



DiEM25 Transparency

Questionnaire for DiEM25 Members

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Why do we want transparency?

Most people would agree that more transparency in politics is generally a good idea. We should remember that transparency in itself is an instrument and not an end. So, before dipping deep into the details, we should ask ourselves:

- What political goals do we want to achieve with greater transparency?
- What is the connection between democracy and transparency?
- How can transparency bring us closer to our ideal of a just society with equal chances for political and economic participation for all?

Making EU institutions accountable

One of the basic principles of democratic control is that people have the right to know how and why their elected representatives and public officials take decisions, particularly on issues that affect them. Access to information on the work and the decision making processes of public bodies is at the heart of accountable governance. The most commonly used arguments against additional transparency revolve around the need for a “space to think” or to negotiate freely, potential threats to national security, additional administrative burdens and increasingly, business secrets. To a certain extent these concerns can be valid, in other cases they are meant to make decision makers’ lives easier to the detriment of their democratic control. The main question is therefore:

- What kind of information should the EU’s decision making bodies release about their proceedings and decisions, how fast and in what form?

Other questions that arise in this context:

- What kinds of documents should be published automatically and in which timeframe?
- Who has the right to request access to documents that are not published automatically, how fast should administrations react to such requests?
- How precisely should citizens have to define the scope of documents they want to access, given that they are not likely to be aware of the existence of all individual documents relevant to the subject matter they are interested in?
- How to draw the line between legitimate exceptions to transparency and attempts to conceal information?
- Court procedures are often too slow to guarantee timely access to information: How

to deal with the reluctance of public administrations to reveal requested documents?

- Should public officials be made personally responsible for not granting access to documents as required by law?
- Should private companies be covered by specific transparency obligations?

Institutions and decision making bodies we want to look at in the chapter are the EU Council, the Eurogroup, the European Commission, the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), the European Central Bank, the Troika, as well as Member States administrations as far as they are directly involved in EU decision making processes.

Lobbying unmasked

Democracy is the art of finding good compromises between conflicting interests. Articulating one's interest and trying to influence decision making in one's own favour - whether in an individual or collective capacity - is therefore an integral part of the political process, so nothing "evil" per se. However, the problem arises if some interest groups get privileged access to decision makers and decision making processes - be it through the resources they can mobilise, through personal contacts or because they are in the position to offer personal and/or political favours - that is denied from others. Furthermore, while much political lobbying and campaigning is done in the public sphere, substantial parts of it remain hidden, so citizens often cannot even know how and why various interest groups might have influenced certain laws or administrative decisions.

- What kind of activities and actors should a definition of "lobbying" cover on EU level?
- What kind of incentives and sanctions would a mandatory lobby register for all EU institutions need to have in order to be effective and meaningful?
- How could a European lobby register also cover lobbying activities targeting member state government officials?
- What kind of organisations and individuals should be obliged to enroll in the lobby register?
- What kind of information should be provided in the lobby register and how can data accuracy be checked and enforced?
- How should EU officials and MEPs (and their staff) report about meetings with representatives of interest groups?
- How should members for the expert groups that support the legislative work of the European Commission be selected and what kind of information should be published

about them?

- What kind of “cooling off periods” do we need for different kinds of EU officials to contain the “revolving door” effect that creates strong personal links between interest groups and legislators? How can we discourage and sanction former EU officials using their personal links within the institutions for lobbying advantage (with Barroso and Goldman Sachs just being the tip of the iceberg)?
- How can we regulate effectively conflict of interest situations of decision makers - especially elected office holders - in the EU institutions? What kind of side activities should be reported on and in which detail, what activities should be forbidden?
- What kind of reporting requirements and possible sanctions do we need in order to tame harmful global lobbying activities by EU businesses especially in developing countries?

Secret trade agreements

In the past years, the “next generation” trade agreements TTIP, CETA and TiSA have generated lots of resistance across Europe. Beyond the content of these deals that privileges large multinational corporations over citizens, consumers and smaller local businesses, the negotiation process accounted for much of the criticism. Due to maximum secrecy, the general public is not able to discuss these deals and members of parliaments are not able to exercise their democratic control rights, whereas lobbyists are invited generously to have their say. When the negotiations end, governments and parliaments are presented with the simple choice of “take it or leave it” - an open, democratic deliberation about the content is not desired. No wonder that calls to drop these agreements also include the demand to entirely rethink the way we conclude international trade agreements. This includes not just those that clearly affect European citizens negatively, but also those that the EU concludes – also without public notice – on unequal footing with developing countries (BITs, FTAs, association agreements).

- How should the mandate of such far-reaching trade deals be decided in future? Should it be made public in parts or entirely - and at what point?
- What kind of access should members of national and regional parliaments and governments and Members of the European Parliament have to documents of such trade deal negotiations?
- What documents should be made accessible to the public and at what point?
- How should the democratic debate preceding the adoption of such agreements look like?

Follow the money

It is not just decisions on behalf of the public and the road to them that is being kept hidden from the public's eyes. Public money - or money that belongs in part to the public through taxation - is also frequently hidden, usually through various offshore channels. Often enough, such money comes itself as reward for corrupt behaviour. Therefore when speaking about transparency in the interest of common good, we also have to address tax evasion, money laundering and other forms of cheating the public interest.

- 🔗 What measures should the EU apply to ensure that all wealth and income is taxed in the place where it is being created?
- 🔗 How can we stop EU member states from syphoning away other EU member states' incomes?
- 🔗 What can the EU do on a global level to eliminate offshore tax havens?
- 🔗 What sanctions could be effective to discourage tax evasion?
- 🔗 How can we exclude companies with opaque ownership structures from participating in public procurement and benefiting from EU funds?
- 🔗 What anti corruption prevention mechanisms need to be put in place, and how?

Public money

Besides the income side of public budgets, there is also a big need for more transparency on the expenses side, to enable us to see clearly who the benefactors of public money actually are. This will then also enhance our ability to hold those who decide about public budgets accountable and to participate in decision making about spending public money in a well-informed way.

- 🔗 What rules do we need to make spending of EU money - especially the part which is distributed by national governments and their agencies - more transparent?
- 🔗 What should be the basic principles for spending EU money in member states, considering especially public procurement procedures?
- 🔗 How could we monitor more efficiently how EU money is spent in member states?

- 🔗 Do we need more efficient sanctions against corruption in EU member states?
- 🔗 How can we make budgets - including on local and regional level - more transparent and enhance citizen participation in budget decisions?
- 🔗 In what format should data about public spending be made available, what information should it contain about beneficiaries of public money?

Transparency put into practice

Last but not least, we should not just talk about the rules of achieving more transparency, but also how to make it work in practice. That includes developing tools, ideas and proposals to make information on public decision making and budgets easier to access, process and analyse, to harness people with the knowledge to understand such information, to support the work of journalists and researchers who dig up the information on corruption and abuse of power, and to protect those who alert the public about corrupt practices.

- 🔗 How can we improve our educational systems to increase media literacy, data analysis skills and democratic awareness?
- 🔗 What educational means could we use to increase general awareness about the need for better transparency?
- 🔗 What technologies could help us to give researchers and citizens better access to information about public decision making processes, about those involved in these processes, and about the handling of public money?
- 🔗 How can we support the work of investigative journalists?
- 🔗 What rules and practices do we need to encourage whistleblowing and strengthen the protection of whistleblowers?