



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Directorate-General for Trade

Directorate A - Resources, Information and Policy Coordination
The Director

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NOTE FOR THE ATTENTION TO ALL DG TRADE STAFF

Objet: Guidelines on the Registration of Documents

Following the recommendations formulated in the audit report on document management presented last year by unit 01 (Ares(2013)2639741), Directorate A has elaborated a guide with the objective of helping units to better identify which documents must be registered, which documents should be permanently retained on files and, consequently, which documents/e-mails typically do not need to be retained.

In the near future and with the same objective to help, other thematic files, as for example the differences between official and working file, will be distributed.

I trust that you will find these guidelines a useful working tool. Unit A1 remains at your disposal for any further support needed.

[Art. 4(1)(b)]

Peter Sandler

Enclosures: Guidelines

Guidelines on the Registration of Documents

A clear approach to document registration and filing is not only good management, it will also help us ensure we have a record of all key documents in any file and make it easier to find things again, in particular, for requests for access to our documents. Our main tool for registering and retaining documents is ARES, but sometimes you may use other specialist IT systems instead, for example Sherlock for TDI documents, BASIS for briefings, etc.

REGISTER OR NOT REGISTER? You should ask yourself these questions:

All documents received or created by Commission staff on a matter relating to the policies, activities and decisions falling within the Institution's competence and in the framework of their official tasks should be registered and filed in at least one official file (Chef de File Unit).

E-mails are documents and should be registered and archived whenever they contain information of substance that is not short-lived and is likely to require action, follow-up or a reply from the Commission. This is particularly true for substantive e-mails exchanges with people or organisations outside the Commission.

We suggest you look at documents with four questions in mind:

1. Is the document formally drawn up or received?

Sent documents: this includes documents approved as ready by the author (i.e. for adoption at meeting, sent to DG or Cabinet for signature, signed versions of letters or notes, or intended for publication, etc.) and ready to be transmitted on, inside or outside the Commission.

Received documents: this includes documents (eg. Letters, e-mails, position papers, information requests, invitations) which are sent to DG Trade by someone outside the Commission.

2. Does the document involve the responsibility of DG TRADE?

Does the document define DG policy or commit us in some way vis-à-vis other services or actors inside or outside the Commission? Do we need to carry out an action, reply or a follow up to the document? Documents, notes, letters defining our policies, activities or taking decisions of DG TRADE.

3. Is the information contained in the document important and not short-lived?

This would include, for example, documents that are final or an important intermediate step or which contain substantial policy-relevant information? Documents whose life is only short-lived, for example, a long internal e-mail exchange, or draft versions of documents would not normally meet this criterion and do not need to be retained on the file.

4. If the document is not registered and will therefore not be available, is there a risk resulting from losing that information?

In case you answer is "YES" to one of these questions:

You should register in ARES or in one of the other specialist systems



Guidelines on the Registration of Documents

Non-exhaustive list of document types that are likely to be registered in an official registering application (ARES, BASIS, ABAC, SYSPER, SHERLOCK...)

ARES is the single general register in use in the Commission introduced in 2008, but there are other specific registers, identified as e-Domec compliant which follow similar rules or procedures but which are separate from the general register.

Good administrative practice: documents should be registered as soon as possible!

Registration of incoming mail is centralised by CAD team (paper and e-mails) who assigns CF and CLASS tasks to the competent service. Outcoming documents should be registered by CF service.

- All formal notes/communications/e-mails (e.g. to national authorities, Council, European Parliament and Commission committees, Troika partners, external entities) both received and sent,
- E-mails addressed to DG TRADE hierarchy containing internal debriefs or reports.
- All internal briefing/speeches/defensives and suggested lines to take (BASIS),
- Contractual and financial documents: see guidelines from DG BUDG (ABAC...),
- Reports, minutes of meetings with external stakeholders (e.g. trade unions, employer federations, sectorial lobby groups etc.),

According to this logic, all final documents produced by DG TRADE staff such as briefings, speaking, defensives, memos, internal notes, external notes, minutes, reports, replies to ISC, etc. should be registered and filed subject to a decision to the contrary by hierarchy in one of the above systems.

Contributions to Communications, reports, ISCs, or to other documents prepared by SG or other DGs as a rule should be filed if they contain substantial policy-relevant information or have an important analytical content.

A practical rule of thumb is that if TRADE staff provides input to an official report / publication / legislative proposal, this input has to be registered and filed.

Country-specific work such as minutes or debriefs of meetings with third countries and member states' national authorities, inputs into Troika negotiations, reform proposals etc. should be registered and filed if they express TRADE official position and have important policy content.

What does not need to be registered and filed in ARES? Drafts, working documents at the initial stages of preparation, contributions to negotiations if they are likely to be subsequently modified, short-lived, non-substantive documents, for example, many day to day internal e-mails, which do not meet the requirements for registration. Documents as the COM, SEC and C series distributed within DG TRADE, documents registered elsewhere in other systems as ABAC, SYSPER2, MIPS, GESTDEM, etc. Those systems comply with Commission archiving practice and enable retrieval as needed.