
COMMISSION STICKS TO ITS LINE ON BARROSO CASE

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"The [commission] vice president [Katainen] made it very clear that such an activity was not carried out by Mr Barroso" when both men met last October, the commission's new secretary general Martin Selmayr said in letter seen by EUobserver.

The letter was sent to Alter-EU, the Alliance for Lobbying Transparency and Ethics Regulation, in reply to a request to reconsider the commission's greenlight to Barroso's job at the US investment bank Goldman Sachs.

Barroso took the job in July 2016, and the commission ethics committee estimated that it did not breach rules as long as Barroso did not engage in lobbying.

However, the meeting with Katainen - held without note-taking in a hotel near the commission's headquarters - "confirms that Mr. Barroso has not kept his commitment to not lobby on behalf of Goldman Sachs," according to Alter-EU in its letter to the commission earlier this month.

The coalition of transparency NGOs said that the opinion of the commission's ethics committee, which said last year that Barroso's job did not breach rules, "must be deemed null" and Barroso's case "should once again be assessed."

Selmayr argued in his letter: "any meeting with Mr Barroso, regardless of the capacity in which Mr Barroso acts and independently of the possibly private or social character, shall be published as a meeting with an interest representative."

Selmayr said that the policy was set by commission president Jean-Claude Juncker after Juncker's predecessor Barroso took a job at the US business bank Goldman Sachs in July 2016.

Juncker took that decision after public outcry and after the EU Ombudsman called for a strengthening of ethics rules for former commissioners.

Barroso, for his part, had pledged in a letter to Juncker that he had "not been engaged to lobby on behalf of Goldman Sachs," and that he did "not intend to do so."

In a report earlier this month, EU ombudsman Emily O'Reilly suggested that the meeting with Katainen could be considered as lobbying. She also demanded that the ethics committee reassess Barroso's case.

She noted that at the meeting, which Katainen described to EUobserver as a "beer between friends", "matters discussed, trade and defence policy, may be of interest to an investment bank such as Goldman Sachs."

She added that "one of key objectives of a lobbyist is to meet with public officials and to obtain from them information which may be useful to the company they represent."

In his letter Selmayr argued that "this strict approach" of treating Barroso like a lobbyist "does not mean that every meeting with Mr Barroso must have the purpose of lobbying."

"The commission is in contact with the European ombudsman," he added about O'Reilly's demands, but did not answer Alter-EU's request for a reassessment of the case and for a reinforcement of ethics rules.

After the ombudsman report, the commission suggested it would not change its rules, arguing that it was already "world leader for the quality and intensity of its rules."

Kaynak/Source: