

Spitzenkandidaten survey on EU lobbying transparency and regulation

In Brussels as the political heart of the European Union, a high degree of corporate influence on policy-making continues to put public-interest decision making on the line. With the help of big lobbying budgets, threats to leverage their economic power (via layoffs, offshoring, or refusal to invest), privileged access to policy-makers and public officials, a blurred line between the private sector and public office thanks to the ever-revolving door, and many other influencing tools, vested interests all too often manage to shape EU legislative processes in their interests – commonly at the expense of environmental safeguards, climate action, and the protection of social, consumer and workers' rights.

2019 brings an opportunity for big change in the EU, with a new European Parliament and Commission to take the lead. The next President of the European Commission should play a central role in fighting the excessive corporate power that still undermines EU democracy. As a lead candidate for the presidency, we kindly ask you to answer the following questions.

Please provide a few lines of reasoning for each of your responses and assessments.

1. How will you ensure that citizens' interests are prioritised over corporate interests?

Our raison d'être as MEPs is to represent the interests of the citizens and so, if I were to become Commission President, one of the key issues would be to strengthen - inter alia - the powers of the European Parliament to initiate inquiries (cf the EMIS and PEST committees), and to improve the functioning of the Petitions committee as well. The Parliament's powers of control over the Commission should also be improved (for example the way the EC responds to Parliamentary Questions leaves much to be desired). A long-standing fight of the GreensEFA group is the strengthening of the European Citizens' Initiative and so far we have managed to achieve progress in the way the Parliament would ensure proper follow up of ECIs, but much more ambition is required on the side of the European Commission. This would be one of the first steps we would take. These structural reforms are key to ensuring the independence of EU decision-making in a way that more adequately reflects the interests of citizens.

A reform of the Commission's expert groups would also be required to ensure they are not dominated by certain interests. More resources should also be put into EC consultations to make sure that they reach a far greater percentage of EU citizens to ensure they are more representative.

In any case, during the Commissioner-candidate hearings we will use the new powers of the European Parliament to scan for conflicts of interest (COIs) and to prevent candidates with COIs from advancing to the next stage of the committee hearing procedures which would lead to their appointment as Commissioner.

In the next Parliament term we will also once again push for conflicts of interest amongst MEPs and Commissioners to be eradicated, including via stricter revolving door provisions and in the case of MEPs clearer bans on side jobs that create a risk of a COI.

Corporate sponsorship of Council Presidencies is also an area where robust action is required to prevent corporate capture of the decision-making process.

2. Will you enforce the guideline for commissioners to balance the numbers of their stakeholder meetings with corporate interest representatives and non-profit entities (incl NGOs, trade unions, academic institutions, etc)?

If yes, how will you enforce it? If no, why not?

We will question candidate commissioners during their appointment process and will push for a reform of the Commission decision on meetings with interest groups as well as the rules on expert groups to ensure a better balance in the inputs received from different stakeholders.

3. Will you a) prioritise the establishment of a strong and actually mandatory Transparency Register that covers all three institutions, b) ensure sufficient financial and staff resources for its maintenance, and c) support a sanctions regime for non-compliance with the register's rules?

This has been a GreensEFA group priority for a number of years and, in our opinion, the failure of the updated inter-institutional agreement on the Transparency Register presents a clear opportunity to push our demands for a legally binding register, including appropriate sanctions.

It is worth pointing out that we engaged constructively in the revision of the transparency register IIA despite its inherent weaknesses and that we were instrumental in pushing for the establishment of a contact group so that all EU political groups could be involved in some way in the decision-making process. Our insistence on transparency in the process also led to the creation of a specific website and stakeholder meetings, which while limited and certainly improvable, were unprecedented when compared to previous discussions on lobby register reform.

4. Will you extend the ban on meetings with unregistered lobbyists to all levels of the European Commission?

Yes. This has been a key demand of the GreensEFA during the lobby register negotiations, down to Head of Unit level.

5. Are you going to introduce a legislative footprint that traces any input received by lobbyists during the drafting of proposals?

Both of us and many of the Greens/EFA members are already using Lobbycal as a form of legislative footprint (more information here: <https://lobbycal.greens-efa-service.eu/all/>). We also encourage our members to make use of the voluntary legislative footprint to be attached to their reports, and are currently finalising Greens EFA standards on transparency and ethics which include a call on Members of the next group to integrate legislative footprints into their work.

Our campaign to oblige at least rapporteurs, shadow rapporteurs and committee chairs to publish their meetings with stakeholders was also successful, with the new rules having entered into force this Spring and the first stages of implementation of this rule expected by the 2nd July. In the next term we will prioritise the proper application of this transparency rule, as we foresee that there will be continued attempts from the centre-right to significantly weaken the provisions.

The Commission should also enact a legislative footprint.

6. Will you implement the [recommendation by European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly](#) that all dealings with tobacco lobbyists should be fully transparent, in an effort to ensure the EU's full compliance with Article 5.3 of the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control and its accompanying guidelines?

Yes, this is part of the aforementioned GreensEFA Standards on transparency and ethics. If I were to lead the European Commission, I would not only ensure transparency but I would recommend that those working on tobacco policy limit their contacts with the tobacco industry, in accordance with the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control's implementation guidelines.

7. Will you replace the current self-policing system for the prevention of ex-Commissioners' conflicts of interests in new roles (including but not limited to revolving door moves) with a fully independent ethics body which consists of members external to the European Commission, has the power to initiate its own investigations, implement its decisions and has sufficient financial resources to effectively do its work??

The establishment of an independent ethics authority to proactively monitor declarations of interest, scan for COIs, give advice on 'grey zones' and propose sanctions where necessary is one of our key demands for the next legislative term. This is important not just for the EC but also for the Parliament and other EU agencies. Currently the EU ethics system is weak, fragmented and dealt with very differently across different institutions, which is unsatisfactory.

8. Do you have any other comments you would like to make in the context of this Spitzenkandidaten survey?

No, but we are happy to discuss further should you wish to contact the GreensEFA Group Transparency and Democracy Campaigner working on these issues.