



The Citizens' Report

Participation, Ethics and Transparency:

What citizens want
from Brussels



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Citizens Report is composed of extracts from the blogs and summaries written by 40 European citizens following the EU Citizens Trip to Brussels, which took place from 14 to 16 November 2012. The report was edited by Pamela Bartlett Quintanilla of Access Info Europe.

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Executive summary

Participation, ethics and transparency: What do citizens want from Brussels?

The Citizens' Report presents the conclusions of a group of 40 members of the public who were selected to participate in a Citizens Trip to Brussels from 14-16 November 2012. The Trip to Brussels was organised by six European NGOs as part of the ALTER Citizens Project in order to bring together citizens from five different countries to debate about European Union transparency, ethics and participation.

The Citizens' Report is a compilation of extracts from the summaries and blog posts written by the citizens following their trip to Brussels. The report presents their main concerns with regards to European Union transparency, ethics and participation and contains recommendations for EU policy-makers that came directly from the citizens themselves.

The issues that citizens identified almost unanimously are a lack of transparency, weak ethics regulation and low levels of citizen participation in the European Union. Citizens were also concerned about the lack of public awareness about the EU institutions and about how decisions are taken or laws are passed.

Citizens regretted the fact that the European Union institutions were not leading by example in the fields of transparency and ethics because they felt that this permitted their national governments to remain lax on these issues. They also felt that the 'information gap' between the EU institutions and citizens was leading to a drop in confidence in the decisions taken by the European Union and to a decline in trust towards Brussels.

Citizen concerns and recommendations

- Citizens believe that the EU's transparency register should be made obligatory and that decision-makers should publish information about the meetings they have held with lobbyists or other interest groups, whether they be NGOs, religious associations, trade unions or businesses.
- Citizens also call for a wider access to EU information as opposed to strictly "access to official documents". They emphasise the need for proactive transparency calling for more publishing of relevant, detailed and up-to-date information about the EU's decision-making process.
- Citizens want to be able to participate more effectively in the decision-making process and therefore ask that the EU focus more actively on citizen participation and take ambitious measures to ensure the participation of a diverse and multiple range of citizens and interest groups. They believe that enhanced citizen participation is an effective way to ensure that public interests are not over-dominated by the interests of private companies or lobbyists during the EU's decision-making process.
- Citizens propose stricter ethics regulation including a tightening of the Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) in order to prevent conflicts of interest that might be created by the "revolving door" phenomenon, and when MEPs have second jobs.



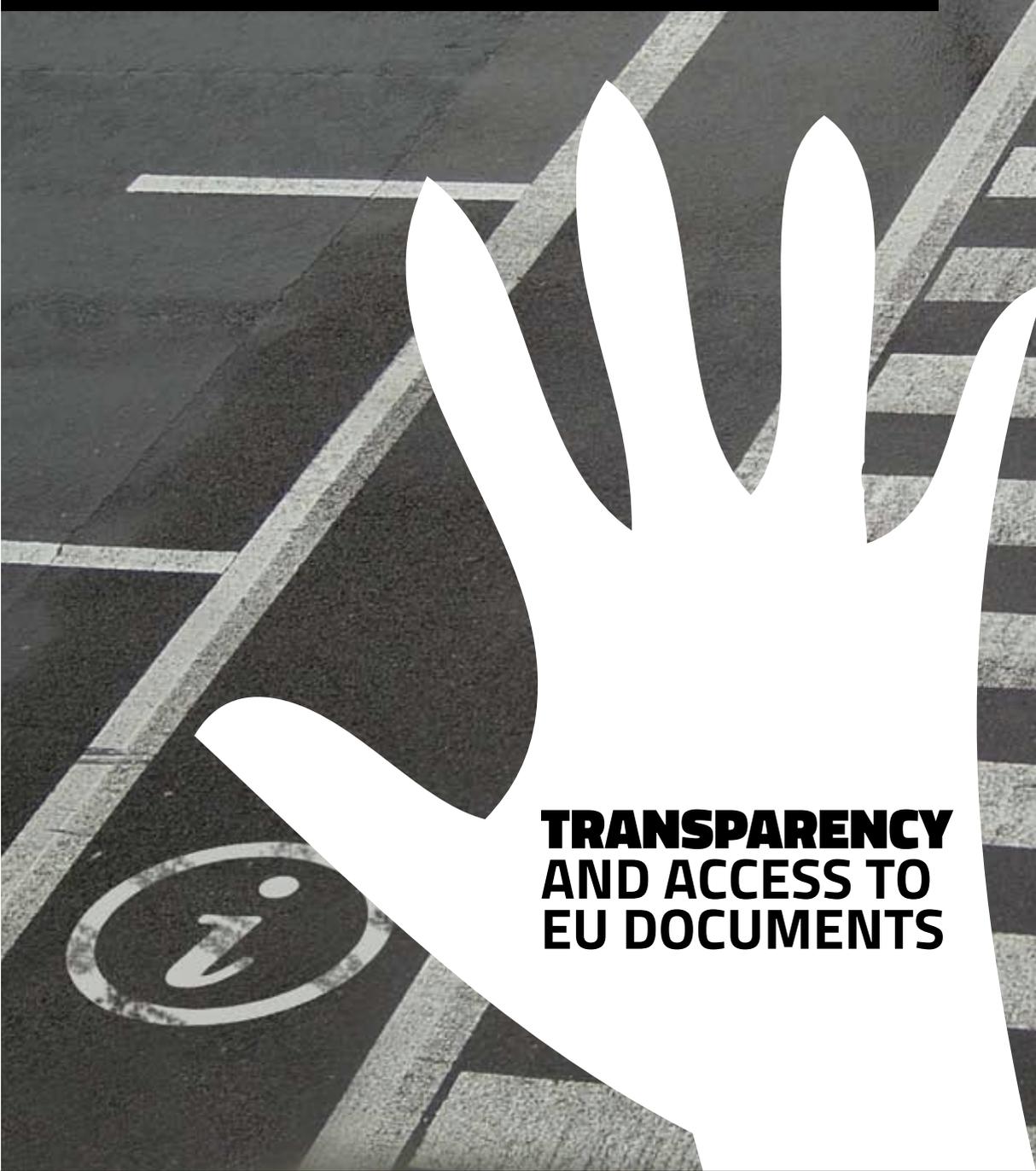
What citizens are concerned about:

