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MEPs and activists demonstrate against revolving doors scandals involving Barroso, Kroes and De Gucht on October 12, 2016 / Thierry Monasse





EU staff have handed in a petition with more than 150,000 signatures calling for former President Barroso to be stripped of his pension rights and honorary titles after his appointment to the board of Goldman Sachs.

Disgruntled EU civil servants are demanding the Commission change its ethics code and impose stricter sanctions on former officials that breach it.

They handed in a petition with over 150,000 signatures to all three EU institutions on Wednesday (October 12) to protest former Commission President José Manuel Barroso's recent appointment to the board of US investment bank Goldman Sachs.

Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) from the United Left group led a protest outside the Commission's Berlaymont headquarters to tie in with the handover, donning masks of Barroso and former commissioners Neelie Kroes and Karel De Gucht, who have also been implicated in revolving doors scandals.



GUE/NGL in the EP

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MEP @DdJong talks about the support from the Parliament to change the regulations that allow #revolvingdoors at @EU_Commission

11:36 AM - 12 Oct 2016

9 6

Michel Vanden Avont, a former Commission staffer who started one of the petitions, said people want a fundamental change in the way the EU is run.



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Former EU staffer Michel Vanden Avont started a petiti...

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"We are expecting a lot. This is the first time that civil servants have taken this initiative," Vanden Avont told Euranet Plus.

"We want a Europe that is more social, that is more open to its citizens, we want European citizens to be involved in the construction of this Europe," he said after handing his petition to the European Commission.

"We're also tired of all the attacks that we have endured, as civil servants, before Brexit and particularly afterwards. But what has really ticked everyone off is the decision of Mr Barroso to work for Goldman Sachs, one of the most pernicious banks in the market right now."

A 'giffhorse for Europhobes'

A petition by Vanden Avont and former and current EU employees on [change.org](https://www.change.org/p/for-strong-exemplary-measures-to-be-taken-against-jm-barroso-for-joining-goldman-sachs-international) (<https://www.change.org/p/for-strong-exemplary-measures-to-be-taken-against-jm-barroso-for-joining-goldman-sachs-international>) has so far garnered more than 152,000 signatures.

It calls for the suspension of Barroso's pension rights and honorary titles, and says the European Court of Justice should check whether he has complied with his EU treaty obligation to "behave with integrity and discretion" on leaving office (article 245).

"It is, at the worst possible moment, a disastrous symbol for the Union and a gift horse for the Europhobes that a former Commission President is associated with the unbridled and unethical financial values that Goldman Sachs represents," the petition says.

A separate petition by a group of transparency campaigners, under the banner wemove.eu (<http://wemove.eu/>), has been signed by more than 63,000 and calls for former commissioners to be banned from any lobbying for three years after leaving office.

[Transparency International](https://www.transparency.org/) (<https://www.transparency.org/>), one of the groups involved in the campaign, said it had received "stock replies" and no real dialogue from Commission Secretary General Alexander Italianer, who received the petitions on the Commission's behalf.



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Handed our #Barroso petition to Italianer @EU_Commission earlier. Stock replies and no dialogue - very frustrating @foeeurope @GreenpeaceEU

3:56 PM - 12 Oct 2016

6 1

The Commission said in a statement that Italianer "expressed the President's confidence in the staff" when he received the petition.

Matt Carthy, an Irish MEP who took part in the protest on Wednesday, said the Barroso appointment has tarnished the EU's reputation.



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MEP Matt Carthy says citizens want an end to the revol...

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“We’ve seen a hugely and severely damaging austerity agenda, pursued by and large and cheerled by the Commission that José Manuel Barroso was heading,” Carthy said.

“So lots of people right across Europe – people in Ireland, people in Greece, people in other bailout countries, but arguably every citizen of the EU – suffered as a result of that agenda,” he added.

“Now we see that Barroso has taken on this key role within Goldman Sachs, and to many, they look at it as a payoff for his role in saving the financial sector ahead of the citizens of Europe. So what I think that has led to is a realisation that this culture of revolving doors needs to be brought to an end.”

EU ethics rules

Former Commission President Barroso was appointed as a non-executive chairman and adviser to Goldman Sachs following the UK’s vote to leave the EU, the bank announced in July.

The European Commission said he did not breach a code of conduct requirement for prior approval of new posts taken up within 18 months of leaving office. Barroso’s term ended in November 2014.

However, EU treaties also require commissioners to behave with integrity (article 245) and professional secrecy (article 339) at all times after they leave office.

A three-person “ad hoc ethical committee” has been in place since 2003 to examine potential conflicts of interest, but the Commission is not obliged to take its advice.

In September, following a letter from EU ombudsman Emily O’Reilly, the Commission said it would no longer receive Barroso as a former president, but a lobbyist, and referred the Goldman appointment to the ethics committee. The committee is still looking into the issue, the Commission said.

