

European Federation of Journalists

**Submission to the Consultation on the
European Transparency Initiative
Green Paper**

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The European Federation of Journalists, the largest organisation of journalists across the European Union, representing unions and associations of journalists in all member countries, welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Green Paper on a European Transparency Initiative (ETI).

The EFJ is registered in CONECCS, the database of civil society organisations of the European Commission.

The EFJ is above all concerned with transparency regarding public access to information on European decision-making regarding the allocation of funds to private and public bodies as well as documents and information that provide the maximum amount of public scrutiny of all actions and activities of the European institutions. Regarding more information on financial matters we are in favour of full disclosure of financial benefits and other assistance that the European Union may provide to journalists and media bodies. In this regard we note that Brussels concentrates more journalists and lobbyists than any other city in the world, however transparency rules and disclosure of relations between corporate lobbies and EU civil servants or politicians are not sufficient in our view. That means also Members of the European Parliament should disclose their connections and financial interests. In general we believe more transparency is required on beneficiaries of EU funds.

Chapter III. Disclosure of beneficiaries of Community funds

Question:

Do you agree that it is desirable to introduce, at Community level, an obligation for Member States to make available information on beneficiaries of EU funds under shared management? If so, what information should be required at national level? What would be the best means to make this information available (degree of information required, period covered and preferred medium)?

The EFJ shares the concern of the Green Paper stating that “although modern mass communication tools open up unprecedented opportunities for public access to information, European citizens regrettably feel that they have relatively limited knowledge about the European Union”.

We believe that the EU fund beneficiaries should be disclosed as it is a matter of public scrutiny and access to information for journalists. Experience shows that a more open administration provides for more nuanced reporting. In the case of EU-reporting, repeated Eurobarometers show a lack of knowledge among the public about EU-spending, only 17 percent of the population knows that agriculture is the most important budget expenditure, whereas almost one third, 31 percent, believe that administration consumes the main part of the EU budget (according to Eurobarometer 64, p. 88). Better access to information about the spending of EU funds is crucial not least to increase public awareness of EU policies and thus facilitate a public debate as well as in-depth research about European policies.

This is particularly the case for major funds such as the common agricultural policy, the regional structural funds and the cohesion fund. Indeed, practices and level of disclosure

vary from state to state or even from region to region, which makes it difficult to carry-out proper investigative journalism on this issue. Some countries have put in place systems of disclosures showing that transparency is possible both from an administrative and from a financial point of view.

The EFJ suggests creating an EU-wide template for an information system providing data on EU funds recipients, which would be accessible to journalists as well as to citizens across the EU, in particular via an online database. This database should contain basic information such as the name and location of the beneficiaries, their legal form and the activities supported by the EU, the amount received as well as the relevant budget lines or regulations. It is crucial that the information is published in the same format for all member states and all types of payments, in order to safeguard the possibility for journalists to carry out European analysis of the information.