



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

LEGAL SERVICE  
The Director General

Brussels, 5 February 2020

Mr Alberto Alemanno  
The Good Lobby  
c/o SECO - 1<sup>st</sup> floor  
To the attention of Elena Turci  
Rue d'Arlon, 53  
1040 Brussels  
Belgium

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### **BY E-MAIL AND REGISTERED MAIL WITH ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF RECEIPT**

**Subject:** Request for access to documents

**Ref.:** Your request of 10<sup>th</sup> January 2020 registered under reference GestDem  
2020/187

Dear Mr Alemanno,

I refer to your above-referenced request under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents<sup>1</sup>, by which you request:

- *the legal opinion concerning the 2000 Proposal for an Agreement between the European Parliament, the Commission, the Court of Justice, the Court of Auditors, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions establishing an Advisory Group on Standards in Public Life - SEC(2000) 2077 final, Brussels 29.01.2000 ;*
- *any legal opinion discussing the EU Ethics framework (of the EU Commission and/or any other EU institution, agency, body).*

#### **1. IDENTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF THE CONCERNED DOCUMENT**

The Legal Service has identified the following document as matching the terms of your request: note of 9 November 2000 to the attention of Mr Sullivan, former Secretary General of the European Commission (reference JUR(2000)30674).

Please be informed that the initiative to create an Advisory Group on Standards in Public Life did not succeed and that no further legal opinions were drafted by the Legal Service in this context.

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<sup>1</sup> OJ L 145, 31.05.2001, page 43.

After a concrete assessment of the identified document, I am pleased to inform you that access can be granted with the exception of some personal data, covered by the exception laid down in Article 4(1)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, as will be explained below. Accordingly, please find enclosed a copy of the requested document, expunged of personal data.

## **2. REFUSAL OF PERSONAL DATA**

According to Article 4(1)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 "[t]he institutions shall refuse access to a document where disclosure would undermine the protection of: [...] (b) privacy and the integrity of the individual, in particular in accordance with Community legislation regarding the protection of personal data".

The refused information concerning the initials and the name and contact details of the Commission's officials not having the function of senior management staff constitutes personal data, which must be protected under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 in accordance also with the European Union legislation regarding the protection of personal data.

As the Court of Justice has ruled, when access to documents containing personal data is requested, the Data Protection Regulation, i.e. Regulation (EU) 2018/1725<sup>2</sup>, becomes fully applicable<sup>3</sup>.

Article 3(1) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 provides that personal data "*means any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person [...]*". The Court of Justice has specified that any information, which by reason of its content, purpose or effect, is linked to a particular person is to be considered as personal data.<sup>4</sup>

With regard to the personal data such as names, signatures, functions, telephone numbers and other information relating to the institutions officials, the General Court has recognised in its judgment in Case T-39/17 that they fall within the notion of "private life" regardless of whether this data is registered in the context of a professional activity<sup>5</sup> and, therefore, it constitutes personal data in the meaning of Article 3(1) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725.

Consequently, the above indicated data concerning the Commission's officials has been redacted.

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<sup>2</sup> 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/EC (OJ L 205 of 21.11.2018, page 39).

<sup>3</sup> Judgment of the Court of Justice of 29 June 2010, Case C-28/08 P, *European Commission v The Bavarian Lager Co. Ltd*, ECLI:EU:C:2010:378, paragraphs 59 and 63. Whereas this judgment specifically related to Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 18 December 2000 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data by the Community institutions and bodies and on the free movement of such data, the principles set out therein are also applicable under the new data protection regime established by Regulation (EU) 2018/1725.

<sup>4</sup> Judgment of the Court of Justice of 20 December 2017, Case C-434/16, *Peter Nowak v Data Protection Commissioner*, ECLI:EU:C:2017:994, paragraphs 33-35.

<sup>5</sup> Judgment of the General Court of 19 September 2018, Case T-39/17, *Chambre de commerce et d'industrie métropolitaine Bretagne-Ouest (port de Brest) v Commission*, ECLI:EU:T:2018:560, paragraphs 37, 38 and 43.

Pursuant to Article 9(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 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 proportionate to transmit the personal data for that specific purpose after having demonstrably weighed the various competing interests"*.

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

According to Article 9(1)(b) of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725, the European Commission has to examine the further conditions for a lawful processing of personal data only if the first condition is fulfilled, namely if the recipient has established that it is necessary to have the data transmitted for a specific purpose in the public interest. It is only in this case that the European Commission has to examine whether there is a reason to assume that the data subject's legitimate interests might be prejudiced and, in the affirmative, establish the proportionality of the transmission of the personal data for that specific purpose after having demonstrably weighed the various competing interests.

In your request, you do not put forward any arguments to establish the necessity to have the data transmitted for a specific purpose in the public interest.

Therefore, the European Commission does not have to examine whether there is a reason to assume that the data subject's legitimate interests might be prejudiced.

Notwithstanding the above, please note that there are reasons to assume that the legitimate interests of the data subject concerned would be prejudiced by disclosure of the personal data reflected in the documents, as there is a real and non-hypothetical risk that such public disclosure would harm their privacy and subject them to unsolicited external contacts.

Consequently, I conclude that, pursuant to Article 4(1)(b) of Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001, access cannot be granted to the above-mentioned 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 individuals concerned would not be prejudiced by disclosure of the personal data concerned.

Please note that the exception of Article 4(1)(b) has an absolute character and does not envisage the possibility of demonstrating the existence of an overriding public interest.

### **3. REUSE OF THE DOCUMENT**

Please note that you may reuse the above-mentioned document free of charge for non-commercial and commercial purposes provided that the source is acknowledged and that you do not distort the original meaning or message of it. Please note that the Commission does not assume liability stemming from the reuse.

### **4. MEANS OF REDRESS**

Should you wish the position regarding the refusal of personal data to be reconsidered, you should present in writing, within fifteen working days from receipt of this letter, a confirmatory application to the Commission's Secretariat-General at the address below:

European Commission  
Secretariat-General  
Unit C.1. 'Transparency, Document Management and Access to Documents'  
BERL 7/076  
B-1049 Bruxelles  
or by email to: [sg-acc-doc@ec.europa.eu](mailto:sg-acc-doc@ec.europa.eu)

Yours sincerely,



Luis ROMERO REQUENA

Attachment: 1