

Brussels, 10 March 2014
Press release

“Don't go through the revolving door”, transparency campaigners tell EU commissioners

European commissioners have been reminded of the need to avoid conflicts of interest which undermine public trust in EU policy-making, as they near the end of their term in office.

The Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation (ALTER-EU) [1] has sent individual letters to every serving European commissioner to remind them of their responsibilities under the revolving door rules. [2]

When the last Barroso Commission left office in 2010, a number of former commissioners went through the revolving door by taking private sector jobs which raised concerns about the risk of conflicts of interest. For example, Günter Verheugen who had been the European commissioner for enterprise and industry founded the European Experience Company, a consultancy firm together with his former head of cabinet Petra Erler. Meanwhile, Charlie McCreevy who had been the European commissioner for the internal market joined the boards of Ryanair, Sentenial and the bank BNY Mellon. [3]

ALTER-EU is keen to ensure there is no repeat of these scandals when the current commissioners leave office later this year.

Olivier Hoedeman of Corporate Europe Observatory, a member of the ALTER-EU steering committee said: “Our letter reminds the current crop of commissioners about the revolving door rules but also recommends some higher standards which we encourage all commissioners to follow. After all, if former commissioners are entitled to a generous three-year transitional allowance, it is not unreasonable to ask that they also refrain from lobbying for three years.”

Jorgo Riss, director of the Greenpeace European Unit and a member of the ALTER-EU steering committee said: “We don't want to see a repeat of the Verheugen and McCreevy scandals in 2014. In January ALTER-EU asked President Barroso to remind his team about the revolving door rules before they left office. The Commission has seemingly ignored our request so we thought we had better take action into our own hands.”

Ricardo Gutiérrez, General Secretary of the European Federation of Journalists and another member of the ALTER-EU steering committee said: “Commissioners should be leaders in complying with the highest ethical standards, even after the end of their term in office. It is clearly against what they have worked for if they jump straight into the arms of big business as lobbyists once they have left the Commission.”

The individual letter to each commissioner reminds them that there is an 18 month notification period after they leave office during which time they must notify the Commission if they plans to take up new professional activities. Former commissioners also face an 18 month lobbying ban. These rules are included within the code of conduct for commissioners. [4] However, ALTER-EU considers that both of these rules should be extended to three years to match the transitional allowance to which former commissioners are entitled and to better rule out the risk of conflicts of interest from

arising.

In January 2014, ALTER-EU's steering committee wrote to President Barroso to set out proposals for reform to the code of conduct for commissioners and the ethics committee which applies these rules. [5] The proposals included extending the ban on former commissioners moving to lobbying jobs from 18 months to three years.

Contact:

Olivier Hoedeman, Corporate Europe Observatory, email: olivier@corporateeurope.org tel: +32 (0)2 893 0930, mobile: +32 (0)474 486545

Jorgo Riss, Greenpeace European Unit, email: jorgo.riss@greenpeace.org tel: +32 (0)2 274 1907

Notes for editors:

[1] ALTER-EU is a coalition of about 200 civil society groups, trade unions, academics and public affairs firms campaigning against the increasing influence exerted by corporate lobbyists on the political agenda in Europe.

[2] A sample letter (to Commissioner Oettinger) can be read [here](#).

[3] In 2009-10, former Commissioners Verheugen, McCreevy, Borg, Michel, Ferrero-Waldner and Kuneva took on jobs that raised concerns about conflicts of interest. Further information about the revolving door moves of all of these ex-commissioners can be read [here](#) and in this ALTER-EU report: [Revolving door provides privileged access](#)

[4] The existing code of conduct for commissioners which contains the revolving door rules can be read here: http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/pdf/code_conduct_en.pdf

[5] The ALTER-EU letter to President Barroso which proposed reforms to the revolving door rules plus ALTER-EU's detailed proposal for reform of the Commission's ad hoc ethical committee can be read here: <http://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2014/01/barroso-letter-on-revolving-doors> The Commission's response can be read here: <http://www.alter-eu.org/documents/2014/02/reply-on-revolving-doors>