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New conflict of interest ruling on Czech PM Andrej Babiš

Quote from Bart Staes MEP

A Czech municipal authority in Černošice has ruled that Prime Minister Andrej Babiš has a conflict of interest around his media organisations that are controlled by the Agrofert group. Under Czech law it is illegal for a Prime Minister to control media organisations.

This follows on a complaint last year by Transparency International Czech Republic, who uncovered evidence that Babiš is the ultimate beneficial owner of the Agrofert group. After the Transparency International complaint and sustained pressure from the Greens/EFA group in the European Parliament, the European Commission's own legal opinion found that Babiš is in conflict of interest in between his role as PM and his ownership of Agrofert, given that the group receives large amounts of EU funds. There is currently an on-going Commission investigation in Czech Republic on the matter.

Bart Staes, Greens/EFA MEP and member of the Budgetary Control committee in the European Parliament comments:

"It's seriously problematic to have an EU Prime Minister taking decisions in the European Council that could benefit him personally. Andrej Babiš is not just some diet Orbán who can brush off questions about his business dealings and media ownership just because he's Guy Verhofstadt's Czech mate and sits in the ALDE group. Andrej Babiš' conflicts of interest undermine the rule of law in Czech Republic and the integrity of EU decision-making. Not only can Babiš make decisions at the EU and national level that may suit his own interests, he can also chose how those decisions are communicated through his own media companies.

"Credit must be given to the Czech authorities that ruled in an independent and courageous way, given the political climate. The Commissioners must show the same level of courage and immediately explain how they plan on insuring that the integrity of EU funds and policies are insulated from the whims of a power hungry oligarch".

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