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Ombudsman commends Commission for progress on transparency in TTIP negotiations

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The European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly, has welcomed the latest steps taken by the European Commission to increase the transparency of the on-going Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) negotiations.

In response to her own-initiative inquiry, the Commission is building on its more pro-active approach to publishing TTIP documents. It stated that its soon-to-be-published list of TTIP documents will be comprehensive, and signalled that it continues to seek to persuade the United States of the need for greater transparency in these trade talks.

Emily O'Reilly commented: "The Commission has engaged positively with the Ombudsman to increase the transparency of the TTIP negotiations. While more can be done in the coming months to increase public awareness of the content and implications of TTIP – and particularly when consolidated texts of EU and US positions come close to being finalised - I am pleased with the way in which the Commission has further moved to build on the transparency measures already put in place.

I commend the European Parliament and civil society groups who have also pushed for more transparency. The democratic responsibility now lies with the elected representatives to scrutinise the negotiations on behalf of their constituents, engage with European citizens and decide the future of TTIP."

More can still be done about lobbying transparency

The Ombudsman opened her TTIP investigation in July 2014 and also conducted a public consultation. In January 2015, she submitted a list

of recommendations to the Commission, including a call for increased transparency around meetings that Commission officials hold on TTIP with business organisations, lobby groups or NGOs. In its reply, the Commission states that, for reasons of 'proportionality', it does not currently intend to publish agendas or minutes of such meetings or to extend the transparency obligations to levels of Director, Head of Unit and negotiator. It also argues that data protection reasons stand in the way of it publishing the names of meeting participants without their consent.

In the Ombudsman's view, data protection should not be used as an automatic obstacle to public scrutiny of lobbying activities in the context of TTIP. It is possible to deal with data protection concerns by informing participants when they are invited to meetings of the intention to disclose their names. This should be done in the public interest.

She plans to publish her analysis of the Commission's reply in the coming weeks.

The Ombudsman's recommendations for greater TTIP transparency are available here:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release.faces/en/58669/html.bookmark>

The Commission's reply to her recommendations is available here:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/correspondence.faces/en/59343/html.bookmark>