



The Secretary-General

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NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION OF THE CONFERENCE OF PRESIDENTS

Subject: European Business and Parliament Scheme

On 4 April 2008, Mrs Frassoni, Co-Chair of the Green-AEL Group, wrote to the President of the Parliament to ask for clarification about the status and activities of the European Business and Parliament Scheme (EBPS). In particular, the letter raises questions about whether the organisation, to which the Quaestors have granted an office on Parliament's premises, is engaged in some kind of lobbying activity.

Background

- The **European Parliament and Business Scheme (EBPS)** is designed to offer MEPs (and senior EP staff) the opportunity to undertake short 'placements' in companies within their home countries or elsewhere, to improve mutual understanding between the political and business worlds. It currently has 28 participating firms which are, for the most part, major European multinational companies.
- The EBPS operates within the wider framework of **International Association of Business and Parliament (IABP)**, the body which oversees and accredits schemes of this kind in a number of countries around the world. The 'business and parliament' model currently operates in 14 national and regional parliaments - including Finland, Sweden, Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom, as well as several countries outside the EU - and has existed for 30 years. In all cases, there are strict rules to prevent any kind of lobbying. The IABP makes it clear that all programmes have to be mutually educational, independent and non-partisan.
- The 'business and parliament' concept was extended to the European Parliament in the early 2000s, first for senior officials and (since 2006) for MEPs. This process was specifically encouraged by Parliament's authorities at that time. The objective of the scheme established in the European Parliament is to 'provide an exchange of understanding and knowledge' by providing 'tailored study programmes and other activities bringing together business practitioners and parliamentarians of all parties'. The EBPS programmes - which must be at least two days long - can focus on any aspect of business, agriculture or the role of SMEs, depending on the interests of the individual participant.

European Parliament Patronage

- Successive EP Presidents - Pat Cox, Josep Borrell and Hans-Gert Pöttering - have served as the *ex officio* Patron of the IABP and EBPS. It is the case that presidents

of the Parliament, under the Parliament's rules, cannot be permanent patrons for 'social, cultural or artistic activities or events'. However, there is no similar restriction on permanent patronage of bodies supportive of MEPs' parliamentary activities.

- In the various national 'business and parliament' schemes, the Speaker of the Parliament usually gives his or her support either as the Patron, President or Chairman of the parliamentary board. This serves to underline that the scheme is meant as a resource for the Parliament as a whole and not one or other particular political group.
- Vice-President Vidal-Quadras is at present the Chairman of the EBPS. He is assisted by a **Parliamentary Board**, which includes John Bowis (EPP-ED), Lena Ek (ALDE), Angelika Niebler (EPP-ED), Edit Herczog (PES), Manuel Medina Ortega (PES), Dirk Sterckx (ALDE), and, until recently, David Hammerstein-Mintz (Greens/EFA).

Provision of Office Accommodation

- The Quaestors agreed to make an office available to the IABP/EBPS in the Parliament on 26 September 2007. On previous occasions, the Quaestors had declined the request because of lack of available office accommodation.
- At present, the Parliament provides office space, on a similar basis, for the Former Members' Association and the Voluntary Pension Scheme, both of which are outside bodies established in Belgian law. In general, Parliament operates a policy of reducing the number of outside bodies on EP premises.
- Several other national or regional parliaments offer office accommodation to their chapters of the IABP (as in Scotland, Northern Ireland, New Zealand and Georgia).
- In December 2006, the Quaestors considered a proposal from the Administration for a general set of rules concerning the allocation of office space to outside bodies of various kinds. However, it was unable to agree on such rules. As a result, requests are dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

Role of Parliamentary Board

- The companies taking part in the European Parliament scheme are admitted on the basis of various criteria. These include that they undertake to adhere to the Code of Principles of the IABP and EBPS, reflect good practice in their sector and country, provide practical examples of corporate social responsibility, and their participation contributes to the balanced sectoral representation of the economy.
- According to the IABP rules, the participating companies provide the participating parliamentarians with business exposure within a framework guaranteed by the Board, which accredits the companies on an annual basis.
- The Parliamentary Board of the EP scheme is designed to be a key feature of accountability of the scheme, ensuring that both parliamentarians and business participants fully adhere to the Code of Principles. In addition, it gives the Board the power to exclude the company if the Code is breached.

In the light of the above, the Conference might consider it appropriate to ask the Administration to draw up a set of rules governing the allocation of such office space to outside bodies of all kinds


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