



**TRANSPARENCY
INTERNATIONAL**

the global coalition against corruption

OPEN DATA TO FIGHT CORRUPTION

CASE STUDY: THE EU AND LOBBYING

Transparency International is a global movement with one vision: a world in which government, business, civil society and the daily lives of people are free of corruption. Through more than 100 chapters worldwide and an international secretariat in Berlin, we are leading the fight against corruption to turn this vision into reality.

www.transparency.org

Authors: Daniel Freund and Yannik Bendel, Transparency International EU

Note: TI would like to thank Savita Bailur (London School of Economics), David McNair (ONE) and Stefaan Verhulst (GovLab) for reviewing the studies.

© Cover photo: iStockphoto.com/Eraxion

Every effort has been made to verify the accuracy of the information contained in this report. All information was believed to be correct as of 21 December 2015. Nevertheless, Transparency International cannot accept responsibility for the consequences of its use for other purposes or in other contexts.

ISBN: 978-3-943497-97-7

Printed on 100% recycled paper.

© 2016 Transparency International. All rights reserved.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....2

THE CONTEXT3

 CORRUPTION IN THE EU3

 OPEN DATA IN THE EU.....3

THE PROJECT.....4

 OVERVIEW.....4

 RESULTS8

 LESSONS LEARNED8

ANNEX.....10

 STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS.....10

 Project partners.....10

 Advocacy partners10

 Media partners10

INTRODUCTION

Open data is a key requirement for achieving progress in the fight against corruption. This is one of the reasons that the Group of 20 (G20) – which includes the most economically and politically powerful countries in the world – has opted to adopt open-data principles to help promote public integrity and reduce corruption.¹

This move reflects a growing trend toward the increased publication and availability of open data – data that is freely shareable, comparable, released and usable (both legally and technically).² The international Open Data Charter and specific national initiatives have attempted to create a common foundation to accelerate this process. Yet much important and useful government data remains locked up. According to the Worldwide Web Foundation, 90 per cent of the 86 countries surveyed provide scant information on data related to government budgets, public contracts and public services (such as health and education).³ This shows a continued trend, first found in a survey by the Open Knowledge Foundation in 2013.

The coming years will be critical to ensure policies and practices are in place to maximise the use of open data to fight corruption. For this to happen, data must be:

- accessible: it must be free to use and reuse, published in a timely manner and easily found
- accurate: it must be complete and reflective of reality
- intelligible: it must be structured in a way that can be analysed (e.g. clear and consistent columns, values and formats)
- meaningful: it must be useful for the user⁴

This case study – one of three produced – aims to provide guidance to policy-makers and activists in a diverse range of countries for how specific data sets can be used to prevent, detect and investigate corruption. All three case studies look at national or regional initiatives carried out by the Transparency International movement. These initiatives have been designed to leverage open data sets as part of addressing corruption. As such, the studies do not assess the broader landscape of open data or how it has been used in other areas to promote change.

The findings from all three case studies show that often many aspects of open data – that it is accessible, accurate, intelligible and meaningful – are not being met or are only partly fulfilled when it comes to data sets useful for reducing corruption.

Recognising and correcting these shortfalls is a critical step to ensuring that open data promotes positive changes for society and in people's lives. It is in this spirit that the case studies should be used.

¹ These principles were approved during the G20 meeting hosted by the Turkish government in November 2015.

² Open Knowledge Foundation, "Open Data Handbook", <http://opendatahandbook.org/glossary/en/terms/open-data> [accessed 27 January 2016].

³ See: World Wide Web Foundation, "Open Data Barometer", January 2015, <http://barometer.opendataresearch.org>.

⁴ Criteria developed by Transparency International UK.

THE CONTEXT

CORRUPTION IN THE EU

Sixty per cent or more of people surveyed in Belgium (70 per cent), Greece (83 per cent), Italy (70 per cent), Spain (66 per cent) and the United Kingdom (60 per cent) feel that their governments are run by a few big interests and that political parties are the most corrupt institutions in their respective countries.⁵ There is widespread mistrust across the European Union in the policy-making process.

