Press release | 09.05.2012

EU agencies - conflicts of interest

Resignation of EFSA chairperson vindicates EP efforts to tackle conflicts of interest at EU agencies

The chair of the European Food Safety Agency (EFSA) management board Diána Bánáti has resigned from her position (1) following pressure from the European Parliament, and the Greens in particular, over conflicts of interest. Tomorrow, the European Parliament will vote on the EU 2010 budget discharge, with questions hanging over the budgets of a number of EU agencies due to conflicts of interest.

The Green group, which first drew attention to the conflict of interest with Ms Bánáti's dual roles with EFSA and the industry lobby group International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI) (2), welcomed the announcement, with Green MEP **José Bové** stating:

"The clear conflict of interest in Ms Bánáti's role with ILSI made her position as EFSA chair completely inappropriate and untenable. Against this background, resignation was the only option and we only regret that it has taken so long for the agency to come to its senses.

"Given the sensitive nature of EFSA's work, especially as regards the authorisation of GMOs, the need for the independence of its staff and board is essential. The presence of key staff and board members with direct links to the food industry is not acceptable. Ms Bánáti's resignation is a first step to cleaning up the agency."

Commenting on the implications for the EP vote tomorrow, Green budgetary control spokesperson **Bart Staes** MEP (3) added:

"The resignation of Ms Bánáti vindicates the European Parliament's efforts to draw attention to and root out conflicts of interest at the EU agencies (3). These conflicts of interest are not just limited to EFSA, with the European Medicines Agency being another prime culprit. Agencies like EFSA and the EMA, which deal with the authorisation of goods and items that have direct implications for public health and safety, must act completely independently and any possible conflict of interests with industry must be ruled out. This is both in the public interest and in the interest of the agencies themselves, and the credibility of their work.

"MEPs voting tomorrow must take account of this in their decision on whether or not to grant a discharge to the budgets of the affected agencies. It is also essential that the European Court of Auditors stop delaying the publication of its report on conflicts of interest at the agencies. It is in the public interest that this report is published and the ECA must stop sitting on it."

(1) EFSA announcement http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/press/news/120509.htm
(2) See the Greens/EFA statement from September 2010: www.greens-efa.eu/efsa-and-gmos-2628.html
(3) Bart Staes was part of an EP delegation, which visited EFSA last week to discuss this issue.

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