



, 19.03.2009

EU Parliament continues sad slide from citizens' institution to VIP/lobbyist club **EP reform and lobbying**

Today the European Parliament's conference of group presidents made a series of poor decisions affecting Parliament reform and control of lobbying. **Monica Frassoni**, Co-President of the Greens/EFA group, commented:

"Today's decisions clearly show that the European Parliament is sliding towards political conformism and control freakery. The leadership of the larger political groups and the administration are installing themselves as an elite to run Parliament according to their own political interests. This is to the detriment of transparency, citizens' access, committees' capacity of initiative, individual MEPs and smaller political groups.

Today, after the parliamentary reform working group toiled for two years, the three biggest political groups blocked all of its progressive proposals. These included boosting the debate and initiative capacity of committees, upgrading the subcommittee on human rights to full committee status and strengthening in particular the petitions committee, which is a last resort for many citizens.

The only approved reforms are backward steps: it is no longer possible to table amendments or debate 'own initiative' reports in plenary. This made it easy to sideline Margrete Auken's critical report on urbanisation in Spain (1), welcomed by thousands of petitioners but opposed by fearful Spanish conservatives and socialists.

Today the Conference of Presidents also concluded that joint meetings of several committees will vote to decide key reports, instead of the competent committee alone. This will certainly complicate the legislative procedure, multiply conflicts between committees and draftspersons and undermine the coherence of Parliament's negotiating powers as an institution.

Commenting on the Conference of Presidents further decisions on lobbying control, Ms. Frassoni added:

"Parliament has failed citizens on lobbying control. In May last year, the

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European Parliament overwhelmingly adopted a crystal clear resolution calling on both Commission and Parliament to establish a mandatory register for lobbyists and a code of conduct with precise sanctions and rules. Now negotiations with the Commission, from which the Greens were deliberately excluded, are heading in the direction of a lowest common denominator solution along the lines of the weak Commission Code of Conduct and optional registration. No real breakthrough is expected before the end of this legislation period and we were kindly informed that the "final" text will be ready in a few weeks, before which time we are not allowed to see a draft. So much for transparency and openness.

With European elections just weeks away, Parliament has missed an open goal to demonstrate its commitment to transparency and good governance. The major political groups' leaders are strangling the free voice and free representation of the European people in this institution."

Notes to editors:

(1) Petitions committee "Report on the impact of extensive urbanisation in Spain", by Margrete Auken (DK, Greens/EFA), on the agenda for next week's EP plenary session in Strasbourg. The report, prompted by several petitions from Spain, is highly critical of abuses of property rights and transgression of EU environmental and public procurement directives.