



AIACE

International Association of Former Staff of the European Union

More than 12.500 members – open to former employees of the EU institutions and bodies

The Secretary General
91/2020



INFO-SECTIONS No 11 – 2nd half of 2019, and 2020

Newsletter of the International Office for members of the Association

The purpose of this publication is to serve as a link between the work of our Association's international structure and our approximately 12 500 members. It consists of a few brief items containing information about the work of the International Bureau and is being sent to the sections so that they can pass it on to their members. This 11th number covers the period from July 2019 to December 2020.

Cancellation of the Yearly Congress and General Assembly

The worrying trend in the health situation in Europe last autumn prompted the Management Board to cancel the 2021 Congress, as vaccines will probably not be available soon enough and in sufficient quantities to permit travel in May 2021. The Congress in Loutraki will therefore, in principle, be held in 2022. Meanwhile, the Bureau has been considering the possibility of holding a virtual General Assembly in May or June 2021.

Cancellation of statutory meetings

Because of the health situation, all statutory meetings have been cancelled and replaced, as necessary, by videoconferences, which does not always facilitate debate.

Meetings of the Bureau and the Management Board

As it is impossible to travel under acceptable conditions, all meetings of the Bureau and Management Board are being held by videoconference until further notice. Whenever necessary, written procedures are being used to take decisions between meetings of the Management Board. The elections of the President and Vice-President will be held using electronic voting during the meeting in March 2021 (mornings of 16 and 17 March 2021).

Social welfare appropriations

As the budget has yielded substantial surpluses because of the cancellation of face-to-face meetings and the General Assembly, it has been decided to allocate €57 000 to sections which have incurred, or anticipate, extra expenditure because of the pandemic.

European civil service / consultation of DG HR

DG HR has launched an extensive staff consultation exercise concerning the future of human resources strategy. The AIACE was formally invited to participate, which is a first, and a welcome one. The AIACE's contribution was drafted by a small ad hoc group in conjunction with the President, coordinated by Dominique Deshayes, and sent to the Director-General of DG HR. The text can be accessed on the AIACE website.

15 Sections : Belgique/België – Danmark - Deutschland – Éire/Ireland - España - France – Ελλάς/Grèce - Italia – Luxembourg - Nederland – Österreich – Portugal – Suomi/Finland – Sverige - United Kingdom

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Revision of the General Implementing Provisions

The work of the JSIS working group is proceeding extremely slowly. Little progress has been made as yet. Watch this space ...

Equality coefficients

The JSIS working group has been working under unsatisfactory conditions. The PMO's proposals have often met with objections from the AIACE (pensioners in the various Member States being the main beneficiaries), as they would have considerably increased the percentages of costs to be borne by pensioners themselves in a whole range of situations. In the end the JSIS adopted the proposals with a few adjustments, but without accepting all our demands. The Board of Heads of Administration ultimately rejected the JSIS's proposal and called for the AIACE's objections to be studied and taken into account before their next meeting in March 2021.

Restrictive measures in connection with the JSIS

During the lockdown period, we have observed an unusually large number of complaints about reimbursements or decisions on direct billing, which seem indicative of a tendency to demand documents that are not required by the General Implementing Provisions, or to equivocate about applications for reimbursements. The PMO denies that any attempt is being made to apply austerity measures; we have been gathering together the cases that have been reported to us. Fortunately, in most of those that have been processed, it has proved possible to arrive at a solution once we had intervened.

Covid-19 donation

Because of the serious consequences of the pandemic in some regions of Europe, a group of officials and other staff, who had already organised themselves to tackle the problem of climate change (eustaff4climate.info), decided to set up an emergency fund, the EU staff COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund, which is being managed under the umbrella of the King Baudouin Foundation; the management committee is chaired by David O'Sullivan, former Secretary-General of the Commission. It is being funded mainly by individual contributions from staff of the institutions (monthly or one-off); the AIACE has decided to make a symbolic one-off donation of €25 000 (from the reserves) in order to demonstrate pensioners' support for the actions of this fund. All information about this can be found on the website <https://eustaff4climate.info/eustaff-covid-19-solidarity-response-fund/>.

Switch from Yammer to Teams

As Microsoft has decided to terminate support for Yammer, we have been compelled (being faced by a fait accompli) to accept a different social network, Teams. The preparation of the transition was complicated and complex, particularly because of the (excessive) pressure of time involved. After a few teething troubles, the transition seems to be proceeding without too many difficulties, the problems being resolved one by one. Yammer will no longer be accessible after 20 December 2020. As from January 2021, all pensioners will be invited to join Teams After EC if they so wish.

Seminars / videos

As the seminars to prepare staff for retirement were cancelled overnight, it was necessary to quickly create a video presenting the AIACE using the resources to hand (admittedly limited to 20 minutes). It was a stopgap, and is currently being replaced by a more professional alternative, which will also be suitable for placing on the AIACE's website. In addition, interactive question and answer sessions have been organised by DG HR.

Brexit

Irrespective of the outcome of the negotiations on a trade agreement, the withdrawal agreement remains in force, dealing, inter alia, with taxation (double taxation). But some problems will remain to be solved, such as the European Health Insurance Card, emergency care on the continent for spouses with a complementary cover, roaming, etc.

Health screening

New screening programmes have been organised, some of which are specifically for 60+. They are more ambitious than the previous ones. The negotiations with the approved centres are progressing slowly and with difficulty. So far, agreement has only been reached on Belgium, Spain, France (to a very limited extent at this stage), Greece, Portugal and Italy (but not the whole country). The discussions with other centres and with centres in other countries have been suspended during the lockdown and should resume in 2021. Meanwhile, pensioners have the option of organising screening for themselves wherever they wish and obtaining a reimbursement afterwards, which is always possible in any case, but subject to ceilings (which have been published).

Insurance

Some subscribers to HospiSafe, distributed by Afiliatys, did not wish to accept the change of insurer for the HospiSafe contract, or the cessation of the use of the broker Cigna for that insurance. Many of them opted to remain with Cigna, which is also our insurer. The transfer was possible without formalities and remains so until 31 December 2020. The AIACE, together with Cigna, has launched a travel assistance insurance scheme, which provides more extensive cover than traditional insurance policies and incorporates several options.

All the information can be found on the AIACE website at <https://aiace-europa.eu/assurances>

Case T-315/19

Art. 20 of the Staff Regulations provides that if a marriage takes place after retirement, the surviving spouse may only receive a pension after a period of 5 years, in contrast to active staff (1 year). In the present case, the death of the retired official occurred before the 5 years have elapsed. AIACE intervened in this case before the General Court. To our great surprise, the General Court ruled that this provision is discriminatory and a source of inequality; as such, this provision of the Staff Regulations is therefore not applicable. This ruling on the non-applicability of a provision of the Statute seems to be a first. Similar cases will have to be re-examined.

Tenth anniversary of the cooperation and partnership agreement with the Commission

This anniversary was celebrated with an AIACE/Commission joint declaration signed by Commission President J.-Cl. Juncker and AIACE President J. Díaz Pardo.

Mr Juncker becomes an honorary President

Jean-Claude Juncker has been appointed an honorary President of the AIACE.

Grant

The Commission has decided, at our request, to increase its annual grant to us for social welfare measures from €100 000 (unaltered for years) to €120 000. All the other institutions have followed this good example and adjusted their grants as well.

Didier HESPEL
Secretary-General