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## EU'S 'ANTI-LEAKS STRATEGY' LEAKED

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EXCLUSIVE / The European Commission will launch an anti-leaks strategy on Friday (30 September) to prevent key policy documents being circulated to the media, and avoid further reputational damage to the EU's flagship institution, EurActiv.com has learned.

The executive's new anti-leaks strategy was discussed during a meeting of director-generals last Thursday (22 September). Director-generals are the highest-ranking officials, after the 28 EU Commissioners.

But the document was met with indignation by trade unions, who said it will negatively affect working conditions by inciting moral harassment at the European Commission.

Irene Souka, responsible for Human Resources at the Commission, told her colleagues that the strategy will be based on training, a communication campaign and an annual declaration.

The main objective of the anti-leaks strategy is to ensure that sensitive and confidential information is appropriately protected, avoiding political and reputational damage for the Commission, Souka told the executive's top officials, according to notes of the meeting seen by EurActiv.

Leaks have been a top concern for Jean-Claude Juncker's Commission. Some of its draft proposals illustrated the close links between the EU executive and industry representatives, while other leaked documents have helped torpedo free trade talks with the US.

### COMMISSION LASHES OUT AT TTIP LEAKS AS STORM IN A TEACUP'

The EU hit back at Greenpeace on Monday (2 May) for promoting misconceptions after it leaked documents about the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) showing that the US is pressuring Brussels to roll back health and environmental standards.

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The issue has been discussed at various occasions by the College of Commissioners.

During the College meeting on 13 January 2015, Juncker strongly deplored the leaks to the press of documents used to prepare the Commission's 2015 work programme, according to the minutes of the meeting.

Juncker considered the leaks unacceptable behaviour and told his Commissioners he would draw all the necessary conclusions from the incident.

But during the same discussion, Commissioners lamented that some of the additional measures planned to avoid further leaks would limit the time to examine the documents.

The European Commission may at times decide to leak information at its own initiative, to test the waters on a given policy proposal, or when it favours its own political agenda.

At other times, the Commission has used the public indignation caused by leaked information to initiate reforms which would have been difficult to pass otherwise. This was the case with the Luxleaks scandal which the executive turned to its advantage by initiating a crackdown on the tax privileges enjoyed by multinational corporations in Europe and elsewhere.

#### VESTAGER: WE SHOULD THANK THE LUXLEAKS WHISTLEBLOWERS

EXCLUSIVE / Margrethe Vestager, the EU's powerful competition commissioner, believes everyone should thank the whistleblowers and investigative journalists who uncovered the so-called Luxleaks scandal and says she is personally in favour of country-by-country reporting on corporate taxation.

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Some cases were more embarrassing for the executive. Neelie Kroes, a former Vice-President in the Barroso I and II Commissions, admitted she forgot to declare her directorship of an offshore company in the Bahamas while she was still in service.

The information was published last week by a consortium of journalists in the Bahamas Leaks scandal.

#### COMMISSION READY TO SANCTION KROES AFTER MISSING HER CONFESSION

The European Commission said there was scope to slap sanctions on its former competition policy chief Neelie Kroes, embroiled in the Bahamas Leaks scandal, after taking five days to react to an e-mail where she confessed having transgressed the rules.

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The executive was also forced to punish its former President, José Manuel Barroso following the public outcry when he was appointed non-executive chairman of Goldman Sachs, a US investment bank often blamed for the 2007 global financial crisis.

This week, information emerged that Barroso had met with Goldman Sachs while he was still in charge of the European Commission.

#### The protagonist of transparency

According to the Juncker team, these secret meetings, and a lack of transparency, now belong to the past.

This Commission is the protagonist of transparency, chief spokesperson Margaritis Schinas told reporters on Monday (26 September).

Schinas pointed out that one of the first decisions taken by the Juncker Commission was to ensure that any meeting with Commissioners and director-generals are made public.

The European Commission will launch its anti-leaks strategy on 30 September. During the closed-door meeting of the director-generals, Souka recalled the sanctions that officials could face in the event that they breach their obligations.

The attendees commented that all EU institutions should adopt a common stance on how to minimise the risk of leaks. They also suggested raising awareness of the importance of an anti-leak stance by organising ethics days.

TIMMERMANS: TRANSPARENCY IS NEEDED TO RECONNECT WITH SCEPTICAL CITIZENS'

Frans Timmermans claimed on Monday (2 May) that the EU was a world leader in trade transparency, as he called for a compulsory register of lobbyists in Brussels.

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The executives efforts to limit what officials communicate appears in contradiction with its declared intention of further strengthening transparency at EU institutions.

Schinas said it remains to be seen what form the strengthening of the transparency rules will take. But it is believed that the European Commission will unveil a revised inter-institutional agreement on Wednesday (28 September) that will expand the rules restricting meetings between Commission officials and accredited lobbyists, to lower-level civil servants.

Inquisitorial practices

Meanwhile, the anti-leaks strategy was heavily criticised by trade unions, which sees it as a form of moral harassment that will put officials under inquisitorial practices.

In an open letter sent to Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva, the European Civil Service Federation warned that the actions and methods of the strategy are not only ill-adapted, but also counterproductive and even deceptively pernicious.

Civil servants complained that the plan is very unclear about the type of information covered by the strategy, the degree of sensitivity concerned, and the limits of dissemination.

The result, they concluded, will be a poisonous climate of distrust within the institution.

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Kaynak/Source: