



Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation
Rue d'Edimbourg 26
1050 Brussels

Brussels, 29th June 2020

Věra Jourová
Vice-President of the European Commission

Dear Vice-President Jourová,

Unbalanced lobby meetings and corporate influence

I am writing to you on behalf of ALTER-EU, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation, with questions and suggestions for how to protect EU decision-making from undue influence. Our [founding statement](#) in 2005 was signed by over 200 civil society groups and ALTER-EU has ever since worked hard to improve regulation of lobbying. 15 years later, however, excessive industry influence remains a serious problem, as documented in our recent book [“Corporate capture in Europe”](#). Corporate capture of policy-making is a problem that the [OECD](#) recognizes, and the EU institutions, including the European Commission, need stronger rules and a change of culture to protect decision-making from the risk of such corporate capture. Amid an unprecedented and extremely difficult situation like the current COVID-19 emergency and the reconstruction phase that is ahead, this need is even more pressing.

Proactive lobby transparency and equality of treatment

We welcome the commitment in the Commissions’ 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 the clarification made by the Secretariat-General in a recent letter to ALTER-EU that “the Commission is convinced that lobbying activities should be based on the principles of transparency, integrity and equality of treatment”. However, this intent was never defined, nor properly enforced. In the last five years, 70 per cent of Commission meetings with lobbyists took place with representatives of business and their associations. *How is the Commission ensuring the implementation of such principles, namely the equality of treatment, among Commissioners and their Cabinets?*

Curbing the revolving door and privileged access

Another aspect of the excessive influence of business lobbyists is the revolving door phenomenon. The public has witnessed numerous questionable career moves of former officials, which represent a threat to the credibility of EU institutions. Therefore, we need stricter rules for all EU institutions, as well as better enforcement. We welcome the Commission's commitment to supporting 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? What steps do you plan to establish the independent joint ethics body?*

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 socializing, is only one example. *Will you end such privileged access for corporate lobbyists to the Commission?*

Tackling excessive corporate influence

Transparency is crucial to monitor lobbying efforts and detect undue 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 a sector's access to policy making. An 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, together with 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;
- closing the revolving door;
- banning privileged access for fossil fuel companies by refusing to host industry events or accepting industry sponsoring, and not participating in fossil fuel sponsored events.

Transparency, accountability and balance in COVID-19 times

The COVID 19 recovery programs provide massive unprecedented public financial support to companies and economic sectors. Like the [European Ombudsman](#) we believe that transparency and high standards of public administration are especially important during times of crisis. We have identified several developments that pose significant risks. First, with the transfer of work and meetings to online platforms, we are concerned that the Commission is apparently failing to log lobby meetings as required, thereby undermining transparency and preventing public scrutiny of such contacts. *Has the Commission issued specific guidelines for transparency of lobbying meetings and, for the lockdown and physical distancing reality, to guarantee transparency of the EU decision-making processes?*

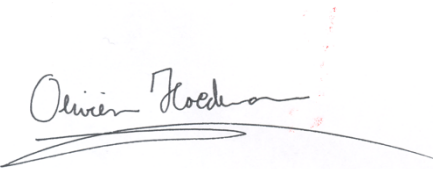
During confinement, your Cabinet Member told journalists that telephone calls with lobbyists were not disclosed in the Commissioners', Cabinet Members and Directors-General list of lobby meetings. Our member, Corporate Europe Observatory, asked the European Commission for the rules or guidance justifying this exclusion and were told they did not exist.

Are telephone calls with lobbyists not logged in the Commissioner's meetings lists ? If so, what is the basis for the exclusion?

How do you plan on enforcing the lobby transparency rules that dictate that Commissioners, their Cabinet Members and senior officials publicly disclose all their lobby meetings in a timely manner and meet only registered lobbyists?

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

Yours sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Olivier Hoedeman". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line. There are some faint red marks and a vertical line to the right of the signature, possibly from a stamp or another document.

on behalf of the steering committee of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU)

ALTER-EU steering committee:

Paul de Clerck (Friends of the Earth Europe)
Olivier Hoedeman (Corporate Europe Observatory)
Nina Katzemich (LobbyControl)

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