

NGOs demand Timmermans make good on mandatory lobbying register

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One hundred and twelve organisations sent a letter to European Commission Vice-President Frans Timmermans today (11 May) asking for stronger rules on lobbying transparency.

The [appeal](#) was organised by the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) and called for a legally binding registry of lobbyists.

Timmermans [announced last fall](#) that the European Commission would introduce a mandatory transparency registry detailing senior Commission staff's contact with lobbyists

The [current registry](#) is still voluntary and not legally binding. Last month, [Timmermans told *The Register*](#) that companies that are dishonest about lobbying would not be welcome in his office.

He reportedly said that the sanction for false reporting ought to be the same as not registering at all — no access to policy makers, and no meetings with Commissioner

or their underlings.

ALTER-EU has previously called out companies for fudging details about lobbying, including by outsourcing to consultancies and reporting lower lobbying costs. In its January [report](#), the group criticised financial services firms, including Credit Suisse and Standard & Poor's, for their lobbying disclosures.

The letter said the group welcomed the current Juncker Commission's efforts on lobbying transparency, but called for lobbyists to be legally required to enter themselves in the transparency registry.

The group also wrote that the Commission should encourage more disclosure about lobbying, including on the money lobbyists spend, and demanded a ban on meetings between all Commission staff and unregistered lobbyists. Current rules ban only the most senior staff from those meetings.

The European Commission should "lead by example" for other EU institutions' regulations on lobbying transparency, underscored the group's letter.

According to Oxfam's Natalia Alonso, making the lobby registry legally obligatory "would help balance the influence that wealthy elites have over rule-making compared to public interest groups".

Pam Bartlett Quintanilla of Access Info Europe, which signed the letter to Timmermans, said that the Commission should "ensure that the information provided in the register is relevant and complete and that there are strong sanctions in case of non-compliance".

Organisations that signed the letter to Timmermans are hindered by a lack of transparency about lobbying activities, says Bartlett Quintanilla.

Signatories from the health sector, for example, are afraid "that large companies, mainly pharmaceutical companies, are having a bigger impact on the decision making".

Some large pharmaceutical companies lobbied against the [Clinical Trials Directive](#) in 2013, which requires results from clinical trials to be posted to a [public registry](#).

The health groups that signed ALTER-EU's letter to Timmermans include the European Public Health Alliance, the European Heart Network and the Council of Occupational Therapists for the European Countries.

Among the other organisations and trade unions that signed the letter are Oxfam, the European Public Services Union, and other civic groups, including some that represent health issues and advocate for freedom of information. The European Parliament intergroup on integrity, transparency, anti-corruption and organised crime also co-signed the letter.

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