



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Common Staff Committee of the Executive Agencies
Staff Committee of CHAFEA
Staff Committee of EACEA
Staff Committee of EASME
Staff Committee of ERCEA
Staff Committee of INEA
Staff Committee of REA

Brussels, 28 April 2020
Luxembourg, 28 April 2020

OPEN LETTER TO DR VON DER LEYEN, PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AND TO DR HAHN, COMMISSIONER FOR BUDGET AND ADMINISTRATION

Subject: **Proposal to close the Consumers, Health, Agriculture and Food Executive Agency (CHAFEA) in Luxembourg and situation in all six Executive Agencies of the European Commission in the context of the current reorganisation**

Dear President von der Leyen,
Dear Commissioner Hahn,

We are writing to you, Dr von der Leyen, as the President of the European Commission, as a Medical Doctor, and as a Public Health Specialist.

We are writing to you, Dr Hahn, as Commissioner for Budget and Administration, as responsible for staff matters in the Commission and also in the Executive Agencies.

We, the staff in the CONSUMERS, HEALTH, AGRICULTURE and FOOD EXECUTIVE AGENCY (CHAFEA) in Luxembourg.

We, the staff in the other Executive Agencies, being the RESEARCH EXECUTIVE AGENCY (REA), the EXECUTIVE AGENCY FOR SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES (EASME), EDUCATION, AUDIOVISUAL AND CULTURE EXECUTIVE AGENCY (EACEA), INNOVATION AND NETWORKS EXECUTIVE AGENCY (INEA), and THE EUROPEAN RESEARCH COUNCIL EXECUTIVE AGENCY (ERCEA), all located in Brussels.

We all value your principles “*that people need to be at the very centre of all our policies. ... and that it is only together that we can build our Union of tomorrow.*”¹

Unfortunately, these wise words are currently being ignored due to the announced closure of CHAFEA and the relocation of its programmes and staff to other Executive Agencies in Brussels, **with no form of social dialogue or consultation** with the staff representatives or any staff involved. The announcement of the closing of CHAFEA

¹ https://ec.europa.eu/info/publications/commissions-contribution-shaping-conference-future-europe_en

came as complete surprise to its staff, and at a time when the colleagues involved are isolated at home already dealing with an unprecedented crisis.

CHAFAEA is an Executive Agency, in existence since 2005. Among other actions and programmes, CHAFEA implements three of the EU Health Programmes for the Commission, one of the major instruments for the Commission's Health Strategy implementation. CHAFEA staff implements projects together with Member State authorities to combat communicable and chronic diseases. This includes projects, which are working towards combatting the current COVID-19 crisis. Furthermore, CHAFEA colleagues serve as the "corporate expertise" and "corporate memory" in project and programme management for units in the parent Directorates.

The *option of closing CHAFEA has never been openly discussed*. In fact the management, the steering committee and parent DG, have assured the staff about the development of the Agency with addition of new programmes to manage. Currently, 80 highly experienced colleagues are confronted, on a relatively short notice, with an uncertainty about their jobs and are being forced to move their life and residency 200 kilometres away. Needless to say, this is not a practical solution for all staff.

Additionally, the *decision to close CHAFEA without any social dialogue does not only effects CHAFEA staff, but also the staff of all other Executive Agencies*. The current developments are confronting the staff with the possibility, at some point in the future, of potentially having to pack up their life and move elsewhere, or lose their jobs, and this without any form of consultation or consideration for the staff. This puts a lot of pressure and concerns in the minds of **all staff** of the Executive Agencies. We, the approximate 3,000 dedicated employees of the Executive Agencies, are working daily to make sure that all European programmes entrusted to the Executive Agencies are diligently and very professionally implemented. We believe that we do not deserve to be treated in such a disrespectful and arbitrary manner.

There has been a complete absence of social dialogue in this process. After years of inexistence of any social dialogue within the Executive Agencies, on 23 January 2020 all six Executive Agencies Directors signed a Memorandum of Understanding defining the modalities and procedures of interaction between The Executive Agencies and The Trade Unions and Staff Associations (see attached).

Article 2 of this Memorandum of Understanding stipulates that *Executive Agencies recognise the role and responsibility of the Trade Unions and Staff Associations that represent the Agencies' staff by involving them, where possible, in a transparent and effective manner*. This agreement stipulates that any decision concerning staff must first be discussed with staff representatives. The Director of CHAFEA is a signatory of this agreement, and her signature is a commitment on CHAFEA's part.

Article 5 of this Memorandum of Understanding stipulates that *the Executive Agencies undertake to hold at least two meetings yearly to discuss pertinent issues for the benefit of the staff of the Executive Agencies with the Trade Unions and Staff Associations. [...] A representation of the Common Staff Committee and the Executive Agency Staff Committees shall be invited as observers to these meetings*. Up to now, no meetings have been convened to discuss any of the changes the Executive Agencies are facing.

This Memorandum is only three months old and it has been already disrespected. The way this decision is being taken obviously disregards these primary engagements. It may very well lead to Trade Unions and Staff Associations envisaging any type of action,

including potentially serving a notice of an interruption of service (strike) as mentioned in Article 10 of the Memorandum of Understanding.

Even the grounds of the upcoming decision are questionable. A cost-benefit analysis is referred to. The decision for closure seems to be based on this CBA, which has never been presented nor explained, either to the staff of CHAFEA, its Staff Committee, Common Staff Committee or Trade Unions and Staff Associations. Comparing the very specific grants and procurements with the small budgets that CHAFEA has implemented for the Commission in the field of public health, consumer protection, food safety and agricultural products promotion cannot be compared with the large budget actions in the priority fields of research and economy. Nevertheless, as we see in the current COVID-19 crisis, these actions are necessary and, given the small budget, very effective.

Furthermore, the argument of proximity, that an Executive Agency can only be effective if located in Brussels, is against the European Values of its Member States. The regulatory agencies are spread over the European Member States, and the policy Directorate for public health is in Luxembourg. Lastly, moving about 80 colleagues and their families to Brussels could endanger business continuity of the current and new programmes, and cannot be cost efficient.

Therefore, we kindly ask you to reconsider the proposal of closing CHAFEA and to discuss alternative proposals with the relevant Directorates, also in the light of the all new Health Programme proposal and the potential role of CHAFEA in its implementation. Additionally, **we ask you to make sure that a proper social dialogue is conducted before taking any final decisions**, and include also the relevant parties which will undergo major programme shifting between Executive Agencies.

If such options would not be possible, we request that you offer the opportunity of choice for our Luxembourg colleagues to be integrated into other Commission services located in Luxembourg. It is one thing to transfer programmes across agencies in Brussels and have colleagues change their daily commute, but to force them to change country with just over six months' notice in a world pandemic emergency is really something else!

The Common Staff Committee (Executive Agencies)

The CHAFEA staff committee

The EACEA staff committee

The EASME staff committee

The ERCEA staff committee

The INEA staff committee

The REA staff committee

CC:

- Director-Generals
- Six Directors of EA
- Trade Unions and Staff Associations
- Six Executive Agency Staff Committees
- Common Staff Committee (Executive Agencies)

Attachment: Memorandum of Understanding Concerning the modalities and procedures of interaction between The Executive Agencies and The Trade Unions and Staff Associations, signed on 23 January 2020