



**AIACE**

**International Association of Former Officials of the European Union**

*More than 12 500 members – open to former staff of all the EU institutions and bodies*

Ad Hoc Group on the European Public Service  
83/2020



3 December 2020

## **HR STRATEGY – CONTRIBUTION BY AIACE**

In 2019, in the highly significant context of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the establishment of AIACE, it seemed appropriate to launch an initiative highlighting the role and importance of the European civil service.

This idea was warmly supported by Commission President Juncker at his meeting with the President, Vice-President and Secretary-General of AIACE at the time of signature of the joint declaration in February 2019.

It was also decided to take advantage of the General Assembly at the Annual Congress in Lisbon in May 2019 to organise a round table devoted to Europe, its past, its achievements, its future, the development of the Community Method, the place occupied therein by the civil service of yesterday and today, and the changes in it due, in particular, to the most recent reforms.

This work made it possible to adopt the Declaration annexed to this document.

AIACE is the largest and oldest association of retired officials and other retired staff of all the European Institutions.

AIACE, the International Association of Former Officials of the European Union, counts the majority of former officials among its membership. Of approximately 27 500 retired staff, some 13 000 are members of the Association, divided into 15 national sections.

AIACE has been recognised as an organisation representing all employees of the Institutions who are retired, a situation which was formalised in a Cooperation and Partnership Agreement signed between the Commission and the AIACE and renewed in 2019 by Mr Juncker and the President of the AIACE, reaffirming the commitment to a historic institutional partnership. Over the years, similar agreements have been signed with the European Parliament, the Court of Justice of the EU, the European Economic and

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Social Committee, the European Committee of the Regions, the European Court of Auditors and, lastly, the Council of the European Union.

The members of AIACE are an integral part of the European civil service, serving the European public interest. AIACE consists of former officials and other staff of all levels who possess expertise in every sector of activity of all the European institutions. This very varied expertise is enriched by the fact that its members have witnessed the development of the Institutions over several decades. This therefore means that AIACE has both a broad overview and a detailed understanding of them, combined with a knowledge of past developments, which makes it a perceptive observer and a useful adviser at a time of change.

## **1. The sacrosanct principles of the European civil service**

Any exercise which seeks to analyse the European civil service, whether through objective observation based on academic research, in terms of a regulatory approach, or with reference to human resources management policies, must be premised on the principles underlying this 'unique professional community'<sup>1</sup>. These principles are at the very heart of the process of European integration, giving it its unparalleled character and its role as a focus for identity. Such principles constitute inviolable 'values'.

### **Indivisibility, independence, permanence, competence**

These principles, and the values that they enshrine, are unique in relation to national public administrations or other public bodies or international institutions of an intergovernmental character. They have made it possible to establish a unique body of staff, independent of national administrations, permanent and competent, working in the service of a shared interest, the process of European integration. These principles are accompanied by such values as a "sense of belonging" to an institution and loyalty to it.

This body of men and women is independent of the Member States: the European Institutions themselves recruit their staff using appropriate procedures, and appoint them mostly as officials with jobs for life. The professional skills of these staff are based on a high level of training and in particular include multilingualism, administrative know-how, adaptability to varied cultures and environments and a sound knowledge of various fields of policy. These staff serve a common interest and contribute to the progress of European integration.

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- <sup>1</sup> According to the expression used by Magali Gravier (Éléments d'analyse sur le statut de la fonction publique européenne (1951-2003); in [Politique européenne 2003/3 \(n° 11\)](#), pages 79–98.

These principles are of more than just symbolic value and are not merely a source of identity: they constitute essential values and tenets whose continued acceptance should guide any conception – and any reform – of the European civil service.

### **Its rights**

The corollary of these principles is the expectation that staff will be equipped with a range of skills, in return for which they have the benefit of formally established rights and privileges (salaries, pensions, health insurance, the European Schools) which partly account for the attractiveness of employment in the public service of the European Union.

There is a need to adapt the European civil service to developments in the policies of the Union and to the ceaseless process of European integration; in doing so, these principles must always be upheld and those characteristics peculiar to, and inseparable from, these values must always be maintained.

The successive reforms that have been implemented and the human resources management policies adopted can certainly be viewed as trials, which should guide any analysis. Former officials of all categories can bear witness to the importance of avoiding developments inimical to these principles. It goes without saying that lessons should always be learned both from mistakes and from successes.

## **2. The successive reforms and their impact**

The staff of the European institutions have had to respond to numerous challenges in recent decades, particularly because of changes in the responsibilities of the institutions due to treaty amendments, the establishment of agencies and enlargement, as well as the reforms of the Staff Regulations in 2004 and 2014.

