



Brussels, 16 March 2023

Note for the attention of Mr Marc LACHAISE Director of Fusion for Energy (F4E)

Dear Marc,

First, we would like to congratulate you on your appointment and welcome you as the new F4E Director. We are looking forward to meeting you soon and to creating a fruitful and renewed social dialogue.

We would like to introduce you our Trade Union “Renouveau et Démocratie” which is the most representative union of the European civil service across the EU institutions.

From the very beginning of our presence at F4E in 2021, **R&D** has been very committed to providing its contribution to help F4E move into a **new era**, putting the project and the people at the heart of the organisation to improve the working environment and Staff well-being.

In this regard, **R&D** has always called for **management to lead by example** and to move towards a **culture of trust**, which is also considered essential in Commissioner Hahn’s statements.

F4E Staff has expressed hope that the new F4E Director will bring an element of stability and a supportive corporate culture, an openness to reinforce trust and cooperation, and providing a clear vision of F4E’s future activities and mission.

It is the managerial culture and not just “the agenda” that must change!

For F4E Staff and for the success of the project, it is key to change the managerial culture. The “Change Agenda”, which has already been underway for two years, has not brought any concrete actions to significantly improve the managerial culture.

A very deep change of the managerial culture is crucial, as during the last years F4E went through a crisis, mainly due to the lack of leadership, the lack of vision and silos approach. Even though the top management has changed, the gap between F4E’s senior management and the Staff is still worrying...

These concerns have been duly flagged by the **Court of Auditors** in its reports identifying serious weaknesses in F4E’s management and approach to staff well-being.

Several external assessments as well confirmed that Staff matters and Staff well-being are serious issues at F4E.

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The Governing Board's Management Assessment 2022 and several **Staff Engagement and other Surveys** have repeatedly highlighted the enormous workload, due notably to the silos approach, the pressure on Staff, the disproportionate use of external resources undermining the long-term sustainability of the organisation, the lack of trust in the Director and the Senior Management, the dysfunctional and non-transparent internal decision-making process, and the overall weak management practices.

The suicide of our colleague has been a turning point

The most dramatic event occurred in May 2021, when one staff member took his own life, denouncing, in his last letter to his family, the work pressure and toxic working environment at F4E, which had previously been deplored by the Staff Committee, by the trade unions and by mid-managers.

The European Parliament and its Budget Control Committee called a special meeting in February 2022 in relation to the detrimental Staff management at F4E, following the suicide of our colleague and the massive symbolic strike that F4E Staff undertook to honour his memory.

F4E Senior management still does not seem to have fully grasped the gravity of the situation

Despite the seriousness of this situation and the urgent need to put in place effective corrective measures to address it, so far F4E's Senior Management has implemented mainly superficial action plans.

The complaints and the call for help from the staff could not be clearer

As soon as you take up your post, you will be solicited through different channels and you will undoubtedly receive sometimes contradictory information and analysis, even from actors who claim to be able to explain the opinions of F4E Staff much better than their representatives do.

Within the European institutions, each member of Staff is periodically called upon to express his/her opinion in response to Staff Engagement Surveys (SES).

The SES is the most indicative tool because it is carried out in all EU bodies and it thus allows comparing best and worst practices across organisations.

Thus, we would like to draw your attention to some of the most relevant points identified in the Staff Engagement Surveys, or by the *Working Group for the optimisation of F4E's organisational structure* (Report endorsed by the GB on the 9th February 2023).

1) ***Rebuilding Trust : the more than worrying results of the last SES***

The most significant finding of the SES was the total lack of trust of Staff in F4E's senior management, with probably the worst results ever obtained in any EU Institution, while the heads of unit were comforted by positive feedback.

F4E's Senior Managers have performed very poorly in terms of trust and leadership.

This is a very critical aspect, as also underlined by the GB working Group for the optimisation of F4E's organisational structure: *"Since 2020, the Staff Engagement Survey shows a most significant decrease in the area of leadership (the lowest scoring dimension of the survey), while also being 20 percentage points lower than the average of EU Agencies that participated in this Staff Engagement Survey. The Survey shows significant decrease in staff's perception of top management having a long-term vision for the organisation, as well as in the area of top management's commitment to the development of F4E, and in terms of leading by example"*

When looking more in detail at SES results, it is clear that the root cause of the lack of trust lies in the fact that the Staff perceive Senior Managers as working remotely, in isolation and in a fragmented approach, often defending or putting forward decisions which benefit their own area or department, with no real vision nor interest in the optimal development of F4E as an organisation.

In the SES, there is a clear indication that Staff wish a strong improvement, with particular focus on questions highlighting the fear of the Staff facing mistakes, giving consideration to staff Opinions and encouraging ideas, all of which score very low. It should be noted that these dimensions are strongly linked to a low level of psychological safety.

In the past, the critical results of SES have never been properly taken into account and the senior management of F4E has seemed to ignore the responsibility and accountability, forgetting that these are essential principles for any institution.

