



To: Mrs Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Health
Re: Open Letter to Commissioner Vassiliou concerning the Expert Groups Formed by DG Health and Consumers in the policy fields of Public Health and Food Safety

Brussels, 8 August 2008

Dear Mrs Vasiliou,

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 Health and Consumers on public health and food safety issues, this would make you responsible for the 78 Expert Groups dealing with public health and food safety registered on-line as operating under this directorate.¹

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 2008.² ALTER EU has today also written to them concerning progress on this. Up to now, very little progress appears to have been made regarding the transparency of the Expert Groups working on public health and food safety; only eight of the 78 Expert Groups listed include membership details. The membership of 70 groups (90%) remains unknown to the public.³

ALTER EU is concerned that a number of these groups are dominated by particular sectors. An example is the Expert Group on Flavourings which is currently carrying out a consultation on behalf of governments and the Commission but is consulting 10 trade associations and only one consumer organisation.⁴ The Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health is also dominated by business interests.⁵

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 Flavourings and The Advisory Group on the Food Chain and Animal and Plant Health. ALTER-EU urges you to dissolve these groups and make the advice received from them public.

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



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Notes

- ¹ Accessed on 6 August 2008 – <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/search.cfm?l=all>.
- ² ‘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’.
- ³ Accessed on 6 August 2008 – <http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/search.cfm?l=all>.
- ⁴ www.alter-eu.org/en/system/files/publications/expertgroupsreport.pdf, p. 22.
- ⁵ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/oj/2005/c_097/c_09720050421en00020002.pdf.