The European civil service remains sound, but many of these changes have considerably increased its heterogeneity in terms of working conditions, as well as of the skills required of staff. Some of these reforms, largely based on a 'one size fits all' approach, for example regarding mobility, have substantially detracted from the smooth passing-on of experience in various fields, causing a loss of institutional memory. This has also reduced the propensity to undergo specific training, because the prospects of being able to put it to use for any length of time are limited, apart from the fact that the range of such training on offer has remained unsatisfactory.

For example, we are observing a very strong tendency to divide staff into different classes, not only because staff carrying out the same kind of work are working under different terms of employment. The big increase in the number of contract agents, not only as a result of the establishment of a fairly large number of regulatory and executive agencies, has helped to

create a certain number of isolated compartments, with very limited prospects of change.

However, one long-standing dilemma has never been sufficiently tackled: how to recognise the performance of officials by promoting them without automatically assigning them management responsibilities when not all of them possess the same talent or capacity for managing a sector or unit.

As we can see, various alarming reports also show that the situation is deteriorating. The number of applicants for jobs with the European Institutions has declined, particularly in the 'old' Member States, which, in the longer term, will endanger the geographical balance of the European civil service. Moreover, some officials recruited since the reforms of 2004 and 2014 have had a tendency to stay at the European Institutions only for relatively short periods, then to move on to more attractive jobs elsewhere.

It is clear that the series of reforms has seriously impaired the attractiveness of the European civil service. It is therefore essential that any reform of staff policy should deal with the following aspects:

- The mobility requirement should become more specific to the job that an individual is doing, so as to avoid any loss of institutional memory.
- The methods currently being used to train staff should be reviewed so as to facilitate adaptation to new requirements, such as teleworking, financial management and administration of funds, and better use of the existing European School of Administration (EUSA) in Brussels and Luxembourg and the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht.
- As regards promotion, different ways of recognising staff's performance should be found, without linking promotion so closely to managerial roles.
- In recruitment, greater attention should be paid to the geographical balance among staff.

### **3. OUR FIELDS OF ACTION**

The prime purpose of AIACE as stated in its Articles of Association is to maintain close contact with the EU's authorities and to represent and defend the interests of former staff as broadly as possible in relation with those authorities.

## AIACE and the European Commission

The first agreement between the Commission and AIACE was signed in 2002 and renewed and extended in 2008. The resulting partnership led to the participation of AIACE in the social dialogue, and cooperation with DG Human Resources to perform social welfare work and to supply expertise in major subjects such as the JSIS and pensions. AIACE welcomes this agreement and hopes to step up the dialogue.

## Pensions and the Method

It was in March 1972 that the Council adopted the Staff Pay and Pension Adjustment Method, which makes it possible to maintain parallelism between the trends in purchasing power in the European civil service and in national civil services. The most recent (6th) modification of the Method has made it possible to uphold the principle of parallelism and the link between the annual adjustments to pensions and to salaries. The application of the weighting expresses the principle of equal treatment, which ensures equality of purchasing power between all the pensioners, wherever they live.

Lastly, adjustments have become automatic and no longer have to undergo the cumbersome co-decision procedure.

In 2020, the moderation and exception measures have played their part perfectly in taking into account the difficulties associated with the Covid-19 pandemic. AIACE wishes to see the current Method continue after 2023, and in particular it advocates maintaining the weightings for certain pensioners.

On several occasions, the Commission has confirmed the existence of a notional pension fund, particularly in its Report to the EP and the Council on the application of Annex XII to the Staff Regulations. AIACE supports this position and is not in favour of creating a financial pension fund.

## The Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme (JSIS)

After officials reach retirement age, they continue to be covered by the JSIS. However, there are also differences in the status of pensioners to which AIACE's representatives on the management bodies draw attention and for which they propose solutions. Pensioners are no longer covered by accident insurance and no longer have the benefit of automatic regular health checks such as are prescribed under occupational health arrangements. On the other hand, they are eligible for specific screening programmes.

At the same time, they are at greater risk of contracting a serious illness or disability or becoming dependent. Lastly, old and isolated people far away

from the Settlement Offices experience difficulties in completing the requisite administrative formalities to obtain care and reimbursements of medical expenses. AIACE welcomes the attention that DG HR and the PMO have devoted to the difficulties encountered by these beneficiaries and calls for the JSIS to adjust its procedures even better to meet the specific needs of pensioners, whether or not they are members of AIACE.

In the field of health insurance and the reimbursement of medical expenses, AIACE calls for a system of equality coefficients to continue on the basis of real representative data, so as to ensure the equal treatment provided for by the common rules in the EU Member States (and in the UK), in accordance with the methodology stipulated in the relevant provisions. AIACE would be alarmed by any fresh approaches which ran counter to this.

### The European Schools

AIACE defends the existence of the European Schools and advocates their development, as they constitute an essential aid for the recruitment of officials from all EU Member States and symbolise a multicultural Union.

## **CONCLUSION**

It follows from these considerations that AIACE strongly believes in the principles and achievements that have inspired the conception and nature of the European public service.

