

## New conflicts of interest at the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA)

“Revolving doors with industry are fast becoming EFSA’s main entrance”  
Monday, 21 March 2016

In a letter to the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA), Testbiotech is urging its executive Director Bernhard Url, to take measures to safeguard EFSA's independence and restore its credibility. The letter was prompted by the fact that in January Barbara Gallani was appointed EFSA communications director. Ms Gallani is currently serving as chief scientist at the UK food industry lobby group, the Food and Drink Federation and will take up her position at EFSA without any cooling-off period. Risk communication is one of the most important tasks undertaken by EFSA.

This case is strongly reminiscent of previous cases of revolving doors at EFSA: For example, in 2009, Testbiotech discovered that Suzy Renckens, head of the GMO unit at EFSA had moved straight on to a GMO company. This case of mismanagement was criticised by both the EU Ombudsman and the European Parliament.

“It appears that the ‘revolving doors’ are now the new main entrance to EFSA’s upper management level. As our current findings show, the case of Barbara Gallani is just a symptom of a more general ongoing mismanagement at EFSA. The authority still is not ready to adequately protect its independence and credibility,” Christoph Then says for Testbiotech.

A recent investigation by Testbiotech shows that at least four EFSA experts responsible for the risk assessment of genetically engineered organisms, play an active role in organisations that are known for their close affiliations to the biotech industry. In addition, an expert from the German Federal Institute for Risk Assessment (BfR) who is also actively involved with EFSA, failed to declare his activities with the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI).

Bernhard Url was appointed in 2014 as executive director at EFSA. He took up the position at a time when there had already been several serious cases of conflict of interests at EFSA. The most prominent of these, in 2012, was the chair of the EFSA Management Board, Diána Bánáti, who was forced to resign because she held a parallel leading position at the International Life Sciences Institute (ILSI). At that time, EFSA tightened up its rules to ensure its independence, including the obligations set out in the rules for declaration of interest (DOI) to make transparent relevant interests. From then onwards, parallel activities of experts in institutions such as ILSI were considered to be a conflict of interest and, therefore, unacceptable to EFSA. These higher standards of independence were thought by many to be a step in the right direction, but soon afterwards Url was appointed to take over, he was subsequently quoted in the media as saying he saw no need to raise the standards of independence any further.

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**Further information:** [The open letter to EFSA](#) [2]

[The case of Suzy Renckens](#) [3]

[EU Parliament criticises EFSA standards of independence](#) [4]

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