



May 2014

ALTER-EU briefing for newly-elected members of the European parliament 2014-19

Congratulations on your election as an MEP. As the coordinator of the Politics for People campaign, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) is delighted that you signed up to our pledge to “*stand-up for citizens and democracy against the excessive lobbying influence of banks and big business*” and we are looking forward to working with you in the coming months and years to put that pledge into action.

This briefing sets out a number of proposals for MEP action in the first few weeks and months of the new parliament that would be essential for promoting lobby transparency and ethics regulation. We would be pleased to discuss our ideas with you as soon as you have the time.

1. Key appointments within the European parliament

In the first few weeks of the new parliament, appointments will be made to several key positions which will play a very important role in lobby transparency and ethics regulation in the coming term. These roles are:

- European parliament vice-president for transparency: traditionally appointed from among the members of the Bureau. The vice-president is responsible for oversight of the transparency register and should lead the parliament's transparency efforts.
- President of the European parliament: traditionally appointed from the largest political group. The president plays many essential roles, including being the lead enforcer of the code of conduct for MEPs.
- Quaestors, who also play a key role in forcing transparency and ethics in the European parliament

We hope that in the coming weeks political groups and MEPs will stand-up for citizens and democracy by ensuring that those put in charge of these key roles have a strong track record and commitment to transparency and ethics issues.

2. President of the European commission

The president of the European commission also has an extremely important role to play when it comes to transparency and ethics, and this is the first time that the European parliament will be able to influence who is eventually chosen. The Barroso-II Commission failed to make meaningful progress on key issues such as lobby transparency, revolving doors, advisory groups and access to documents, as shown in this [recent report](#) issued by the ALTER-EU coalition. There are a number of initiatives that MEPs could take to ensure that the next president of the European commission prioritises transparency and ethics issues during the next five years.

In political group meetings, MEPs could raise transparency and ethics issues and work to ensure that they are high on the next commission president's agenda and that there is a concrete action plan for making improvements in these areas.

3. Mandatory transparency register

ALTER-EU considers that MEPs should insist upon full lobby transparency at the EU level by promoting the introduction of a mandatory transparency register with far more comprehensive and more reliable information to replace the current, voluntary system.

We hope that in September when MEPs hold hearings for commissioner candidates, you will ask probing questions to demand support from the commission for a mandatory lobby register and to demand that commissioners no longer meet with unregistered lobbyists. We will be in touch with you about this nearer the time.

We also hope that you will contribute to making the transparency register de-facto mandatory by **refusing to attend meetings or public events hosted by non-registered lobby groups**, for example. Non-registered groups should not be allowed to host events in the European parliament.

We also invite you to take transparency into your own hands, for example by **maintaining an online list of all meetings held with lobbyists and publishing a legislative footprint** (a list of all lobby meetings held and correspondence received) when you are acting as rapporteur on a committee report. This would serve to bring transparency to the law-making process and would permit citizens to participate more actively in EU decision-making.

4. Expert groups

The commission's advisory groups (formally known as 'expert groups') provide expert advice on specific issues, which is then used to shape new policies or even to form the backbone of new legislation. The dominance of big business representatives within these groups has been heavily criticised, and the European parliament has a strong record in trying to make sure these groups are representative of all of Europe's diverse stakeholders. However, the commission appears to have gone back on its commitment to reform. For more information, see: A year of broken promises and a recent blog on the new Ombudsman investigation.

As MEPs, you will shortly be asked to approve the commission budget for 2015. ALTER-EU would like MEPs to act to freeze the budget of the commission's expert groups as a way of demanding more commission action to tackle the over-dominance of these groups by corporate lobbyists. The European ombudsman has also recently launched her own investigation into the commission's expert groups and MEPs could make a public statement to support this initiative.

5. Revolving door

ALTER-EU considers that when commissioners and officials walk through the 'revolving door' by leaving their EU jobs and starting to work for corporate lobbies, big business gains inside-knowledge, vital contacts, and above all, powerful influence. This helps to make Brussels even more business-dominated and remote from citizens' concerns and the public interest. For more information, see: Stop 2014 being the year of the revolving door!.

We would like to invite MEPs to sign a letter to the new president of the European commission to urge him to make urgent changes to the code of conduct for commissioners, including to set up independent oversight of revolving door moves as current commissioners start to leave office. We will be in touch with you again about this matter shortly.

5. Code of conduct for MEPs

The code of conduct for MEPs was introduced in 2012 following the cash-for-amendments scandal. While the code itself is not as strong as it could be, the implementation of the code has been even weaker. For more information, see: Mind the gap.

ALTER-EU would like MEPs to ask European parliament presidential candidates probing questions about how they will implement the MEP code of conduct to avoid previous weaknesses.

As an MEP, you will also need to complete a declaration of interests as foreseen in the code of conduct for MEPs. **We encourage you to include a high level of detail in your own declaration.**

Please contact us if you have any questions about any aspect of this briefing:
info@alter-eu.org; +32-2-8931062; www.alter-eu.org

ALTER-EU is a coalition of about 200 civil society groups and trade unions campaigning against the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe.

ALTER-EU coordinated the Politics for People campaign.