In light of the more than worrying results of the SES, we call for establishing a culture of value-based leadership, a culture of trust by sweeping away management by fear.

All managers should be asked to develop trust and recognition at work, active participation of Staff in the decision-making process, valuing Staff's competence and contribution regardless of hierarchy, improving communication and outreach between senior management and staff, rebuilding a safe environment. In order to increase psychological safety, Staff should be encouraged to express openly their opinions, even when raising difficult issues.

The F4E decision-making approach needs to get rid of blame and shame culture that has so far had a negative impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation.

- 2) ***In order to fully respect the EU Staff Regulations and its implementing rules, it is compulsory to insure close coordination between F4E administration, DG ENER and the Commission's central administrative services.***

The establishment of a genuine culture of trust starts by requiring that administrative procedures are transparent in all circumstances and by fully respecting the letter and the spirit of the Staff Regulations and their implementing rules.

In the last few years, the Staff has suffered from the lack of transparency in the decision-making process, thus jeopardising confidence in the fairness of the decisions taken.

The Staff Committee and Trade Unions have also repeatedly alerted management to the lack of fairness and transparency in decision-making on staff matters, but always in vain.

Senior Management at F4E are expected to be warrants, in all circumstances, of the respect of EU Staff regulations.

The EU values and the ethical policies should be always at the core of our work. The utmost should be done to ensure that the EU Staff Regulations are based on the best practices to the benefit of Staff, as is the case in other European institutions and bodies.

F4E's administration needs to be helped and assisted

In this respect, as F4E has demonstrated that it is not always able to offer such guarantees, R&D has actively and successfully worked to ensure that the Commission's central services and DG ENER can provide the F4E administration with the necessary assistance and support.

Thus, it is important that you formally confirm the request to the F4E administration to verify with the Commission services the compatibility with the Staff Regulations and its implementing rules of each important administrative decision, also taking into account best practices, before its adoption under your personal responsibility.

This will allow you to focus on operational and political tasks, avoiding criticism, deviations from the applicable rules and waste of time in painful discussions and procedures, leading sometimes to the need to correct erroneous decisions. It will also allow F4E to recover its autonomy in taking administrative decisions without having to systematically consult the Governing Board adviser.

It should be recalled that in response to the problems observed and in order to provide all the necessary guarantees, in the recent past, F4E Governance has been asked to closely monitor the administrative decisions and a member of the Governing board was then appointed as the adviser with an extensive mandate.

3) ***The organisational structure of F4E must be duly and deeply revised***

The need to improve the planning, prioritisation and organisation of work is also one of the most relevant outcomes of the SES. F4E's structure and formats could be rationalised to develop synergies, avoiding overlaps or duplications.

The Surveys have highlighted a general issue of collaboration between Departments (*Divide et Impera* approach) and between Units (Silos approach)

The difficulty expressed by Staff in having a bottom-up influence on F4E's decisions points to an excessive hierarchical approach.

Similarly to Staff, the Governing Board also identified the need for an assessment of F4E's organisation and a thorough analysis of the organisational issues, with recommendations on a way forward, as was reported by the Working Group for the optimisation of F4E's organisational structure.

We call for a more collaborative and efficient structure, bridging the gap and enabling real communication between senior management and Staff, supporting the correct use of Staff competencies and skills, abolishing silos and minimising hierarchy layers according to the real needs of the organisation.

In order to guarantee the success of these changes, it is imperative to closely involve the Staff and their representatives and to present measures decided in the absence of any prior dialogue.

4) ***The social dialogue must restart on fresh new basis***

The Social Dialogue needs to restart with the necessary levels of transparency and spirit of collaboration that have been lacking in recent years.

Staff representation can and should be an actor of the necessary change at F4E.

In this respect, we would like to underline that R&D contributed to the intervention of the GB to solve the unsustainable situation that had developed at F4E under the previous director, also requesting serious and credible investigations, *inter alia*, concerning the suicide of our colleague.

R&D is strongly committed to the progress of F4E and has continuously and intensively worked towards creating a constructive and effective social dialogue to shape a fresh new healthy working environment within F4E.

Conclusion

R&D is pleased to welcome you as the new F4E Director and to support you in ensuring a smooth and effective improvement process, establishing a reinforced integration with IO and operating in compliance with EU regulations.

We are confident that you will fulfil the mission assigned to you by the Governing Board and that you will lead as a bridge and “peace-maker”.

We are fully committed to backing your efforts to bring Staff together and unify F4E under common and shared values and goals, putting finally the “Human” at the heart of F4E’s management, building a new culture of trust, restoring team and project mindset thanks to a dedicated top senior management and finally leading by example.



Cristiano SEBASTIANI
Président

Copy: Carlos Alejaldre, Governing Board Chair

Massimo Garribba, Deputy Director General of DG-ENER, IC Chair

F4E Staff

Reference documents:

[F4E_D_2H2URX - 2022 Staff Engagement Survey Results - Final report \(internal\) – 2 November 2022](#)

[F4E_D_2XH45K - Report of the 10th Annual Assessment of Fusion for Energy](#)