



Brussels, July 2016

Richard Corbett MEP

Dear Mr Corbett,

As the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) we are keen to reiterate our key policy positions in the context of the proposed revision of the European Parliament's Rules of Procedures. We very much hope that the revised rules will take a strong steer from Sven Giegold MEP's report on 'Transparency, accountability and integrity in the EU institutions' which we think has taken a broadly progressive stance on a number of transparency and ethics issues.

### **Paid second jobs (our priority issue)**

We think that MEPs should not hold official positions in, or have remunerated arrangements with, organisations that lobby the EU, and we would like to see this clearly incorporated into the Code of Conduct / rules of procedure.

In our view:

- This ban on such second jobs needs to be made explicit in the Code of Conduct/ rules of procedure. This would provide a clear standard to MEPs and citizens, and would eliminate the risk that vague language will be open to weak interpretation and enforcement
- This ban should not just apply to jobs with lobby consultancies (in fact, we are not aware of any sitting MEP who currently has a paid job with a lobby consultancy) but all organisations which lobby the EU
- Language such as "specific behaviour in the scope of the Member's parliamentary work" is very vague and implies that only *direct* lobbying activities are included. In fact, we consider that the main risk of MEPs working for organisations which lobby the EU is that they will conduct *indirect* lobbying activities such as providing advice, insider-know and contacts

### **Code of Conduct advisory committee**

We propose two important changes to the advisory committee:

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EUTR registration number: 2694372574-63

- the committee should include a majority of independent, non-MEP members, drawn from the ranks of ombudsmen or other ethics experts operating at the member state level
- the committee should have decision-making power on cases brought to it and on the imposition of sanctions

Such changes would make the process to enforce the Code of Conduct more effective and more likely to win the trust of citizens. Such new arrangements would take decision-making out of the hands of the President of the Parliament and place it in the hands of those who can simply review the evidence before them.

### **Declarations of additional income**

The new rules should tighten the disclosure requirements for MEPs' additional income. We support:

- the introduction of an unremunerated category and a €1-€499 category
- the principle that the higher the sum, the greater the level of disclosure required. This means that sums over €10,000 should be declared precisely and not in bandwidths of €10,000

In addition, we think there should be an explicit ban on MEPs receiving any financial or in-kind support for their work or that of their office or staff, include the funding of staff by third party organisations. An exception would be the funding which comes from political parties or groups.

### **Gifts and hospitality**

The implementing rules of the Code of Conduct should be amended to:

- Reduce the acceptable gift value from €150 to €50
- Include a specific obligation to declare the cost of travel and hospitality paid for by third parties

### **Relevant interests**

The new rules should ensure that there is a requirement on MEPs that any specific, relevant interests are disclosed in all official written or verbal parliamentary activities, for example, reports, motions, questions etc, and that such disclosures are available on the public record. This would help ensure wider awareness about, and scrutiny of, MEP financial interests in the context of their parliamentary work.

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## Sanctions

The current sanctions for breaches of the rules or the Code of Conduct are far too weak. Alongside the proposal to prohibit MEPs from representing the Parliament on inter-institutional fora for up to one year, these ideas could also be considered:

- Extend the period during which MEPs are excluded from taking part in all or some of the activities of the European Parliament
- Explicit inclusion of (shadow) rapporteurship in the list of activities eligible for suspension
- Suspend the right to vote in committee and/or in plenary
- Publish all sanctions applied to an MEP

## Meeting unregistered lobbyists

We hope that the revised rules of procedure will propose that MEPs, their staff, and officers of the Parliament only meet with registered lobbyists.

In our view:

- If MEPs continue to meet with unregistered lobbyists it undermines the integrity of the lobby transparency register. When MEPs continue to meet with unregistered lobbyists, it also undermines the Parliament's oft-stated position that it supports the development of legally-binding lobby register
- It should be made clear that MEPs' meetings with individual citizens would not be affected by such a rule. In our view, lobbyists should only register when they have at least one representative who spends 20 percent or more of a full-time equivalent's working time on EU lobbying activities (whether this individual is paid or not); or have earned or spent over €5000 per year on EU lobbying activities

## Inter-groups and unofficial MEP-industry fora

Rule 34 should be amended to:

- Ensure that official inter-groups provide transparency on their membership and on all funding received
- Explicitly ensure that the transparency rules for official inter-groups also cover unofficial MEP-industry forums

Both official inter-groups and unofficial MEP-industry forums can provide an important channel for corporate lobby influence and as a minimum, there should be transparency about how such groups operate.

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## **Next steps**

Before the summer break, we would greatly appreciate the opportunity to discuss these proposals with you. Additionally that would be an opportunity to re-visit our previous discussion about **holding a possible event on these issues in September**. Our colleague Myriam Duou will contact your office in the coming days to hopefully arrange a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Paul de Clerck on behalf of the ALTER-EU steering committee