



Brussels, 19 November 2007

To: Mr Manuel PINHO, Minister for Economy and Innovation
Mr Mariano GAGO, Minister for Science, Technology and Higher Education
Commissioner Janez Potočnik,
Commissioner Viviane Reding

Re: High Level Conference on Nanotechnologies, Braga

Dear Ministers and Commissioners,

BEUC, EEB and Friends of the Earth Europe are writing to you to express our deep concern and disappointment about the organisation of the High Level Conference on Nanotechnologies, due to take place in Braga on 20 - 21 November 2007.

We are deeply disappointed by the fact that a conference that seeks to address nanotechnology in terms of industrial and economic development fails to include even one session or keynote speech on health, environment and societal attitudes. This is in complete contradiction to the European Commission's objective to "integrate health, safety and environmental aspects to the technological development of Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies and to establish an effective dialogue with all stakeholders, informing about progress and expected benefits, and taking into account expectations and concerns (both real and perceived) so to steer developments on a path that avoids negative societal impact", as enshrined in the 2005 European Commission Action Plan on Nanosciences and Nanotechnologies.

Furthermore, there are no NGO speakers whilst industry is highly present thus running the risk of a biased and narrow discussion. None of the EU-focused NGO working on nanotechnology issues have been invited and to our knowledge, the invitation has not been circulated widely (if at all) to stakeholders other than industry and scientists working on nanotechnology.

We would particularly like to draw your attention to Parallel session 4 on food, environment and energy which, according to the programme "will explore the possibilities of nanotechnologies in the field of environment, energy and food. Their impact on the consumer will also be considered". The discussion concerning the potential opportunities of some applications of nanotechnology needs to be accompanied by a consideration of potential risks and an evaluation of how best to cover societal needs which, whilst they include them, are wider than industry needs. Moreover, it is deeply troubling to note that the impact of nanotechnologies on consumers will be discussed without the participation of consumer representatives.

We are further disconcerted by a phone call with the organizers – the Science and Technology Foundation – who indicated to us that it was sufficient to have scientists commenting on consumer attitudes.

We believe that the approach taken by the Portuguese Presidency and the organizers of this conference completely contradicts the notion of a balanced approach to nanotechnology championed by the European policy-makers.

Given such short notice, we are demanding that the Chair of the opening session communicate the contents of this letter to the conference participants, and that the NGO representative attending the meeting, Dragomira Raeva, be given the opportunity to formally communicate our views to the participants and the plenary. We further request that all presentations and minutes of the conference be sent to NGOs working on nanotech at EU level and that any further meetings of this type include NGOs, consumers groups, trade unions as speakers.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a stylized 'J' followed by a long horizontal stroke that tapers to the right.

John Hontelez
Secretary General
European Environmental Bureau

On behalf of:
Jim Murray, Director, BEUC
Paul de Clerck, Interim Director, Friends of the Earth Europe