

MICHEL BARNIER

Membre de la Commission européenne

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Dear Sirs,

I would like to thank you for sending me your views on the possible measures to strengthen the involvement of civil society organisations in EU policymaking in the area of financial services, particularly as regards their fair representation in expert groups advising the Commission in that domain.

The Commission has fully acknowledged on various occasions the importance of civil society organizations in giving voice to the concerns of the citizens and offering them a structured channel to contribute to EU policy shaping. As you know, the consultation of a wide range of stakeholders is at the heart of our 'better regulation' strategy, and civil society organisations play an essential and unique role in assessing whether proposed policies would deliver tangible benefits for EU citizens.

For this reason, I recently decided to include an additional expert representing the trade unions in our newly established Group of Experts on Banking Issues (GEBI).

I am aware that the financial and economic crisis has significantly shaken the confidence of consumers, retail investors and SMEs in the regulations that are meant to protect them from failings in the financial system. Therefore, it is more essential than ever that the concerns of end-users and other non-industry stakeholders are taken into account when the Commission designs initiatives that aim to restore citizens' confidence in the soundness of the financial sector and in the ability of financial integration to deliver concrete benefits to them.

The Commission has already taken some initiatives which will improve significantly our consultation procedures in the area of financial services policy.

First of all, I would like to mention the establishment of the Financial Services User Group, which is designed to streamline and further improve the quality of the input to the Commission's policy work in the area of financial services from consumers, retail investors and micro-enterprises. I would warmly invite you and the organisations you represent to forward the invitation to participate in the related calls for expression of interest to all potentially interested persons. Information can be found under the following link: http://ec.europa.eu/internal_market/finservices-retail/users/index_en.htm. Deadline for applications is set to 30 September 2010.

Moreover, the proposed reforms of the financial supervision system will also facilitate the involvement of stakeholders, including civil society representatives, in European financial services policymaking. The new European Supervisory Authorities will be required to consult interested parties on draft technical standards, guidelines and recommendations, and provide them with the opportunity to comment on proposed measures. Separate Stakeholder Groups will be established for that purpose, representing in balanced proportions the various stakeholders.

However, I remain convinced that more needs to be done to enhance the active participation of civil society organisations in Internal Market policymaking in order to fully achieve a fair balance of non-industry stakeholders' representation in our consultation processes.

To this end, I have started with my services an internal reflection process in order to identify the most appropriate measures in order to ensure appropriate and direct representation of consumers, retail investors, SMEs, trade unions and other civil society representatives in all advisory groups assisting the Commission in the development of concrete policy initiatives. We are also examining possible ways of facilitating the capacity-building of civil society organisations to represent their interests in financial services policies at EU level and exploring ways of raising awareness of on-going formal and informal consultations.

Your letter and your suggestions are therefore very timely and we will take full account of them in our internal reflection work. Given the on-going work, I am not in a position to comment in detail on all the ideas mentioned in your letter. However, I will certainly inform you of the outcome of our current reflections and about the concrete measures we envisage to take.

My Cabinet and my services remain at your disposal to discuss these matters further and I look forward to continuing our co-operation.

Yours sincerely, *M. Barnier*



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