



Communicating with the outside world

GUIDELINES FOR ALL STAFF ON THE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Commission staff are increasingly called upon to communicate with the general public and stakeholders via a wide variety of channels. One recent development is that social media such as Twitter, Facebook or professional networks like LinkedIn and Yammer are growing more popular for people-to-people communication. In fact, social media are becoming one of the busiest media platforms where citizens are spending more and more time. Based on user participation and user-generated content, social media provide a means of gathering and sharing information, knowledge and opinions in an easy, conversational manner.

What are social media?

'Social media' is the term used for online technologies and practices to share content, opinions and information, promote discussion and build relationships. Social media services and tools involve a combination of technology, telecommunications and social interaction. They can use a variety of formats, including text, pictures, audio and video.

Who can take part in this new form of communication?

Everyone can participate in social media, in their own personal capacity. However, your statements and opinions will remain personal and cannot be regarded as representing the Commission's official position. You do not speak on behalf of the Commission and you should point this out in the appropriate manner.

As a general rule, only Commissioners, Spokespersons, Heads of Representations and Press Officers in Representations are entitled to speak on behalf of the European Commission and to relay political messages. In response to the growing interest in social media, 'mandated staff' in every DG, working in close cooperation with the Spokespersons, have now been added to this group. Their role is to relay political messages and to provide support and assistance on social media.

What follows are a few principles and guidelines to ensure the appropriate use of social media.

Core principles

How to deal with social media

Many European Commission staff members use social media in various ways. However, the 'personal' style of social media can make it difficult to draw the line between public/professional and private use. As an official or other servant of the European Commission, you are bound by the Staff Regulations and the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour, which apply to your contributions to social media in the same way as they do when you communicate with other media or speak at conferences, etc. The five core principles from the Staff Regulations set out below are the guiding principles which you must always respect whenever you get involved in the internet or in social media.

- **Objectivity** – which means presenting any situation in a reasoned and unprejudiced manner (Staff Regulations, Article 11).
- **Impartiality** – which means weighing opinions in a balanced manner and without taking a position: for example, explaining the reasons behind a Commission position, while acknowledging differing views (Staff Regulations, Articles 11a and 17).

- **Loyalty** to the Institution – which means presenting the Commission's views within your field to the best of your ability and clearly in line with the views previously expressed by the Commission and the Commissioner responsible (Staff Regulations, Articles 11 and 17a).
- **Discretion** – which essentially means non-divulgence of any information that has not yet been made public (Staff Regulations, Article 17).
- **Circumspection** – which means exercising caution, carefulness, moderation and a due sense of proportion and propriety.

How to act responsibly

Putting something on the internet is not a gratuitous act. Even if you write in your personal capacity, you remain and will be perceived as a Commission official. You should therefore refrain from any act or behaviour which might reflect adversely upon your position and the Commission (Staff Regulations, Article 12). Obviously, you are entitled to freedom of expression, but there are limits, which you can look up in Article 17a(2) of the Staff Regulations. In particular, when activities on the Internet amount to actual publications on EU-related matters, prior authorisation is required.

For further information, see:

<http://www.cc.cec/statut/en/tit12.htm> and

http://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/hr_admin/en/ethics/obligations/Pages/freedom_expression.aspx and

http://myintracomm.ec.europa.eu/hr_admin/en/idoc/Pages/index.aspx

You should be aware that the Commission will take action against breaches of these principles.

Golden rules

As mentioned in the introduction, staff members who are not part of the group of mandated staff must bear in mind that they do not represent the official position of the European Commission.

You should participate **using your own name or under a chosen alias**, as the profiles referring to the European Commission are reserved for mandated staff. Here are some golden rules on participation in any social network:

- **Remember that you are speaking in your personal capacity:** all your statements and opinions are personal and you should not give the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the Commission.
- **Don't forget that you are responsible for what you write:** Remember that your words will stay online. Exercise good judgement and common sense whenever you write. Even when you write in your personal capacity, you are still a Commission official. Ask yourself: 'What could someone do with this information?' and 'Could it compromise me and/or the Commission?' Do not go into detail about your tasks in the Commission or its working procedures. Never discuss sensitive or classified issues.
- **Be credible, consistent and respectful:** Social media request users to be accurate, fair and consistent. Encourage response and debate. Whenever possible, align online participation with other offline communication. Use appropriate, inoffensive language and show respect for the opinion of others. Users might include current or potential stakeholders, along with current, past or future staff members. Be aware that libel and defamation laws apply.
- **Be vigilant:** Think about your own personal reputation. Very few things on the internet are genuinely anonymous. Don't publish anything that you would not want your colleagues or family to see.



- **Respect copyright:** If you have any doubts or need advice, contact the DG COMM Copyright Task Force (COMM-Copyright@ec.europa.eu).
- **For your own protection, be aware of internet security:** all social media platforms have their own privacy and data protection statements. Read them carefully. There is always a risk of virus attacks and identity theft, so take the necessary precautions and avoid giving personal details (e.g. your home address or phone numbers).
- **Observe the rules on use of ICT equipment** which 'may be used for private purposes as long as it is on a purely occasional basis and does not amount to extensive use of the equipment for private purposes' (Staff Notice 45/2006).
For further information, see: http://www.cc.cec/guide/publications/infoadm/2006/ia06045_en.html.

If you need help

- Access to, and the use of, such networks are subject to the Commission's security policy and rules and Commission system owners must respect their obligations under Decision C(2006)3602 and 2001/844. The DG HR Security Directorate is of course available to assist system owners and others contemplating the establishment of, or access to, social network systems.
- If you feel threatened on the internet or in social networks or if someone seems over-interested in your work, do not hesitate to contact the DG HR Security Directorate for advice (EC SECURITY HELPDESK or ec-security-helpdesk@ec.europa.eu).
- If you have doubts or any questions about social media activity, contact your Information and Communication Unit and the DG COMM social media team (COMM-social-media-team@ec.europa.eu).
- If you notice debates or developments mentioning, or any misuse of, the name 'European Commission' in your social media community, please inform the DG COMM social media team (COMM-social-media-team@ec.europa.eu) or the DG COMM Copyright Task Force (COMM-Copyright@ec.europa.eu).