



Inter Press Service News Agency

THE STORY UNDERNEATH

Tuesday, May 20, 2008 14:03 GMT

[Latest News](#)[Contact Us](#)[Readers' Opinions](#)[Search](#)**EUROPE:****Stealth Lobbyists Creep In**

David Cronin

**BRUSSELS, May 9 (IPS) - The often cosy relationship between corporate lobbyists and the Brussels bureaucracy was illustrated in the past few weeks as several members of the European Parliament (MEPs) prepared to visit Peru.**

Vidal Quadras Roca, the assembly's vice-president, contacted a fellow MEP organising the trip to inform him that participants could see first-hand projects in Lima run by British Petroleum, the French private water firm Suez, and the Spanish telecommunications giant Telefónica. All these companies, it transpired, are represented by the International Association of Business and Parliament, a shadowy body which has an office within the Parliament's own building and can avail of facilities financed by the European taxpayer.

Revelations that 'stealth lobbyists' have penetrated their way deep into the corridors of power came at a delicate moment for the Parliament. Those MEPs who were not jetting off to Latin America were involved in a debate about how to tighten up the rules covering what lobbyists may and may not do.

A significant breakthrough was made May 8 when the Parliament officially urged that a mandatory register should be set up for the estimated 15,000 lobbyists in Brussels, most of whom work for business interests. Among the details that would have to be included in the register would be a lobbyist's sources of funding and names of his or her clients.

Transparency campaigners have applauded the Parliament's call in principle, interpreting it as a clear message to the EU's executive, the European Commission. Next month, the Commission is scheduled to unveil its own blueprint for a register, and all the indications are that it favours a voluntary one, with considerably less onerous reporting requirements.

Yet the recommendation made by MEPs contains major loopholes. Law firms that work for corporate clients, for example, would not have to register their activities. This exemption was proposed by Klaus-Heiner Lehne, who supplements his salary as a German MEP by working as a partner in a law firm.

Paul de Clerck, a campaigner with Friends of the Earth, argued that the Parliament's own independence can be compromised when its members have ties to business. "This outcome shows the need for the Parliament to clean up its own house and introduce strong rules to prevent conflicts of interest," he said.

In a recent book 'Der gekaufte Staat', German writers Kim Otto and Sascha Adamek cited how industry lobbyists have found jobs within the European Commission, where they have been able to bring direct influence in shaping EU legislation.

The examples they cited included those of a staff member with the leading accounting firm KPMG, who worked on a corporate taxation dossier for the EU executive, and an employee with the chemicals company BASF who worked with the Commission before moving to the German ministry of economic affairs. The latter individual's salary was paid by BASF, even though he was manning desks in public institutions.

Within Brussels, one of the best-known cases of the seemingly organic ties between the EU institutions and businesses can be found in the sleek offices of GPlus Europe. Of the 49 employees listed on this public relations firm's website, 28 have worked for the European Parliament, the Commission or for the Brussels embassies of the Union's national governments.

GPlus has used the insider knowledge that its employees have of the EU institutions as a selling point, helping it to win clients as illustrious as Microsoft and Vladimir Putin; the former Russian president hired its services in an effort to improve his image in the West.

The firm has been especially successful in poaching those responsible for implementing the Commission's strategy on communications. One recent recruit Gregor Kreuzhuber boasts on his curriculum vitae of spending over a decade in the

Commission -- where he acted as its spokesman on agriculture and industry.

The register recommended by MEPs will initially only apply to lobbyists who liaise with the Parliament itself. Some MEPs have said, though, that they wish to reach an agreement with the other main EU institutions so that they will introduce a similar system, also on a mandatory basis.

Jo Leinen, a German Socialist MEP, said he hopes the register will be operational several months before the next European Parliament elections, scheduled for the summer of 2009. "Before the European elections, do we want to tell citizens that Brussels is open and transparent?" he said.

Ingo Friedrich, a German conservative, contended that the register will be an "important step towards more transparency in European legislation."

But Monica Frassoni, an Italian Green, said it is "absurd" that lawyers working on EU affairs will not have to register. "Lawyers play an increasingly important role in influencing policy in Brussels, and they promote themselves as such on their own websites," she said. (END/2008)

[Contact Us](#) | [About Us](#) | [Subscription](#) | [News in RSS](#) | [Email News](#) | [Mobile](#) | [Text Only](#)  
Copyright © 2008 IPS-Inter Press Service. All rights reserved.