



Generation 2004 Newsletter no.9

November-December
2014

TOP STORY

(More than) a Ray of Light???

Post-2004 conference

You will remember the call launched by Generation 2004 on the 10th anniversary of the 2004 reform (see here p. 1 and here p. 3) for all unions and staff associations (OSPs) to come together in a conference which would analyse in a holistic manner the post-2004 problem and ideally come out with a set of proposals intended to improve the situation and career perspectives of post-2004 colleagues.

As requested by the other OSPs, Generation 2004 had accepted to give up the unilateral initiative of organising this conference and instead organise it jointly with all OSPs acting in unison.

After almost seven months of discussion and preparation which was not always easy, the inter-OSP conference was organised over 16-17 November entitled 2004-2014: 10 years of inequality and injustice at the European Commission.

The conference, which can be defined as a success, tackled the post-2004 issue from the perspective of contract agents (see more [here](#)) and permanent officials respectively.

As regards permanent officials, whilst we will not go into detail here and yet concerning the outcome of the conference – in order not to preclude the issuance of a common communication by all OSPs over the coming days - all parties broadly concurred on the following points:

- at this point, ALL OSPs recognise unequivocally the existence of a serious problem concerning the non-convergence of pre and post – 2004 careers;
- the Commission should as soon as possible conduct a serious and independent analysis quantifying the extent of the problem;

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- the Commission should without delay embark upon a set of corrective measures intended to address the situation;
- there are a number of potential measures which are both financially, legally and statutorily viable if there is the sincere political will of the Commission to address the problem.

OSPs are currently finalising a common communication summing up the results of the conference which will be subsequently presented to the Commission before the end of the year. It is now time for all OSPs to pass from words to concrete actions!

First meeting of OSPs with our new Commissioner – Kristalina Georgieva



On Friday 21 November, all unions and staff associations (OSPs) were invited to a first meeting with the new Commissioner in charge of personnel (as well as budget) – Vice-President Kristalina Georgieva. Several members of her cabinet including the head – Mrs Mariana Hristcheva – were also in attendance.

The meeting was a very cordial and positive event, with Mrs Georgieva proving to be a warm and open person as well as a good, attentive and patient listener.

She (and her staff) appear to have “hit the ground running”, demonstrating an excellent grasp of staff issues and engaging into some

serious discussion on a number of concrete matters, beyond the usual pleasantries which normally characterise such initial meetings.

As Generation 2004, we were delighted to hear Mrs Georgieva identify “post-2004” as one of the main problems which she was aware of. Indeed, during his intervention, Stefan Grech – Chair of Generation 2004 – remarked his satisfaction after so much time during which the post-2004 problem had been denied by the administration as if there was indeed no such problem.

Grech went on to remind the Vice-President that she had inherited a deeply-divided civil service, a large portion of which (post-2004) felt hurt, demotivated and outright betrayed. At this point, as shown during the post-2004 conference held only a few days before, all OSPs were agreeing on this and were calling upon the Commission to act as soon as possible to address a decade of injustice. Grech concluded by expressing the trust of Generation 2004 in Mrs Georgieva and confidence that she will indeed muster the political will to address the post-2004 issue once and for all; **COURAGE Vice-President Georgieva** – you will find us four-square behind you. **Where there is a will there is a way, but where there is a political will, then there is a highway.**

Staff Survey - 2014

During the meeting, Commissioner Georgieva encouraged all colleagues to participate in the ongoing Staff Survey being conducted by the Commission for 2014, emphasising her wish to hear directly the views of staff as a precursor for future actions. In the recent days you received several reminders from DG HR as well. For once we would like to support such a call.

Whilst Generation 2004 is and will continue to be the primary voice of the post-2004 generation in EU institutions, it is very important that you yourself use this opportunity to speak in order to give an individual face to our collective message. We are not attempting to put any words in your mouth, but simply provoke your brains with a couple of reflections whilst urging you to complete this survey:

- Are you a hardworking person willing to give an extra effort in your work while not receiving support from the system?

- Are you pessimistic about your professional future and feel deprived of true career opportunities simply because you joined the institutions at the wrong time?
- Do you feel discriminated as an official coming from the newer (post-2004) Member States by the "take it or leave it" attitude of the Commission when as a fresh laureate it only offered you the possibility of employment at the lowermost grade irrespective of your age, qualifications and vast experience?
- Do you believe that the Commission has proven to be the least attractive employer among all the EU institutions, by interpreting existing rules in a non-transparent way with detriment to big categories of staff? Sounds familiar? You disagree? Then please, go and write it down! [The survey is open here until Friday 05 December.](#)

Lastly, a humble word of advice to Commissioner Georgieva:

Whenever formulating future similar surveys, it would make a lot of sense for the administration to discuss the potential questions beforehand with the staff representation, in order to allow for some honest feedback "from the ground" as to where questions could be fine-tuned to focus even more precisely on the main concerns of staff.

