

Spitzenkandidaten survey on EU lobbying transparency and regulation

Die Antworten von Frans Timmermans (Sozialdemokraten)

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

It is absolutely essential to make sure the concerns and desires of Europeans are heard and represented in policy making, and this is something I have prioritised for the past five years, including by opening up all stages of the Commission's decision making process to public consultation.

As Commission President I would go even further, and I would improve our involvement of trade unions, NGOs and civil society representatives. I will make a personal commitment to meet regularly with civil society, in Brussels and around Europe, for open discussions about our policy plans and ongoing legislative procedures.

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?

I think it's essential that a range of interests are represented across stakeholder meetings in the commission. This starts with commissioners making an effort to balance the meetings they take with interest representatives, but it is also wider than that, and includes holding regular citizens' dialogues, at home and around Europe, to engage with members of the public.

Well-informed decision-making must be based on inputs from a range of representatives. This is crucial to ensure we are acting in the interests of Europeans and it should be at the heart of our approach to legislation in the next mandate.

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?

I have been fighting for a mandatory transparency register for all institutions for the past few years. And for the most senior levels of the Commission this is already *de facto* in place. However the Council and Parliament have not yet been willing to match our levels of ambition, and negotiations have become stuck. The absolute priority for me is to go from a voluntary to a compulsory system across all institutions. I will ensure that we pursue this in the next Commission.

In the Commission we have held to a very simple but strict rule for over four years now: lobbyists cannot meet high-level decision-makers without having first joined the EU Transparency Register. When we implemented this, the number of registrations increased significantly.

Of course, there will be a need to guarantee sufficient funding and staff for such a programme, as well as further initiatives that outline consequences for non-compliance with the register, and these elements should be part of any discussion about a mandatory transparency register. A sanctions regime is already in place, but we can always discuss ways to improve it.

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

First, our priority should be ensuring lobby transparency has the same rules across the institutions, including when it comes to unregistered lobbyists. We need to restore Europeans' trust in their politicians by showing them we are committed to working in an open and transparent manner. When other institutions match the level of ambition of the Commission we can discuss next steps.

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

The first step we need to take is the mandatory transparency register. Let's do this first, and then take it from there.

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?

The Commission's view is that the current framework is fully consistent with the FCTC and ensures that the FCTC, including its Article 5(3), is respected. As Commission President I would ensure regular reviews of our transparency policies and adapt them where necessary.

The mandatory transparency register we have been pushing for, to apply to all three EU institutions, will be another contribution to increasing transparency across the board.

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 introduction by President Juncker of a new code of conduct in February last year already extended the cooling-off period for former Commissioners from 18 months to two years. Former Commission Presidents have a further cooling off period of three years. Moreover, the code of conduct proposed an independent ethical committee with a reinforced status to strengthen scrutiny around conflicts of interest and provide advice on this. I will naturally monitor how this new code of conduct works in practice.

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

We need to rebuild people's trust in Europe. Transparency is a vital part of this, demonstrating to people that we are committed to working in their interests. We have come a long way over the last five years but there is still more we can do to increase transparency.