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European Commission finds Czech PM Babiš has conflict of interest

Andrej Babiš

Today, several international media outlets are reporting that the European Commission's legal service has concluded that Prime Minister of Czech Republic Andrej Babiš has a conflict of interest between his role as head of the Czech government and his business dealings.

The reports state that the Commission's legal service found that Mr Babiš's role as beneficiary of the Agrofert group of companies constitute a conflict of interest, currently in his role as PM, and previously in his role as Finance Minister, given that he is in charge of both negotiating and implementing EU funds, of which he personally benefits from. Agrofert comprises of over 230 smaller companies, several of which receive large amounts of EU funds.

Ever since these allegations first were raised by Transparency International Czech Republic, the Greens/EFA group have been calling for a full investigation into the extent of Babiš's conflicts of interest. Now that the Commission has confirmed that there is a conflict of interest, Andrej Babiš should sever all ties with the Agrofert group and resolve this conflict, failing that he must step down as Prime Minister.

The Greens/EFA group has raised this issue with the European Commission on several occasions throughout hearings in the Budgetary Control Committee. The Commission had promised to look into the matter, but so far has refused to publish the now leaked legal opinion. The Greens/EFA group have called for a plenary debate in the European Parliament as soon as possible.

Philippe Lamberts, President of the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament comments:

"There can be no justification for abusing the position of public office for private gain. The European Commission's own legal service has quite clearly found that Andrej Babiš has a conflict of interest and now the Czech Parliament and Commission cannot stand by and let this situation further denigrate the standing of the Czech government and the EU.

"Mr Babiš cannot be allowed to remain both a beneficiary of Agrofert and head of the Czech government, he must sever any financial ties to Agrofert from which he might benefit from through his role as Prime Minister. All EU funds going to the Agrofert group must be suspended immediately, pending a full

investigation. The European Commission should now publish all the documents related to Mr Babiš's case and explain exactly what steps they intend to take to remedy this outrageous situation.

"The Commission claims that it is up to national authorities to deal with such conflicts, but how realistic is it that Czech civil servants would be able to rule against their own PM? This is European Union money distributed through European Union policies and it must be up to the European Commission to take responsibility and resolve this conflict of interest. The Greens/EFA group have demanded a debate in the European Parliament and will ensure that the Commission fulfils its duty as guardian of the EU treaties to prevent such shocking abuses of power.

"Finally, Guy Verhofstadt and the ALDE group should really take a long hard look in the mirror and question whether they want to keep propping up their own pet Czech oligarch while he so brazenly undermines European values."

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