



Staff management at the Commission: between pessimism and anger

For some years the Commission has regularly pledged to reduce the workforce, in order to show lawmakers and the outside world that it can do more with less. Linked to the 2014 reform of the Staff Regulations, which planned to limit the rights and guarantees of the European Civil Service, this staff reduction policy aims above all to cut the Commission's operating costs in section 5. Nevertheless, this policy has an appreciable impact on the services by requiring them to ask questions of themselves and to reorganise constantly in order to cope with staff shortages. However, this situation becomes even more problematic when it is further burdened with hasty decisions emanating in particular from the College and passed on by DG HR and DG BUDG, which defy every attempt at staff planning and the management of tasks associated with staff in situ.

The case of DG HR

The best example is that of DG HR itself. Since the arrival of Mme K. Georgieva, DG HR has had to develop and implement an ambitious human resources policy while cutting back its workforce by at least 10% over 5 years, in other words more than double that of other DGs, at a time when this DG has some ambitious projects – reducing job insecurity and inequality, ensuring career monitoring, establishing a mobility policy and a talent management policy, etc. – and should therefore have greater resources. This is a further illustration that social issues and human resources management are not a priority for the College.

It is quite clear that this decision risks compromising DG HR's political objective. It is therefore open to question whether such staff planning by DG HR contributes to the pursuit of new objectives.

DG RTD as well

A second example of the aberrations of provisional staff management is DG RTD.

In the first place, in 2012-2013 DG RTD foresaw a staff reduction plan affecting 600 people (permanent posts and credits combined) over 6 years (2014-2020, a Horizon 2020 implementation period, the flagship programme of the DG) to become "DG policy", taking account of the fact that, on the basis of the elements available at the time, these job cuts could occur "naturally" through unforced transfers and retirement. Staff levels at DG RTD were therefore slowly cut back over the initial years before rapidly increasing in the last few years. However, without informing DG RTD or the other DGs in the research category, DG BUDG soon agreed with budgetary authorities on the principle of budgetary neutrality, which stipulates that, year on year, budgets must be strictly balanced. The consequence of this decision

was that staff reduction plans had to be modified and that in the early years more jobs had to be cut, in particular policy officer roles, and that in the coming years the DG risks being in the position of having more staff than necessary with a budgetary and financial profile, in spite of the fact that 75% of the budget for the management of Horizon 2020 programmes will have been contracted out.

Next, it was logically planned that the outsourcing of Horizon 2020 management tasks between 2014 and 2020 would be done with staff qualified in the management and budgeting of DG RTD, notably contract agents. This plan was effectively a roadmap to ensure the simultaneous transfer of qualified staff together with their duties from DG RTD to the agencies. However, in 2014-2015 the roadmap did not function as fewer than thirty contract agents from the research DGs were included on the list. As a result, the relevant staff at DG RTD cannot continue their agency duties and must be redeployed internally, and the agencies must now recruit outside of the roadmap. This situation is far from the best use of talent. It appears that this is caused by the restrictive interpretations of DG HR, which decided in 2013-2014 that only staff working exclusively on Horizon 2020 could be transferred to agencies. Yet the reality was that, out of necessity, most staff at the time were still working a great deal on the previous Framework Programme 7.

Finally, we should also mention another major technical problem. As the permanent posts at DG RTD were budgeted on research credits (and therefore not on section 5), the cuts in DG RTD staff are likely to mean that "research" posts are now allocated outside of DG RTD and the Research DGs: to other DGs and for duties that have nothing to do with the legal basis of Horizon 2020 through which they are financed. The result is that the responsibility for the use of research credits becomes watered down in proportion to the staff cuts within DG RTD.

Also other DGs: so that no one feels left out

In more general terms, all DGs are affected by the erratic central policy now being implemented.

Thus, the recent Commission decision of 9 December 2015 to freeze another 550 posts (because DG BUDG had miscalculated pay rises and the number of vacant posts) has led to a change in DG staff forecasts by suddenly increasing the number of vacant posts. It is also likely that during the year, as early as the spring, the Commission will decide to strengthen one policy or another, thereby strengthening certain DGs, as it did in 2015 with the migration policy in favour of DGs HOME and ECHO (58 permanent posts). Once again, the DGs will be faced with losing planned posts and will have to deal as best they can with the most pressing issues. No one knows how many people, and with what profiles, this will concern.

