

4 April 2024

Dear College of Commissioners,

As civil society organisations working to improve the transparency, accountability, and integrity of the EU institutions, we are writing to you with concern regarding the current allegations surrounding the appointment of the new EU envoy for small and medium-sized enterprises (SME).

According to the Commission's [website](#), on Monday 31<sup>st</sup> January of 2024, Markus Pieper, an MEP from Germany's Christian Democratic Union party, was appointed by the College as the EU SME Envoy. The [newly-created position](#), which was announced by President Ursula von der Leyen in her State of the Union speech in September 2023 and authorised by the College on 8 November 2023, is that of an Hors Class adviser and ranks second-highest on the EU's salary scales, at AD15. Corresponding to one of the most senior positions in the Commission, the EU SME envoy responds directly to the President.

Guaranteeing the integrity of the appointment to such a role is therefore paramount. Yet, numerous media reports leave serious doubts regarding the integrity of this appointment.

Therefore, we, the undersigned organisations, formally request that the College rescind Mr. Pieper's appointment and carry out a transparent, objective recruitment procedure that fully adheres to the Commission's general principles applying to decisions on senior official appointments. We further request that an investigation into potential breaches of the Commissioner's Code of Conduct during this recruitment process be immediately launched.

### **Flawed recruitment procedure**

Opening in late September of 2023, the call for applications for the position was closed on the 25<sup>th</sup> of October. According to several [news media](#), at the conclusion of the assessment process in early December, three candidates were shortlisted for the position: Markus Pieper, Martina Dlabajová, a Czech MEP, and Anna Stellingner, Deputy Director General for International and EU Affairs at the Confederation of Swedish Enterprise. According to the [Commission's own general principles on appointments of senior officials](#), recruitment shall be based on **merit, gender balance and geographical balance**. Mr. Pieper was reportedly outqualified on all three criteria, as the other candidates were not only both women from underrepresented Member States, but are said to have [outperformed Mr. Pieper's own efforts by at least 30%](#) in the Commission's external and internal recruitment assessments.

Given that Mr. Pieper therefore did not conform to any of the three guiding principles in this recruitment process, we call on the Commission to rescind the appointment and carry out a new recruitment process that is transparent and adheres to these guiding principles.

## **Potential conflict of interest**

The appointment of Mr. Pieper over seemingly better-qualified candidates suggests not only a flawed recruitment process, but a process that personally benefitted the Commission President. Indeed, Mr. Pieper's political affiliation and nationality suggest the President has favoured her political ally for one of the Commission's senior civil service posts. These concerns are also shared by a group of cross-party MEPs, who have also asked the Commission for clarification through a [priority parliamentary question](#).

There is no room for potential conflicts of interest in the recruitment of Commission officials, let alone those of a rank as high as the one afforded to Mr. Pieper.

The selection of the EU SME envoy was therefore not based on a "straightforward, transparent procedure" as [required](#) by the Commission, and potentially breaches the principle of an "open, efficient and independent European administration" established by article 298(1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. In addition, the Commission should always guarantee the right of good administration (Article 41 of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights).

We therefore call on the Commission to launch an investigation into the potential breaches of the Commissioner's Code of Conduct during the recruitment process for the EU SME envoy. This would demonstrate the Commission's commitment to eliminating legitimate doubts that appointments favour politics over competence.

Thank you for your consideration. We remain at your disposal should you have any further questions.

Yours sincerely,

**Transparency International EU**

**Transparency International Germany**

**The Good Lobby**

**Corporate Europe Observatory**

**LobbyControl**

**Emilio De Capitani**

**Friends of the Earth Europe**

**Transparency International France**

**abgeordnetenwatch.de**