



## How the European Commission deals with the provision by third parties of travel expenses and hospitality in the context of business trips

**Case SI/2/2023/KR - Opened on 03/03/2023 - Decision on 08/12/2023 - Institution concerned** European Commission |

The Ombudsman carried out a strategic initiative following revelations that, in the context of business trips to a non-EU country, the expenses of a director-general at the European Commission were covered by that country's government and national airline. The Ombudsman sought to determine the extent of this practice and how the Commission checks that there are no conflicts of interest when third parties cover the expenses incurred by Commission staff.

Shortly after the initiative was launched, the Commission changed the rules concerning third party contributions to business trips. The Ombudsman concluded that, if applied diligently, these rules will prevent third party contributions for business trips giving rise to conflicts of interest. However, in the course of the initiative, the Ombudsman became aware of a small number of business trips of senior civil servants that were paid for by third parties. The Ombudsman therefore announced the intention to [open an inquiry \[Link\]](#) to assess the instances in question and identify what, if any, measures the Commission took to mitigate potential conflicts of interest.



In the context of the strategic initiative, the Ombudsman also looked into how the Commission ensures that its directors-general comply with their obligation to disclose in a timely manner information on lobby meetings. The initiative demonstrated that compliance with this obligation is largely down to the initiative of the directors-general themselves, which the Ombudsman considered problematic. As such, she encouraged the Commission to reflect on whether it could do more to ensure compliance.