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Ombudsman calls on Member States to back EU Transparency Register

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The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in a Member State, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman offers a fast, flexible and free means of solving problems with the EU administration.

For more information:
www.ombudsman.europa.eu

Twitter:
[@EUombudsman](https://twitter.com/EUombudsman)

Contact:
Gundi Gadesmann,
Deputy Head of the
Communication Unit

T. +32 2 284 26 09

gundi.gadesmann@ombudsman.europa.eu

The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has called on the Council of the European Union to participate in the Transparency Register of EU interest representatives. She also encouraged the European Commission to follow the European Parliament's (EP) example of introducing much stronger incentives for lobbyists to register. This follows yesterday's vote on a revised Transparency Register in the EP.

Emily O'Reilly commented: "Lobbying plays an important role in functioning democracies.

However, ordinary citizens who take an interest in these matters will continue to be baffled as to why the EU does not support, more directly, their right to know which interests are lobbying the EU institutions and for which purposes. As the current voluntary register does not fulfil this role sufficiently, it should be given teeth. For example, the Commission could instruct its officials not to discuss policy with unregistered lobbyists. Furthermore, to be effective, the Council should participate in the register as it is one of the key decision-making institutions in the EU. These steps could be taken now, without waiting for the register to become mandatory."

Much stronger incentives needed for lobbyists to register

The Transparency Register is jointly run by the EP and the Commission. It contains around 6,500 organisations. However, many lobbyists do not find it worth their while to register.

In its report, the EP calls for incentive measures to encourage lobbyists to sign the register, including, for example, restricting access to EP premises for non-registered organisations. Parliament also asks the Commission to adopt similar measures.

The Ombudsman regularly deals with complaints about the Transparency Register, e.g. about allegedly inaccurate information given on the register. In that context, she called on the Commission to improve the monitoring and comparability of data in the register. She also recommended that the Commission systematically inform lobbyists and other interest representatives it meets about its intention to release their names, should requests for public access be made about their lobbying activities.