

“ There should be more **awareness** in the EU administration of the impression it makes on the public when people with regulatory expertise move to the private sector, where their **knowledge and networks** can have significant commercial and other value. That understanding is not yet there. ”

Emily O'Reilly



Ombudsman launches broad inquiry into Commission handling of staff 'revolving doors' cases

Press release no. 3/2021 - 18/05/2021 - **City** Brussels - **Country** Belgium - **Date** 18/05/2021

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly has [launched a wide-ranging inquiry \[Link\]](#) into how the Commission handles so-called 'revolving doors' cases among its staff. The inquiry is part of a reinforced monitoring of how the EU administration implements the ethics obligations on EU staff who move to the private sector.

The Ombudsman will inspect **100 personnel files** related to decisions by the Commission on requests by senior and mid-level managers for approval of either new employment or of unpaid leave in order to undertake another activity.

The files cover a total of 14 Directorate-Generals in addition to all commissioner cabinets, the Commission's Legal Service, Secretariat-General, internal think tank and the Regulatory Scrutiny Board. The wide scope aims to ensure a broad understanding of how such decisions are taken across a range of Commission departments.

“Robust management of the 'revolving doors' issue is important for maintaining trust in the EU institutions. Any perception that the rules are not being properly enforced risks questions being raised about whether the EU administration is acting fully in the public interest.

The potential corrosive effect of unchecked 'revolving doors' is, in my view, underestimated - this



is why my Office has focused on it for several years.

There should be more awareness in the EU administration of the impression it makes on the public when people with regulatory expertise move to the private sector where their knowledge and networks can have significant commercial and other value. That understanding is not yet there,” said Ms O’Reilly.

The Ombudsman has carried out several inquiries related to revolving doors, including one [concerning \[Link\]](#) the European Banking Authority (now closed) and one [concerning \[Link\]](#) the European Defence Agency (ongoing). The Ombudsman has also [written \[Link\]](#) to the Commission to ask it to ensure compliance with the conditions it drew up when it approved former Commissioner Oettinger’s new role at a communications consultancy, which has a tobacco company as one of its largest EU clients.

Annual Report 2020

Today, the Ombudsman also launches her Annual Report for 2020. As in past years, complaints related to transparency and accountability accounted for the biggest proportion of inquiries (25%).

The Report documents the Ombudsman’s proactive monitoring of how key EU institutions responded in the context of the COVID-19 crisis. The Ombudsman [found \[Link\]](#) that the European Centre for Disease Control has insufficient powers to properly carry out its mandate. She also [asked \[Link\]](#) the Council’s to improve the transparency of its procedures for decision making during the COVID-19 crisis. In 2021, the Ombudsman opened complaint-based COVID-19 inquiries concerning public access to the vaccine contracts signed by the Commission and details about the Member States taking part in negotiating the vaccine contracts.

“When crisis hits, transparency and accountability are often sacrificed in favour of expediency. It is therefore all the more important to remind public administrations to continue to act in a manner that ensures the greatest public trust,” said Ms O’Reilly.

2020 also saw several important inquiries related to environmental decision making, as well inquiries concerning ethics and concerning fundamental rights - such as an inquiry into the effectiveness of Frontex’s complaints mechanism.

The 2020 annual report is [here \[Link\]](#).

A web story, highlighting the most relevant cases and statistics, is [here \[Link\]](#).