SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR STAFF
PURPOSE

Thinking of using your personal social media account to **communicate on EU matters**, but not sure about the rules and best practice for this?

Social media can be an excellent communication tool and help amplify messages and facilitate connections to new audiences. As an institution, we would like to **encourage and empower you** to use these channels to speak about the EU and its policies with the general public.

The EU needs the advocacy of committed Europeans, and Commission staff have an important role to play. We hope that many of you will act as **ambassadors of our European policies and values**, including in your use of social media.

However, there are certain considerations you need to bear in mind. This is because the very nature of social media often makes it difficult to draw lines between public/professional and personal use.

In addition, even when you use social media in your personal capacity, you remain a member of Commission staff and are bound by certain obligations resulting from the Staff Regulations (in particular Articles 11, 11a, 12, 17, 17a), as set out below.

To help you respect these statutory obligations, these Guidelines provide you with advice on how to use social media to communicate on EU matters, in a way that is **appropriate and safe**.

Although the present Guidelines do not cover your personal use of social media when it is not related to EU matters, some of the rules and practical recommendations also apply (see Part 4).

SCOPE

These Guidelines cover the **personal use of social media when communicating on EU matters**.

They apply to **all Commission staff**, which means:

- **statutory staff** (Officials, temporary agents and contract agents)

- **seconded national experts**
  (for their obligations, see Article 7 of Commission Decision C (2008) 6866)

- **contractors** or other **service providers** (who should also use these guidelines as a point of reference when using social media in their personal capacity).
These Guidelines do not cover cases where staff have been mandated to speak on behalf of the Commission, to act on behalf of the Commission in the Commission’s administrative relations with the public, or to relay institutional messages as part of their duties (e.g. Commissioners, spokespersons, Heads of Representation, press officers in Representations, or when staff post on the social media profiles of an official EC presence, such as EC corporate accounts, DGs, Representations or EU programmes).

"PUBLICATIONS" – SPECIAL RULES

Some social media content (e.g. blogs) may amount to a "publication", as defined in the Staff Regulations. If so, the respective Staff Regulations rules apply – especially the requirement to get prior approval from your institution (Article 17a).

What makes something a publication?
The main criteria to consider are the length, the text itself and the audience.

- **Publication**
  
  Opinions which go beyond a short appreciation and amount to a structured stand-alone text.

- **Not a publication**
  
  - Short messages that consist merely of sharing pre-existing content.
  
  - Opinions which consist of simply expressing a short appreciation (thoughts, beliefs, or feelings) of a pre-existing content.

RULES & PRACTICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

1. PRINCIPLE OF FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

As a Commission staff member, you can use social media, in your own personal capacity, including to share or comment on EU-related content and topics. We encourage you to make full use of the opportunities offered by social media for this purpose, in accordance with the principles in these Guidelines.

We recommend that you use official sources to share content related to EU matters. One convenient option is the staff advocacy tool Smarp, which contains dozens of interesting, ready-to-share stories.

Signing up is quick and easy at ec.smarpshare.com.

If you have questions, contact comm-smarp@ec.europa.eu

You must ensure that your use of social media does not mistakenly give the impression that you are speaking on behalf of the Commission. Where appropriate, you should use a disclaimer (e.g. in the profile of your account) stating that you are responsible for the content and that it does not necessarily reflect the views of the European Commission.

While everyone is free to open a personal social media account, the creation of dedicated Commission accounts, e.g. to communicate around projects, needs to be agreed with your social media team and DG COMM. Using the latter accounts falls under the mandated use of social media, which is not covered by these Guidelines.
2. YOUR DUTIES RESULTING FROM THE STAFF REGULATIONS

Whether you choose to state where you work or not on social media, be aware that you are at all times:

- bound by the Staff Regulations (especially Articles 11, 11a, 12, 17, 17a)
- accountable for your actions.

At any time, even if you use social media to communicate on EU matters in your personal capacity, you remain a member of the Commission staff and your activity might be traced back to you and the Institution.

Failure to comply with the Staff Regulations in the context of the application of these Guidelines may lead to disciplinary follow-up.

The core principles that apply are summarised below. If in doubt, contact your manager and/or your communication unit/team. If the question relates specifically to the application of Ethics rules, contact the Central Ethics Service HR.E.3.

a. Circumspection

Exercise caution, carefulness, moderation and a due sense of proportion and propriety (see also section “c” below).

In practice:

- Think about your contributions to social media in the same way as you would do if you communicate with other media or speak at meetings and conferences;
- Remain respectful at all times (never use offensive language or content);
- Ignore provocation and be aware of the potential escalation of the online conversation;
- Be aware that any online message (even if initially posted in a private forum) can become public and, once posted, it is difficult to remove it;
- Be aware that third persons may also perceive you as a Commission official and a representative of the European institutions even if you have made a disclaimer.

b. Confidentiality

As a member of Commission staff, you have an obligation not to disclose, without authorisation, information received in the line of duty, unless that information has already been made public or is accessible to the public (see however section “c” below).

