



Decision in the above case on how the European Commission handles requests for interpretation of meetings with stakeholders and interest groups on the EU Health Policy Platform

Decision

Case 2098/2021/VB - Opened on 17/03/2022 - Decision on 08/07/2022 - Institution concerned European Commission (No further inquiries justified) |

Dear Mr X,

On 25 November 2021, you submitted a complaint to the European Ombudsman about the European Commission's decision not to provide interpretation of an online meeting organised in the context of the EU Health Policy Platform (EU HPP) [1] .

In your complaint, you argue that the Commission should make interpretation available into and from any EU language. In your view, the Commission should ensure that all participants in meetings with stakeholders and interest groups are able to express themselves in their mother tongue, to guarantee a level playing field between them.

My inquiry team opened an inquiry into the complaint and received a reply from the Commission. We did not receive any comments from you on the Commission's reply, which we shared with you.

In its reply, the Commission clarified that the debate on health policy at EU-level takes place to a significant extent in English. The Rules of Procedure of the Platform reflect this reality and specify that the working language of the EU Health Policy Platform is English. Users are requested to accept these rules before registering on the platform.

Since 2020, the Commission has organised 124 webinars under the umbrella of the EU HPP. It said that your request for interpretation is the first and only request that it received. The Commission did not consider the possibility of providing *ad hoc* interpretation during meetings when participants who do not speak the working language request it, since no one had requested it previously.

The Commission also clarified that citizens may contact the Commission for any questions related to the EU HPP in one of the official and working languages of the EU institutions of their choice and will receive an answer in the same language.



The Commission said that it plans to carry out an evaluation study in 2022 to assess the functioning and usefulness of the EU HPP, where it will also address the question of the working languages used in the platform.

The Ombudsman's finding

Given that the Commission will carry out an overall assessment of the EU HPP, including the matters related to the use of working languages, and that such an assessment could draw attention to possible issues and lead to potential improvements of the platform, I decided to close the case with the following conclusion:

No further inquiries are justified at this stage. [2]

In your exchanges with my office, you also raised concerns about the fact that the EU HPP is available in English only. While this issue is different from the provision of interpretation during meetings, which was the subject matter of the inquiry, I have decided to share your views with the Commission for its consideration in the context of the evaluation study.

In addition, I consider it useful to make the following suggestions for improvement to the Commission, which are based on my practical recommendations for the EU administration on the use of official EU languages when communicating with the public:

(i) The Commission should take into consideration the issues raised by the complainant regarding provision of interpretation and working languages when carrying out the evaluation study on the functioning and usefulness of the EU Health Policy Platform. Any restrictions on the use of languages should be objective, proportionate and transparent. [3]

(ii) The Commission should make available on the EU Health Policy Platform a link to its language policy together with its assessment as to why restrictions on the use of languages are justified in this case.

(iii) The Commission should make available in all EU official languages the parts of the EU Health Policy Platform's website that are of particular interest to the public. [4] It should also consider whether eTranslation could be offered for the remaining parts. [5]

I also asked the Commission to inform me of the outcome of evaluation study in relation to language issues.

Thank you for having contacted the European Ombudsman.

Yours sincerely,

Emily O'Reilly



European Ombudsman

Strasbourg, 08/07/2022

[1] The EU Health Policy Platform is an interactive tool to boost discussions about public health concerns, share knowledge and best practices: <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/hpf/> .

[2] Full information on the procedure and rights pertaining to complaints can be found at <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/document/70707> .

[3] In accordance with the European Ombudsman's practical recommendations for the EU administration on the use of official EU languages when communicating with the public, recommendation 4, <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/doc/correspondence/en/129519> .

[4] In accordance with the European Ombudsman's practical recommendations for the EU administration on the use of official EU languages when communicating with the public, recommendation 6.

[5] As mentioned on the Commission webpage on the use of languages on Commission websites, https://ec.europa.eu/info/languages-our-websites_en .