

Access Info Europe

Calle Cava de San Miguel 8, 4c
28005 Madrid, Spain



Vice President Frans Timmermans
European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Also sent by e-mail to Deputy Head of Cabinet Michelle Sutton, Secretary-General of the European Commission Alexander Italianer, Head of Transparency and Lobbying Regulation Unit Martin Kroeger.

Madrid, 31 January 2017

Dear Vice President Frans Timmermans,

I am writing to bring your attention to the need to address the lack of transparency around public spending by the European Union and, in particular, the travel expenses of Commissioners on trips they conduct in their role as public officials and representatives.

This information is currently not available to the public although in December 2016, Access Info Europe, a pro-transparency civil society organisation, obtained small segments of it using the EU's access to documents rules.

On Thursday 26 and Friday 27 January, in under two days, a total of 119 people from across Europe submitted a total of 168 requests for access to the 2016 travel expenses claims of the 28 European Commissioners. This massive response demonstrates the huge public interest in and demand for transparency of this information.

We now call upon the Commission to publish proactively the travel expenses of Commissioners, per Commissioner, per mission, in detail, online, and in a machine-readable format.

Such transparency is central to implementing the Commission's treaty obligations to work as openly as possible. It is essential to guaranteeing accountability for the activities of the Commission, permitting public oversight and scrutiny of public spending. Transparency is also, as you yourself have noted, important for combating scepticism among citizens.

The Juncker Commission adopted its mandate in 2014 with a strong commitment to transparency, and has taken steps in this regard on the proactive publication of lobby meetings with top officials, as well as publishing a proposal for a new lobby transparency register regime, to be discussed in the coming months with the Parliament and Council. These are all welcome developments.

Now the Commission has the opportunity take a step towards greater spending transparency by publishing the itemised travel expenses of Commissioners. We urge you to take the initiative to proactively publish this information for previous years and to commit that henceforth there will be regular publication of this data – perhaps on a monthly or even a real time basis, following the good practice of the European Ombudsman.

Your sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Helen', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Helen Darbshire
Executive Director
Access Info Europe