Unauthorised disclosure of information, intentionally or through negligence, notably to somebody outside the Institution who should not know about this information (at least before a certain “release date”), constitutes a leak and can be highly damaging to the interests of the Commission.

In practice:

- Internal documents such as drafts, data, notes, emails etc. (and in particular, classified or sensitive information) can never be shared or referred to on social media;
- Do not disclosing any information about the exact nature of your work that is not yet publicly available; in particular, do not disclose any reference to specific sensitive files you may be working on.

c. **Objectivity, impartiality and loyalty to the Institution**

While you are entitled to freedom of expression, you need to pay due respect to the limits resulting from the Staff Regulations and notably from the principles of **objectivity, loyalty and impartiality**.

Be careful to avoid any act or behaviour which might **reflect adversely upon your position** and the Commission (cf. Article 12 of the Staff Regulations), e.g. sharing content which could have a negative impact on the Commission’s reputation and/or could pose a security risk on the Commission’s assets, particularly when you identify yourself as a staff member of the European Commission or when the context might lead to that conclusion.

When sharing content, always take into account your position and your field of expertise. If public content relates to your precise area of work, it could have a greater impact on the audience you decide to share it with.

Before sharing such content, you should pay extra attention to the sensitivity of the file (unless an official Commission account has already promoted the same content in social media previously). If in doubt, consult your communication team and/or your line manager in advance before taking any action.
In some instances, even commenting on public information or targeting a specific audience when sharing content could be seen a breach of impartiality by your institution (especially if related to investigations or calls for tender).

**In practice:**

- Only share correct information; be aware of fake news and an evolving media landscape where everyone can post information;
- Never post content on social media which could have a negative impact on the Commission’s reputation and/or could pose a security risk on the Commission’s assets;
- Fully anonymous use of social media (i.e. with "dummy" untraceable accounts) is not recommended;
- Do not express opinions that could impair your ability to be seen as performing your duties in an objective or impartial manner.
- Pay particular attention not to be seen as speaking on behalf of the Commission when the content relates to your area of work.
3. PERSONAL USE OF COMMISSION ICT SERVICES

When using the Commission’s ICT (information and communication technology) services to post on social media in your personal capacity, follow the:

– guidelines on using ICT services (admin. notice n° 24-2016)
– rules on personal use of ICT services

Personal use of social media while using the Commission ICT equipment is permitted, if it is limited and reasonable (similar to, for example, personal use of professional e-mail or telephone in the office).
4. GENERAL ADVICE WHEN USING SOCIAL MEDIA

a. Be aware of privacy settings

Content on a social media platform can be shared and made available to different audiences, depending on the platform and/or the settings chosen by the user (e.g. to the public or only to friends or friends of friends). You may also be able to control whether content you post can be re-shared by others.

Make sure you carefully read the privacy policies and learn to manage the privacy and data protection settings of different platforms on which you are active.

In practice:
- Be aware of the risks linked to content you have previously published or threads where you intervened but which you do not control because they can be publicly shared;
- Always be aware that any detail of your personal life you disclose could be misused by third parties, e.g. to harm you or the Commission and other European Union institutions;
- We recommend you minimise the availability of key personal data such as your date and place of birth.

b. Respect copyright

If you want to use content such as texts, pictures, videos or music that belongs to third parties in social media, you must be aware that this content may be protected by copyright.

You can use someone else's photo (or any other copyrighted material) when the copyright owner gives you written permission specifically to use the content in social media (a generic permission to use the content on the web is not sufficient).

In practice:
- Unless explicitly stated, any picture you find on the internet could be copyrighted;
- Check the licence of every image before using it on social media. If you are not sure about the rights/ownership, do not use that picture. Please note that widely used licences (for instance, Creative Commons) are often not compatible with most social media’s terms of use;
- Also, respect the privacy of people depicted in photos and videos, and don’t post a person’s image without their consent;
- You may at any time ask the Commission’s communication units to provide you with material that you can use on social media.
c. Maintain strong security of your accounts

In practice:
- If you use social media mostly for personal use, use your private e-mail address rather than your European Commission e-mail;
- Be aware that fake social media messages or profiles are often used to perform phishing and ultimately hack your account;
- Choose strong passwords, different from your passwords at work, and change them regularly;
- Use any additional security options, such as stronger authentication methods;
- If you suspect your account has been hacked, reset your password immediately, make sure the e-mail address connected to the account is secure, revoke connections to third-party applications and update the passwords in your trusted third-party applications.
d. If you have made a mistake, correct it as soon as possible

In practice:
- On Twitter, post a new tweet stating it is a correction of a previous one and delete the one with the error;
- On other platforms, edit the post in question (if possible);
- If your attention is brought to the problem by someone else, thank them for letting you know and inform them you have made the correction.

If there is a security-related incident and it may harm the Commission or yourself, report it immediately to the HR Security Directorate.

REVISION

The effectiveness of these guidelines will be evaluated three years after they are adopted, or earlier if necessary, and may be revised.

These guidelines replace the information contained in Administrative Notice N° 34-2011 of 19 August 2011 on Social Media Guidelines for all staff.

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