

16/06/2016

Deputato al Parlamento Europeo

Mr Neven Mimica
Commissioner for International Cooperation and Development
European Commission
Berlaymont
1049 Brussels

Dear Commissioner,

We are writing to you concerning the triennial DEAR project “Change Your Shoes” (Grant contract, External Actions of the European Union, DCI-NSAED/2014/353-107).

This project was approved in December 2014 by DG DEVCO B2 and the contract was signed on December 18. The project started its activity at the beginning of 2015 with the participation of 18 organizations from several European and Asian countries. The leading organization is Südwind - Austria.

The aim of the project is to raise consumer awareness with regard to leather shoes' production, in order to improve working conditions and well-being of workers through information, advocacy and lifestyle choices. Among other activities, the project includes research on the social and environmental conditions in the leather footwear production chain countries including China, India, Indonesia, Turkey and Italy (which plays an important productive role in tanning and footwear sectors). The research, whose main focus is wages and working conditions, health, financial investments and profits, danger of chromium VI, will form the baseline for the media work, media campaign, information materials and tools as well as lobbying work¹.

The organisations participating in the project decided to initiate the investigation from the tanning phase in the district of Santa Croce (Tuscany). The outcome report, entitled "A tough story of leather", was published in

¹ Activity 1.5, p.14 of the grant contract.

Deputato al Parlamento Europeo

December 2015² and is supposed to be one of several reports on different countries, mainly outside the European Union, focusing on the global production networks and global supply chains for the production of leather shoes.

After the publication of this report, DG Devco contacted the project's coordinator asking to withdraw the published report. Protests against the report were raised by the European industry of the sector, which did not consider the report accurate nor appropriate (European Confederation of Footwear Industry, Confederation of tanning industries in Europe and Unione Nazionale Italiana Conciatori - the Italian association of tanning industries). Industry representatives were invited to two different meetings which took place in the European Commission premises in order to discuss the report together with DG Devco and DG Grow and with project's representatives.

After a first round of discussions, Change Your Shoes representatives decided to suspend the publication of the report, as act of good will in the context of the ongoing dialogue with the European Commission and in order to verify the claims sent by the industry representatives through Devco. However, after having confirmed the soundness of the content of the report and answered to all the criticism expressed by the industry, the report has been made public again. The criticism raised by the industry³ and the responses from "Change your shoes" project⁴ have also been made public.

On the 4th of May 2016 Südwind Agentur (coordinator of the project) was officially informed by DG Devco that the payment of the second instalment of the project was suspended, to carry out additional controls, in particular because of the "controversial Italian report".

² The report can be consulted at <http://www.abitipuliti.org/changeyourshoes/2015/12/16/2015-report-una-dura-storia-di-cuoio/>

³ http://www.abitipuliti.org/changeyourshoes/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/12/UNIC_comments_353-107-Feb16-Final-2.pdf

⁴ http://www.abitipuliti.org/changeyourshoes/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2015/12/CYS-Answers_to_UNIC.pdf



Deputato al Parlamento Europeo

Considering that the project's contract has been fully respected and that it contains clearly the indication that activities and research would have involved Italy as a country subject of the study, and considering furthermore that the content of any report produced within the context of the project does not reflect the position of the European Commission (as clearly stated also in the report "A tough story of leather"),

We would like to ask you, as Commissioner responsible, clarifications about the reasons on why the European Commission has suspended the payment of the second instalment for the project "Change Your Shoes".

Furthermore, we would like to ask clarifications about the role played by the industry and about the presence of its representatives during the discussions on the application of the contract between the European Commission, acting as contracting authority on behalf of the European Union, and the coordinator of the project.

Considering that several associations participating to the project are suffering heavy financial consequences because of the suspension of the payments, we call on you to take the necessary actions in order to ensure that the grant contract is fully respected and that the payment of the second instalment is made as soon as possible.

We would like to ask you a meeting at your earliest convenience in order to discuss this very important matter in depth.

Looking forward to receiving your feedback,

We thank you very much in advance for your attention and we remain at your disposal for any clarification or further discussion you may need.

Best regards,



Deputato al Parlamento Europeo

Maria Arena,
Renata Briano,
Sergio Cofferati,
Fabio De Masi,
Pascal Durand,
Laura Ferrara,
Eleonora Forenza,
Elena Gentile,
Ana Maria Gomes,
Tania Gonzalez Penas,
Agnes Jongerius,
Jean Lambert,
Ulrike Lunacek,
Curzio Maltese,
Edouard Martin,
Emmanuel Maurel,
Alessia Mosca,



Deputato al Parlamento Europeo

Dimitrios Papadimoulis,

Evelyn Regner,

Judith Sargentini,

Elly Schlein,

Barbara Spinelli,

Josep-Maria Terricabras,

Miguel Urban Crespo,

Ernest Urtasun,

Josef Weidenholzer,

Members of the European Parliament