A large part of the problem is tied to lobbying. In Brussels alone there are about 25,000 lobbyists working to influence EU legislation. Based on a recent assessment of lobbying policies and practices in 19 EU countries, Transparency International has found that the average score for the quality of existing lobbying legislation is 31 per cent across all the assessed countries and 36 per cent for the three EU institutions analysed (the European Commission [EC], the European Parliament [EP] and the Council of the European Union).⁶

Lobbying that is unchecked and not transparent can contribute to poor policy decisions and increase the risk of institutional capture by special interests. In 2011 a cash-for-amendments scandal hit the EP, in which four Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) accepted large payments from undercover journalists in exchange for introducing legislative amendments.⁷

OPEN DATA IN THE EU

In 2001 the institutions adopted a regime granting citizens the right to access EU documents. Over a decade later, in December 2012, the EU Commission launched the EU Open Data Portal. The site is to be the central hub for data held by the Commission as well as other EU institutions. Since then several thousand different data sets have been released and are available free of charge. Data sets range from geographical data to statistics on trade. Data on the transparency and integrity of EU institutions (such as from the Transparency Register) are also hosted on the EU Open Data Portal.

Yet progress on open data in the EU is mixed. In some cases information, such as parliamentarians' asset declarations, are in PDFs, making the data hard to extract. In other cases institutions are still not disclosing lobbying information. Even the EU Open Data Portal has its challenges. First, rather than the EU institutions opening their books, the EU Open Data Portal is generally a collection of existing public data sets. Moreover, major EU institutions such as the Council and Parliament are noticeably absent and have contributed little to nothing to the common project. Second, low user rates underline the fact that the usability of the portal needs to be improved.

⁵ Transparency International, *Global Corruption Report: Education* (Abingdon, UK: Routledge, 2013), www.transparency.org/gcb2013/report.

⁶ Countries were assessed along three metrics: transparency, integrity and equality of access. The study used 65 different indicators to measure and compare the performance of the 19 countries and the three main EU Institutions (Council, Commission and Parliament) against international best practices. See Transparency International, *Lobbying in Europe: Hidden Influence, Privileged Access* (Berlin: Transparency International, 2015), www.transparency.org/whatwedo/publication/lobbying_in_europe.

⁷ Tanja Milevska, "Ex-MEP to Serve Prison in 'Cash-for-Laws' Scandal", EurActiv.com, 3 February 2014, www.euractiv.com/future-eu/ex-mep-serve-prison-cash-laws-sc-news-533205.

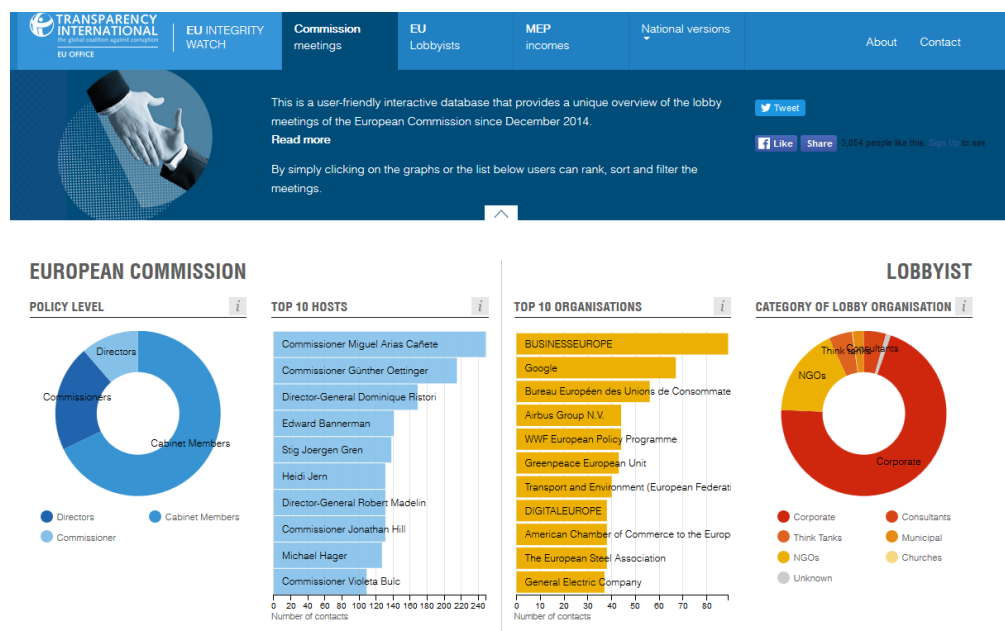
THE PROJECT

OVERVIEW

In October 2014 Transparency International EU launched EU Integrity Watch (www.integritywatch.eu), an online portal of different tools monitoring the integrity of EU institutions. This portal has only been made possible by using freely available data from the European Union, particularly lobby meeting data that the Commission started publishing in 2014. Two tools were launched at the end of June 2015, providing an overview of Brussels lobbying by combining information on over 7,000 meetings held by the EC's senior officials with lobbyists, with the information available on lobbying organisations active in Brussels, including their declared lobby expenditure, human resources and thematic areas of activity. There are now three key elements of data that the project focuses on.

