

## EU Ombudsman hails Dutch drive to improve Council transparency

Written by Martin Banks on 24 June 2019 in News  
News

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly has welcomed the initiative of the Dutch government, which is supported by other EU governments, to improve legislative transparency in the Council of the EU.



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Proposals to publish more legislative documents and allow for greater openness of trilogue negotiations to help greater citizen awareness of, and engagement with, EU law-making are broadly in line with recent Ombudsman recommendations.

O'Reilly said they will also help to show the shared responsibility for EU decision-making.

“Europeans have a right to know what their governments are doing in Brussels. As the six Member

States supporting the initiative highlight, the Strategic Agenda of the European Council is an opportunity to modernise EU decision-making, improve accountability and fight disinformation,” O’Reilly said.

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“Despite many positive transparency improvements by the European Commission and Parliament in recent years, the Council - where governments meet - remains a ‘black box’ and it would be a positive move for all citizens if some of the larger Member States in particular used their influence to help to get rid of the ‘blame Brussels’ culture.

O’Reilly added, “It is important to recognise the link between a lack of citizen understanding and engagement on the one hand and a corresponding lack of trust on the other hand which can fuel an anti-EU culture.”

“Recognising the shared responsibility for decision-making, and not blaming ‘Brussels’ for decisions they themselves have taken, is one way that national governments can help to counteract that culture.”

The Ombudsman opened an investigation into the transparency of the Council’s legislative work in 2017.

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**EU Ombudsman Emily O’Reilly**

Following an analysis of the practices of the Council by inspecting internal Council documents and taking into account the results of consultation, in 2018 the Ombudsman made three proposals for improving democratic oversight of the process.

Her ideas were overwhelmingly supported by the European Parliament in early 2019.

The Ombudsman also carried out an inquiry into the transparency of trilogues, the informal negotiations between the Commission, Parliament and Council on draft laws.

Her proposals to improve transparency included the setting up of a common legislative database.

Reacting to the announcement, Corporate Europe Observatory's transparency researcher Vicky Cann said: “Changing the transparency culture in the European Council is a bit like Waiting for Godot: it takes a long time and nothing substantially changes.”

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Despite a 2017 recommendation from the Ombudsman, and Corporate Europe Observatory’s subsequent complaint, President Tusk and his team have refused to publish a proper list of which lobbyists they have met and on what topic.

“The new Council President must draw a line under this opacity by establishing strong ethics and transparency rules and practices - for themselves and for their team.”

### **About the author**

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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