

MEPs want inquiry into EU tobacco scandal

January 9 2013

Leading lawmakers from Europe's Greens called Wednesday for an inquiry into a tobacco lobby scandal that cost the bloc's top health official his job late last year.

French MEP Jose Bove and Belgian Bart Staes demanded "a special committee of inquiry" in the [European Parliament](#), saying "European institutions failed to meet their obligations" of transparency regarding a tobacco-linked [fraud probe](#) against former health commissioner John Dalli.

Dalli resigned late October after being cited in a report from the EU fraud office OLAF.

He has repeatedly claimed he was innocent and the victim of a plot hatched as he prepared to toughen up the European Union's anti-smoking legislation.

"We don't understand what happened," Bove said, adding that "the industry won time" with Dalli's removal. "There'll be no new European law before 2015," he said. "The situation is unacceptable."

The two lawmakers also said two top European Commission officials, including its secretary-general Catherine Day, each met three times in 2012 with a Swedish tobacco-maker, US tobacco giant Philip Morris and European [tobacco industry](#) lobbyists.

Bove said Day had "delayed" the release of Dalli's proposed new anti-

smoking legislation.

"We want the confidentiality of the entire inquiry regarding the Dalli affair lifted so that parliament has the right to see what really went on," said Staes.

"All the agreements concluded between European commissioners and lobbyists must be examined to see if the rules are sufficiently strict," Staes added. "Ethical rules must be reinforced."

The MEPs added that neither Dalli nor the parliament had been given the chance to read the OLAF report as it had been sent on immediately to the Maltese judicial authorities for possible action.

They also queried the Commission's controversial reappointment in December of a tobacco lobbyist to its ethics committee.

French lawyer Michel Petite, whose Clifford Chance firm numbers Philip Morris among clients, was named for a new period on the three-man ethics board that advises the EU executive on whether former commissioners can join private companies in the same sector as their former portfolios.

But in September 2011 and in September 2012 he met officials of the Commission's legal service.

A document obtained by AFP that the Commission gave the parliament's budget committee states that "Mr Petite mentioned that his law firm provided legal advice to a tobacco company (Philip Morris International) and set out his views on some legal issues of [tobacco](#) legislation."

In 2010, the three-person ethics panel had no problems with former industry commissioner Guenther Verheugen launching a lobby firm two

months after quitting.

The panel also famously agreed to former internal market commissioner Charlie McCreevy, whose portfolio involved transport, going to work for Ryanair, and for ex-fisheries commissioner Joe Borg to join a firm that lobbies the EU on maritime policy.

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