
From: EU employees
Sent: 28 February 2017 17:45
To: EO-GuidelinesComment
Subject: Our comments on the draft 'Practical guidelines for public officials' interaction with interest representatives'

Dear Ms O'Reilly,

The European institutions have adopted a number of codes and guidelines for their staff and members. Rules and standards are of course necessary but their emphasis is on compliance, they do not necessarily foster a culture of ethics. What we want to see is values such as transparency and integrity truly embedded in the daily working practices of the staff, the management and the political representatives of our institutions.

For that reason we want to thank you for your draft "Practical guidelines" as we believe they could contribute to a better integration of ethics into the organisational culture of the European institutions.

We take the opportunity offered to make comments and have two suggestions on the overall design of the guidelines with the view of making them even more practical:

First, what you provisionally call "guidelines" we would suggest to call a "vade mecum", as it would serve as companion guide to the public officials as they go about their daily work.

Second, the "guidelines" are presented in the form of a list of "do's" and "don'ts", to which we would add a reflective process in the form of a series of questions: "have I considered that...?", "Have I checked that ...?" We think that such checklist formulation is more conducive to the individual appropriation of ethical values.

As regards the substance of the guidelines, we think that overall they are fairly comprehensive and appropriate.

Nevertheless, because we are in favour of the introduction of a legislative foot print at all levels (not just political and managerial but also operational) we would add some recommendations that bring in more transparency:

- We would rephrase the item "Maintain good record keeping habits" to specify that minutes of each meeting need to be prepared. No meeting is off the record. Those minutes should be drafted in a manner that they are ready to be made available in a request for access to documents.
- In the context of public consultations all contributions from private interests should be made fully public at the end of the consultation (no anonymisation of the published contribution).

As for the mention of conflicts of interests, we would make it more explicit by adding: Recognise that you may find yourself in a situation of conflict of interests through no fault of your own, that does not mean you should ignore that situation. Realise also that people's perception, whether right or wrong, of the situation should also be a factor in your evaluation of the risk.

Finally, a culture of ethics cannot thrive in an organisation without an exemplary leadership. We take this occasion to reiterate our demand for a stronger code of conduct for our political leaders. We have raised with you the issue of the inadequate response given by the European Commission to former President Barroso's ill-judged move to Goldman Sachs. Stricter rules are needed to fight unacceptable practices such as that of revolving doors. Also, greater accountability of decision-makers and their relations with private interests needs to be enabled.

Thank you again for those guidelines. Once they are final, we will promote them within our institutions.

Regards,

The collective of EU employees concerned with ethics in the European institutions