- Lack of transparency in the European Union
- The “Ping-Pong” Phenomenon or “Policy-laundering”

What citizens recommend on transparency and access to EU documents:

- Proactive publication of information about the decision-making process
- Better access to EU documents
- The EU should act as a role model for national governments

01



**TRANSPARENCY
AND ACCESS TO
EU DOCUMENTS**



UPON THEIR RETURN FROM BRUSSELS, the individuals participating in the Citizens Trip highlighted the need to improve the public's access to information about the European Union; including by publishing complete, up-to-date and accurate information that would permit citizens to participate in the decision-making process and to hold EU decision-makers to account.

In 2011, the European Ombudsman reported that a quarter (23.3%) of the complaints processed by his office were related to refusals to provide public access to EU documents and unsatisfied requests for EU information. In February 2013, an opinion poll conducted in 6 different countries as part of the ALTER Citizens Project revealed that citizens are eager for greater transparency of EU institutions, with 85% declaring that it was important for the public to have access to information about what their governments argue during Council negotiations on future EU rules and laws.

Citizens were convinced of the need to improve public access to information about the EU, both through proactive publication of information about the EU's decision-making process and through the practice of making access to documents requests. Citizens hoped for a recognition of a right of access to information in the EU as opposed to a more restrictive access to documents regulation.

Linked to this, citizens regretted the lack of readily-available information about how the EU functions and about which body is responsible for what. Some felt that the lack of clarity on the division of competences between the national and the EU level led to situations in which neither the European Union nor their own government took full responsibility for the decisions taken in Brussels. This was referred to as the "ping-pong" or "policy-laundering" phenomenon.

What citizens are concerned about

Lack of transparency in the European Union

A significant number of the individuals that participated in the Citizens Trip to Brussels mentioned that they had hoped that the EU would be an example of transparency that would encourage their national governments to improve public access to information at home. However, most of them reported that they had been disappointed with the current levels of transparency in the EU institutions. One citizen remarked that:

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Despite the growing euro-skepticism, I bet my last coins that the majority of the Spanish population considers that the European Union is an example of political transparency. However, you just need to dig a little into the depths of the communitarian scheme to discover that there are cracks...

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- Spanish citizen

Another citizen lamented the lack of transparency of Members of the European Parliament and expressed an interest in accessing documents containing the salaries of public officials and detailed declarations of outside earnings. He commented that:

“

I have known many new things, especially about lobbying and untransparency of politicians, which is not only a Czech problem but problem of all European regions, as I have noticed. I was really surprised by the behaviour, opinions and arguments of a German Member of Parliament. His behaviour was absolutely the same like I know from Czech members of Parliament, specifically I mean his effort to keep in secret things about his privacy and his earnings.

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- Czech citizen

Referring to the right of access to documents in the EU, which in 2009 was recognised as a fundamental human right of all EU citizens, one person remarked that:

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*I learnt that the right that has emerged in the world in the past five decades is a **right to access information rather than a narrower** right to access documents at least as interpreted by those advocating for more transparency*

such as Access Info Europe. This is not a position shared by many EU institutions. They tend to favor a narrow reading of the terms “document” and “public interest in disclosure” while opting for a broad interpretation of the “commercial interests” exception among others.

The European Court of Justice itself doesn't make public the submissions (i.e. the arguments made by the parties while a case is on-going) while the European Court of Human Rights does.

The transparency of the policy process is also rather opaque. The Council of Ministers do release the positions of countries on request for instance but without attributing them to any specific country, which makes them useless.

- Dutch citizen

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- Dutch citizen

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Citizens were also concerned about the timeliness of the publication of EU documents since they had learned during meetings with EU officials that the most effective way to have an impact on EU decision-making is to participate as early on in the process as possible. One person lamented that:

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Although [participation] mechanisms do exist... the most effective moment for having an impact on the drafting of EU legislation is before the draft has even reached public opinion or been debated.

- Spanish citizen

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The “Ping-Pong” Phenomenon or “Policy-laundering”

The “ping-pong” phenomenon is a term commonly used to describe situations in which one is referred back and forth from the EU to the national level when requesting access to documents or information or when identifying the person or department responsible for a particular policy. The term “policy-laundering” was coined to describe situations in which Brussels is blamed for unpopular decisions or laws, even though these decisions were arrived at with the full participation of EU Member States.

