



How the European Commission dealt with a request for public access to documents concerning meetings between the Commission President and industry representatives, including of a company developing a vaccine against COVID-19

Case 1525/2020/MIG - Opened on 22/09/2020 - Decision on 19/03/2021 - Institutions concerned European Commission (No further inquiries justified) | European Commission (Solution partly achieved) |

This case concerns a request for public access to all documents related to five videoconferences between the European Commission President and industry representatives, including of a company developing a vaccine against COVID-19. The complainant was concerned that the Commission had not identified all documents falling under his request, and that it granted him access to only part of one of the twelve documents it identified. In particular, he sought access to a presentation made by the company in question.

In the context of the Ombudsman's inquiry, the Commission identified three additional documents to which it granted wide access. The Ombudsman proposed, as a solution, that the Commission also grant wider access to the presentation, as requested by the complainant. However, the Commission refused to do so, maintaining that the relevant information was commercially sensitive, that the company objected to the disclosure of this information and that there was no overriding public interest.

The Ombudsman expressed regret at the Commission's decision. She acknowledged, however, that the Commission was unlikely to disclose the information in the face of the company's objection. She also acknowledged that the Commission has since made greater efforts towards providing information on the negotiations with vaccines manufacturers. The Ombudsman closed the case, urging the Commission to ensure that transparency requirements form part of ongoing and future negotiations with companies where important public interests are at stake.