

Fighting for more transparency in EU policy-making

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

On behalf of the Society of European Affairs Professionals (SEAP), we would like to ask you to join SEAP's Transparency Pledge, our commitment to open, tolerant and informed political debate and engagement.

About Transparency

SEAP has long advocated for increased transparency, participating in the public consultations leading to the approval of the European Transparency Initiative. Likewise, SEAP has been a vocal proponent of the introduction of a mandatory transparency register for interest representatives that encompasses the three main EU institutions. This is something we believe would not only improve the confidence of EU citizens in the institutions, but also the professionalisation of the industry which needs to pay increased attention to ethical standards and disclosure obligations. SEAP is addressing this letter to MEP's to reiterate its commitment and availability to work towards the improvement of lobbying transparency.

To that end, SEAP is campaigning with the recently launched **Transparency Pledge**, raising awareness for the fact that all EU professionals that respect the EU Transparency Framework should be allowed to take part in policy debates. It is SEAP's conviction that democracy is best served by ensuring accessibility, openness, transparency and fairness as part of the policy process. We sincerely hope it can aid in highlighting the importance of this subject for the broad community of EU stakeholders and civil society. You can read more about our pledge in our **policy brief** on the subject (attached in this letter).

Earlier this year, the European Parliament's Conference of Presidents has decided to move forward with negotiations on establishing a mandatory transparency register, and with the first formal trilogue meeting on the subject scheduled to take place next Monday, it is now an important moment for all EU stakeholders to be aware of the benefits of improving the EU transparency framework. We hope to count with your support in working together to improve the current system. Act today by signing our Pledge and join SEAP in our fight for more accountability, fairness, openness and transparency in the EU.

About SEAP

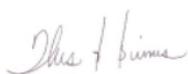
SEAP is the Society of European Affairs Professionals, the recognised organisation of all EU public affairs professionals including those operating in trade associations, corporations, consultancies, not for profits and other representative bodies. Created in 1997, SEAP has been working actively to promote the advancement of the EU affairs profession and its professionalisation, advocating for values of integrity and transparency. It is our belief that EU affairs professionals play a key role in the improvement of policy outcomes for all the EU citizens, and that the policy-making process should be as inclusive, accessible, open and transparent as possible. Most recently in 2019, SEAP promoted the creation of platform named LobbyEurope, to educate the broader public about the important role European affairs professionals play in policy-making.

Since its inception, SEAP has championed transparency by approving the first-ever Code of Conduct for EU affairs professionals, which is regularly updated in order to reflect advancements in policy topics and regulatory changes. Furthermore, SEAP has worked to ensure that all the 300+ individual members of our association are trained on our Code of Conduct and on transparency matters, making sure all are committed to acting in a professional, truthful, responsible and ethical manner when conducting their professional activities. Compliance with our Code of Conduct is enforced via an independent complaints' mechanism.

We remain at your entire disposal to discuss these subjects with you in person at your best convenience,

With best regards,

On behalf of the SEAP Board,



Wes Himes

President

The Transparency Pledge

Policy Brief



The Transparency Pledge is raising awareness to the fact that **all industries and companies should be allowed to take part in the public policy process** as long as they abide by the EU Transparency Framework. Furthermore, it stresses the **need for the development of an improved transparency regulation in the EU**. SEAP and LobbyEurope firmly believe that better regulation around lobbying can increase the confidence of the public in the democratic process and overall improve the quality of decisions by assuring ever better policy outcomes. At the same time, certain organised interest groups have been promoting the idea of silencing others, an idea which we must challenge.

Why improving the EU transparency framework is important?

Since its creation, SEAP has championed transparency and ethics, advocating for a stronger framework regarding these subject, approving in 1997 the first ever Code of Conduct for European Affairs Professionals. Mostly recently, SEAP advocated for the expansion of the EU Transparency Register to encompass all three institutions, and to make it mandatory. Why is this important?

- It incentivises interest representatives to sign up to the register and to adhere to its Code of Conduct, fostering a culture of compliance;
- Tackles undue influence by unregistered lobbyists by ensuring a more transparent framework of operation for interest representatives;
- It allows all involved stakeholders to build trust in the European Union system by improving access to information;
- It mitigates and fights the occurrence of scandals of corruption and undue influence that have degraded the trust of citizens in their politicians, their political institutions and the EU itself.



By ensuring rules for public affairs professionals it sets the standards for informed and open debate.

Why are participatory rights important?

Organised interest groups have an important role to play in policy making, by bringing to light information and expertise that the officials need to inform their decisions. Why is this important?

It **provides policy makers with information** whose analysis is necessary to achieve the best possible policy outcomes by allowing them to:

- Balance different and opposing interests when formulating policy solutions;
- Bridge the shortcomings resulting from understaffing, time shortages and knowledge deficits regarding the expertise, specialist and technical information required to make complex legislative decisions.



It aids policy makers to **evaluate the impact of their decisions** regarding:



- Business and industry interests;
- The interests of civil society;
- Interest of other organised groups.

Why silencing certain industry sectors is not the right solution?

Trying to silence or diminish the participatory rights of certain industry sectors or organisations is, in principle, a poor solution for the problems it tries to solve:

- It ignores much of the complexities of the issues simply seeking to throttle opposing opinion;
- It runs the risk of setting a precedent for extending the restrictions to other interest groups;
- It diminishes the flow of information from that sector to public officials, which are left with less diversified opinions on the issues at hand;
- It stifles open and democratic debate by silencing different opinions.

What standards can be improved?

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability of public officials by allowing them to justify their decisions in light of available relevant information, and of European affairs professionals by incentivising them to be registered and conscious of the implications of their activity.

TRANSPARENCY

Transparency of the decision-making process by allowing the public monitoring of meetings that take place, and by enhancing the freedom of individuals and groups to mobilise and defend their interests, whilst guaranteeing equal opportunities in the access to information.

FAIRNESS

Fairness of participatory rights, by making sure that all stakeholders can take part in the policy making process without unjustifiable privileges or distortions, whilst guaranteeing equal opportunities for voicing policy concerns.

OPENNESS

Openness to all stakeholders that may be involved in a decision, by allowing for channels of communications to be established, providing them with opportunities to contribute with expertise and information, regardless of how large or small they may be.

"I BELIEVE ALL INTEREST GROUPS, REGISTERED ON THE EU TRANSPARENCY REGISTER, SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO TAKE PART IN POLICY DEBATES AND DISCUSSIONS WITH EACH OF THE EU INSTITUTIONS, AND I SUPPORT CONTINUED TALKS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INTER-INSTITUTIONAL AGREEMENT ON A MANDATORY TRANSPARENCY REGISTER FOR LOBBYISTS."

This means:

- Open debates that deliver **good policies** that benefit all EU citizens;
- EU **institutions must remain OPEN** to all companies, associations and organisations on the EU Transparency Register;
- **No sector should be discriminated against**, everyone has the right to express their voice in European debate.

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