

Ending corporate privileges and secrecy around lobbying in the European Union

The undersigned organisations are deeply concerned about the growing influence of corporate lobby groups on European Union decision-making. Over 15,000 professional lobbyists now operate in Brussels, a large majority representing business interests. Yet, ethics and transparency rules around lobbying are virtually non-existent. Beyond the problem of business spending ever-increasing amounts to influence the political process, the European Commission has developed a tradition of awarding privileged access to corporate interests. The enormous influence of corporate lobbyists undermines democracy and all too frequently results in postponing, weakening or blocking urgently needed progress in EU social, environmental and consumer protections. As the first steps in addressing these problems, the Commission should take determined action to improve transparency around lobbying and ensure that no business groups are given privileged access and influence on EU policy-making.

We welcome the 'European Transparency Initiative' (ETI), launched in March 2005 by European Commissioner Siim Kallas, in particular, the objective to address the current lack of mandatory regulation and reporting of lobbying activities. A mandatory system for lobbying disclosure is urgently needed and must be shaped in a way that optimally enables democratic scrutiny of inputs into EU policymaking.

The undersigned organisations demand the following:

1. EU lobbying disclosure legislation which must include:
 - A mandatory system of electronic registration and reporting for all lobbyists with a significant annual lobbying budget. The reports must be made available in a fully searchable, sortable and downloadable online database.
 - Enforceable ethics rules for lobbyists (for instance prohibiting employment of officials or their relatives for lobbying purposes).
2. An improved Code of conduct for European Commission officials, including:
 - Recording of formal and informal meetings between Commission officials and lobbyists and logging of correspondence (to be made available in a fully searchable online database).
 - An extended 'cooling off' period before Commissioners and senior officials can start working for lobby groups or lobbying advisory firms.

The European Commission should encourage the other EU institutions, particularly the European Parliament and the European Council, to develop similar rules.

3. The Commission must terminate cases of privileged access and undue influence granted to corporate lobbyists, for instance:
 - joint taskforces in which corporate interests are represented while public interest NGOs are not (such as "Cars 21" which consists of Commission officials, CEOs and lobbyists from the automobile industry, but no environmental NGOs).
 - the privileged status accorded to business lobby groups like the European Services Forum and the Trans-Atlantic Business Dialogue.

These are minimum requirements if the 'European Transparency Initiative' is to achieve meaningful democratic progress. Vested interests are defending secrecy and privileged access by advocating "self-regulation", voluntary codes of conduct and other pseudo-solutions that do nothing to increase democratic scrutiny of the role of lobbyists in EU policy-making. If the EU institutions would endorse

such proposals instead of introducing mandatory disclosure and ethics rules, it would fundamentally undermine the 'European Transparency Initiative'. We have formed the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) to prevent the failure of this important initiative.

Signatories (over 100 civil society groups - as of 2 June 2005):

- A SEED Europe
- ATTAC Austria
- ATTAC Denmark
- ATTAC France
- ATTAC Hungary
- Both Ends, The Netherlands
- Breastfeeding Promotion and Protection Association of Latvia
- BUDS (Foundation for Human and Nature Protection), Hungary
- BUKO PharmaKampagne, Germany
- Campagna per la riforma della Banca mondiale (CRBM), Italy
- Campagne tegen Wapenhandel, The Netherlands
- CEE Bankwatch Network [with member organisations from ten countries in Central and Eastern Europe]
- Center for Encounter and active Non-Violence, Austria
- Clean Air Action Group, Hungary
- Coalition against BAYER-dangers, Germany
- The Corner House, United Kingdom
- Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO)
- Corporate Watch
- Dubnica Environmental Group
- Ecologistas en Acción, Spain
- European Federation of Public Services Unions (EPSU)
- European Network on Debt and Development [Eurodad]
- FERN - the EU forest campaign
- Forum Voor Vredesactie, Belgium
- Freedom of Information Project, Privacy International
- Friends of the Earth Europe (more than 30 national organisations with thousands of local groups)
- Greenpeace (European Unit)
- Health Action International Europe
- Hungarian Young Greens
- IBFAN Europe
- IBFAN Italia, Italy
- ID's - Information Diffusion Europe Associations
- IGLA (Informationsgruppe Lateinamerika), Austria
- Initiativ Liewensufank asbl, Luxemburg
- ISDE Austria (ÄrztInnen für eine gesunde Umwelt)
- Kairos Europa
- KEPKA - Consumers Protection Centre, Greece
- La revue Prescrire, France
- LobbyControl, Germany
- Mani Tese, Italy
- National Platform EU Research and Information Centre, Ireland

- Nonviolent Peaceforce
- Observatorio de la Deuda en la Globalización (ODG), Spain
- Österreichische Bergbauern und Bergbäuerinnen Vereinigung / CPE Austria
- Pesticide Action Network, Germany
- Plataforma por la Defensa de los Servicios Públicos -Madrid, Spain
- Platform, United Kingdom
- Platform for Consumers interests (BeVaCo), The Netherlands
- Public Services International (PSI)
- Quaker Council for European Affairs
- Quercus - Associação Nacional de Conservação da Natureza, Portugal
- ROBA dell Altro Mondo, Italy
- Servas Belgium
- Servas International
- Sisyfos, Sweden
- Social Audit Ltd, United Kingdom
- SOMO, The Netherlands
- SOSNA civic association, Slovakia
- SpinWatch
- Transnational Information Exchange, The Netherlands
- Transnational Institute (TNI)
- Voor Moeder Aarde – Friends of the Earth Flanders
- Vrede vzw, Belgium
- War on Want, United Kingdom
- WEMOS, The Netherlands
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Sweden
- Women in Development Europe (WIDE)
- Women's Global Network for Reproductive Rights
- World Development Movement, United Kingdom
- World Economy, Ecology & Development (WEED), Germany
- Young Researchers of Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina
- ZA MATKU ZEM (For Mother Earth), Slovakia

Signatories from outside of Europe:

- ARTICLE 19 (Global Campaign for Free Expression)
- Center for Media and Democracy, United States
- Consumer Action, United States
- Edmonds Institute, United States
- Friends of the Earth US
- Humanitarian Group For Social Development (HGSD), Lebanon
- Information for Action, Australia
- Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, United States
- Public Citizen, United States