



Nessa Childers

Member of the European Parliament

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Brussels, 1 September 2014

To: Members of the European Parliament

Dear Colleagues,

**Re: Nomination of Mr. Phil Hogan as Commissioner-designate by the Irish government**

I am writing to you with regard to the nomination of Mr. Phil Hogan as Commissioner-designate by the Irish government.

I harbour serious reservations concerning Mr. Hogan's suitability to be a member of the College of Commissioners, at the helm of the European Union's executive body, for the reasons outlined below.

The European Commission is meant to represent the interests of the Union as a whole and, as the guardian of the Treaties, is in charge of overseeing the implementation and enforcement of Union law.

The enforcement of EU legislation to combat discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin is an inescapable dimension of the safeguarding of fundamental rights, pursuant to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

The Racial Equality Directive, in particular, applies not only to the workplace context but also to access to education, health care and social protection, as well as access to goods and services, particularly housing.

In September 2012, Mr. Hogan, a Member of Dáil Éireann, the Irish Parliament, and then Minister for the Environment, Community and Local Government, submitted a request to Kilkenny County



Council to prevent a Traveller family from being provided with social housing accommodation in Bonnettstown, on behalf of local constituents.

In response to the representations from local constituents who had requested that he intervene to deny the allocation of social housing to this Traveller family, Mr. Hogan replied in writing that the family "will not be allocated the house in your area" and that he was "glad to be of assistance in this matter".

When his actions surfaced in Irish media, Mr. Hogan defended them on the grounds that he had passed on local residents' concerns about anti-social behaviour, "in good faith", to the local Council.<sup>1</sup>

While the County Council ignored Mr. Hogan's submission and proceeded to house the Traveller family as planned, his claim to be merely passing on information from local constituents to the Council does not exculpate him, in his capacity as Minister in charge of local government and housing, from an action that is potentially illegal under equality and housing legislation, and in which he showed favourable treatment to some constituents to the detriment of a Traveller family that also originates from the same area.

Expressing dismay at Mr. Hogan's comments, the Irish Traveller and Roma Centre, Pavee Point, accused Mr. Hogan of "pandering to prejudice against the Traveller community"<sup>2</sup>.

While my views, as a progressive member of the European Parliament, and those of Mr. Hogan, as a member of an EPP-affiliated party, naturally differ, and while I take serious issue with instances of his personal past behaviour, those are, of course, not the reasons why I am writing to you, questioning Mr. Hogan's suitability as a candidate to the Commissioner's post.

I do not wish to preclude you from forming your views of Mr. Hogan at the hearing, as Mr. Hogan seems to have done when he wrote to Kilkenny County Council to pass on allegations of petty crime by local constituents.

However, as a representative of all Irish citizens, including ethnic minorities such as the Traveller community, I must bring to your attention facts which were confirmed and defended by Mr. Hogan himself.

These, I believe, are incompatible with the proper discharge of the duties incumbent upon a European Commissioner.

At his hearing, Mr. Hogan will have to answer for his representations to local authorities, at the behest of some constituents, opposing the allocation of housing to a family on the basis of their ethnicity. This is tantamount to discriminatory behaviour that flies in the face of EU fundamental rights principles and legislation.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independent.ie/irish-news/hogan-request-to-council-not-to-house-traveller-family-ignored-28814075.html>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.paveepoint.ie/phil-hogan-pandering-to-prejudice/>



The Traveller community are disadvantaged, discriminated against and face strong prejudice. Tragically, the family home provided in this specific instance I am bringing to your attention was subsequently burned down with most of their belongings.

In an environment where intolerance can reach such extremes against the Traveller community, Mr. Hogan's misjudgement in his capacity as a Minister, which was roundly condemned across the Opposition benches, proves all the more flagrant.

An issue where the past Commission showed moral backbone, particularly in the person of Commissioner Reading, was on opposing Roma discrimination (Personally, I consider her track record in this area a positive lesson on the merits of a gender-balanced college).

It is my belief that appointing someone with Mr. Phil Hogan's profile would thus send a very ominous signal to those who suffer and fight discrimination in Europe, on ethnic and on other grounds.

I have no doubt that those would see this as a step backwards for equality. We must show zero tolerance against racism, especially at a time when the far-right is once more raising its ugly head across the continent.

Thank you for your attention.

Kind regards,

Nessa Childers MEP