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'Moment of truth' approaching for lobbying transparency

Published: Wednesday 30 April 2008

The European Parliament is widely expected to approve a landmark report on lobbying during its Brussels plenary session next week (8 May), representing a key moment in the drive to improve the transparency of the EU institutions and the estimated 15,000 lobbyists who seek to influence them.

Background:

The European Parliament's Constitutional Affairs Committee recommended on 1 April that a proposal for a mandatory lobbyists register common to all three EU institutions be drawn up by the end of the year, providing "full financial disclosure" of EU lobbying activities in Brussels ([EurActiv 03/04/08](#)).

The report is the focal point of Parliament's contribution to the wider [transparency initiative](#) launched by Administration and Anti-Fraud Commissioner Siim Kallas in 2005.

[Speaking](#) before the American European Community Association in Brussels on 25 April, Anti-Fraud and Administrative Affairs Commissioner Siim Kallas expressed his belief that an "emerging agreement on a 'one-stop shop' register" could be found. Describing the [report](#) as it stands as "a very good basis for inter-institutional discussions, including with the Council," Kallas expressed his readiness "to work with the European Parliament and Council on a common register that meets the expectations and special requirements of all institutions".

Commissioner Kallas stressed that he will "continue to defend the view that there is nothing wrong with lobbying," insisting that "the Brussels lobby world is in no way penetrated by scandals".

Recent debate has also focused on who exactly will be included in the register. "The Commission considers it sufficient for organisations to register" as "the interests represented can be assessed without requesting individual names," Kallas said.

Provided that the report is approved in plenary, an inter-institutional working group will be established to prepare a proposal on a common register by the end of the year. In the event that such an agreement cannot be reached, the report suggests "mutual recognition between Parliament, the Commission and the Council" of separate registers.

But full financial disclosure still needs to be defined "more explicitly" and Parliament needs to improve "its own rules on lobbying transparency and ethics" before the inter-institutional register can become a reality, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) will argue in a letter to MEPs ahead of a plenary vote on the Stubb report scheduled for 8 May.

Moreover, ALTER-EU believes the end-of-year target date for agreement on a mandatory inter-institutional lobbyists register between the Commission, Parliament and Council should be "much more ambitious".

Tom Spencer of the European Centre for Public Affairs (ECPA) said a common, mandatory register for all three institutions is "an absolute must", particularly as "key lobbying activities take place in co-decision between the Parliament and the Council".

Positions:

Anti-Fraud Commissioner Siim Kallas told the American European Community Association on 25 April that the Commission "wants to prove that neither we nor the lobbyists have anything to hide," adding: "We want to make clear that lobbying is an honourable profession which is vitally important in a democracy".

Erik Wesselius of **Corporate Europe Observatory**, who sits on the steering committee of the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU), believes "we have now reached the moment of truth," claiming that "the coming two-month period will decide whether any real and lasting results will be achieved in our struggle for mandatory EU lobbying transparency and ethics rules".

Calling on the EU institutions to "stand their ground," **Tom Spencer** of the **European Centre for Public Affairs** (ECPA) told EurActiv that the most important aspect of the register is how it will "produce better and more transparent lobbying" and called on the EU institutions to look at the "big picture" rather than engaging in a "technical and personal" debate over its precise nature.

Next steps:

- **8 May:** Parliament to vote upon the lobbying [report](#) prepared by new Finnish Foreign Minister Alexander Stubb.
- **By end 2008:** Inter-institutional working group to present proposal for a common lobbyists register (providing report is adopted).

Links

EU official documents

- European Parliament: [Lobbying report \(consolidated version to be voted upon\)](#) [FR] [DE]
- European Parliament (Legislative Observatory): [Procedure file for lobbying report](#) [FR]
- European Commission: [Speech by Commissioner Kallas: 'The European Transparency Initiative: A great opportunity for lobbyists'](#) (25 April 2008)
- European Commission: [Transparency Initiative](#) [FR] [DE]