



**European Economic and Social Committee
The Secretary-General**

Brussels, 23.02.17 000160 -
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Dear Secretary General

Thank you for giving us the opportunity to comment on the Ombudsman's draft practical guidelines for public officials' interaction with interest representatives, which was sent to us on 16 December 2016.

I support this initiative and its objectives. I believe that they are in line with the obligations binding EESC public officials, which are laid down, in particular, in the Staff Regulations, the EESC Code of Good Administrative Behaviour (modelled on the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour) and other EESC internal rules (such as the Guide to the obligations of officials and servants of the EESC).

I would like to make two additional remarks:

(1) The first "do" and "don't" bullet points make meetings between public officials and interest representatives conditional on registration in the EU (or equivalent national) Transparency Register. I would point out, however, that the establishment and operation of the EU Transparency Register are not part of EU legislation; they are the subject of internal decisions of EU institutions (not including the EESC) and of an interinstitutional agreement between the European Parliament and the European Commission of 16 April 2014, none of which is directly applicable to the EESC.

(2) Given the EESC's nature and role in the EU institutional set-up, and its advisory function enshrined in the Treaties, EESC members are themselves interest representatives acting in the Union's general interest. Moreover, it is essential that, in the performance of their duties, they seek the expertise of a variety of stakeholders, and in particular those not represented in the Committee, in order to increase the representativeness and legitimacy of the EESC's work, not least its opinions.

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In this context therefore, it is not for EESC public officials (who assist EESC members in their work), but for the EESC members themselves to decide whether their various interactions with non-EESC interest representatives are legitimate or could be viewed as exposing them to undue influence.

I look forward to receiving the final version of the practical guidelines.

Yours sincerely

Luis Planas

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