



EUROPEAN WOMEN'S
LOBBY
EUROPEEN DES FEMMES



Equality for lesbian, gay, bisexual,
trans and intersex people
in Europe



European Network Against Racism
Réseau européen contre le racisme

OPEN LETTER TO

President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker
President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz

From:

European Women's Lobby
ILGA-Europe, European Region of the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association
ENAR - European Network Against Racism

Brussels, 8 November 2016

Re: Remarks by European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Günther Öttinger

We welcome the fact that European Commissioner for Digital Economy and Society Günther Öttinger has at last apologised for his racist, sexist and homophobic remarks made over a week ago in a speech he gave in an official capacity. However, we are dismayed that a person holding such a high position of leadership in Europe should think these remarks appropriate in the first place. That it took over a week for Commissioner Öttinger to acknowledge the damage his words issue an apology is alarming.

In September 2016, 177 European and national Civil Society Organisations and Trade Unions came together to call for "A new Europe for people, planet and prosperity for all". In that call, we urged that "We must all – leaders, media and individuals – actively and at every opportunity speak out and act against division, marginalisation of different groups in society and those that play on fears for their own political ends."

Many people across Europe are dissatisfied and disillusioned with the European Union and feel remote from its institutions and policies. As people search for answers, Euroscepticism and nationalism, intolerance and misinformation are winning out over cooperation, humanity and solidarity. During these times of deepening political crisis in Europe, far right populists are increasingly vocal in their attacks on women's rights, migrants and minorities, and LGBTI* persons. We see these political forces as attacking the very values of the European Union which we seek to advance: of human rights, of gender equality and of solidarity.

The inability of Commissioner Öttinger to uphold and defend these values threatens the credibility and legitimacy of the European Union as a whole. It sets an indefensible example to staff in the institutions that they can also engage in sexist, homophobic and racist behaviour.

Looking ahead we hope that the publicity surrounding this speech can start a real conversation about how the European institutions can take a lead on role modelling the core European values of anti-discrimination and equality.

With that in mind, we call on Commissioner Öttinger to resign with immediate effect.

We call on you, both Presidents to:

- ▶ Issue an official statement of condemnation by the European Commission, acknowledging the damage done by this type of statement and for the mishandling by the EC;
- ▶ At the time of the appointment of a new Commissioner responsible for Human Resources, to make a clear commitment to adopt internal staff policies for the European Commission that fully ensure non-discrimination based on all ground set out in the EU treaties and case law, and to ensure that the EC steps up its efforts to create truly a truly inclusive workplace for everyone.
- ▶ Develop a plan of action for strengthening and implementing the code of conduct for Commissioners and officials of all EU Institutions, including systematic investigation and stronger implementation of sanctions in cases of sexist, racist and/or hate speech by members of the European Commission, and through giving the power to the Ombudsperson to monitor EC Commissioners' and officials' public statements.

Yours sincerely,

Joanna Maycock
Secretary General
European Women's Lobby
Joanna.Maycock@womenlobby.org
+32 2 210 04 26

Evelyne Paradis
Executive Director
ILGA-Europe
Evelyne@ilga-europe.org
+32 2 609 5410

Michael Privot
Director ENAR European Network
Against Racism aisbl
michael@enar-eu.org
+32 2 229 35 70