

EU commission struggling to attract top economists

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BRUSSELS - So few people are applying for jobs in the European Commission that the official in charge believes it will soon no longer be possible to guarantee a high calibre workforce where all member states are fairly represented.

EU commissioner Maros Sefcovic, in charge of administration, says salaries for the commission are too low to be attractive to candidates from rich member states.

"For some time we are facing quite a serious problem recruiting people from so-called high-wage economies," he said Monday (26 March).

The problem goes across the board from entry-level salaries for policy officers (€4,349.59 a month before tax) right up to the top bureaucratic posts in the commission.

Germans represent 16.31 percent of the EU population. Yet in 2010, only 7.61 percent of EU applicants for an administrator post (a policy expert) in the commission were Germans. This dropped to 6.82 percent last year - less than half of what it should be to ensure the country's fair representation in the commission.

But it is in Britain where the problem is so acute that the commission has actively started to try and recruit students in their last year of university to stop well-qualified graduates flitting off to highly-paid jobs elsewhere.

While the country represents 12.38 percent of the EU population, it accounted for only 2.39 percent of entry-level applicants in 2011.

Sefcovic notes that he himself has interviewed "several high civil servants" from "high-wage economies" who have made it through the commission's staff hiring process only to turn down the job in the end because national civil services pay more.

The situation risks becoming "structural" by the end of this decade, by which time around 60 percent of managers will be coming to retirement age but are not being sufficiently replaced.

Where are the economists?

But the problem is not just a long term one. The commission is also having immediate difficulty getting top economists to fill an extra 59 posts in its Economic and Financial Affairs department (DG ECFIN).

The beefed-up DG reflects the increased powers the commission has in surveilling national budgets but also over bailed-out countries, particularly Greece, which require almost constant detailed economic analysis and responses.

"I know that [economic affairs commissioner] Ollie Rehn and [director general] Marco Buti are struggling to get to the level of economists that they would like to have," said Sefcovic.

Of the 59 places up for grabs, only six have been filled. Twenty-two are in the process of being filled, while the rest remain empty.

Sefcovic's comment on staff problems come as member states begin their traditional squabbles on the EU's multi-annual budget (2014-2020).

The commission's administrative budget accounts for 6 percent of the around €130 billion annual budget. However, some member states - including the UK and Germany - have called for further reductions in salaries and pensions in the next long-term budget.

The commission counters that its current problems stem from staff reforms which kicked into place in 2004, when salaries were lowered and pensions made less attractive.

"We can really have almost all old member states before 2020 facing this problem. I was trying to be clear what kind of consequences this problem might have for the fair geographical representation and for the high quality of officials we need in the commission over the coming years," said Sefcovic.

Comissioner Sefcovic proposes raises in salaries of EU officials [Poland]

Dziennik Gazeta Prawna daily quotes the EU Administration Commissioner Sefcovic as stating that salaries of the EU officials should be increased. Mr. Sefcovic argued that given the present wages are not attractive for candidates for jobs from e.g. the UK or Germany, yet member states are always clamouring for “geographically balanced” recruiting. It is also said that the Fiscal Pact requires the hiring of more experts. Yet the aforementioned countries are not asking for more hires of their citizens – they are among the signatories of the letter submitted by 17 EU remembers asking for cuts in Eurocrat’s salaries and benefits.

Dziennik Gazeta Prawna: The European Commission is backing cuts. But not in its house. / Komisja Europejska popiera cięcia. Ale nie na swoim podwórku page: 2 info: by Jędrzej Bielecki date: Thursday, April 12, 2012