“In Brussels, they blame the Member States for the lack of control. I bet you can guess what they say in Madrid, for example, about the lack of control – that it’s Brussels’ fault”

- Spanish citizen

Another citizen described how the “ping-pong” phenomenon impedes citizens and civil society organisations from finding out exactly what their country is promoting during EU negotiations which therefore makes it difficult to hold governments to account for decisions taken in Brussels:

“ *You’re trying to find out what position your government is taking in the Council. You can ask them directly but they often don’t respond. It’s very easy for the Member States – and it’s been publicly exposed on occasions – to say one thing to Parliament, or to the media, and then after a while some documents are leaked that show they have been doing exactly the opposite (in Brussels).*

- Spanish citizen

One citizen outlined his concerns about the lack of information about the EU’s decision-making process in the following terms:

“ *While minor changes, like making transparency register for lobbyists obligatory, might help transparency deficit of EU, [it] cannot really be tackled without addressing the underlying problem that EU citizens have no idea how EU institutions work and what they are doing.*

- Czech citizen

What citizens recommend on transparency and access to EU documents

Proactive publication of information about the decision-making process

Citizens felt that it is necessary to clarify with which institutions, and at what level (regional, national, EU) responsibility lies in order to tackle the “ping-pong” phenomenon. Citizens highlighted the need for more transparency in the European Union’s decision-making process, and felt that it was necessary for information of this nature to be published proactively.

One citizen commented that:

“

It's absolutely necessary to take a step forward in our responsibility and demand with more energy than ever political transparency throughout the WHOLE decision making process. We don't want them to tell us: 'this comes from Brussels. We want to know what, who, how, where and why. The five questions of politics.

- Spanish citizen

”

“We want to know what, who, how, where and why. The five questions of politics.”

- Dutch citizen

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Another citizen highlighted the need to campaign for greater transparency of the EU institutions and stated that:

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The EU officials should reconsider the importance of transparency in politics once again and realize that the less transparent their actions are the less credible they are. Citizens and NGOs should push the EU and national politicians to do much more for transparency. There is a good opportunity to push this agenda on the EU level with the next EP elections. We should unite our voices and make the EU politicians more accountable for their actions.

- Czech citizen

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One citizen recommended that the EU institutions conduct their work more openly and revise their public communications strategy:

“

The biggest problem I see is little media interest and therefore little interest of citizens. Personally, I was shocked by MEP – Vice President for transparency, who several times showed that transparency is for him rather a word without meaning. In particular, the EU should make information about their work more transparent, open to people to change the existing communication with the public.

- Czech citizen

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Better access to EU documents

Citizens recommended that the EU respect and fulfil the right of public access to EU documents, which they saw as a useful tool for the public and civil society to verify the facts and to hold governments to account. Citizens also realised that through the practice of making access to documents requests they could contribute to the opening up of EU institutions.

They regretted, however, the fact that the EU's transparency rules were limited to “documents” and identified a need for a more progressive approach and for the recognition of a right of access to EU **information**.

Commenting on the importance of the right of access to information one citizen asserted that:

“

There is no doubt that transparency is one of the essential features of democracy and a basic tool as far as the right to information is concerned... The concept of transparency has clear principles, such as all relevant information should be provided and the data disclosed is reliable because it is based on facts.

- German citizen

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One citizen remarked that filing access to documents requests helped to strengthen the right of access to documents in practice, stating that this was a motivation in itself:

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As citizens request access to documents, so the EU institutions continue to improve their information processing mechanisms and their capacity to respond.

- Spanish citizen

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Other citizens said they had learned tips on how to access EU documents and were particularly content with the face-to-face meetings they had held with EU officials. One person recounted that:

“

I have gained a few new contacts and tips, which could be useful for watchdog activities of our NGO. Among them I would like to mention the meeting with officials from EC DG Home Affairs and information on how to “get and unlock” some information and documents about projects funded by EU institutions, which are not accessible on the national level.

- Czech citizen

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One person summarised a discussion held on 15 November 2012 with Mattias Bjärnemalm, the head of Office for MEP Amelia Andersdotter, which he felt clearly highlighted the importance of the right of public access to EU documents for finding out what position each Member State is arguing during ongoing legislative negotiations in the Council of the European Union:

“

Talking about the ping-pong phenomenon, one of the citizens present at the meeting remarked that they – our governments – always tells us ‘it’s Europe’s fault) - ‘Well then ask them for the documents!!’, Bjärnemalm retorted.

‘Tell them: if it’s Europe, then show us the Council documents!’

- Spanish citizen

”

‘Tell them: if it’s Europe, then show us the Council documents!’

- Spanish citizen

”

The EU should act as a role model for national governments

Some citizens stressed that in their countries, most people felt that the EU had a relevant role to play in their national politics. This led them to question why the EU institutions were not leading by example in matters of transparency and openness:

“

The EU as an organization has a great potential to become a leading force in taking measures in transparency, that can be afterwards adopted throughout Europe. It would be a mistake to waste this opportunity. So far we can unfortunately only see the opposite – EU officials often adopt non-transparent measures, which they have experienced on the national level.

