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NGO Accountability Alternative Regulation Ethical Best Practice EU & US lobbying

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Kallas pushes for more transparency and ethics in EU policy-making

In Short:

All the EU institutions as well as lobbyists will be under pressure to become more open and respect high ethical standards when Commissioner Kallas moves ahead with transparency plans in October.

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Background:

In a speech on 3 March 2005, Commissioner Siim Kallas announced plans to strengthen transparency rules for EU policy-makers and the thousands of lobbyists seeking to influence them in Brussels (EurActiv, 7 March 2005).

Issues:

A Commission advisory group has been set up to flesh out proposals to prop up transparency and accountability of EU decision-makers and lobbyists in Brussels. The creation of the group was agreed on 18 May by the 25-strong College of Commissioners.

The group, which draws together officials from all Commission departments, has been asked to examine the feasibility and practical implications of an upcoming transparency initiative outlined by Commissioner Kallas on 3 March (EurActiv, 7 March 2005). The feasibility aspects to be examined will include an assessment of how much more bureaucracy the rules could imply - with the underlying aim of keeping red tape down to a minimum.

The plan outlined by Kallas includes proposals to force the thousands of NGOs, lawyers and professional lobbyists in Brussels to report on the specific interest they represent and how they are financed. It also proposes giving detailed accounts of how EU money is being spent, in particular that granted to NGOs.

But the media spotlight has recently turned on the Commission's own reporting standards after it emerged in April that President Jose Manuel Barroso had spent the summer holiday on a luxury yacht owned by Spiros Latsis, a friend and billionaire, before he took office.

Things got further complicated for Barroso after Belgian daily *La Libre Belgique* revealed on 18 May that the President's five bodyguards are on a Portuguese and Commission pay-roll at the same time.

Positions:

Seventy six eurosceptic MEPs led by UK Independence Party leader Nigel Farage succeeded in pushing Barroso to defend himself against a censure motion at the Parliament's next plenary sitting on 25 May. The move

was condemned as "unjustified and disproportionate" by **political leaders of the centre-right, socialists, liberals and green groups in Parliament**.

On 18 May, a coalition of 80 civil society groups led by campaign group Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) launched ALTER- EU (**Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation**) in support of Commissioner Kallas's transparency initiative. The coalition is pushing for the introduction of mandatory disclosure rules to allow for "effective democratic scrutiny of the role of lobbyists in EU policy-making" and to "end corporate privileges and secrecy around lobbying in the European Union".

The coalition calls for enforceable ethics rules on lobbyists and for a fully searchable electronic public register detailing all lobbyists with a significant annual budget. It also calls for an improved code of conduct for EU commissioners that would include "an extended 'cooling off' period before commissioners and senior officials can start working for lobby groups or lobbying advisory firms".

At the time Commissioner Kallas outlined his plans, the **Society of European Affairs Practitioners (SEAP)** - which represents professional lobbyists in Brussels - said a detailed public register of lobbyist's clients and sources of income would not be acceptable at that stage. It pointed to its recently revamped self-regulatory ethics code as being sufficient to ensure satisfactory ethical standards (EurActiv, 18 Feb. 2005).

Latest & next steps:

- October 2005: Advisory group to present a report to the College of Commissioners
- A formal consultation with civil society (green paper) containing more detailed proposals and policy options is expected to follow

Links

Official Documents

- Commission: Speech - Siim Kallas: The need for a European transparency initiative (3 March 2005)

Political Groups

- EPP-ED / PES / ALDE / Greens-EFA: Motion of Censure against the Commission - Statement from European Parliament Political Group Leaders [FR] [DE]

EU Actors positions

- Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO): Ending corporate privileges and secrecy around lobbying in the European Union (18 May 2005)
- Society of European Affairs Professionals (SEAP): SEAP steps up its campaign on best EU lobbying practice (10 Feb. 2005)
- Society of European Affairs Professionals (SEAP): Revised code of Conduct

Press articles

- IHT: Barroso to confront critics of his cruise
- Le Figaro: Les gardes du corps portugais de Barroso sèment le trouble
- La Libre: Cinq gardes du corps et dix salaires
- La Libre: Barroso menacé? Non, a dit Dewael

Feed-back to section coordinator

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