



Transparency: EU institutions to set an example

A report adopted by the European Parliament urges the EU institutions to do more to open up their registers and documents to the public. In the light of a recent judgment by the Court of Justice, MEPs call on the Council to hold all its debates in public and on Parliament to publish more information on its Members' activities. The report by Marco CAPPATO (ALDE, IT) on public access to EP, Council and Commission documents was adopted with 355 votes in favour to 195 against and 18 abstentions.

MEPs believe that the EU and its Member States have moved towards recognising a genuine right of access to documents of the institutions and they point out that the rate of refusals to allow access is falling. However, shortcomings have emerged in the implementation of the regulation, owing to differing interpretations. They call on the institutions to take fresh measures to improve transparency, arguing that this is "a condition of their legality, their legitimacy and their accountability".

The House stresses that the European institutions have a duty to ensure that their activities are publicised, a principle underscored by the European Court of Justice in a judgment delivered on 1 July 2008 on a case brought by former MEP Maurizio Turco. The Luxembourg-based judges took the view that opinions of the Council's legal service relating to any piece of legislation should be made public. They also set limits to the grounds for refusing access to a document.

According to MEPs, this "historic" ruling requires the Council to ensure that all its documents and information are in the public domain, including the identity of members of national delegations and working parties.

A single European information portal

In addition, the committee argued that Parliament must take the lead on transparency and should embark on a special action plan ahead of the 2009 elections, with more information on MEPs' activities, their attendance at parliamentary meetings - in absolute, relative and percentage terms - and on their allowances and expenses.

MEPs in the committee add that "accessing information relating to the EU institutions still remains an obstacle-strewn path for ordinary citizens". An inter-institutional search engine should be introduced, together with "a single EU register / portal" for information and documents. The institutions are urged to improve transparency of the procedures for comitology and for agreements thrashed out at first-reading of the co-decision procedure through "trialogues".

Transparency in MEPs own activities

The report says that Parliament should be at the forefront of publicity, transparency and

Press release

openness in the EU, and that, before the 2009 Parliamentary elections, it should launch an extraordinary action plan, for instance within the framework of the e-Parliament initiative, to ensure that more and easily accessible information is made available on its website, on:

– MEPs' activities, participation in and attendance at Parliamentary work, in absolute, relative and percentage terms, available and accessible to citizens also through search criteria

– Parliament's activities in plenary, committee, delegations and internal bodies: the Legislative Observatory should be improved by including references and links to all relevant documents; committee and delegation work should be streamed on Parliament's website as plenary work is, and also recorded, and made available and accessible to citizens through search criteria; internal bodies (such as the Conference of Presidents, the Bureau, the Quaestors, the Working Party on Parliamentary Reform, etc) should promote and ensure the highest level of transparency of their work vis-a-vis other members and citizens by making all their documents available,

– MEPs' allowances and spending, in conformity with the position taken by the European Ombudsman in relation to the fact that access to information should apply also to such data, as well as all declarations of financial interests for all MEPs, and that such information should be available in all EU official languages.

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