



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Ursula von der Leyen  
The President

Brussels, **04 AOUT 2020**  
Ares (2020) 2205027

Dear Ombudsman O'Reilly,

*I would like to thank you for your letter, in which you recognise the enormous efforts of our public administration to ensure the effective and transparent functioning of the EU during these extraordinary times. Please accept my apologies for the delay in replying to you.*

*The COVID-19 pandemic is affecting all aspects of our societies, including the functioning of our democratic systems. Despite severe disruptions to our way of life, we have made all necessary efforts to ensure the continued efficiency and functioning of the Union and our institutions. The European Commission has reacted quickly, with the necessary flexibility, it has adapted its internal decision-making mechanisms and operations as necessary and is taking every available measure to protect lives and livelihoods across Europe. These unprecedented measures require unprecedented transparency. The European Commission remains committed to upholding the accountability of the EU's institutions and to this end has been communicating as widely as possible with utmost transparency throughout the crisis.*

*I welcome your observations, addressed below, and thank you for recognising the commitment and dedication of our EU civil servants.*

1. *The EU institutions serve all EU citizens, who hold us accountable not only for the handling of the crisis and the path towards recovery, but for all of our actions. In an effort to ensure full transparency, the Commission is working on several fronts, notably through a strong, multilingual web presence. All Members of the College communicate daily through speeches, statements, video messages, interviews and social media. Weekly readouts are held in the Commission's press room where we explain and elaborate on the decisions taken by the College in front of the press as well as anyone else who wishes to follow online.*

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*Ms Emily O'Reilly  
European Ombudsman*

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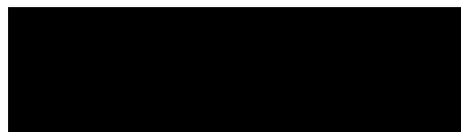
*At the very onset of the COVID-19 crisis, we created a central coronavirus response website, which is available in all official EU languages and is updated daily to provide comprehensive information, including a timeline, about the Commission's response. With over four million visits and some 70% of the visitors considering the website useful, the Commission's coronavirus response website is a successful and transparent initiative.*

- 2. Every available euro has been utilised to deliver a comprehensive response and exceptional flexibility has been granted. For the first time ever, the general escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact has been activated; the Commission is also temporarily facilitating the most flexible State aid rules yet. Most temporary measures have review clauses to ensure they are reviewed at regular intervals and adapted to the evolving situation.*
- 3. To ensure the widest possible dissemination of information to the public, the Commission also holds daily virtual press events to which more than 850 journalists can connect and ask questions. To step up the fight against disinformation, the European Commission and the European External Action Service have issued a Joint Communication<sup>1</sup>, in which the immediate response to the current 'infodemic' and further actions to fight coronavirus-related misinformation, disinformation and foreign interference are outlined.*
- 4. In spite of the challenging context, the Commission upholds its high transparency standards in order to respond to the legitimate demands of citizens and stakeholders. Even when video meetings are held, our rules apply. Any contacts with lobbyists need to comply with our transparency standards. We have continued to uphold the right to public access to documents, issuing over 2800 initial replies and some 60 confirmatory decisions between March and June. As such, the Commission ensures a level of transparency that goes far beyond that of other EU institutions.*

*With regard to the negotiations with the United Kingdom, apart from the first negotiation round, subsequent rounds were held by videoconference, with physical meetings slowly resuming in July. The EU and UK negotiations continue to move forward, and in line with our transparency policy, we communicate regularly to the public on progress.*

*I hope you find these explanations useful and look forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation in the interest of European citizens.*

*Yours sincerely,*



*Ursula von der Leyen*

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<sup>1</sup> [JOIN\(2020\) 8 final](#)