

## Briefing Paper

February 2013

## EU Citizens opinion poll on transparency, ethics, and lobbying in the EU

### Introduction

As part of the EU Citizens<sup>1</sup> project, Friends of the Earth Europe, Access Info Europe, Aitec, Environmental Law Service, Health Action International and Spinwatch, with the support of the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (AK Europa), commissioned a public opinion poll on transparency, ethics and lobbying in the European Union (EU). The survey was conducted by TNS opinion<sup>2</sup> in six European countries – Austria, the Czech Republic, France, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom – with over 6,000 people in the second half of January 2013. The survey asked respondents about the following topics: lobbying transparency, access to EU documents, and parliamentary ethics. In each of these areas, four questions were asked, either asking about the degree of agreement with a statement or the degree of importance of an issue.

### Main findings

#### **Lobbying transparency**

- 70% think that it is widely known that lobbyists have a strong influence on EU policy-making.
- Almost three quarters of the respondents (73%) declared concern that lobbyists representing the business sector have too much influence on EU decisions.
- 77% think that lobbying by business representatives can result in policies that may not be in the public interest.
- 80% believe there should be mandatory regulation of lobbying to ensure a balanced participation of different interests in decision-making.

#### **Access to EU documents**

- 85% think that full information about member states' negotiations should be open to the public.
- 84% think it important that full documentation from the European Central Bank about what it is doing in response to the financial crisis is publicly available.
- 86% find it important that detailed financial reports and evaluations on how EU money is spent by Member States is made publicly available.

#### **Parliamentary ethics**

- 80% declare they feel less confident that a MEP represents the best interests of citizens if they also work for a lobby group or a private company.
- 82% think that it can be a conflict of interest if a MEP works for a lobby group or a private company.
- 67% think that MEPs should not be allowed to work for a lobby group or a private company while they are serving as elected representatives.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.eu-citizens.org/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.tns-opinion.com/>

- 69% think that being a MEP is a full-time job, which does not leave time for any other employment.

## **Policy recommendations**

- **Lobbying transparency: to the European Commission and the European Parliament**

- Ensure the upcoming review of the Transparency Register is conducted in a fully open and democratic way, fully involving the European Parliament and reflecting its position in favour of a mandatory register;
- Use the upcoming review of the Transparency Register to create a fully operational tool by:
  - Initiating the transition towards a fully mandatory register by 2015;
  - Improving the quality of the information contained in the register, including by executing regular spot checks of the information provided and by fully investigating and resolving external complaints of under-reporting;
- Promote greater lobbying transparency by committing to only meet with registered lobbyists.

- **Right to access to EU documents: to all EU institutions**

- Ensure that the existing regulation on access to EU documents (Regulation 1049/2001) is respected;
- Guarantee that citizens' fundamental right of access to EU documents is upheld by responding to requests in a timely and complete manner and by granting partial access if full disclosure is not possible;
- Denounce legislative proposals that would have the effect of restricting the right of access to EU documents during the ongoing negotiations between the European Commission, Parliament and Council over the reform of the EU access to documents Regulation 1049/2001.

- **Parliamentary ethics:**

### **To President Schulz**

- Initiate a review to assess potential conflicts of interest for MEPs who have outside financial interests;
- Extend the mandate of the advisory committee to a proactive monitoring and investigative role, so that it can undertake random checks of the declarations and investigate any potential conflict of interest.

### **To the working group on the implementing rules of the code of conduct**

- Introduce clarifications about what constitutes a conflict of interest by establishing a list of clear criteria. Activities that constitute a conflict of interest should include the following:
  - Any paid or unpaid activity of interest representation, as defined in the joint Transparency Register, for lobby consultancies or industry groups or any other lobby actor;
  - Any paid or unpaid position in the advisory or supervisory board of companies operating in fields that MEPs are likely to regulate or companies with an interest in influencing the European Parliament;
  - Any type of holding (including shares and stock options) or other financial interest in companies operating in fields that MEPs are likely to regulate or with an interest in influencing the European Parliament.

The complete results of the survey, presented by country and in total, can be downloaded here:

<http://www.eu-citizens.org/noticia10.php>