- **Lobbyist meetings** Self-reported data by senior EC officials on their meetings with lobbyists have the potential to yield important insights into the nature and topics of lobbying activities.
- **Profiles of lobbyists** Data from the Transparency Register provide an indication of who those lobbyists are, how much they have spent on lobbying, how many people they have working for them and what files and topics they are active on.
- **Parliamentary disclosures** The financial declarations filed by MEPs can be useful for scrutinising their outside activities and incomes for potential areas of conflict.

Figure 1: Screenshot of www.integritywatch.edu



EU Integrity Watch takes this data to provide a unique overview of the activities of Members of the European Parliament to shed light on access to and potential influence over policy-makers. Drawing on these three sets of data, MEPs can be ranked and visual comparisons created. In the process, it can help to identify those MEPs with a high degree of external activity. The goal is to better monitor them for potential conflicts of interest between their legislative work in parliament and outside activities.

For this project to be successful, it has been set up as a collaborative effort involving different parties of the anti-corruption and open data community,⁸ including several partners (see the Annex). The platform ParlTrack is used for obtaining the data. It is pulled from the websites of the EC and the EP on a daily basis, and the raw data is stored in a database that is shared with a number of other civil society organisations (such as Corporate Europe Observatory, in its LobbyFacts.eu website) to divide the costs and reduce duplication of work. The data is standardised into a common and shared format and provided to all partner organisations in a single application programming interface (API). Tables 1 and 2 help to provide an overview of the quality and availability of the data sets being used.

Once the data is available on EU Integrity Watch, TI EU uses the information for its own research and follow-up work and makes the raw data available to data journalists, civil society organisations and interested citizens (see details and examples in the Annex).

The technology behind the platform ([D3.js](#)) was developed by *The New York Times* in order to make complex data sets accessible to a wider audience. As new data is made available, the website will come to include additional data sets.⁹

The initial development and design of EU Integrity Watch and the three tools it currently features cost about €20,000 (some US\$27,000) in IT development plus the work of a dedicated person within TI EU for about six months. As the technology is easily scalable and can be adapted to varying data sets or translated, it is now possible to create national versions for a much smaller budget. The ongoing development of Integrity Watch France, for example, is budgeted at €4,000 (just under US\$4,400 at the current exchange rate). The price of the national version depends mostly on the availability, quality and format of the data that is intended to be displayed. National versions will also be launched in the Netherlands and Italy in the coming months.

⁸ These include the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU), Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO), LobbyControl and SpinWatch.

⁹ The project is co-financed by the Open Society Institute for Europe (OSIFE) and the Belgian King Baudouin Foundation (KBF).

Table 1: Data Availability

Overview of Open Data Sets on Lobbying

DATA SET	INFORMATION	DETAILS
Declaration of MEPs' financial interests¹⁰	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Occupation or membership • Other mandates • Membership or activity • Occasional activity if total remuneration exceeds €5,000 in a calendar year • Holding or partnership with potential public policy implications • Other financial interests 	The members' administration unit in the EP is responsible for collecting the declarations; supervision is done by the Advisory Committee on the Code of Conduct under order of the EP president
Transparency Register¹¹	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registrants' key characteristics (e.g. address of headquarter and Brussels office, names of people with legal responsibility, name of person in charge for EU affairs) • Goals/remit of lobbying activities • Specific activities and EU initiatives covered by the register • Number of persons and full-time equivalents involved in the activities • Name of persons accredited for access to EP premises • Membership and affiliation • Estimated lobby expenses • Grants received from EU institutions • Financial data 	The Joint Transparency Register Secretariat is tasked to monitor the completeness, timeliness and accuracy of the declarations
Lobby meetings¹²	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date • Location • Entity/ies met • Subject(s) of the meeting 	Each European commissioner, their Cabinets and each director-general is responsible for their own declarations ¹³

¹⁰ Each of the 751 MEPs has his or her own declaration: www.europarl.europa.eu/mepdif/4555_DFI_rev0_EN.pdf.

