



Brussels, 28.07.2016
C(2016) 5020 final

Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Tweede Kamer for its reply to the public consultation on the Transparency Register. The Tweede Kamer's comments and suggestions are very timely.

The Commission welcomes the Tweede Kamer's support for our wider transparency agenda and particularly for the Transparency Register as one of its most important tools. Transparency lies at the heart of the 'Democratic Change' priority set out in the Political Guidelines of this Commission. The Commission is already very transparent but will continue to meet the ever higher expectations for openness and accountability. Therefore, the Commission has reviewed its tools and practices in order to adapt them and progress further where appropriate.

It is with this objective in mind that the Commission included in its Better Regulation package in May 2015 a series of new transparency features to better facilitate the participation of citizens and stakeholders in the policy-making processes. We have also taken decisions to improve transparency around trade negotiations and have tightened our internal rules on expert groups to introduce more openness and avoid conflicts of interest. Finally, the rule that Commissioners, their Cabinets and Directors General only meet with interest representative who are registered has led to a significant increase in the number of entries in the existing Transparency Register.

The forthcoming proposal for an Interinstitutional Agreement on a mandatory Transparency Register covering the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission is an important item in the Commission's Work Programme for 2016. It is the Commission's aim that the Council joins this future agreement as a fully-fledged partner, a view also expressed by the Tweede Kamer. The Commission welcomes in this light the commitment of the Dutch Government, including during the Dutch Presidency of the Council of the European Union, for greater and active transparency in the EU decision-making process.

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In preparing the proposal, the Commission will take due account of all the feedback received in reply to the public consultation which ended on 1 June. The Commission received a total of 1,758 contributions. This high volume of responses shows that the Commission's Transparency Initiative and the commitment to create a mandatory Transparency Register have helped increase the importance of the Register vis-à-vis the other EU institutions and stakeholders.

Given the important role of national Parliaments in the multi-layered system of European governance, when designing the proposal for a mandatory Transparency Register, the Commission will pay special attention to the views expressed by the Tweede Kamer and by other national Parliaments, including as regards the scope of the Register.

The Commission is pleased to note that the Tweede Kamer recognises the progress already achieved in terms of transparency and has provided input aimed at further improving the scheme.

The Tweede Kamer also stresses the contribution of ethical and transparent lobbying activities to policy-making and the importance of integrity and equality of access. These principles, which have already inspired the current Register, will also be essential in the design of the future mandatory system.

The Commission will look carefully at how further mechanisms making access to decision-makers conditional upon registration can be defined and implemented by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council in order to fully implement the 'mandatory' nature of the new regime.

This exercise also offers a fresh opportunity to look carefully into all the provisions contained within the current Interinstitutional Agreement and to improve it where necessary. Our aim is to balance effective disclosure rules without creating an excessive bureaucratic burden for interest representatives and the EU institutions. The Commission intends to present its proposal for a mandatory Transparency Register in the autumn.

The Commission hopes that these clarifications address the issues raised by the Tweede Kamer and looks forward to continuing our political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*