

Watchdog group applauds European Commission action against special adviser's conflicts of interest

Amsterdam, 20 February 2007 – Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO) applauds Commissioner Kallas' unprecedented decision to terminate Mr. Rolf Linkohr's status as special adviser to Energy Commissioner Piebalgs. Mr. Linkohr is the director of C.E.R.E.S, a Brussels-based consultancy that is specialised in lobbying for large energy companies, including many nuclear energy producers. In a letter to CEO, Commissioner Kallas explains his decision and announces new measures to improve transparency and accountability, including the release of the list of names of all 55 special advisers to the Commission. The letter is online at: <http://www.corporateeurope.org/docs/Kallas15022007.pdf>

“Commissioner Kallas has given off a clear sign that the obligation for special advisers to the Commission to avoid conflicts of interest is more than an empty formality”, says Erik Wesselius, transparency campaigner at Corporate Europe Observatory. Kallas' letter announces that special advisers will from now on have to sign a ‘declaration on the honour’ to avoid the emergence of conflicts of interest, but does not go into detail about which limitations will be imposed to the advisers vis-à-vis their other professional activities. “We are very encouraged that the names of all special advisers to the Commission will soon be in the public domain, as they should be, and we look forward to clearer rules that can prevent the emergence of conflicts of interest in the future”, says Erik Wesselius.

These steps are key to improve the credibility of EU decision-making and bode well for the Commission's final bid on the European Transparency Initiative (ETI), expected to be presented in the second half of March. “The Commission must show the same courage when it comes to EU lobbying disclosure and take firm action to introduce financial transparency obligations for all lobbyists”, says Erik Wesselius.

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Notes:

1. Commissioner Kallas' initiative was sparked by open letters sent by Corporate Europe Observatory to the European Commission in mid-January:
 - “Open letter to Commissioner Piebalgs on the subject of a potential conflict of interest of Mr. Rolf Linkohr”, Corporate Europe Observatory, 16 January 2007. <http://www.corporateeurope.org/docs/PiebalgsLetter.pdf>
 - “Open letter to Commission President Barroso and Vice President Kallas on the subject of transparency and rules with regards to special advisers to European Commissioners”, Corporate Europe Observatory, 16 January 2007. <http://www.corporateeurope.org/docs/BarrosoKallas.pdf>
2. Commissioner Kallas' decision to dismiss Mr. Linkohr as a special adviser was covered in the Financial times yesterday: “Brussels special advisers to be named”, Andrew Bounds, *Financial Times*, 18 February 2007. http://www.ft.com/cms/s/e2532608-bf72-11db-9ac2-000b5df10621,dwp_uuid=70662e7c-3027-11da-ba9f-00000e2511c8.html
3. For more information about Mr. Linkohr's lobbying activities for nuclear firms and other large energy corporations, see: “The conflicting interests of Rolf Linkohr: energy industry lobbyist and special adviser to the EU Energy Commissioner”, Corporate Europe Observatory background paper, January 2007. <http://www.corporateeurope.org/RolfLinkohr.html>
4. Corporate Europe Observatory is an Amsterdam-based EU lobby watchdog group. See also: <http://www.corporateeurope.org/aboutceo.html>