Finally, the plan to recentralise certain functions (communications, HR, IT) will lead to selections among staff in place in these jobs in the DGs: some will go to the central services, others will stay and have to change jobs, and the DGs will have to provide appropriate training. Once again, nothing seems clear in this area and it is likely that the decisions will be taken in haste this year. We can only note, yet again, the absence of a plan. The decisions to decentralise HR functions, for example, were taken several years ago based on entirely contrary analyses. How will we manage to recentralise HR duties and in relation to

what objective analyses? The only basis for this unreasoned decision may be to make savings by setting up a new Office that is less expensive to run. The Commissioner has only made a veiled reference to this plan, and we have been unable to find out more.

This policy is bad for the Civil Service and bad for the European project

It is also undeniable that the general evolution of European policies within the context of the European crisis profoundly affects HR management within the Commission in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Thus, the "better law-making" policy overseen by the Secretariat General, which reflects the general political agenda of the Member States for a reduced role for the European Commission, reveals the underlying trends at work in HR management. The decrease in the Commission's legislative work not only means a reduction of the workforce (the different annual or exceptional taxations) but also a "qualitative" turn in which more and more time is spent on justification than on action, and on procedure than on the purpose. The staff of DG DEVCO, for example, complain more and more that the "interesting work" is done by external consultants (at substantial cost) while the staff themselves are restricted to procedural work and justifying expenses. As a result, not only is the expertise within these DGs going downhill, but also these colleagues are exposed to bureaucratic rationalisation processes that increase stress and threaten their jobs. At DG AGRI, the rapid reduction in staff, implemented in complete uncertainty concerning the number of people involved and the planned dates, has resulted in a permanent rumour of reorganisation that demotivates staff and distracts them from their duties. At DG SANTE, the need to define negative priorities without being able to discuss the issue in a more transparent and rational way has resulted in surprising decisions concerning the international activity of the DG. More generally, the prospect of less European intervention should disrupt the budgets of major European policies, such as agriculture, regional development and social support and profoundly impact the "big-spending" DGs, in particular DG AGRI, DG REGIO and DG EMPL.

DG CNECT is another good example of the profound changes affecting staff. The prevailing opinion is that there are too many AST management, administration and finance staff. It is therefore necessary to cut back on these staff members by automating procedures as much as possible along the lines of "there is nothing more to be done and it is enough simply to press a button". Yet staff are clearly faced with a very different situation, as the newly automated management systems, such as SYGMA and COMPAS for example, do not manage everything, are flawed, require additional checks and finally need to be followed up with actions on a daily basis. Overall, AD staff find it difficult to use these new systems, which, in turn, require trained AST staff, who are fewer and fewer in number. Furthermore, the political desire to transform DG CNECT into "political" or "Marketing" DGs means that AD staff or GF IV contract agents spend an increasing amount of time organising "events" for the "real" world of "customers" than on managing the substance of projects and acquiring additional knowledge. The scientific reflection aspect of public policies is becoming increasingly secondary when it should, on the contrary, be a priority, particularly in those Directorates with a research budget.

Doing more or the same with fewer resources is less effective!

It therefore appears that staff management at the Commission must now evolve in an atmosphere somewhere between pessimism and anger. How is it possible to work when staff reduction plans change so quickly and there is no longer time even to reflect on how our jobs are changing? It seems clear that over the last few years it has become impossible in many DGs to do any forward staff planning, despite this being one of the key factors in staff management and the considered use of resources to implement effective European policies. The increase in the number of budgetary or legal constraints that are often barely comprehensible and announced at the last minute, the unplanned changes in political direction, and finally the errors in staff planning at a central level not only make provisional staff management rather illusory, but also result in a permanent state of uncertainty and a growing lack of motivation in staff and management at all levels. In view of this strong trend, it seems likely that a number of the priorities of the Juncker Commission will not be achieved because of inadequate resources, which will have the immediate effect of further delegitimising Europe and the European Commission.

From a practical point of view, U4U has already requested Mme Georgieva to commit to adding in 2017 the 550 posts withdrawn in 2016 following an error by DG BUDG. However, we are also asking for DGs HR and BUDG to establish, within the framework of a code of good conduct, a much more comprehensive internal communication with the DGs, to enable the development of a better understanding of the particular characteristics of the DGs and to be more flexible concerning the means of implementing the staff reduction in a better planned and more humane manner. The agreements between DG HR and DG BUDG on the one hand and the other DGs on the other should be transparent and observed. Finally, U4U refers to its [proposals for a true talent management policy](#) and for wiser choices regarding "[doing more with less](#)" (see the [second consultation](#) in progress).

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