

Mr Nuno Brito – Ambassador

Permanent Representative of Portugal to the EU
Avenue de Cortenbergh 12
1040 Brussels
Belgium
e-mail: mssl@reper-portugal.be

Berlin, 12 January 2021

Sponsorship of the Portuguese Presidency

Dear Ambassador,

First of all many thanks for your response to my letter which we received on 25 November 2020. In the meantime Portugal has started its EU Presidency and we wish you and your colleagues every success for the coming months.

Since receiving your reply it has come to our knowledge that the Portuguese Presidency has in fact taken on two corporate sponsors in order to, according to your website, provide “in-kind” sponsorships in order “to meet the needs of its events.” This announcement has led to some confusion on our behalf and we would very grateful if you could shed some light on the questions below.

In your letter you stated that “*informal meetings, seminars and social and cultural events are on hold for now,*” which is indeed understandable in the current circumstances. We were therefore surprised to learn that the sponsors have been chosen to meet the needs of the events. Please permit me to ask whether the Portuguese Presidency is therefore indeed organising meetings of a significant size that would make the cost of provision of a cup of coffee or drink too high to be covered internally? Or, if such events are not being organised, then could you please explain why the logos of these two companies are on the Presidency website?

In Politico EU Influenceⁱ on 8 January 2021, a spokesperson for the Presidency is quoted as saying that the sponsors are subject to “*a contract pursuant to Portuguese law on Public Procurement and made public on the Portuguese Public Procurement Portal.*” The person added that “*these contracts have been concluded according to Portuguese Law and there are no costs involved.*” This quote leads me to confusion on whether it is indeed a sponsorship contract that has been signed or a public procurement process. If it is indeed public procurement then the logos can be removed from the website – it cannot be both public procurement and sponsorship – it must be either one or the other.

In your reply to my first letter you say that: “*In any case, transparency and accountability will be at the core of our Presidency.*” I therefore ask if you can share on your website, and with us in reply to this letter, the amount of ‘in kind’ contribution these two companies are providing and the signed contracts that have been drawn up with them?

Your decision to take on corporate sponsorship is a provocation to the EU Ombudsman, the institutions who are trying to work towards greater transparency and to the citizens of Europe. It is a step in the wrong direction. Portugal has chosen to promote two companies that work as multinationals or promote multinational brands during its term at the helm of the European Union at a time when trust from European citizens is more crucial than ever.

We ask you to take immediate steps to reverse this decision and to advance the discussions and agreement at the Council to ensure that such arrangements between a country representing an EU institution and a corporate body cannot be made in the future.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thilo Bode'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Thilo' and the last name 'Bode' clearly distinguishable.

Thilo Bode

Executive Director of foodwatch international

¹ <https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/politico-eu-influence/politico-eu-influence-portuguese-priorities-recovery-in-focus-whos-meeting-vestager/>