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Open letter to the European Parliament on Oettinger hearing

Yannik Bendel · Thursday, January 5th, 2017

The following is a joint letter to MEPs from civil society organisations on President Juncker's proposal to put Commissioner Günther Oettinger in charge of supervising the EU budget and managing the Human Resources of the European Commission.

Dear Members of the European Parliament,

Next week, you are asked to reply to European Commission President Juncker's proposal to put Commissioner Günther Oettinger in charge of supervising the EU budget and managing the Human Resources of the European Commission.

As organisations working towards equality, non-discrimination and campaigning for transparency and ethics, we do not think that Commissioner Oettinger is suitable to oversee Human Resources at the European Commission.

Commissioner Oettinger has made racist, sexist and homophobic remarks on several occasions in the past, most recently at a speech he gave in an official capacity in Hamburg on 26 October.

At this crucial moment for the EU, it is more vital than ever to have a strong and credible commitment from the European Commission to counter discrimination and act for equality for all. The Commissioner in charge of human resources must lead by example. He or she should have clear plans for action to make equality for all a reality and speak out against racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia. How else would they be expected to inspire others to do the same? In our view, Commissioner Oettinger is not the right person for this task.

The Commissioner responsible for Human Resources is also tasked with the supervision and enforcement of transparency and ethics rules, including the provisions of the EU staff regulations on revolving doors. Protecting the integrity of EU civil servants and the Commission as a whole demands setting high standards in personal integrity. This is especially true now as the Commission is still dealing with the aftermath of a string of ethics scandals involving former Commissioners.

Commissioner Oettinger has repeatedly attracted criticism over his way of interacting with lobbyists. Evidence shows that Oettinger has not been proactive in pursuing an inclusive and balanced approach to stakeholder consultation as almost 90% of his meetings have been with corporate interest groups. This is the highest percentage of any Commissioner, and is contrary

to President Juncker's instruction to the team of Commissioners to ensure balanced stakeholder representation. On top of this, there have been repeated media reports of undisclosed meetings, most recently when Oettinger met with the unregistered German lobbyist Klaus Mangold during a flight on a private jet to Budapest in May 2016. To this day it remains unclear what the exact circumstances of this flight have been and if he broke ethics and/or transparency rules. In our view, Oettinger is unfit to inspire compliance with existing ethics and transparency rules among Commission staff and his peers.

The undersigned organisations therefore urge the European Parliament to oppose that Commissioner Oettinger be put in charge of Human Resources at the European Commission:

- Transparency International EU
- ILGA-Europe
- European Women's Lobby
- European Network Against Racism
- Corporate Europe Observatory
- IPPF European Network
- Oxfam International EU Advocacy Office (Oxfam International)
- Volonteurop
- Stichting ERGO Network (ERGO)
- Lobbycontrol

This entry was posted on Thursday, January 5th, 2017 at 5:30 am