- Czech citizen

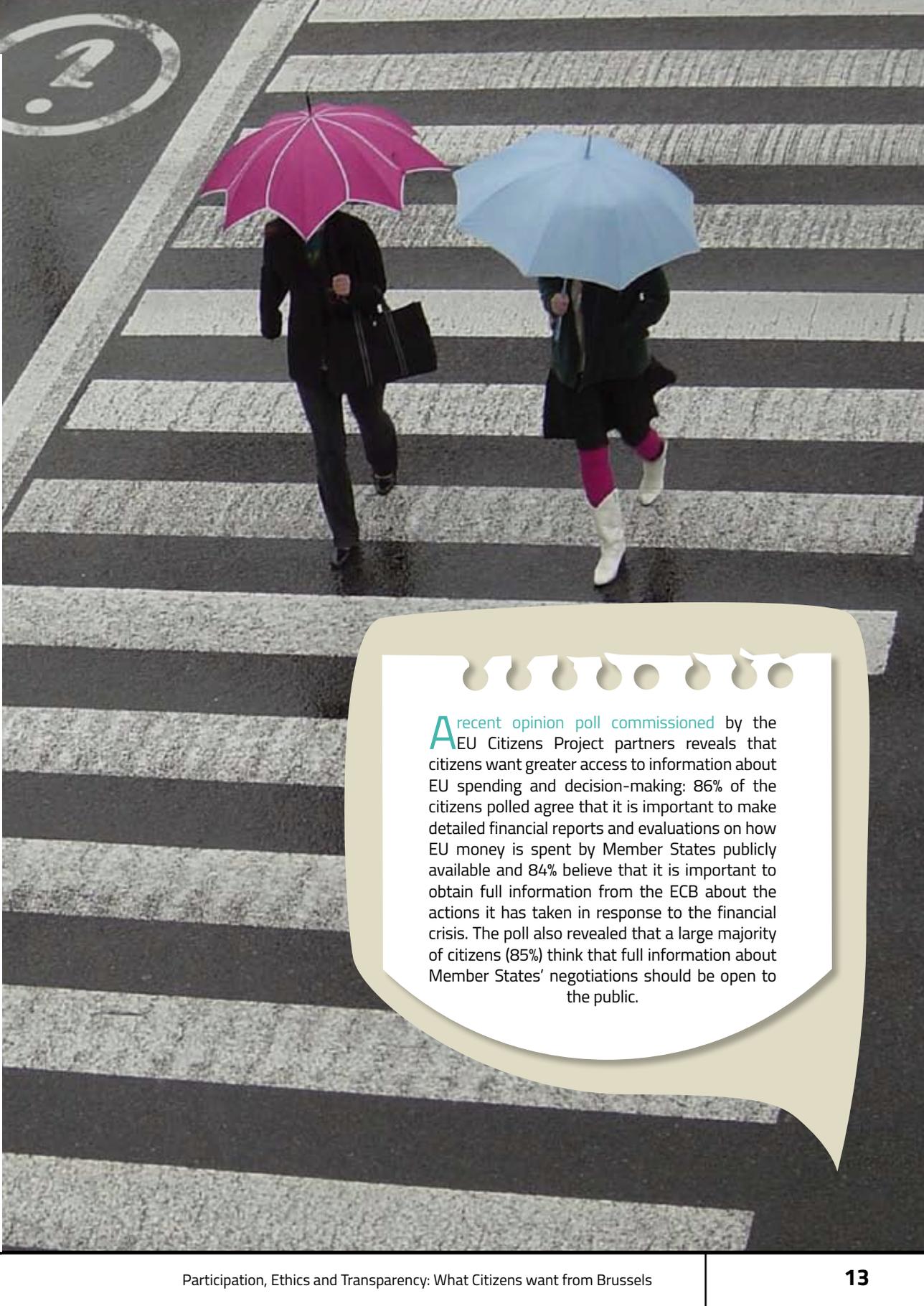
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Latest scandals have shown (cash for amendments, commissioner Dalli) that EU today cannot serve as a model for the member states. I consider this to be a huge mistake, since member states can always make excuses of their non-transparent lobbying saying that EU itself does nothing to improve the situation.

- Czech citizen

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A recent opinion poll commissioned by the EU Citizens Project partners reveals that citizens want greater access to information about EU spending and decision-making: 86% of the citizens polled agree that it is important to make detailed financial reports and evaluations on how EU money is spent by Member States publicly available and 84% believe that it is important to obtain full information from the ECB about the actions it has taken in response to the financial crisis. The poll also revealed that a large majority of citizens (85%) think that full information about Member States' negotiations should be open to the public.