¹¹ There are currently 8,821 organisations registered; each organisation has its own declaration: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/displaylobbyist.do?id=501222919-71>.

¹² As of 1 December 2015 there had been 7,084 meetings declared on 98 different web sites: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyinitiative/meetings/meeting.do?host=829436d0-1850-424f-aebe-6dd76c793be2>.

¹³ Each has a dedicated website to register their meetings with lobbyists; there are a total of 98 dedicated websites.

Table 2: Data Quality¹⁴

Overview of Open Data Sets on Lobbying

DATA SET	LEVEL OF OPENNESS	DATA QUALITY	AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
Declaration of MEPs' financial interests¹⁵	Poor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scattered over 751 different PDFs on MEPs' web pages PDF format (but at least no longer as scanned documents) Not downloadable in a central, open, machine-readable format 	Average <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good scope Not always up-to-date information Lack of standardisation of entries (i.e. languages) and format Unreliable quality of entries (lack of completeness, accuracy) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase data quality and degree of detail Publish information in open-data format Publish data on a centralised data hub Make information searchable and rankable
Transparency Register¹⁶	Good <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One central hub Linked to the EU data portal Can be downloaded in XLS / HTML format Up-to-date data version can be retrieved 	Average <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Good scope (wide range of indicators) Mediocre standardisation (i.e. languages, free text categories) Poor quality of entries (incomplete, inaccurate, misleading and incorrect entries) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase data quality by including systematic checks of entries Improve the functionality of the registration form to include basic plausibility checks of entries Allow for rankings and better data visualisation Better integrate other databases, such as lobby meetings and the expert group register
Lobby meetings¹⁷	Poor <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Scattered over 98 different web sites Not downloadable in an open, machine-readable format 	Average <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited scope Mostly timely publication Lack of standardisation (i.e. languages, detail of entries) Poor quality of entries at times 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Broaden scope: cover all relevant actors Increase data quality Publish data on a centralised data hub Provide a smart search function Link data to the Transparency Register

¹⁴ The assessment of data quality (good, average, poor) is based on individual chapters' determinations.

¹⁵ Example: www.europarl.europa.eu/mepdif/4555_DFI_rev0_EN.pdf.

¹⁶ Example: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/consultation/displaylobbyist.do?id=501222919-71>.

¹⁷ Example: <http://ec.europa.eu/transparencyinitiative/meetings/meeting.do?host=829436d0-1850-424f-aebe-6dd76c793be2>.

RESULTS

These open data sets are the basis for the public to monitor their MEPs and the EC for potential conflicts of interest and undue influence by lobbyists. As outlined above, the limited accessibility, intelligibility and accuracy of EU government and lobby data still stands in the way of effective monitoring. As long as this data is not fully open and proactively published, online tools such as Integrity Watch fill this gap and meet public demand. In 2015 EU Integrity Watch had more than 22,400 unique visitors, and it can be expected that this number will increase when additional national versions are created.¹⁸

The mere existence of the lobbyist meeting register and the Integrity Watch platform has started to lead to a change in culture, in which lobbyists start taking the voluntary register more seriously and file more meaningful declarations. Members of the European Parliament pre-emptively leave their jobs before being elected, as they know they will have to declare their incomes and activities as soon as they take up office. Since the launch of the Integrity Watch tool the total outside revenues of MEPs have decreased by over €1.5 million (around US\$1.7 million) annually and almost 100 activities have been abandoned.

There have been concrete and tangible impacts from the project and the over 4,250 complaints submitted to the Joint Transparency Register Secretariat on the basis of the findings from Integrity Watch:¹⁹

- stronger monitoring and scrutiny of MEPs and potential conflicts of interest
- more than 100 declarations by MEPs updated to rectify or clarify the information
- hundreds of lobbyists updating their declarations on the EU Transparency Register²⁰
- an increased number of organisations signing up to the voluntary lobby register
- over 500 organisations suspended/deleted from the register for failing to comply²¹

EU Integrity Watch has received an extraordinary degree of press and social media attention: more than 500 articles have presented our findings, including stories in *The Wall Street Journal*, the *Financial Times*, *Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, Euronews and leading national and international media outlets from almost every EU member state.²² There have been numerous radio interviews and television appearances on the BBC and the German television channel ARD, as well as thousands of shares and likes on Facebook and over 150,000 impressions on Twitter.

