



U4U - Union for Unity AISBL

Brussels, 9 December 2015

Open letter to the President of the Commission, Monsieur J-C. Juncker

Violence at work

Dear Mr President,

A colleague of mine recently took his own life at his workplace. Although professional problems may not necessarily be the only explanation for a suicide, a destabilising working environment can contribute to weakening individuals and increasing their distress.

We would like to request that you initiate an independent inquiry to determine what professional reasons may have driven our esteemed colleague to this act of desperation. This will also be an opportunity to cast light on cases of "burn out" and situations involving depression within the Commission and the services that depend on it (executive agencies, EEAS, etc.).

According to reports from people who knew our colleague, it is already becoming clear that he was under great pressure in his daily work and that he had recently been subject to a downgrading of his duties, for questionable reasons and that this was managed in a manner that was also open to question. It would be extremely damaging to the reputation of the institution and the morale of the European Civil Service for this case not to be handled with complete transparency.

This tragic episode is part of a general climate that is far from healthy. The European institutions appear to have difficulty establishing a healthy working environment in which employees are respected, in which assignments and working conditions are negotiated and decisions are explained, and finally, in which all forms of harassment are banished once and for all. At this very moment, there are other situations at the services of the Commission where colleagues are learning in a rather brutal fashion that they have been side-lined or subjected to a compulsory transfer, without explanation, without appeal, without support measures and without any consideration for their service record.

The situation at the EPO/OEB, which is not a European institution but on whose Board the EU is represented, is sadly an example of these problems. The Commission cannot leave it without solution and should be involved in an active search for a staff policy worthy of the EPO/OEB.

As well as feeling compassion, we must understand the reasons that led our colleague to this tragic act. We must take steps to avoid such situations. Let us treat those colleagues affected

by the various restructuring measures with respect and dignity and defuse the tension with complete transparency and in accordance with our Staff Regulations, and in particular in line with the principles of non-discrimination and equal treatment.

While it is perfectly reasonable for the Commission to carry out reorganisations to achieve its objectives, any element of arbitrariness must be eliminated, as must violence at work. If the Commission wants to do "better with the same thing", it should consider how this can be accomplished - not on the basis of authoritarian decisions, but by using shared analyses.

These are some courses of action we support to improve relations in the workplace:

- Inform and consult all staff affected by a restructuring as far upstream as possible;
- For decisions taken with regard to staff, first consult them about their wishes and then, once the decision has been made, explain this at an individual interview (at the invitation of the management hierarchy, beyond any possible request from the official);
- When these colleagues have held management positions (CDU or CDUA), make proposals to them so that they can re-establish themselves with dignity and devote themselves to duties in line with their expertise (advisor, senior expert, etc.);
- Define tasks for senior staff, in line with the new priorities of the Commission (especially for those colleagues who have had managerial responsibilities such as CDU or CDUA for more than 5 years, or have had more than 20 years of service);
- Suggest detachment options for those who are nearing retirement, on a voluntary basis, or as motivational mobility for those whose skills are still valuable.

Mr President,

In the context of staff cuts, our institution needs all its employees who must be able to contribute to all its objectives, at their rightful place and in a positive, motivating and dignified working environment.

In the context of the longer working hours (much favoured by the Council at the time of the last reform), senior staff must be able to find responsibilities and posts that correspond to their abilities. Age discrimination is all the more unacceptable in light of the fact that the institution is extending working life and making early retirement more difficult.

The situation that has arisen at the GROW DG must make us reflect on the lack of resources for the prevention of psycho-social risks. It is difficult to know who to approach in the institution and who is responsible for this prevention policy and the management lacks the tools to identify at-risk situations. We also need to address the draft decision relating to the middle management, due to take effect in something of a rush on 1 January 2016, without any guarantee of the necessary support measures and structures.

Our union has, in fact, already alerted the Commission about the need for the experimental and gradual implementation of this decision, just as it warned the Commission about the lack of resources and structures required for its implementation.

This is why U4U is now asking you to defer the adoption and implementation of this decision, which has been rushed through so precipitously and without any analysis of its impact or at the very least to take the time to consider this subject in more detail. We also request the

withdrawal of mandatory mobility for heads of unit who have been in a DG for more than 7 years and urge the introduction of a transition period for all of these measures. U4U believes that these proposals must be taken seriously if we are to avoid contributing, with an additional measure, to the ever worsening atmosphere within our institution.

Finally, the social dialogue we want is a process that must make it possible for the social partners to significantly contribute to the definition of social policies and practices, which is not yet the case in reality. The independent inquiry we are asking for must identify those areas in need of urgent reform.

Yours sincerely,

Georges Vlandas
President U4U/RS