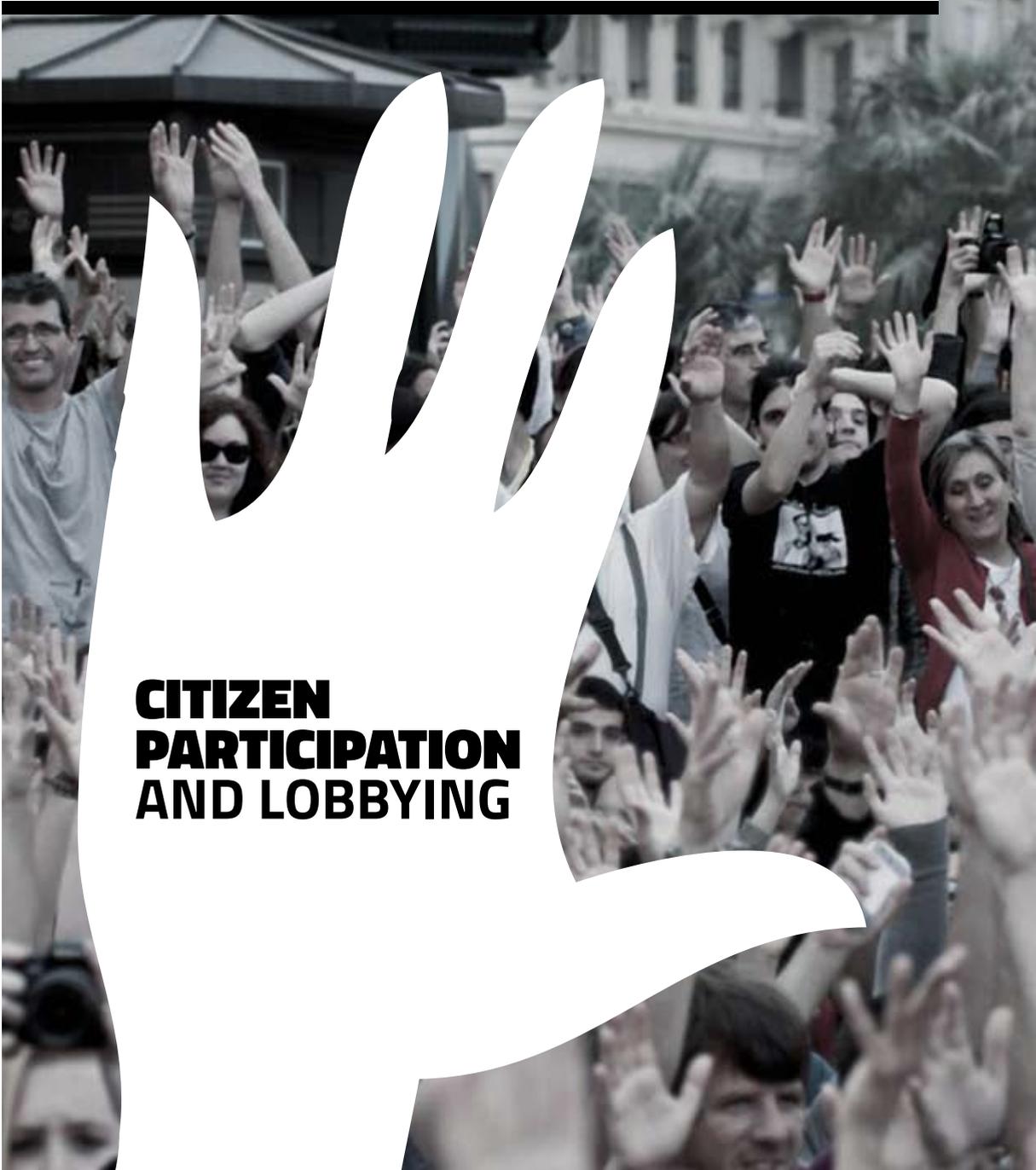
What citizens are concerned about:

- Complexity of the decision-making process
- Unequal access to decision-makers

What citizens recommend on participation and lobbying:

- The EU should foster citizen participation and civil society lobbying
- Citizens should engage more actively in EU decision-making
- The EU should enact an obligatory lobby register

02



CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND LOBBYING



UPON THEIR ARRIVAL IN BRUSSELS, citizens were overwhelmed by the degree of access to the EU's decision-making process that professional lobbyists and other interest groups has managed to achieve, which they felt was due in large part to their physical proximity. They felt that this resulted in unequal access to the EU's decision-making process as most citizens live far away from Brussels and are disconnected from the political realities of the European Union.

Some citizens remarked that the EU's decision-making process was quite complex and that the lack of information about how, when and by whom decisions are taken makes it more difficult for citizens to participate effectively.

Citizens recommended that the EU institutions on the one hand make concerted efforts to improve citizen input throughout the decision-making process and on the other hand, regulate and make more transparent the practice of lobbying in the European Union. Citizens also felt that they needed to start becoming more active and they called on the EU to initiate two-way dialogue with the public.

“The institutions are not as transparent as we would like and because it's complex, citizens don't get involved in the process”

- French citizen



What citizens are concerned about

Complexity of the decision-making process

One citizen described the problematic relationship between the lack of transparency in the EU and the complexity of the decision-making process in the following terms:

“

I wasn't really aware of how the EU democratic system works. It was quite interesting to meet with the assistants and an MEP to talk about their work inside the Parliament. The EU Parliament is a complex world and this complexity makes the situation more difficult to understand for the citizens. The institutions are not as transparent as we would like and because it's complex, citizens don't get involved in the process

”

- French citizen

Another citizen added that the physical and psychological distance between citizens and the institutions of the European Union made the decision-making process seem practically inaccessible:

“

The Brussels bubble definitely exists, for me it's still a far-away centre of decision-making and it's very unfamiliar for the majority of citizens. The fact that there are so many institutions involved in the decision-making process - Commission, Parliament, Council - may serve to divide up power but it also makes it more difficult to understand and to find the right moment for civil society to participate and to have an impact.

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- Spanish citizen

One citizen emphasised that the EU takes many decisions that affect the European public and he hoped that NGOs and civil society organisations would be able to overcome the complexity of the decision-making process:

“

NGOs should focus on the EU, even if, for example in the Czech Republic there is a lot of work with local problems. Often, we do not realize that local problems can be related to European policy, which is very "far" from us.

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- Czech citizen

Unequal access to decision-makers

Citizens were surprised to witness the concentration of lobby firms and large enterprises as they walked around the European Quarter of Brussels – for many, this was their first visit to the city. Upon their return, citizens wrote that they were concerned that some lobbyists might have unequal access to EU decision-makers in Brussels and that this could result in some interests dominating over others during the EU's decision-making process.

A majority of citizens felt that more support needed to be given to citizens and civil society to enable them to participate on an equal footing with lobbyists, and they recommended that the EU enact a mandatory lobby register.

One citizen noted down the following point which came up at a meeting he had attended with Mattias Bjärnemalm on 15 November 2012 and which he felt highlighted the differences between the levels of access that different interests are able to achieve during the EU's decision-making processes.



