

Are you a lobbyist? It is time to register

As Bill Press once quoted, **“Lobbying is the world’s second-oldest profession”**. If you have a look at the Oxford English Dictionary, you will see that it cites examples of the “lobbyists” that appeared as early as 1640, when British citizens would speak to their members of the House of Commons in “lobbies”.

In the U.S. back in 1792, Virginia Revolutionary War veterans hired William Hull to lobby congress for more pay and by the 1820s the term “lobbying” became a synonym for exerting political influence. By 2023 the registered lobbyists in the U.S. reached 12,937.

In recent years the legal regulations for lobbying are increasingly expanded around the world. Aligning with core democratic values like freedom of speech and the right to petition governments, various European countries and EU institutions have been trying to regulate lobbying activities. This includes implementing mandatory lobbyist registers and enforcing transparency requirements to ensure lobbying aligns with principles of trust, transparency, integrity, fairness and confidentiality.

In the UK, the known “Lobbying Act” was introduced in 2014 by David Cameron’s government. In France a new lobbying law is fully implemented since May 2018 and in Germany lobbying exists since 1956 when a Federal Constitutional Court issued a ruling legalizing it.

In Cyprus, lobbying has traditionally been viewed with scepticism and it was connected

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with corruption and ‘favourism’. This was mainly due to the absence of any legislation and the lack of transparency in the way the lobbying activities were contacted.

Heavy criticism and pressure led to the passing of the “Transparency in Decision-Making Processes and Related Matters Law of 2022 (Law 20(I)/2022) in an effort to create a frame-

work of transparency in public decision-making processes in a way which would prevent any corruption. The law introduced obligations for lobbyists involved in such processes, officials within the state agency or the wider public sector and employees for the benefit of officials, who, by virtue of their position, take part in such processes. The Law imposed these obligations to non-government organizations and to trade unions thus widening the scope of entities that must abide to the new law requirements. The Law also requires that all meetings between state officials and lobbyists are published with details of the discussions and of any financial elements involved. In this way, both officials and lobbyists can be accountable for their actions. All provisions of the Law came into force on the 1st of March 2024.

Most importantly, pursuant to this legislation, individuals who wish to take part in decision-making processes are now required to register in the Lobbyists' Register. The Law designated the Independent Authority against Corruption (IAAC) as the responsible authority

for implementing the provisions of the legislation. The Authority accepts applications for registration in the Lobbyists' Register since the 27th November 2023. Once approved the individuals will be requested to sign the Code of Ethics. This Code is based on the principles of the Code of Conduct of the Public Affairs Community of Europe (P.A.C.E) and The Code of the European Transparency Register. It's interesting to note that the Law provides that lobbyists who fail to comply with the requirements or file incomplete or inaccurate reports, may be liable to fines and imprisonment.

One can now safely say that lobbying and its regulation has come a long way but still there are challenges in terms of how the public perceives this and how it implements it. Various organisations and associations play an essential role in educating the public on how healthy, transparent and ethical lobbying can play an important role in modern democratic countries. Cyprus has shown its commitment in strengthening its public decision-making processes by creating a transparent regime which will only continue to develop and improve.

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