On no account should these principles and values be jeopardised in the course of adjustment or reform processes.

These principles are vital to the attractiveness of the European public service, which needs to be preserved and strengthened in order to 'compete' in a market for excellence and talent.

These gains (the Method, JSIS, etc.) go hand in hand with the unique character of the European public service, and any reduction in them would undermine the European public service and hence render it less attractive.

When it comes to thinking about the establishment of a new staff policy, AIACE is proud to be involved in the consultation process and, as a preferred discussion partner, is ready to consider any aspect that it is invited to think about.

### Declaration on the European Public Service

AIACE International<sup>2</sup> is an organisation which brings together former officials and agents of the European Public Service who are bound by statutory ties but above all by their strong feelings of belonging to Europe and by their professional experiences within the European institutions.

Whilst AIACE continues to demonstrate its firm commitment and positive involvement in matters which most directly concern its members such as the Method, the EU Pension Scheme and the Joint Sickness and Insurance Scheme, the consideration of wider issues are also very pertinent to the Association. To reflect on the nature and effectiveness of our institutions and their administration is certainly part of its mission.

In this context and to mark its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary, AIACE launched an initiative to begin a process of reflection on the EPS, beginning at its Lisbon Congress of 2019 where a Round Table was held on this topic. Following these Round Table discussions, AIACE wishes to make its contribution and bring its reflections and thoughts on the European Public Service to the attention of the institutions.

Ever since the founding of the European Communities, the European Public Service (EPS) has closely paralleled the building of Europe, as a driving force serving the institutions. Right from the start, Jean Monnet wanted an EPS that could serve as an essential element for the European project. In addition to **professional competence**, the EPS should thus be characterized by **independence from the Member States, multilingualism and European conviction**. The need for independence meant that instead of using officials seconded from national administrations, officials would be recruited mainly through competition and appointed to permanent posts.

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The staff of the European institutions have had to adapt to many new challenges over the past decades, especially because of the evolution of the institutions' responsibilities. This change has been accentuated by the administrative reforms which followed the resignation of the Santer Commission, further emphasised by the 2004 and 2014 reforms of the Staff Regulations.

Our European Public Service remains robust. The EU administration continues to be known for its high degree of professional competence and the wide geographical and linguistic coverage amongst its officials, who remain politically independent of the Member States.

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<sup>2</sup> The International Association of Former Officials of the European Union

However, there are several alarming reports<sup>3 4</sup> indicating that the situation is deteriorating. The number of applicants for posts in the European institutions has been decreasing. In particular, the number of qualified applicants from the “old” Member States has diminished considerably which in the longer term jeopardizes the geographical balance of the EPS. Also, many of the officials recruited since the reforms in 2004 and 2014 have tended to stay in the European institutions only for a short period of time, then moving on to more attractive jobs elsewhere. This trend is worrying, as it undermines one of the particular strengths of the European civil service - the experience, acquired over many years.

It is plain that the 2004 and 2014 reforms of the Staff Regulations have seriously reduced the attractiveness of the European Public Service. In addition, the 2004 reform of the Staff Regulations has created many tensions between officials recruited before and after that year.

There are further major concerns that need to be addressed, such as:

- The 5% decrease in staff numbers has created enormous difficulties for the working lives of existing personnel of the institutions;
- The considerable resort to temporary and contract agents, within a multiplicity of agencies. Tasked from the start with “non-core business” jobs, the distinction between officials and temporary/contract agents has steadily become more and more blurred;
- The agencies have become closed “silos”, with little prospect for staff mobility.

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The European Public Service must of course continue to adapt to the new circumstances of integration, requiring an increased political responsibility for the EU institutions. It is then of uttermost importance to ensure that the defining characteristics of the EPS - professional competence, independence from the Member States, multilingualism and European conviction – are safeguarded, as an essential part of ensuring the proper functioning of the Union.

Decisive measures are needed to make working in the European institutions attractive, not only for current staff but also and especially for future generations. Attention must be given to remuneration levels, working conditions, recruitment procedures, career prospects and job stability.

Some of the required measures are obviously urgent and need to be addressed in the immediate term.

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<sup>3</sup> COM (2018) 377 final/2

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19\\_15/SR\\_Staff\\_reform\\_EN.pdf](https://www.eca.europa.eu/Lists/ECADocuments/SR19_15/SR_Staff_reform_EN.pdf)

Other questions require a deeper reflection on the European Public Service, in partnership with all the institutions and in liaison with other initiatives which have already been started.

AIACE therefore invites the Union's institutions to commit to an examination and comprehensive analysis with an updating of all relevant factors. This exercise would aim to draw up conclusions pointing towards the desired design of the European Public Service, in the light of the policies to be implemented and their management. This would build on the experience of past achievements regarding human resources, on-going reflections and existing studies.

Within the limits of its resources, AIACE proposes that it should be associated with such an exercise.