

Code of conduct for Commissioners (18 September 1999)

Caption: At its first meeting on 18 September 1999, the Prodi Commission adopted a code of conduct for Commissioners.

Source: European Commission. The reform of the European Commission - Reference documents. [ON-LINE]. [Brussels]: European Commission, [23.11.2001]. Disponible sur http://europa.eu.int/comm/reform/refdoc/index_en.htm.

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Code of conduct for Commissioners

The Treaty articles on the Commission make special reference to the complete independence enjoyed by the Members of the Commission, who are required to discharge their duties in the general interest of the Community. In the performance of their duties they must neither seek nor take instructions from any government or from any other body. The general interest also requires that in their official and private lives Commissioners should behave in a manner that is in keeping with the dignity of their office. Ruling out all risks of a conflict of interests helps to guarantee their independence. The object of this code is, first and foremost, to address this concern, particularly by setting limits to Commissioners' outside activities and interests which could jeopardise their independence. It also responds to the need to codify certain provisions relating to the performance of their duties.

Outside activities

Commissioners may not engage in any other professional activity, whether paid or unpaid. Writing a regular column is regarded as a professional activity. Giving courses free of charge in the interests of European integration on the other hand is permitted.

Commissioners shall notify the President if they are intending to publish a book during their term as Commissioner. Royalties from copyright in a work published in connection with their duties shall be paid over to a charity of their choice.

Commissioners may not accept any form of payment for delivering speeches or taking part in conferences.

Commissioners may hold honorary, unpaid posts in political, cultural, artistic or charitable foundations or similar bodies. They may also hold such posts in educational institutions. Posts held on these terms shall under no circumstances involve any risk of a conflict of interest. They shall be listed in a declaration [...] made available to the public.

Commissioners may be active members of political parties or trade unions, provided that this does not compromise their availability for service in the Commission.

Commissioners may not hold any public office of whatever kind.

Whenever Commissioners intend to engage in an occupation during the year after they have ceased to hold office, whether this be at the end of their term or upon resignation, they shall inform the Commission in good time. The Commission shall examine the nature of the planned occupation. If it is related to the content of the portfolio of the Commissioner during his/her full term of office, the Commission shall seek the opinion of an ad hoc ethical committee. In the light of the committee's findings it will decide whether the planned occupation is compatible with the last paragraph of Article 213(2) of the Treaty.

Financial interests and assets

Commissioners must declare any financial interest or asset which might create a conflict of interests in the performance of their duties. On taking up their duties, and whenever there is any change during their term of office, they shall make [...] a declaration of such interests. The declaration shall include any holdings by the Commissioner's spouse which might entail a conflict of interests. Declarations shall be scrutinised under the authority of the President and with due regard for Members' areas of responsibility. These declarations shall be made public.

Activities of spouses

To obviate any potential risk of a conflict of interests, Commissioners are required to declare the professional activities of their spouses.

Collective responsibility and confidentiality

Out of respect for the principle of collective responsibility, Commissioners shall not make any comment which would call into question a decision taken by the Commission. They shall also refrain from disclosing what is said at meetings of the Commission.

Rules for missions

Missions are defined as travel by a Commissioner on Commission business away from the Commission's place of work. [...]

Rules governing receptions and professional representation

The rules governing receptions and professional representation are laid down in the Commission decision of 19 September 1979 (COM(79) 507). Where entertainment expenses are not covered by this decision, they will be met by the Commissioner from the flat-rate entertainment allowance provided for in the regulation laying down the emoluments of the Members of the Commission.

Acceptance of gifts, decorations or honours

Commissioners shall not accept any gift with a value of more than EUR 150. When, in accordance with diplomatic usage, they receive gifts worth more than this amount, they shall hand them over to the Commission's Protocol department.

Commissioners shall notify the President of the Commission of any decoration, prize or honour awarded to them.

Composition of Members' Offices

The President is the appointing authority for all Commissioners' Offices and lays down the rules governing their composition after consulting the Members of the Commission. These rules shall secure an appropriate balance between officials and temporary staff as well as in terms of nationalities and equal opportunities. [...]