

Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU)

Press Release

For immediate release: Wednesday 11 May 2011

MEPs vote to support mandatory lobby transparency register – campaigners urge swift implementation



A new common EU Parliament – Commission lobby transparency register is a small step forward, campaigners said today, following its approval by MEPs in the plenary session of the EU Parliament, but they added that further steps are needed to make the new register effective and reliable.

ALTER-EU said they were pleased that MEPs had voted in plenary to make the new joint lobby transparency register mandatory in the near future and said that such a step was crucial as voluntary registration allowed too many lobby firms to avoid scrutiny. ALTER-EU said it was disappointed there was no majority for a proposal for stricter financial reporting.

The coalition urged the Buzek Working Group – launched following the cash-for-amendments scandal in the European Parliament – to develop a clear way forward to ensure that the register’s current failings were remedied by the end of this parliamentary term.

Speaking for ALTER-EU, Paul de Clerck said: “The recent cash-for-amendments scandal highlighted that a softly-softly approach towards EU lobbying transparency does not work. The Buzek Working Group should ensure compulsory registration for all EU lobbyists before the end of this Parliament’s term. By doing that, President Buzek could make a major step in improving transparency of European institutions”

ALTER-EU said that safeguards against under-reporting were missing from the resolution, to end the widespread practice of firms and lobby groups reporting unrealistically low lobbying expenditure [note 1].

The common register also fails to ensure sufficient transparency on funding sources, allowing front groups to hide their true identity, even when they register [note 2]. ALTER-EU recommends that all organisations in the register should name the government agencies, grant-making foundations, companies and others that contribute to their budgets, and to specify the amounts of funding received from each source.

Erik Wesselius, also from ALTER-EU said: “The common lobbying transparency register still has very serious shortcomings. The flaws and loopholes in the register should be urgently repaired. All registered lobbying organisations should be obliged to provide more comprehensive and reliable information on their lobbying activities. The information provided by registrants should be checked regularly, at least through random “spot checks” by the administration.”

For more information, please contact:

Paul de Clerck, Friends of the Earth Europe, +32 (0) 494380959, paul@milieudefensie.nl

Erik Wesselius, Corporate Europe Observatory, +32 (0) 476901587, erik@corporateeurope.org

Nina Katzemich, LobbyControl, +49 (0) 179/ 5093022, nina.katzemich@lobbycontrol.de (E, DE)

About ALTER-EU

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) is a coalition of over 160 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms concerned with the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe, the resulting loss of democracy in EU decision-making and the postponement, weakening, or blockage even, of urgently needed progress on social, environmental and consumer-protection reforms.

Notes:

[1] For example, BusinessEurope, one of the most active and influential corporate lobby groups in Brussels, has declared that it only spent between € 550,000 and € 600,000 on lobbying in 2010. This would not even put BusinessEurope among the 50 highest spending professional associations in the register.

Two other examples where under-reporting of lobby expenditure is likely:

- 1) the cosmetics industry lobby group COLIPA (less than € 50,000 in 2008, ca. 20 employees in Brussels)
- 2) the European airlines lobby AEA (less than € 50,000 in 2009, ca. 20 employees in Brussels)

[2] Front groups are organisations that pretend to be neutral or public interest groups which in reality represent the interest of one or more companies or other organisations.

[3] ALTER-EU assessment of European Parliament – Commission agreement on a common “Transparency Register”, 11 February 2011, <http://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2011/02/11/alter-eu-position-on-transparency-register>