O’Reilly has called on the Commission to change its code of conduct, extending the 18-month cooling off period and replacing the ethics committee with an independent panel. Her call was echoed by MEPs at the European Parliament’s recent plenary session in Strasbourg.

Bernd Loescher, a Council employee and head of one of the EU staff trade unions, said that the Commission’s strategy up to this point has been “not to react”.



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EU staff union leader Bernd Loescher says the Commis...

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“It’s the same strategy that [former Commission President] Mr Santer had, just before he was forced to resign,” he said. “We are used to it, but I don’t think citizens will let it go this time.”

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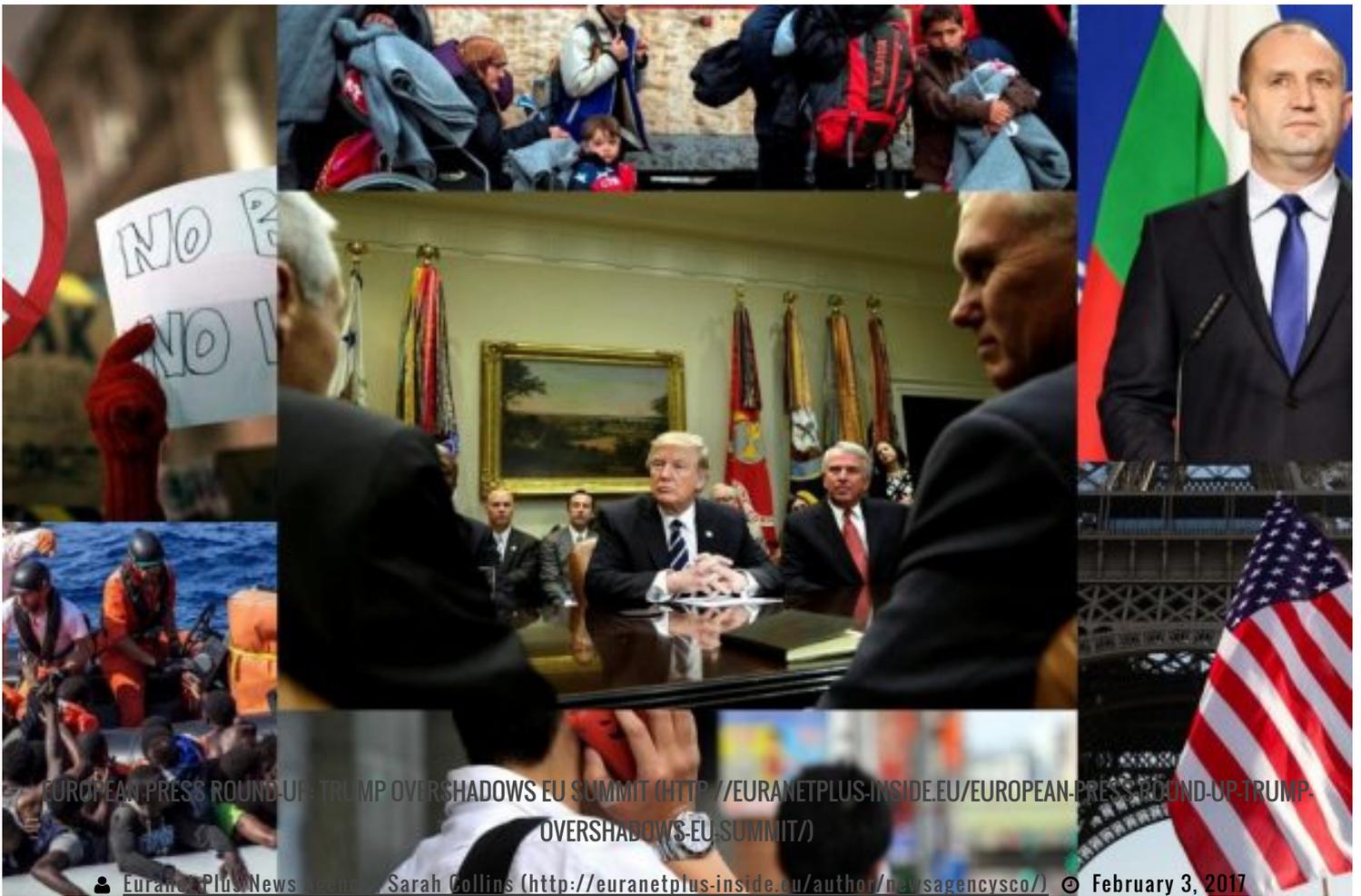
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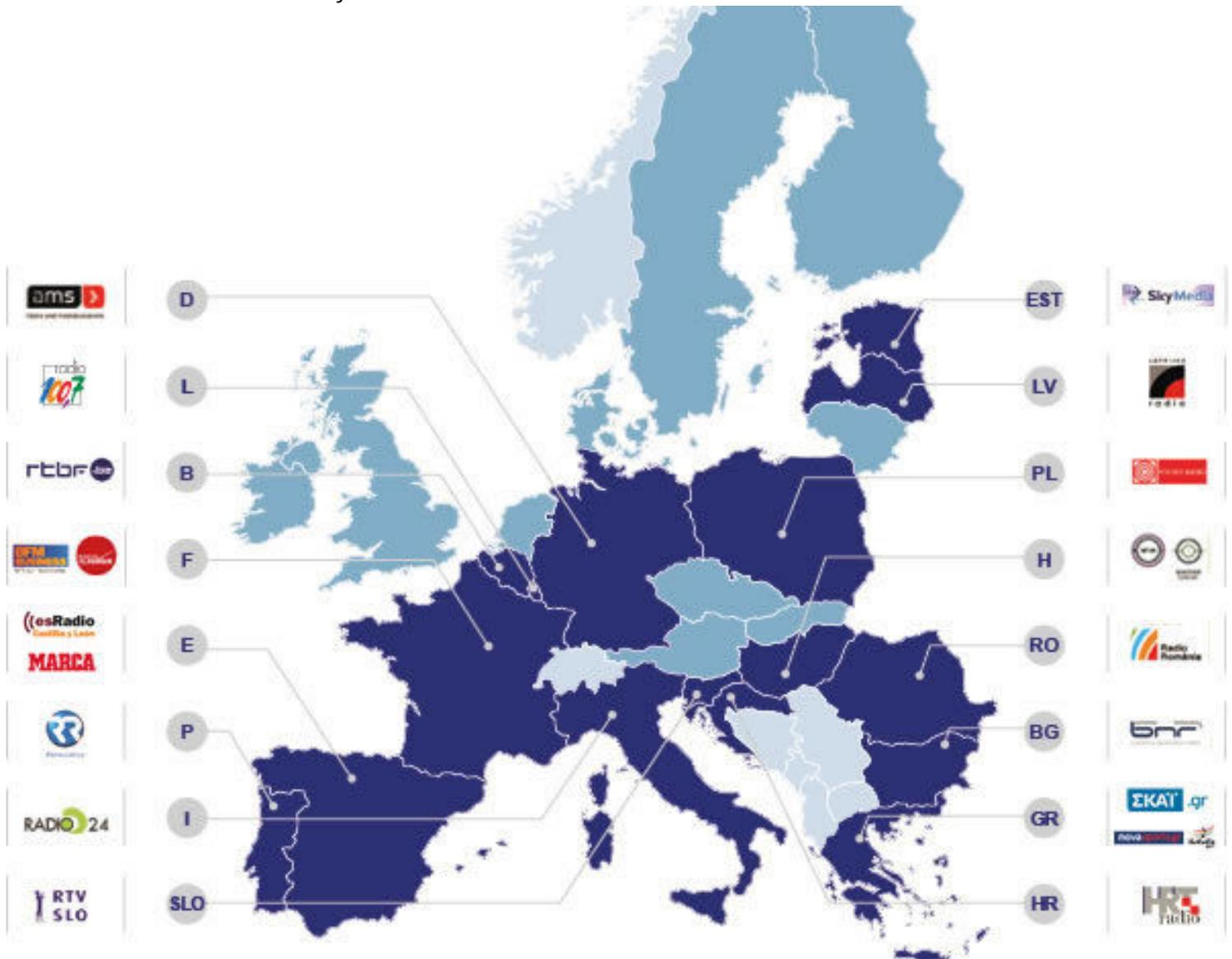
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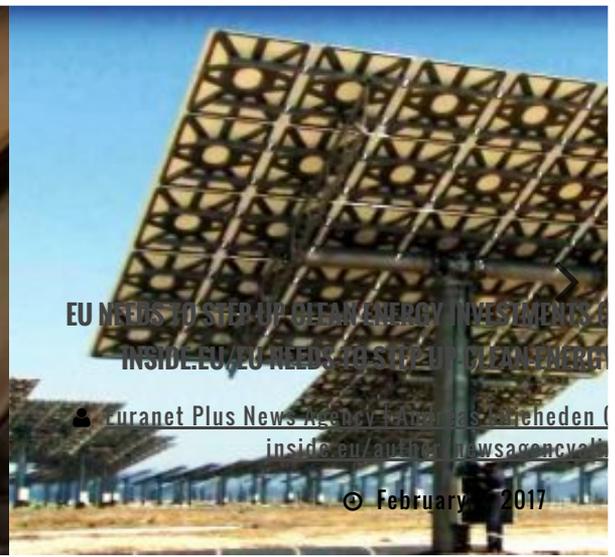
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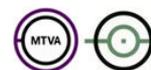
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