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## New Commission must end corporate dominance of EU expert groups

*(Brussels 29 August 2014)* New European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker needs to tackle the persistent over-representation of corporate interests in European Commission 'expert groups' warn trade unions and transparency organisations.

These organisations (ETUC, EPSU, UNI & CEO) have highlighted this fundamental issue with the EU's advisory groups in response to the European Ombudsman's public consultation on the topic that closed yesterday [add the document].

Expert groups are often formed at the beginning of the Commission's legislative process to provide expert opinion and guidance. Today most economically and politically important expert groups, such as those working on taxation, financial regulation, or emission reductions, continue to be dominated by business interests, Research shows this can have a damaging impact on EU decisions[1].

European trade unions and civil society organisations have evaluated the composition of these so-called expert groups. They conclude current horizontal rules for expert groups are inadequate, as they do not prevent the fundamental problem of excessive corporate involvement nor are they clear enough to ensure consistency across the different departments of the Commission (known as Directorates-General or DGs). New rules must address the imbalanced in their composition, the secrecy of decision-making, and the unfair application process to participate in expert groups[2].

In 2012, the European Parliament lifted its freeze on the €2 million expert group budget on the condition that no stakeholder should have the majority of seats. Yet corporate interests represent more than 53% of seats within the groups created in the following year, compared to trade unions that never represent more than 14%, environmental groups are not better represented (see chart).

In their submissions to the Ombudsman, the organisations urge the Commission to reduce the number of seats held by corporate interests, in order to have more balanced groups and a more balanced outcome. Trade unions also point out that there are already formalised ways for the Commission to gather expertise, such as the social dialogue, at cross-sectoral and sectoral levels, and formal consultations of the social partners.

Business interests have an undue influence over public policy making through the unbalanced composition of expert groups. Given that corporate interests rarely conform to public interests this is especially critical. The eventual Ombudsman recommendations – expected next year – should address these problems and be implemented via a thorough review of the horizontal rules in 2015.

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1See for example : http://www.alter-eu.org/sites/default/files/documents/a-captive-commission-5-11-09.pdf

2 See http://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2013/11/a-year-of-broken-promises

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European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) was founded in 1973, it now represents 85 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 10 European Trade Union Federations.

UNI Europa is a European trade union federation. It unites national trade unions organising in service and skills sectors in 50 different countries.

EPSU is the European Federation of Public Service Unions it organizes in the energy, water and waste sectors, health and social services and local and national administration.

Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) is a research and campaign group working to expose and challenge the privileged access and influence enjoyed by corporations and their lobby groups in EU policy making.