



European Defence Agency should have forbidden former Chief Executive from becoming strategic advisor at Airbus Defence

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The European Defence Agency (EDA) should have forbidden its former Chief Executive from becoming a strategic advisor at Airbus on conflict of interest grounds, the Ombudsman has concluded.

The Ombudsman's own-initiative inquiry looked into the EDA's decision to approve the former Chief Executive's application to be head of public affairs of Airbus Spain and strategic advisor for Airbus Defence and Space. The former Chief Executive left the EDA in January 2020 and started at Airbus in August of the same year.

When approving the new positions at Airbus - one of the largest actors in the European defence industry - the EDA attached certain conditions. It asked the former Chief Executive to refrain from contact with the Airbus office in Brussels on matters concerning the EDA until 31 January 2022, and for the same period to not take part in any Airbus decisions concerning EDA activities. The condition not to lobby EDA staff expired on 31 January 2021.

The Ombudsman found the conditions were insufficient when measured against the risks of lobbying occurring and that they could not be monitored and enforced. She also found that the EDA was not thorough enough in its assessment of the risk of conflict of interest.

The EDA should have applied stronger conditions, and forbidden its former Chief Executive from becoming strategic advisor for Airbus Defence and Space, the post giving rise to the



greatest risk of conflict of interest. The Ombudsman found that not doing so amounted to maladministration.

The Ombudsman recommended that in future the EDA should forbid its senior staff from taking up positions where there is a clear conflict of interest. It should also set out criteria for forbidding such moves and any applicants for senior posts should be informed about the criteria.

The EDA was also asked to ensure that the form for those applying for authorisation for intended jobs is drafted so that the EDA gets all the relevant information it needs at the outset. The current inquiry showed that for most of 30-day period in which the EDA was assessing the applications for employment at Airbus, it did not have all of the relevant information.

This inquiry is part of overall monitoring by the Ombudsman of how the EU administration implements the ethics obligations on EU staff who move to the private sector.

The Ombudsman recently launched a wide-ranging inquiry into how the Commission handles so-called 'revolving doors' cases among its staff and has an ongoing inquiry concerning the European Investment Bank.