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## **RIGHTS GROUPS SLAM EU'S GERMAN CHOICE FOR NEW HR CHIEF**

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Deutsche Welle (6 January 2017)

Human rights and transparency groups say the European Union is wrong to promote German EU Commissioner Günther Oettinger to a new role. The campaigners have hit out at his "racist, sexist and homophobic" remarks.

In an open letter to the European Parliament, ten campaign groups urged European Union MPs to reject Oettinger's promotion over his politically incorrect comments.

They are angry that Oettinger, who is the current EU Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society, has been promoted to Commissioner for the Budget and Human Resources.

The 63-year-old German has faced outrage after calling Chinese people "slitty-eyes," and making disparaging remarks about women, gay marriage and Belgian politicians in a speech. He has since apologized, ignoring calls by some EU lawmakers for his resignation.

Already in the role

Oettinger's appointment, effective from last Sunday, sees him replace Bulgaria's Kristalina Georgieva, who has quit for the World Bank.

He is due to attend a confirmation hearing before the European Parliament on January 9, and several Euro MPs have threatened to block his appointment.

The groups said that at a "crucial moment for the EU" the human resources commissioner should "lead by example" and "speak out against racism, sexism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia."

"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," they wrote.

[Belgien Europaparlament Brüssel (picture-alliance/D. Kalker)]

An EU committee will grill Oettinger on Monday

"In our view, Commissioner Oettinger is not the right person for this task."

The groups include Transparency International EU, the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, Oxfam, European Women's Lobby and the European Network Against Racism.

Ethics questioned too

In the letter, the organizations also question Oettinger's independence from corporate interests, after he made trips to Budapest on a private jet belonging to a German businessman close to the Kremlin.

But the commission has already insisted he broke no ethics rules by not reporting it under EU disclosure rules.

The EU said on Thursday it had no comment to make about Thursday's letter.

In October, the Beijing government reacted angry to Oettinger's comments about Chinese people, leaving red faces at the Commission.

He apologized but said they were meant to give Germany a "wake-up call" over China's increasing power and a debilitating political correctness at home.

mm/kl (AFP, Reuters)

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