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**European commissioner refuses to answer questions on funding
Irish propaganda advertisements**

At the National Forum on Europe today in Dublin Castle, former Green Party MEP Patricia McKenna challenged EU Commissioner Margot Wallstrom to make a statement on EU Commission-funded advertisements which were found to be in breach of Irish broadcasting law. Ms McKenna asked the Commissioner, charged with communicating Europe to its citizens, to state whether she thought it appropriate that European taxpayers' money has been used to fund political propaganda advertisements on Irish radio. Ms Wallstrom declined to address the issue.

McKenna said it was most disappointing that the commissioner responsible for this issue refused to give her opinion on such an important matter. She pointed out that a series of Europe Direct advertisements on Newstalk 106 and commercial radio stations across the country in 2006 were found to be in breach of the ban on political advertising under the Broadcasting Acts.

She said the EU Commission Representation in Ireland, whose director is Mr. Martin Territt, applied for and was allocated €360,000 for these advertisements.

Ms McKenna and Mr Anthony Coughlan of the National Platform both lodged complaints with the Broadcasting Complaints Commission because the advertisements consisted mainly of statements extolling the benefits of the EU without any reference to the possible negative or 'downside' aspects and were, they believed, clearly targeted at voters in the hope of influencing their vote in the referendum on the Lisbon Treaty.

They argued that the advertisements financed by the Commission were, in effect, political propaganda geared towards influencing public opinion on the EU in the run up to the referendum and were in breach of the Broadcasting Acts which prohibit political advertising. The Broadcasting Complaints Commission upheld their complaint.

In upholding the complaint the BCC referred to a press release from Mr Territt's office, which admitted that the campaign had a political aim and cited the endorsement of that aim by EU Commissioner McCreevy.

Ms McKenna went on to say:

'Mr. Territt recently stated that neither he nor the EU Commission as a whole would be interfering in the Irish debate but it is clear from Commissioner Wallstrom's speech today and her indirect call for Irish people to support the treaty that they are doing just that.'

'The EU Commission, which will benefit substantially at the expense of Irish voters if this treaty gets the go ahead, has no right to interfere in this matter and is duty bound to act under the existing EU Treaties. Considering the massive funds and resources at its disposal there is no doubt that the EU Commission can influence Irish opinion prior to the vote if they can get away with it.'

'€360,000 is quite a substantial amount of money and there is no doubt that, unless challenged, powerful bodies like the EU Commission, will with the help of public monies, try to interfere in this referendum. If this is allowed to happen it will make a complete mockery of the McKenna judgement and will deny the Irish people the right to a free, fair and balanced debate.'

[ENDS]

For further Information

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