

## Tobacco firms held quiet meetings with top EU officials

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BRUSSELS - Tobacco lobbyists and top European Commission officials held several quiet meetings over at least the past two years, says Brussels-based pro-transparency group Corporate Europe Observatory (CEO).

Among them are people from commission chief Jose Manuel Barroso's own cabinet, his secretariat-general and others in the commission's directorate for health and consumer affairs (DG Sanco).

The EU's anti-fraud office, Olaf, says undisclosed meetings with the tobacco industry are a direct violation of an article in the World Health Organisation's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.

Olaf chief Giovanni Kessler reportedly told euro-deputies at a closed-door meeting in October that the convention was mentioned in the John Dalli affair, which centered around his contacts with Swedish Match, a company that makes a type of mouth tobacco called snus.

Commission guidelines echo the WHO convention.

Its internal rules state that officials "should interact with the tobacco industry only when and to the extent strictly necessary" and must "ensure that such interactions are conducted transparently."

Dalli's meeting with a young lawyer in his private office, in the company of Silvio Zammit, a Maltese businessman and small-time mayor, for a discussion of an EU draft tobacco directive and snus constituted "unofficial contacts with several tobacco companies," said a commission spokesperson.

However, CEO has unearthed at least five different meetings, also outside official channels, between tobacco lobbyists and other top EU commission staff.

One of the meetings took place with Swedish Match and people inside Barroso's own secretariat-general in September, a month before Dalli lost his job.

The pro-transparency NGO says Swedish Match met with secretariat-general officials William Sleath and Jean Ferriere as well as Antti Maunu of DG Sanco to explain their views "on the current situation regarding snus and what we see as a logical step to take in the future, that is a regulation for all smoke free tobacco products in the EU."

In June, Clara Martinez Alberola from Barroso's cabinet met with Spyros Pappas (an unregistered lawyer/lobbyist from the firm Pappas & Associates) and Patrick Hildingson of the Brussels-based European Smokeless Tobacco Council.

In December 2011, tobacco lobbyists from the German-based Bundesverband der Zigarrenindustrie and the Dutch-based European Cigar Manufacturers Association met with Barroso cabinet officials Guillaume Morel and Henning Klaus.

Another meeting took place in June 2010 between Philip Morris International and Barroso secretariat staffer John Watson.

Watson wrote in an email at the time that Philip Morris handed him some documents that he would pass on to colleagues. He then says Philip Morris will "write to the DGs [director generals] of Trade and Sanco."

Philip Morris also met with Watson and Marianne Klingbeil, another secretariat-general official, in May 2010 at a conference in London.

"Dalli's meetings with tobacco lobbyists at his office in Malta were not transparent, but could this be the cause of Dalli's resignation? Does the commission have a strict approach around contacts with tobacco lobbyists, as prescribed in the WHO rules? The answer would seem to be No," said CEO.

The commission, for its part, confirms all the above meetings took place but says they were not conducted behind closed doors.

"No rules were violated. The EU rules in place for contacts with stakeholders were respected. These are compatible with the WHO recommendations," said commission spokeswoman Pia Ahrenkilde Hansen in an email to EUobserver.

She told this website the commission disclosed documents related to the meetings following freedom of information requests, including by CEO.

But CEO, which found out about some of the meetings through the EU freedom of information law, said watchdogs should not have to prompt the commission to disclose such meetings by making formal requests for documents.

"If you have to ask for documents - and you are lucky if you get them - then this is not the type of transparency as required under the WHO rules," CEO's Olivier Hoedeman told this website.

Hoedeman noted that DG Sanco publishes most of the minutes and meetings with tobacco industry on its website.

"All the others should do so as well," he added.