



# Enhancing Transparency, Public Information and Relations with Civil Society

## Transparency; policy background

Improvement in the transparency of its institutions and bodies is a key European Union (EU) policy aimed at bringing them closer to the public they serve as well as highlighting their relevance in contributing to Europe's social and economic cohesion and sustainable development.

The EIB considers that as a bank and a public institution, the openness of how it makes decisions, works and implements EU policies, strengthens its credibility and its accountability to citizens. Transparency also serves to increase the efficiency and sustainability of the Bank's operations, reduce the risks of corruption and enhance relations with external stakeholders.

## Public information

Public disclosure of information is an important benchmark for implementing the EIB's commitment to transparency. Accordingly, the EIB is continuously increasing the volume and improving the quality of information that it provides about its activities. It is the only international financial institution (IFI) that publishes its annually-revised three-year rolling business plan – the Corporate Operational Plan (COP). The EIB website is the main platform for actively disseminating information to the public, with some 6.8 million visitors in 2009 (compared to 4 million in 2008). Following an internal evaluation, the EIB homepage [www.eib.org](http://www.eib.org) was redesigned in 2009 to better meet the needs of external visitors and reflect today's best practices in terms of website design and functionality. The Bank is committed to improving its website continuously and making it more attractive and customer-friendly.

In 2009, information on more than 500 projects that were under appraisal was published on the Bank's website, together with other important transparency-related documents such as the Bank's Corporate Operational Plan 2009-2011, its Statement of Environmental and Social Principles and Standards, its Whistleblowing Policy and its new interim revised policy towards offshore financial centres<sup>1</sup>.

A key element of the Bank's communication with the public is the "EIB public disclosure policy". This is based on a presumption of disclosure unless there is a compelling reason for non-disclosure. It was reviewed in 2009 under a large public consultation process also covering the EIB's transparency policy (2004) and the complaints mechanism policy (2008). Approved by the Board of Directors on 2 February 2010, the new policy is now in force (see further details below). Every year, the Bank publishes an evaluation of the implementation of its public disclosure policy. The 2008 edition was published in April 2009 and the next edition will be available in March 2010.

## Public consultations

The Bank conducts public consultations on selected corporate and important multi-sector policies which are typically of interest to all EIB stakeholders. The main objectives of a consultation are to generate valuable stakeholder contributions and to reinforce transparency and accountability. Often considered as best practice, these web-based consultations normally include two rounds of respectively 45 and 20 working days and in principle go together with public meetings with a view to facilitating a direct (face-to-face) dialogue with interested stakeholders. Stakeholder contributions are examined and evaluated by an internal review panel. After approval by the Management Committee, the final draft policy is published for information purposes on the EIB website 15

<sup>1</sup> See also Briefing Note No<sup>o</sup>17 (Strict EIB rules regarding the use of offshore centres).



working days prior to consideration by the Board of Directors, together with a public consultation report. The report outlines how the consultation was conducted and brings together all stakeholder submissions and the Bank's reasoned positions on the extent to which these were taken into account. After Board approval, the policy is published on the EIB website and, if appropriate, in the Official Journal of the European Union.

In addition to formal public consultations, simplified web-based consultations or informal stakeholder meetings on other selected policy documents may be held, depending on the type and content of the document or issue in question.

In 2009, a public consultation was held on the EIB's transparency, public disclosure and complaints mechanism policies. The outcome of this process led to an improved new EIB transparency policy (merging the previous transparency and public disclosure policies) and "Complaints Mechanism – Principles, Terms of Reference and Rules of Procedure", which were approved by the Board of Directors in February 2010 and published on the Bank's website with the corresponding consultation report. The constructive contribution towards this consultation of civil society organisations (CSOs), in particular the Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) traditionally scrutinising the Bank, was very much appreciated by the Bank.

A new consultation process will be launched in 2010 in connection with the revision of the Bank's transport lending policy.

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## Stakeholder engagement and relations with civil society

The Bank's relationship with civil society, including NGOs and other interest groups, is based on the acknowledgment that these organisations can have a valuable input into its policy development. They can also contribute to the Bank's awareness of local issues and provide other useful information contributing to the quality of EIB-financed projects.

Interaction with CSOs is coordinated by the Civil Society Unit. Acting as an interface, its task is to ensure the consistency and quality of communication and to engage with civil society in an active way. The Unit seeks contacts with organisations which can help the public and, more specifically, citizens affected by EIB operations, to find their way to information about the Bank.

As part of its ongoing dialogue with civil society, the EIB organises regular workshops with CSOs. The Spring CSO Workshop (Brussels, May 2009), chaired by Vice-President Philippe de Fontaine Vive, focused on road transport and biodiversity issues. Another key event was the annual CSO briefing in Brussels on 9 March 2009, at which Vice-President de Fontaine Vive presented the 2008 results to Brussels-based CSOs and announced the launch of a civil society homepage on the Bank's website. The 2010 annual CSO briefing is being held back-to-back with the Bank's annual news conference on 25 February 2010.

The Bank engages in dialogue and cooperative partnerships with specialist organisations which share particular objectives or interests with the EIB, such as the Lisbon Agenda, sustainable development, environmental protection, or poverty alleviation. In 2009, the Bank pursued its cooperative relationship with Transparency International, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Extractive Industry Transparency Initiative (EITI), which has been supported and endorsed by the EIB since 2008.

While the Bank will further pursue targeted working relations with expert CSOs, it is also keen to sustain and improve its contacts with policy advocacy NGOs campaigning on the Bank's activities. Contacts with these organisations have increased over the last few years and have increasingly developed a dialogue component. The importance attached to these contacts was underscored by the Bank's participation in events organised by these NGOs in 2009, such as the conference on Accountability of IFIs in March 2009. The Bank itself organised several roundtable discussions with these NGOs on specific issues such as carbon capture and storage and the European Clean Transport Facility, climate change, clean energy, nuclear and carbon footprinting, offshore financial centres or the Bank's environmental and social procedures for investments in developing countries.



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At the project level, the Bank continued to engage and work together with CSOs and citizens' groups, for instance on a number of energy and mining projects in ACP and Latin American countries, and it is also exploring the possibility of involving NGOs in projects where Technical Assistance funds are available.

Further meetings and conferences with interested stakeholders are already foreseen in 2010 to discuss topics of common interest such as "business, banking and human rights" and the mid-term review of the Bank's external lending mandates.

For further information on the EIB, visit its website [www.eib.org](http://www.eib.org)

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