



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

OFFICE FOR THE ADMINISTRATION AND PAYMENT OF INDIVIDUAL ENTITLEMENTS

The Acting Director

Brussels,

Mr David Churchill

E-mail:

ask+request-7185-ee52d6a9@asktheeu.org

Subject: Your application for access to documents under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 - GESTDEM 2019/5451

Dear Mr Churchill,

We refer to your email, in which you make a request for access to documents, registered under the above-mentioned reference number. Your request has been attributed for reply to the Office for administration and payment of individual entitlements (PMO), which manages the payment salary and expenses for Commission staff members, on 8.1.2020.

You request access "to documents/data which details the total travel costs, and also costs of expenses while travelling, for chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier in relation to all his missions so far for this year (2019), and for last year (2018) and 2017". More specifically, you wish to "obtain documents/data which details every single mission he has been on for the said years above".

You also specify that you would like to receive documents that "clearly show for each mission:

- where each mission was to (which country and which city)
- the date the mission started and finished
- whether Mr Barnier took a commercial flight (...), [and] the total cost of the ticket and whether it was first class, business class or standard class or any other class, or whether he took an air taxi (...) [and] the total cost of chartering each air taxi
- the name of the hotel he stayed in during each mission and the total cost of the stay

- (...) all other costs incurred on each of the missions, including all food and drink (all subsistence and the amounts spent on this). In the event any missions involve costs for restaurants or bars, please detail how much the bill was in each restaurant or bar and the name of the restaurant/bar".

Having examined your request under the provisions of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to documents, I regret to inform you that access to the documents requested cannot be granted for the reasons detailed below.

Your request covers a particularly broad period. The Commission considers that the administrative burden necessary for identifying the documents falling under the scope of your request would be disproportionate in this case.

Furthermore, disclosure is prevented by an exception to the right of access laid down in Article 4 of the above mentioned Regulation.

Pursuant to Article 4(1)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, access to a document has to be refused if its disclosure would undermine the protection of privacy and the integrity of the individual, in particular in accordance with European Union legislation regarding the protection of personal data.

The applicable legislation in this field is Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC¹ ('Regulation 2018/1725').

In its judgment in Case C-28/08 P (*Bavarian Lager*)², the Court of Justice ruled that when a request is made for access to documents containing personal data, the Data Protection Regulation becomes fully applicable.

The mission costs data of Mr Barnier, to which you request access, are undoubtedly personal data in the meaning of Article 3(1) of Regulation 2018/1725 which provides that personal data 'means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person [...]'. As the Court of Justice confirmed in Case C-465/00 (*Rechnungshof*)³, *there is no reason of principle to justify excluding activities of a professional [...] nature from the notion of private life*.

Pursuant to Article 9(1)(b) of Regulation 2018/1725, 'personal data shall only be transmitted to recipients established in the Union other than Union institutions and bodies if '[t]he recipient establishes that it is necessary to have the data transmitted for a specific purpose in the public interest and the controller, where there is any reason to assume that the data subject's legitimate interests might be prejudiced, establishes that it is

¹ Official Journal L 205 of 21.11.2018, p. 39.

² Judgment of 29 June 2010 in Case C-28/08 P, *European Commission v The Bavarian Lager Co. Ltd*, EU:C:2010:378, paragraph 59.

³ Judgment of the Court of 20 May 2003 in joined cases C-465/00, C-138/01 and C-139/01, preliminary rulings in proceedings between *Rechnungshof and Österreichischer Rundfunk*, paragraph 73.

proportionate to transmit the personal data for that specific purpose after having demonstrably weighed the various competing interests’.

Only if these conditions are fulfilled and the processing constitutes lawful processing in accordance with the requirements of Article 5 of Regulation 2018/1725, can the transmission of personal data occur.

You have not put forward any arguments supporting the necessity of disclosing any of the above-mentioned personal data. I also refer to the *Strack* case, where the Court of Justice ruled that, if an applicant does not substantiate the need for obtaining access to personal data, the institution does not have to examine by itself the existence of a need for transferring such data⁴.

Nevertheless, please allow me to emphasise that the travel costs of Commission staff are subject to the audit and control procedures established by the EU Treaties, and that the “chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier” is not a public office holder.

Consequently, I conclude that, pursuant to Article 4(1)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, access cannot be granted to the personal data, as the need to obtain access thereto for a purpose in the public interest has not been substantiated and there is no reason to think that the legitimate interests of the individual concerned would not be prejudiced by disclosure of the personal data concerned.

In case you would disagree with the assessment that the withheld data are personal data which can only be disclosed if such disclosure is legitimate under the applicable rules on the protection of personal data, you are entitled, in accordance with Article 7(2) of Regulation 1049/2001, to make a confirmatory application requesting the Commission to review this position.

Such a confirmatory application should be addressed within 15 working days upon receipt of this letter to the Secretary-General of the Commission at the following address:

European Commission
Secretary-General
Transparency, Document Management & Access to Documents (SG.C.1)
BERL 7/076
B-1049 Bruxelles

or by email to: sg-acc-doc@ec.europa.eu

Yours faithfully,

(e-signed)
Giuseppe Scognamiglio

⁴ Judgment of the Court of Justice of 2 October 2014 in case C-127/13 P, *Strack v Commission*, (ECLI:EU:C:2014:2250), paragraph 106.