



Brussels, 17 December 2019

Ursula von der Leyen
President of the European Commission

Dear President von der Leyen,

Unbalanced lobby meetings and corporate influence

We congratulate you on your appointment as President of the European Commission.

I am writing to you on behalf of ALTER-EU, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics regulation. Our [founding statement](#) in 2005 was signed by over 200 civil society groups, but despite almost 15 years of discussions about regulating lobbying, excessive industry influence remains a serious problem, as documented in our recent book "[Corporate capture in Europe](#)". The EU institutions, including the Commission, need stronger rules and a change of culture to protect decision-making from the risk of corporate capture. We look forward to receiving your views on the following issues of concern.

Proactive lobby transparency and balance

We welcome the commitment you made in your political guidelines which state that "citizens should know who we, as the institutions who serve them, meet and discuss with and what positions we defend in the legislative process." We further welcome that you have repeated your predecessor's demand that "Members of the Commission should seek to ensure an appropriate balance and representativeness in the stakeholders they meet". However, this instruction was never defined, nor properly enforced and in the last five years, 70 per cent of Commission meetings with lobbyists took place with representatives of business and their associations. *Will you ensure that Commissioners and their Cabinets monitor and publish regular reports on the requirement to have "balance" in the lobbyists that they meet, and proactively strive for balance by turning down repeat request from business for meetings and/ or proactively approaching civil society voices such as NGOs and trade unions?*

Curbing the revolving door and privileged access

Another aspect of the excessive influence of business lobbyists is the revolving door phenomenon. The most recent example of [Adam Farkas](#) who is about to pass through the revolving door from his former job as Executive Director of the European Banking Authority directly to AFME, a powerful lobby group representing the biggest European and US banks, is only the tip of the iceberg. Career moves like these are a threat to the credibility of EU institutions and we need stricter rules for all EU institutions as well as better enforcement. We welcome your commitment to support an independent joint ethics body for all institutions. *Will you ensure effective enforcement of revolving door rules for political appointees and staff, across the EU institutions and agencies?*

In addition to revolving doors, another aspect of the problem of privileged access concerns the exclusive events between business and politics. The [annual meeting of BusinessEurope's corporate members](#) with various Commissioners or other high-level Commission staff, hosted in the Berlaymont, and combining policy discussions with socialising, is only one example. *Will you end such privileged access for corporate lobbyists to the Commission?*

Biased advice

We are concerned about the major role that companies play when the Commission seeks external advice. For instance, 70 per cent of the non-governmental experts on the "[Real driving emissions](#)" subgroup – a group that was supposed to create realistic testing conditions for the new nitrogen oxide tests – were representatives of the automobile industry. *Will you prevent biased advice in the Commission's decision-making, by strengthening the commission's in-house capacities and ensuring a balanced composition of expert groups?*

Tackling excessive corporate influence

Transparency is crucial to detect one-sided influence, but it will not solve the problem of excessive corporate influence on European politics. More has to be done to protect policy-making from the risk of corporate capture. In extreme cases, where there is an irreconcilable conflict of interest between the interest of a certain industry and the public interest, it can become necessary to limit its access to policy making. An existing example for this is the UN's tobacco control treaty (FCTC), which instructs governments to protect public health policy-making from tobacco industry influence by reducing contacts with the tobacco industry to a minimum and ensuring proactive transparency around all such contacts. *Will you ensure this is properly implemented across the Commission?*

Fossil Free Politics

The fossil fuel industry has for decades successfully tried to stop, delay or weaken policies to stop climate change. ALTER-EU, Greenpeace, Corporate Europe Observatory, Friends of the Earth Europe, and over 230 other civil society organisations have recently launched the [Fossil Free Politics campaign](#) which calls for concrete measures to protect climate change policy-making from fossil fuel industry influence. Proposed measures include:

- limiting lobby meetings with the fossil fuel industry to the absolute necessary;
- excluding fossil fuel companies from expert and advisory bodies;
- close the revolving door;
- banning privileged access for fossil fuel companies through hosting industry events or accepting industry sponsoring and not appear at fossil fuel sponsored events.

We would be glad to further discuss all of these issues with you and are looking forward to your invitation.

Yours sincerely,



Olivier Hoedeman on behalf of ALTER-EU

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