by the transparency coalition comes after the Commission’s announcement that the long-awaited voluntary register will not include meaningful financial information nor names of lobbyists.

“It took the Commission more than three years to come up with a proposal that is not only inadequate and messed up but it also treats various lobby groups in different ways”, says Paul de Clerck (Friends of the Earth Europe). “We are launching an appeal directly to Commission President Barroso. If he is serious about making EU decision making more transparent, he needs to intervene now, in order to fix the flaws in the register”. The weak transparency requirements for the new register have been drafted by the Commission’s Secretariat-General, which operates directly under Mr. Barroso’s responsibility.

“Without names and detailed financial data the register will be a token gesture rather than a serious step forward in securing transparency around EU lobbying”, says Olivier Hoedeman from Corporate Europe Observatory. “Launching the register with these glaring flaws would mean that EU citizens will be denied crucial information, such as how many lobbyists are influencing EU decision-making, on whose behalf and with which budgets”. The number of EU lobbyists is generally estimated to be over 15,000, a large majority representing commercial interests. Industry insiders estimate the annual turnover of corporate lobbying in Brussels to be up to 1 billion euro per year. Precise figures are unavailable because of the absence of financial transparency obligations. The proposed register will not list the individual lobbyists, only their firms or lobby groups.

Even though the Commission always indicated that all lobbyists will be treated equally, the current proposal treats various categories of lobbyists differently. The financial data in the register are incomparable and cannot be compiled into meaningful aggregate data. “All lobbyists should be dealt with in the same way and should disclose lobbying expenses as well as overall budgets”, says Jorgo Riss of Greenpeace.

ALTER-EU is particularly concerned about Commission plans to allow lobbying consultancy firms to opt to declare funding from their clients only in 10% steps relative to their total income. This favours bigger lobby firms who can choose to be less transparent about their clients than smaller firms. The weakening of the transparency obligations for these firms is a direct result of aggressive lobbying by EPACA and other interest groups representing Brussels-based lobbyists-for-hire. “It is unacceptable that the Commission allows large lobby firms, who are mainly working for big business clients, to be less transparent than others,” says Ulrich Mueller from LobbyControl.

ALTER-EU calls upon Commission President Barroso to “ensure that the register will include the names of individual lobbyists as well as meaningful financial data, disclosing lobbying expenses in ranges of €10.000.

In addition to the letter sent by the ALTER-EU steering committee, the coalition will this afternoon launch a pan-European letter writing initiative to convince Mr. Barroso of the need to secure transparency around EU lobbying.

European citizens can participate and write to Barroso via:
<http://www.alter-eu.org/en/cyberaction-lobbying-transparency>

The letter to Commission President Barroso is available online at:
<http://www.alter-eu.org/en/publications/open-letter-3-june-2008>

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Notes for editors

1: On 28 May, the European Commission presented details of its plans for the new register in the Communication “European Transparency Initiative - A framework for relations with interest representatives (Register and Code of Conduct) {SEC(2008) 1926}”: http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/323_en.pdf
See also: “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) on the Commission’s register for interest representatives”, http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/docs/reg/FAQ_en.pdf

2: The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) is a coalition of over 160 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms calling for: A EU lobbying disclosure legislation; improved code of conduct for European Commission Officials; the European EU Commission to terminate cases of privileged access and undue influence granted to corporate lobbyists. The call for “Ending corporate privileges and secrecy around lobbying in the European Union”, the founding statement of the Alliance for Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) and a list of signatories are available on www.alter-eu.org