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3rd May 2016

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EU commission: Transparency is not a panacea



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The European Commission wants a mandatory register of lobbyists for all the EU institutions (Photo: ec.europa.eu)

By **ALEKSANDRA ERIKSSON**  

BRUSSELS, TODAY, 10:27

The EU should scrutinise contacts between decision makers and interest groups more closely, the European Commission's vice-president said on Monday (2 May).

“Transparency is one of few tools we have to reconnect with citizens who are sceptical of our legislature,” Frans Timmermans said at a conference in the European Parliament on reform of the EU lobbying register.

The commission wants to revamp the current register, which is based on voluntary enrolment and does



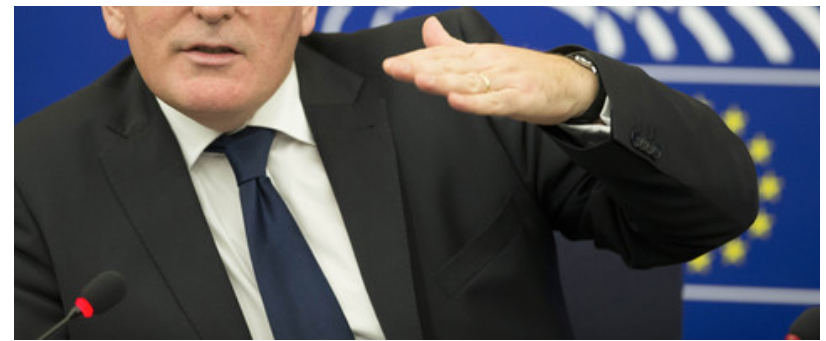
not extend to the EU Council, which represents member states. Until now, only the commission and the parliament have established a register.

But transparency is not a panacea, the commissioner later added, as other speakers agreed with the commission's approach but raised questions on how to make such a scheme workable.

Register roadmap

Andreas Pavlou, from the civil society group coalition Alter-EU, said the current register gave too much leeway to companies who fill it with outdated information.

"Interest groups only have to update their entries once a year and can chose the moment to do so," he said. They should explain more clearly who they are lobbying for and on what issues, he added.



Timmermans: "Transparency is one of few tools we have to reconnect with citizens"
(Photo: [European Commission](#))

There are big differences in the way interest groups fill in their sheets.

Corporate Europe Observatory, a lobbying watchdog that attended the conference, [lists every campaign it has tried to influence](#).

[BusinessEurope](#), the trade federation, indicates that it covers “all topics that matter to European companies” and suggests visiting its website for more information on current lobby priorities.

Others are more minimalist, like the newest entrant, [consulting firm Wey-J Conseil](#), which claims to have neither clients nor income.

Luc Hendrickx, of the small business association UEAPME, said he could not see the added value of the information currently provided on the website.

The lobby register, which lists 9,000 entities, is managed by a secretariat employing three full-time staff and one part-time worker.

Its coordinator, Martin Kroege, admitted that the staff did not have the time to go through all entries, even when the information was clearly wrong. But he said he was not at the conference “to lobby for additional resources”.

Timmermans invited participants to contribute to the consultation that closes on 1 June.

According to German Green MEP Sven Giegold, the European Parliament's rapporteur on transparency, the EU is better at regulating lobbying than most of its member states.

"But all the best regulations are found outside of Europe, in Canada and the US," he said.

He added that the situation was quite depressing.

TTIP transparency

The event was held hours after [Greenpeace disclosed documents](#) on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations.

Critics say the free-trade agreement may undermine labour, environment and health standards. They do not like the way it is being negotiated behind closed doors.

Timmermans said the leak only confirmed that the EU was already transparent

enough and communicated its position without the need to release negotiation documents.

“Give me three examples [of positions] that were not already revealed by the European side,” he said to the audience.

Still, international negotiations cannot proceed by way of leaks, the commissioner argued.

“I hope we can convince others that we are not hiding anything from the European public,” he said.

Sven Giegold replied that there was a “big added value” from the revelations.

“We can now speak about the documents in public without listening to people who are making presumptions, some of which are wrong and others right,” he said.

“This transparency is needed in future TTIP negotiations.”

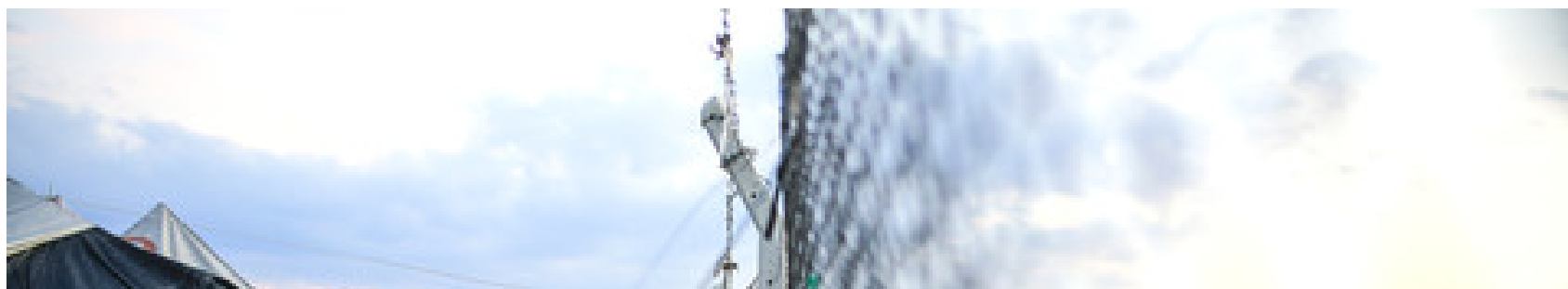


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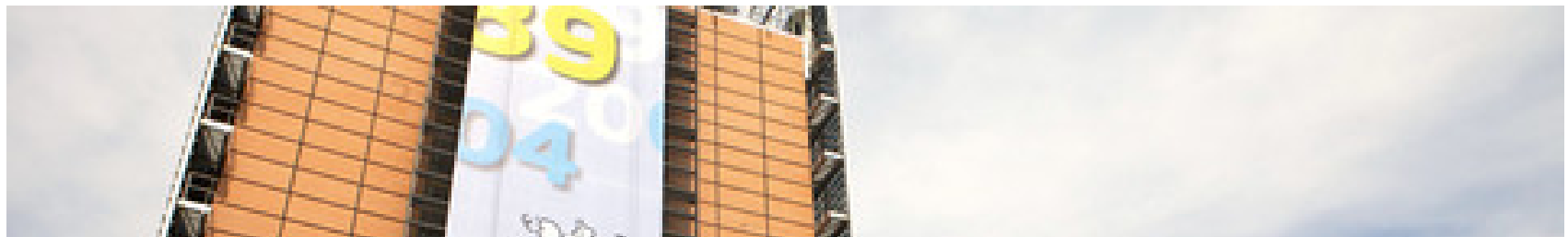




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TODAY, 09:30

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EU commission: Transparency is not a panacea

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