



To: Mr Potočník, European Commissioner for Research
Re: Open Letter to Commissioner Potočník concerning the Expert Groups Formed by DG Research and the Joint Research Center

Brussels, 8 August 2008

Dear Mr Potočník,

In May this year, representatives from the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation in the EU (ALTER-EU) met with Vice President Kallas to raise our concerns about the composition of some of the Commission's Expert Groups. Mr. Kallas told the meeting that responsibility for ensuring that Expert Groups are balanced lies with the Commissioner in whose field of responsibility the group works.

As the Commissioner responsible for providing political guidance to the Directorate-General for Research and the Joint Research Centre¹ this would make you responsible for the 94 expert groups operating under these bodies according to the on-line register.²

President Barroso and Vice-President Kallas had announced that the names of individuals and organisations participating in all Expert Groups would be published by summer 2008.³ ALTER EU has today also written to them concerning progress on this. Up to now, very little progress has been made regarding the transparency of the expert groups working under DG Research and JRC. Membership; only 17 of the 97 groups listed include membership details. The membership of 80 groups remains unknown to the public.⁴

ALTER EU is concerned that a number of these groups are dominated by particular sectors. An example is the expert group on 'Coal Combustion, clean and efficient coal technologies, CO2 capture' with representatives of 10 companies, one corporate-funded research body, two public research institutions, one individual and one international organisation. This means that the public interest and disinterested scientific advice are under-represented on this group which deals with what is an extremely controversial environmental and social issue. We think that this group is incapable of giving valuable, unbiased advice to the Commission.

Without full details of the membership of the other 80 groups, it is impossible to say whether or not they are also dominated by corporate advisors or whether they can provide a broad assessment of the issues.

Both the lack of transparency and the privileged access of business groups in advisory bodies are at odds with the Commission's White Paper on Good governance (latest version: 25.07.2001) which emphasises the intention to "reduce the risk of the policy-makers just listening to one side of the argument or of particular groups getting privileged access." The dominance of business representatives among other non-governmental actors in certain groups is also at odds with the Commission's codes of conduct on consultation and use of expertise.

We would therefore like to ask

- What measures you intend to take to ensure that Expert Groups include all relevant interests in society in a balanced proportion?
- How do you intend to address the above mentioned (and other) examples of clearly imbalanced Expert Groups in order to bring them in line with the Commission's codes of conduct on consultation and use of expertise?

We would like to know what you intend to do specifically to tackle the one-sided composition of the expert group on 'Coal Combustion, clean and efficient coal technologies, CO₂ capture'. ALTER-EU urges you to dissolve this group and make the advice received from this group public. ALTER-EU believes that as Commissioner you have a public to duty to reassess the input and influence this group has had in influencing the Commission's approach on clean coal and coal combustion so far.

ALTER-EU is contacting other Commissioners on the lack of transparency and privileged access of business groups to advisory bodies that fall under their direct competence. Moreover, we are calling on the College of the Commissioners to develop a common, coordinated approach on transparency and balanced composition of the Commission's expert advisory bodies.

Yours sincerely,

On behalf of the Steering Committee of ALTER-EU



Erik Wesselius
Corporate Europe Observatory

Contact:

Erik Wesselius (Corporate Europe Observatory)
De Wittenstraat 25, 1052 AK Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Tel: + 31 - 30 - 2364422 ; E-mail: erik@corporateeurope.org

Notes

- ¹ http://ec.europa.eu/commission_barroso/potocnik/profile/role_en.htm.
- ² Accessed on 8 August 2008 – <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/search.cfm?l=all>.
- ³ ‘The process of collecting and publishing the names of members of the different groups shall be completed by the summer’, said Mrs Rampi to FT Europe (25/3). On the same date Associated Press and the International Herald Tribune wrote: ‘EU Commission spokeswoman Valerie Rampi told reporters the EU’s executive office was going to make public online the names of expert group members and who they represent by the summer’.
- ⁴ Accessed on 8 August 2008 – <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/search.cfm?l=all>.