LESSONS LEARNED

For data to be useful and usable, it must meet open-data criteria. All three data sets used for this project had to be pulled from different sources and cleaned, since they were not provided in a

¹⁸ Since the launch of the French version in December 2015, already more than 10,000 visitors have used the site.

¹⁹ See: <http://www.transparencyinternational.eu/2015/09/press-release-more-than-half-the-entries-on-the-brussels-lobby-register-are-inaccurate-incomplete-or-meaningless-2/>

²⁰ See: <http://www.transparencyinternational.eu/2015/10/4253-complaints-against-lobbyists-has-it-been-a-wake-up-call/>

²¹ See: <http://www.transparencyinternational.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/195-suspended-org.xlsx>

²² See: <http://blogs.wsj.com/brussels/2014/10/13/eu-lawmakers-fresh-from-grilling-others-feel-heat-on-side-jobs/>; <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/ea71f74a-19b1-11e5-8201-cbdb03d71480.html#axzz3tr2dbZNK>; <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/ausland/nebeneinkuenfte-der-eu-abgeordneten-das-daten-dilemma-a-996199.html>; http://www.lemonde.fr/europe/article/2014/10/14/les-petits-a-cotes-des-eurodeputes-francais_4506093_3214.html and <http://www.euronews.com/2014/10/13/ngo-says-meps-boosting-earnings-with-second-jobs/>.

machine-readable format. Tools such as EU Integrity Watch are built only when time and resources permit the manual editing and cleaning of data so as to convert it into an open-data format.

TI EU has repeatedly worked together with both the EC and the EP to broaden the availability and quality of data. As outlined in Table 2, it is important to improve data on lobbyist meetings, registry entries and financial declarations in order to reduce the risks of political corruption and to allow the public to monitor for potential undue influence.

In terms of the next steps, it is critical for the European Union to undertake the following steps.

- Publish more detailed and standardised information on MEP declarations in machine-readable formats and through a centralised, searchable site.
- Eliminate restrictions on the use and reuse of data.
- Revise the financial thresholds in the declarations to allow for more accurate reporting.
- Translate all declarations into all official EU languages.
- Cross-check and validate declarations to make sure that they are plausible and accurate.
- Move toward the “live exporting” and real-time, automated updating of information from the Transparency Register, including the use of an API.

The EC has indicated its openness to and interest in acting upon these important recommendations for improving the functionality of the Transparency Register in the near future. TI EU is also in close contact with the EP in order to feed in technical knowledge on how to enhance MEPs’ declarations of interests.

ANNEX

STAKEHOLDERS AND PARTNERS

Project partners

The project has been possible only as a collaborative effort involving different elements of the anti-corruption and open-data community, including:

- Latte Creative, for the design of the web page
- Tech to the People, for the programming on the back-end work on the web page
- ParlTrack, for the data scraping and management
- Transparency International's national chapters in the European Union, for the dissemination of the tool and local policy expertise

Advocacy partners

As well as the direct project partners there are a number of advocacy partners, who are important in terms of providing feedback, sharing expertise and coming out with a strong, united voice on key issues around EU integrity, open data and open government questions. These include:

- Access Info Europe
- Corporate Europe Observatory and its website, LobbyFacts.eu, which shares the back-end database
- Friends of the Earth Europe (FOEE)
- Whoslobbying.com (United Kingdom)
- Open Interests
- Regards Citoyens (France)
- Sunlight Foundation
- Center for Responsive Politics (OpenSecrets.org)
- Public Citizen
- Votewatch
- Lobbycontrol (Germany)
- Open Data City (Lobby Cloud, LobbyPlag)
- Abgeordnetenwatch (Germany)

Media partners

- International Consortium of Investigative Journalists
- Bureau of Investigative Journalism
- Association of Investigative Journalists
- Data journalists from leading newspapers/websites such as *The New York Times*, *The Economist*, the BBC, *The Guardian*, *Der Spiegel*, *Le Monde*, Politico and others.²³

²³ Raw data is made available to a number of data journalists from leading media who have conducted their own analysis and visualisations with the data provided.

Transparency International
International Secretariat
Alt-Moabit 96, 10559 Berlin, Germany

Phone: +49 30 34 38 200
Fax: +49 30 34 70 39 12

ti@transparency.org
www.transparency.org

blog.transparency.org
facebook.com/transparencyinternational
twitter.com/anticorruption