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Diamandouros believes that transparency is now much higher on the agenda of the EU administration.

EPA/OLIVIER HOSLET

EU institutions, transparency groups in major disagreement

by

by

[Stanislava Gaydazhieva](#)

27/09/2013 - 4:47pm

The European Union (EU) institutions and non-governmental groups pushing for more **transparency** in the **European decision-making process** apparently disagree on where Europe currently stands when it comes to transparency. At least, this is what the debate organised on Friday by the EU Ombudsman **Nikiforos Diamandouros** ahead of the **International Right to Know Day** on 28 September showed.

The outgoing Ombudsman's last event [before his colleague Emily O'Reilly takes up his post as of October](#) was called "The International Right to Know Day- EU Transparency: Where are we now?" and gathered in one room European officials and representatives of major transparency groups to discuss how much progress has been made as regards transparency in the EU bodies over the past decade.

"Transparency creates stronger bonds between the institutions and the public and some progress has been made," said Doru

Fratescu from **VoteWatch**. However, he pointed out that still more work needs to be done, in particular when it comes to increasing the level of transparency of the European Parliament.

“Some achievements which have to be mentioned are the fact that activities by MEPs, as well as attendance lists, are now public and that their plenary session meetings are video broadcasted,” continued Fratescu. However, VoteWatch believes that votes in the committees and the final votes on non-legislative reports should become roll-call, while the electronic votes should be by default roll-call votes.

A similar critical stance was taken also by Paul de Clerck representing **ALTER-EU**, who said that a fundamental shortcoming in achieving transparency in the way EU institutions work is the voluntary status of the EU’s transparency register. In his words this leads to a gap in registration of many key lobbying groups and an increased number of unreliable or incomplete data.

In addition, de Clerck targeted the advisory groups of the European Commission, saying that in fact there are very few representatives of the civil society among the external experts, with many of those actually serving the interest of the companies they represent. “Directorates-General continue to install corporate-dominated expert groups, while it is not a secret to anyone that a massive lobbying of the tobacco industry is taking place in the European Parliament,” added the ALTER-EU representative. He further said that the **Tobacco Products Directive** is under strong lobby pressure from tobacco companies who had sent more than 100 lobbyists to EP. “Large packages of tobacco are being offered to MEPs to influence them,” warned de Clerck.

Helen Darbishire from **Access Info Europe** informed that according to recent data gathered by her organisation, 80% of EU citizens are in favour of a mandatory lobby transparency register.

According to [Diamandouros the most common cause of complains \(a fifth\)](#) remain the lack of transparency in EU institutions. However, it seems that the Parliament and Commission are inclined to look at the issue through rose-colored glasses.

According to **Rainer Wieland MEP** and Vice-President of the European Parliament for transparency, for example, “it is not appropriate to record everything that MEPs do”. Moreover, Wieland said that he has never received any of the tobacco packages being distributed to MEPs, but would have probably accepted them, as he is a smoker.

Nevertheless, the EP’s Vice-President pointed out that the Parliament is far ahead of member states because “plenary sessions are web streamed”.

A more humble view was taken by the commissioner for inter-institutional relations and administration, **Maroš Šefčovič**, who chose to stick to the positive side of things, saying that “transparency improvements at EU level in the last 5 years are remarkable”. According to him, 83% of requests for documents sent to the Commission were successful and the EC is a “victim of success of transparency”.

Certainly, things are not as bad as transparency groups see them, but they are also far from being as good and as progressive the EU institutions see them. The outgoing EU Ombudsman believes that the European citizens should be able to see what the EU bodies are doing on European level and that transparency is now much higher on the agenda of the EU administration than ever before. The question which is arises, however, is whether the EU will manage to seize the moment in a time when [the next European election is being prepared?](#)

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