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European Public Affairs Directory vs. stakeholder.eu

Part One

Like most people in my line of work in the city where I work, I often need a paper source for the various bits and pieces of information about key EU officials (and people in the various satellite institutions) which I use from time to time. Official websites are rather variable in quality, and sometimes, if you don't quite know what you are looking for, a physical book is easier to browse than a monitor screen.

Up to this year, I had relied fully on the European Public Affairs Directory, now rebranded the European Union & Public Affairs Directory 2011, and published by Dods, who are of course a brand leader in this sort of thing. I winced when I saw that the price for this year's EPAD had more than doubled, from last year's £115 to £265, but I felt that, if it remained as essential as in previous years, it was probably just about worth it, especially if the promised extra 150 pages were as useful as the rest.

But it wasn't; rather the reverse. The single thing I used most often from the previous EPADs - the coordinates of the 27 permanent representations of the EU member states in Brussels - had actually been removed. Instead there was a listing of the ministers in the 27 governments, plus the address and phone number of the prime minister's office. The diplomatic missions of **non**-member states in Brussels **are** listed, but not terribly completely either; and anyway, they are usually the least of my worries.

(There is also, of course, nothing about the European External Action Service, which is going to be my main point of contact in the EU institutions. Since the EEAS only came into existence on 1 January, presumably after the EPAD was compiled, I can't blame it for this omission; but it means that once again it does not have the information I need.)

What has been added, as far as I can tell, is much more information about each of the MEPs, supplementing the previous listings with a potted biography and nice photograph. This no doubt will help it sell to those very MEPs, or to people unfamiliar with the European Parliament, but I am in neither category.

It may well be that the extra info included is helpful, and the excised material unnecessary, for a lot of people in the Brussels beltway, but basically I had paid more than twice the price for a book that was less than half as useful for my own purposes. So I asked for my money back, and I am glad to say that they duly refunded me, and I in turn duly brought the book back to their office in person (it's in the same building as mine).

Part Two

Too many of my recent posts here have been consumer whinges, but this one has a happy ending, which I will approach slightly indirectly.

In the summer of 1983, I was on an exchange with a German family in Wiesbaden; and one day the lead news story was of a memorable incident in the Hesse regional parliament, where a visiting American general had been sprayed with blood by a young Green Party member of the *Landtag*, yelling 'Blood for the bloody army!' as he did so. My host family's parents were disgusted (she was a

fervent Christian Democrat, he was a doctor at an American military hospital), but my sixteen-year-old self was rather thrilled by this act of rebellion against the forces of Ronald Reagan.

Fast forward twenty years and more, and the Green Party politician in question, Frank Schwalba-Hoth, now a little older, has served two terms in the European Parliament and has become one of the best-known networkers in Brussels. At the same time as I was agonising over whether or not to buy the EPAD, he was bombarding me (in a very civilised way) with exhortations to buy his own new directory to the European Union institutions, stakeholder.eu. I resisted at first, feeling a certain brand loyalty to the Dods' directory (which as I said above had been perfectly satisfactory in previous years).

But when it became clear to me that Dods' version was deficient, I tried Frank Schwalba-Hoth's site, and found it had almost everything I needed - certainly including the data on the permanent representations that I needed, reasonably complete on [other matters](#), and less than half of the price of the EPAD. One rather sweet point is a link to click on each page to let Frank Schwalba-Hoth's team know if their info is out of date, combined of course with a commitment to rolling revision of the data. I signed up for a two-week free trial period which expires tomorrow, and will upgrade, at fairly modest cost, to the annual online subscription.

I bumped into Frank Schwalba-Hoth last Thursday on the Brussels metro, and (as one does when one meets people who have written books of which one approves) complimented him profusely on the merits of his labours. His response, typically, was to invite me to give a talk to a group of activists for whom he was organising a study visit this week. Inevitably I accepted. Where Frank Schwalba-Hoth is concerned, resistance is useless.