



OPEN LETTER  
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Dear President of the European Parliament Mr Buzek,

we hope this letter finds you well.

My name is Andrea Lavesson and I am President of Active – sobriety, friendship and peace. Active is a European youth umbrella NGO with 38 member organizations in 27 countries from all over Europe.

In this letter I am sending you our thoughts and experiences as well as our wishes – in reaction to the most recent unveiling of the “cash-for-amendments” scandal that threatens the trust of young Europeans in the independence of their elected representatives.

That four corruption cases involving MEPs, from different political groups and countries, have been discovered by journalists and that more discoveries seem to be likely has shocked and surprised us. We are truly worried and quite frankly alarmed. We wonder about what the implications are for the political efforts of so many of our members and their initiatives towards the European Parliament.

Many Active members from all over Europe engage in advocacy to share their visions of a better Europe. We write e-mails with ideas and questions. We call and we try to meet MEPs, when we have the (financial) resources to go to Brussels.

That some MEPs are obviously prepared to sell their publicly entrusted mandate to push through specific amendments shows that something is clearly wrong in the European Parliament and the connected lobbyism practices.

Therefore, Mr Buzek, we are now glad to see that the first steps are being taken to draw lessons from the scandal and to improve the system of democratic participation in the European Parliament. The will for reforms shown, under your leadership together with the leaders of the political groups, this week sends a clear message to young Europeans that the vast majority of MEPs is willing to reform the system and protect the ethical and democratic values that are the foundation of Europe.

We send you this letter, to express our appreciation for the displayed will and determination to defend the integrity of the European Parliament. We fully support your call for the European Commission to prepare legislation for a legally binding mandatory lobby register as well as for putting in place measures to secure de facto mandatory transparency in the meantime.

If Europe shall be a project for and of its citizens, the steps you are now taking are crucial. According to our experience, Mr Buzek, it demands a lot from civil society organizations, especially youth organizations, to effectively engage in political work, to formulate our ideas so that we can contribute to the political processes with them. We in Active hold, and that's our clear message today, that the European Parliament has done well in many ways: open committee meetings, the presence of MEPs in social media, press services, access to documents – all these things are important for young people like, Active members, to feel that they are part of the European democracy which the European Parliament stands for. Now we believe that this scandal gives opportunity to become even better.

Thus we support the reaction of The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) and its clear policy recommendations for even better measures to tackle the problems alleged with lobbying today. Moreover we want to share, as mentioned, our experience for you to take into account when striving for reforms of the lobby system and practices:

Active and its members are working for a democratic, diverse and drug-free society since more than twenty years and we are thus engaged in the quest to reduce alcohol-related harm in Europe, improve public health and prevent young people from alcohol harm. In our efforts we're dependent on financial grants from the Council of Europe and the European Commission and on membership fees. But mostly we're driven by voluntary work. The (alcohol) industry lobbyists in contrast are backed by the billion-dollar business that alcohol is in Europe (while Europe is the heaviest drinking region in the world and alcohol harm costs at least €125 Billion a year). Like so many other NGOs we are facing such a tremendous misbalance in our policy area, too. The (Alcohol) Industry and other economic operators can afford influence – through employing consultants, lobbyists, expensive dinners and mingles conferences and special interest clubs for MEPs, like the EP Beer Club.

Mr Buzek, relating to the on-going scandal, the current tremendous misbalance creates disillusioned young Europeans because we're simply outnumbered in economic strength which leads to immense problems: The European Parliament is not an equal playing field today – if we compare the chances for civil society, especially youth NGOs with economic interests, like the alcohol industry, to influence policy-making. But money does not equal excellence. And money does not equal community interest.

And so we ask you to level the playing field so that civil society organizations like Active, and so many other youth NGOs, have at least the same chances to contribute with our know-how, expertise and picture of reality. Please Mr Buzek, include this problem description (that many MEPs have expressed earlier as well) into the measures taken now.

It is simply hard for young people to believe that they can contribute with their ideas to the welfare of the European Community when MEPs have a background in the industry while they deal with similar issues and policy areas as MEPs and return to the industry after their time in the EP.

Mr Buzek, we thank you for your time and attention and wish you and your colleagues good luck in working with this highly important matter. And of course, we are ready to share our experiences and insights or simply explain in more detail the points put forward in this letter.

Thanks a lot and

Yours Sincerely,



Andrea Lavesson

President Active – sobriety, friendship and peace

"Active- sobriety, friendship and peace" is a non - governmental organisation gathering European youth temperance organisations working for a democratic diverse and peaceful world free from alcohol and other drugs where an individual can live up to her full potential. Active has more than 25 000 members in 27 European countries.