In a very pragmatic way they commented that it is not realistic, or even useful, to try to block the action of lobbying or interest representation, because MEPs also often need input and information during the decision-making process.

What would be more desirable is if civil society were to be more effective doing their lobbying and communication, in order to counterbalance the influence of certain sectors or groups that are much better organised.

We explained that NGOs and civil society groups don't have the same funds or resources as powerful private interests, and they agreed that this was an issue.

- Spanish citizen



The EU Citizens Opinion Poll shows that 73% of citizens are concerned that lobbyists representing the business sector have too much influence in EU policy-making. The poll also reveals that 77% of respondents believe that lobbying by business representatives can result in policies that may not be in the public interest.

“What would be more desirable is if civil society were to be more effective doing their lobbying and communication, in order to counterbalance the influence of certain sectors or groups that are much better organised.”

- Spanish citizen

Other citizens were taken aback by the physical proximity of lobbyists to EU decision-makers compared to the distance they had had to travel to get to Brussels. They were also surprised at the lack of regulation of lobbying activities in the EU:

“The EU Citizens conference in Brussels was a real eye-opener as to the prevalence and power of lobbying in Brussels. The walking lobbying tour of the EU quarter really showed physical proximity of lobbyists to the EU institutions, but also the scope for unofficial lobbying in bars and restaurants after hours.”

- UK citizen

“The fact that lobbyists from powerful transnational corporations were physically located in buildings metres away from the front entrance of the European Commission really spoke volumes. British Petroleum, Phillip Morris International, Shell and the City of London all located around Rond-pont Schuman within a stone’s throw.”

- UK citizen

Citizens were disappointed with the lack of information currently provided by the EU’s transparency register and they felt that it was not robust enough to ensure against potential situations of undue influence. They particularly regretted the fact that the EU Transparency Register is currently voluntary:

“Lobbyists in Brussels are not under any obligation to sign up to any register, neither are Members of the European Parliament or Commissioners obliged to publish their agendas.”

They are our representatives, they are paid by our taxes, but we cannot know who they meet with, or when, or what for, or what the effect these meetings have on the laws that are finally adopted.

- Spanish citizen

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I have learned that untransparent lobbying and corruption is a problem not only in Czech Republic, but in other countries and in EU institutions as well. There is a lot of work to be done.

- Czech citizen

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What citizens recommend on participation and lobbying

The EU should foster citizen participation and civil society lobbying

Citizens welcomed EU-funded participation projects and called for more emphasis to be placed on citizen involvement by the EU institutions, including through the use of new technologies:

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The European Parliament should put a greater emphasis on facilitating the interaction of citizens with the institutions through the use of ICT technologies, not only with monstrous websites with a lot of very useful information, but actually permitting interaction with politicians, so that they can also get a better idea of the realities faced by their country and by its citizens.

- Spanish citizen

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Definitely what is needed is to promote projects like EU Citizens, which serve to hugely motivate citizens to participate in the political activity of the EU.

- Spanish citizen

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It is urgent and important to foster these types of projects so that ordinary citizens can be reached, “woken up” and encouraged to get involved.

- Spanish citizen

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It is essential that we engage with European decision-making as British citizens, and begin an informed, vigorous public conversation with and about Brussels. I saw the EU Citizens event as part of this. It brought in citizens from across Europe and from very different backgrounds, made us feel welcome, invited us to share experiences with each-other, and created an opportunity for face-to-face dialogue with the European officialdom that is worryingly rare. The last session of the final conference worked best because its form followed the principles of the event: the citizens led the session with their questions, and it took place on our terms. I hope there will be more events organised of this kind, it provided a unique space for dialogue between the EU and the citizens it serves.

- UK citizen

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Citizens should engage more actively in EU decision-making

Given the physical distance and seeming complexity of Brussels, citizens realised that they should also take the initiative and actively seek out the right moment and method for making their voices heard in Brussels.

“

I would advise to stay active. People should behave like well informed and self confident citizens who are engaged in public issues, searching and analyzing information from independent informational sources, and giving feedback to their elected representatives and public servants who figure in EU institutions.

- Czech citizen

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It is our obligation, as educated citizens, to make a success story of this ‘invention’ called ‘European Union’. We have no other choice.

- Spanish citizen

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Those who took part in the Citizens' Trip to Brussels mentioned on several occasions the idea that citizens and civil society organisations should learn from the techniques employed by professional interest representatives in order to get their point across more effectively to EU decision-makers. One citizen mentioned that:

“

One of the impressions I get is that the European Parliament is much more open and accessible than it seems, both in terms of providing information and with regards to collecting opinions from people that know how to explain their position in a coherent and concise manner, and based on tangible facts. This doesn't mean that the European Parliament is totally transparent but often the lack of communication is due to our lack of knowledge on how to transmit our message to decision-makers.

- Spanish citizen

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The EU should enact an obligatory lobby register

The European Union currently has a voluntary lobby register that only covers the European Parliament and the Commission. The EU Transparency Register currently has about 5,500 lobbyists registered from private companies, NGOs, trade associations, lobby agencies, religious associations, etc. However, it has been estimated that in Brussels there are currently around 25,000 people that work as lobbyists.

One citizen wrote that he was particularly worried about lobbying in Brussels, calling for the current EU lobby register to be improved, though he felt that there was a lack of political will to do so:

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I realized that the EU institutions are, almost literally, under siege of lobbyists with various interests. A lack of transparency in lobbying is striking and the current transparency register of the EU institutions should be definitely reformed. However, the EU politicians at the conference seemed not so enthusiastic about such a reform.

