

Guide to Gifts and Hospitality in DG Trade

Following the adoption by the Commission on 7 March 2012 of updated rules on gifts and hospitality, we are updating and simplifying the approach within DG Trade.

General:

The general rule is that staff should not accept any direct or indirect gifts or hospitality offered to you by third parties. Where, however, this is offered in the context of normal diplomatic practice or courtesy, for example, by third countries, and a refusal is likely to cause offence staff may accept gifts or hospitality within certain limits and providing the normal rules are followed.

In such situations staff should guard against receiving multiple gifts or hospitality from the same organisation or person within a given period, which might take them outside the limits set out in Commission rules. For DG Trade staff, particular attention may need to be paid during missions.

Practical arrangements:

1. Gifts

Where a gift is received worth between € 50 and € 150 you must ask the Commission's approval to keep it. Payments of sums of money will never be authorised under any circumstances.

The person giving approval is called the "Appointing Authority". In DG Trade this means asking the approval of your line Director or Director General.

The following elements are intended to give general guidance on key principles of the new rules:

- Commission rules presume approval by the Appointing Authority for gifts below €50. Of course, two or more gifts from the same person or organisation in one year may risk taking you above this threshold.
- Gifts between €50 and €150 can only be retained with the explicit approval of the Appointing Authority. To ask approval you should use the new ethics module in SYSPER2. The Ethics Compliance Officer in Unit A1, Ron ter Bogt, will also watch out for the accumulation of gifts above this value from particular organisations or individuals.
- If a gift is refused or if you prefer not to retain a gift, you should either return the gift to the donor or you can send the gift(s) to the OIB who will pass it on to charity (and you will be deemed not to have accepted the gift).

- You will not be authorised to keep gifts with an estimated value above €150. These should be refused and as a matter of transparency you should inform your line manager and Director.
- In the case of small gifts, which taken together, may represent a value over a year above €50 you should inform your line manager.

2. Hospitality

Approval can be presumed:

- Where hospitality takes the form of working lunches or dinners, strictly linked to the function of the staff member, is seen as in the interest of the service (following diplomatic practice or courtesy) and has been agreed with your line manager.
- Where hospitality is of very limited value, e.g. simple lunches, sandwiches, refreshments.

Where hospitality is accumulated from one source over a year, you should inform your line manager in writing and may want to keep a record for yourself. This information should give any relevant background and estimate the value of the hospitality received.

Particular care should be exercised regarding hospitality from industry, industry federations and lobby groups. This should generally be declined if a business association or firm invites you for lunch or dinner. You should always consider whether a simple meeting may be more practical. You should always guard against the accumulation of such hospitality from the same organisation or individual. You should signal your attendance to your line manager and Director in writing.

Where you have any doubts about accepting an offer of hospitality, you should seek prior approval of the Appointing Authority by using the ethics module in SYSPER2.

For further information on how to deal with gifts and hospitality – and, in particular, the specific guidance on hospitality offered during a mission, you may want to consult the formal Commission guidelines on gifts and hospitality by clicking on the link below.

http://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/hr_admin/en/ethics/obligations/conflicts_interest/Pages/gift.aspx

For further guidance on any these aspects please consult our local compliance officer, Ron ter Bogt (tel. 55516).