

Strasbourg, September 14th 2011

Dear President of the European Commission,
M. José Manuel Durão Barroso,

We write to you concerning the declarations made by your Commissioner for Energy, Mr. Guenther Oettinger, who has proposed in a recent interview with the *Bild* newspaper that the flags of countries with excessive deficits should fly at half-mast in front of EU buildings. Unfortunately, your commissioner did not dismiss this notion as the absurd hypothesis that it is, but instead endorsed it, saying that "it would just be a symbol, but one with a big deterrent effect."

Yes, Mr. President, this would be a symbol, and a potent one, of a European Union that would have lost all sight of its principles, ideals, and goals. None of these imply the symbolic humiliation of European nations, regardless of the administrative, budgetary, or other sins that their respective governments may have committed.

The founding visionaries behind the idea of a United Europe have always dreamed of this Union being constituted by countries equal among themselves. The mere thought that, at this point in the European project, a commissioner would seriously consider the ideas proposed by Mr. Oettinger would have made the likes of Schumann, Monnet or Spinelli indignant.

Our citizens are proud to see the flags of their countries flying side by side — and at equal dignity — with the flags of their EU partners. Indeed, any true pro-European is proud to see *all* our flags flying side by side, "united in diversity", in times good or bad. Someone who proposes to do otherwise shows to have failed at understanding what the European Ideal is about, and is unfit to be a European Commissioner. Mr. Oettinger should retract and recant his words, or resign from the European Commission.

Yours sincerely,

The Members of the European Parliament,

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