- Czech citizen

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According to the EU Transparency Register, “lobbying” is defined as: “All activities carried out with the objective of directly or indirectly influencing the formulation or implementation of policy and the decision-making processes of the EU institutions, irrespective of the channel or medium of communication used, for example outsourcing, media, contracts with professional intermediaries, think-tanks, platforms, forums, campaigns and grassroots initiatives.

These activities include, inter alia, contacting Members [of the European Parliament], officials or other staff of the EU institutions, preparing, circulating and communicating letters, information material or discussion papers and position papers, and organising events, meetings or promotional activities and social events or conferences, invitations to which have been sent to Members, officials or other staff of the EU institutions. Voluntary contributions and participation in formal consultations on envisaged EU legislative or other legal acts and other open consultations are also included.”



Citizens were overwhelmingly in favour of the creation of a mandatory lobby register for the EU institutions, which they felt would help to shed light on the decision-making process and ensure that all interested parties and stakeholders are involved. The results of the EU Citizens Opinion Poll confirm this tendency, with 4 in 5 citizens polled agreeing that the EU should have a mandatory system for regulating lobbying to ensure a balanced participation of different interests in EU decision-making.

During a public debate on participation, ethics and transparency organised by the EU Citizens Project partners on 16 November 2012 in Brussels, the issue of lobbying regulation was discussed by EU officials and civil society. One citizen summarised the highlights in the following way:

“

We asked what they had learned from the latest tobacco industry scandal, why they didn't have a mandatory lobby register, what EU legislation could do to help combat corruption in member states...

A teacher from Catalonia drew applause for asking why, when she had to fill in dozens of forms for a small educational grant, did the lobby firms only have to fill in a simple online form on trust?

”

- UK citizen

Those participating in the Citizens Trip to Brussels generally understood that lobbying is a necessary part of the democratic process but they were concerned about the potential for private sector lobbies to exert a disproportionate influence on EU decision-making in the absence of stricter regulation.

Citizens expressed a need for public participation in EU decision-making to be more actively stimulated in order to counter the influence of private interests or professional lobbyists throughout the decision-making process.



What citizens are concerned about:

- The Revolving Door Phenomenon
- Second jobs

What citizens recommend on ethics:

- The European Union should tighten its ethics regulations

03



**ETHICS IN THE
EUROPEAN
PARLIAMENT**



AS MENTIONED EARLIER, citizens regretted the fact that the EU institutions were not leading by way of example on transparency or on ethics regulation as they felt that this permitted Member States to be lax on these issues. Citizens were concerned about the potential conflicts of interest that could arise for Members of the European Parliament and they specifically identified two areas in which they saw a need for greater regulation: the second jobs of MEPs and the “revolving door” phenomenon.

The “revolving door” is a term used to describe situations in which individuals move from the public to the private sector, or vice-versa. The revolving door can lead to many situations in which a risk of a conflict of interest can arise, for example, if the person switches from the regulators to the regulated or if they move to a job which requires them to be in contact with public officials that were formerly their colleagues, to name two examples.

What citizens are concerned about

The Revolving Door Phenomenon

Citizens felt strongly about the need to regulate potential conflicts of interest that can be created when EU officials pass through the “revolving door”, which they felt could become problematic for a number of reasons. Their main concerns were eloquently described by two citizens in particular, quoted below.

Some citizens reported that they had felt a lack of political will to address and prevent the potential conflicts of interest that can be caused by the revolving door phenomenon in the European Union. Following the Citizens Trip to Brussels one person wrote that:

“

The visit helped me to make clear what are the main problem in transparency on the national as well as European level. I must admit, that I was quite disappointed about the situation in the EU – it is naive, but I expected more political will to deal with problems of revolving door or regulation of lobbying.

- Czech citizen

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Another citizen also echoed this sentiment:

“

The EU institutions, including the European Commission, fail to take the revolving door seriously and fail to take effective action to block it. Brussels is home to one of the highest concentrations of political power in the world and the revolving door is one of the most important ways in which lobbyists can influence the political agenda in Brussels.

When European decision-makers leave office and go straight into lobby jobs, or when lobbyists join the EU institutions, the risk of conflicts of interest can be great, undermining democratic, public-interest decision-making, and it is the responsibility of the EU institutions to ensure that this does not happen.

- UK citizen

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“When European decision-makers leave office and go straight into lobby jobs, or when lobbyists join the EU institutions, the risk of conflicts of interest can be great, undermining democratic, public-interest decision-making, and it is the responsibility of the EU institutions to ensure that this does not happen.”

- UK citizen

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“ *Many EU officials go through the ‘revolving door’ meaning that they leave their EU job and soon start working for industry or lobby firms, often in the same policy area. Other times, lobbyists go through the revolving door and start to work for the EU institutions. When this happens, corporate groups gain inside-knowledge, vital contacts, and above all, powerful influence. As a result, Brussels becomes even more industry-dominated and more remote from citizens’ concerns and the public interest. This raises serious questions about the political culture in Brussels and shows how we need new rules to tackle these conflicts of interest.*

- UK citizen

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Second jobs

Citizens debated the issue of MEPs’ second jobs and wondered whether or not it is acceptable for MEPs to take on both public and private functions at the same time. Some citizens and civil society organisations argue that second jobs can create a risk of a conflict of interest for MEPs, particularly if the second job requires him or her to represent the interests of third parties, as this might conflict with their duty to represent the public interest.

Some citizens felt that being an MEP was already full-time job and that the salary of a Member of the European Parliament was already sufficiently high enough to prevent the need for MEPs to have an outside job. The results of the **EU Citizens Opinion Poll** confirm that this tendency is widespread, with 69% of citizens stating that “being a MEP is a full-time job, which does not leave time for any other employment.”

The EU Citizens Project opinion poll also revealed that 82% of citizens believe that a conflict of interest could arise if an MEP works for a lobby group or private company. Four out of five people polled said they feel less confident that an MEP represents the best interests of citizens if they also work for a lobby group or a private company.

One citizen commented that:

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I had a feeling, that some of them lost in touch with the citizens they represent (e.g, it seemed as one of the MEPs did not quite understand the term “conflict of interest).

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- Czech citizen

What citizens recommend on ethics

The European Union should tighten its ethics regulations

The Code of Conduct for Members of the European Parliament came into force in January 2012, in response to the widely reported “cash-for-amendments” scandal that erupted in 2011 when journalists from the Sunday Times caught MEPs on camera allegedly accepting payments from (fake) lobbyists in exchange for proposing amendments to draft EU legislation.

On 16 November 2012, the topic of ethics in the European Parliament, including a strengthening the Code of Conduct for MEPs, was intensely debated at a public conference entitled “Participation, ethics and transparency: What citizens want from Brussels”, hosted in Brussels by the EU Citizens Project partners. Citizens called for greater transparency of MEPs and were generally of the opinion that MEPs should not be allowed to have second jobs.

The **EU Citizens Opinion Poll** confirms this, with 67% of respondents stating that MEPs should **not** be allowed to work for a lobby group or a private company while they are serving as elected representatives.

Following the public debate on ethics, one citizen laid out several recommendations for improvement for EU officials:

*I agree with the proposals mentioned in the discussion between citizens and EU officials that can possibly improve the functioning of EU institutions. **No second jobs for MEPs** (true representative of public cannot manage two full time jobs), **code of conduct should contain sanctions** in case of its breach (nowadays it is just a soft law) as well as **broad financial disclosure of MEPs, [and a] mandatory register for lobbyists**. I disagree with the argumentation of Rainer Wieland that free mandate means more than transparency and that there is no use to declare small gifts. Apart from stricter regulation I do not see any solution to transparency issues.*

- Czech citizen



CONCLUSION

The reports and blog posts written by the citizens that took part in the Trip to Brussels show that members of the public are eager to participate in the decision-making process of the EU, but that they find it difficult because of the lack of clarity about the roles played by the different decision-making actors involved.

Citizens felt that there was a need for the EU institutions to become more transparent, including by proactively publishing more information about how, when and why decisions are taken, and by ensuring that the right of access to EU documents is respected and fulfilled.

Citizens called on the EU institutions to place greater emphasis on collecting a wide range of citizen opinions throughout the EU's decision-making process and to initiate a two-way dialogue with citizens and civil society. Citizens also felt that it was necessary to prevent undue influence of particular interests over the policy-making process and they recommended that the EU enact a mandatory lobby register.

Citizens recommended that Members of the European Parliament improve the Code of Conduct for MEPs to introduce stricter ethics regulation, including restrictions on situations in which a risk of a conflict of interest may arise, such as the second jobs of MEPs and the revolving door phenomenon.

The Citizens' Report demonstrates that in order to ensure public trust and confidence in the decisions taken by the European Union, the EU institutions must work to become more transparent, accessible and accountable.

The EU Citizens Project partners and the citizens that wrote this report would like to encourage the EU institutions to embark on a coordinated response to the recommendations contained in The Citizens' Report.



About the EU Citizens' Report

After visiting the EU institutions, holding meetings with MEPs, participating in workshops and debating with EU officials at a public event about lobbying and ethics, the 40 citizens that participated in the Citizens Trip to Brussels returned to their home countries and wrote down what they thought of the European Union.

In The Citizens' Report, those who traveled to Brussels describe what their main concerns are in relation to transparency, ethics and participation in the European Union. The report also contains recommendations made by citizens to EU policy-makers that they feel would improve public trust and confidence in the European Union if taken on board.

The EU Citizens' Report is a collection of individual voices produced as part of the 12-month ALTER Citizens Project which was partially funded by the European Commission under the Active Citizenship Programme. It consists of extracts from reports and blog posts that the participants wrote after returning from the Citizens Trip to Brussels from 14-16 November 2012.

Access Info Europe, AITEC, Environmental Law Service, Friends of the Earth Europe, Health Action International Europe and SpinWatch would like to thank the citizens that participated in the EU Citizens Project for their invaluable insight, enthusiasm and vision.

About the ALTER Citizens Project

The EU Citizens Project is officially titled the: "Accountability, Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation: Citizens have a right to know" Project (ALTER Citizens). It was designed to bring the voices of citizens to EU decision-makers and to stimulate dialogue between European officials and civil society.

Through a series of workshops, debates, public consultations and opinion polls, the EU Citizens Project partners gathered the views of citizens from six European countries and debated with them on the issues of transparency, participation, lobbying and ethics in the European Union in order to come up with concrete citizen-led recommendations for reform.

The Citizens Report is a product of the ALTER Citizens Project run by Access Info Europe, AITEC, Environmental Law Service, Friends of the Earth Europe, Health Action International Europe and SpinWatch from 5 February 2012 to 4 February 2013.



Europe for Citizens Programme

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