As it is, DG HR is unconsciously missing out on an important chance to improve the relevance of their surveys, whereas in a good administration with a collegial spirit, it should go without saying that surveys are prepared jointly.

Equally, the administration and the staff representations should make it the norm to meet after the publication of such survey results to discuss what to make out of the said results. Each survey report should serve as a basis for discussions on problems that need to be addressed, on things that could be improved.

Promotions Exercise 2014 in the Commission

As you know, over the past days we have communicated with you extensively (see [here](#)) on promotions, not only as regards this (2014) exercise, but on the whole rotten 2004-2014 decade.

An administrative notice published on 14 November (see [here](#)) lists those officials being promoted this year: CONGRATULATIONS to all promoted colleagues.

Equally, we stand by those colleagues who despite meriting their promotion, did not get it owing to the idiosyncrasies of the Commission's genial promotion system.

Generation 2004 is working on a draft Article 90 complaint template which we will offer to you over the coming days (WATCH OUT for more info in a dedicated communication soon).

We are led to believe that with the arrival of a new Commissioner for personnel and a new cabinet, the promotion system will be radically overhauled as soon as possible and as one of the means to reduce the severe gap between low and high grades in the Commission, based on merit, merit and merit. Vice-President Georgieva, President Juncker: our hope lies with you.

First analysis of the AD9 Internal Competition

Internal competitions were presented last year by Vice-President Sefcovic as an initial response to the divergence between pre and post - 2004 careers. What is our assessment now that the competition is over?

Generation 2004 has looked in details at the results of the AD9 competition. The analysis of other competitions will follow. The first finding, not surprisingly, is that cabinet members, together with several temporary agents (TAs) that have a link to DG HR (most of whom coincidentally hail from a specific Member State) represent about a quarter of the laureates.

Another interesting finding is that many of the laureates have some management responsibilities (team leaders, heads of sector, deputy heads of unit, assistants to a DG) or are in charge of sensitive files (e.g. 10 laureates from DG COMP).

As a result, only about 1/3 of the laureates have the profile of typical post-2004 "foot soldiers".

An additional piece of information is that a significant number of laureates were already AD8 with a number of years of seniority. Indeed, 5 laureates have just been promoted to AD9 this year via the normal, annual promotion exercise, so the competition will bring no benefit to them in terms of career progression. Another 2 laureates passed a competition at a higher grade (one at AD10 and one at AD12), so having passed the AD9 competition is of no use to them. Thus, all in all, 7 laureates out of 60 - i.e. close to 20% of all laureates - will gain nothing from having passed the AD9 competition! Hardly something to support DG HR's claim that this internal competition was intended to help post-2004 officials. Since it could be that DG HR has subtracted all 60 promotions from the quota of normal, annual promotions allocated to AD9 (the so-called "cannibalisation" process where the receiving grade "pays" for the promotion of laureates through a reduction in the normal, annual quota) the net effect of the AD9 internal competition could very well be that 7 promotions less than what would have been normally awarded were given to AD9s this year. Generation 2004 has formally requested several clarifications from DG HR concerning these issues (see "clarification on internal competitions [here](#)").

Preliminary results suggest that the same problem occurred with the AD7 and AD8 competitions. Surprisingly, some laureates passed both the AD8 and the AD9 competition.

On average, laureates will have gained about 2.7 years in their career progression, assuming that they would have progressed according to the rates specified in the staff regulations without the competition.

To summarise, the vast majority of laureates are undoubtedly deserving officials who merit this (limited) acceleration in their career. However, apart from the parachutes, only about 20 "foot soldiers" and roughly another 20 high performers advanced their careers by less than 3 years, out of a population of roughly 2,300 AD7/AD8s. This can hardly be interpreted as a remedy to the shortcomings of the 2004 reform.

The only way to make these internal competitions useful for post-2004 colleagues would be to run them on a wide scale, prevent parachutes, prevent duplication of promotions and make sure that they are not financed via "cannibalism" – i.e. stolen from the normal annual promotions within the respective grades.

(see also p.2-3 [here](#))

Contract Agents in Luxembourg continue to fight

Generation 2004 continues to support Contract Agents in Luxembourg as they fight for a decent pay or for that matter, a pay that is not below the legal Luxembourgish minimum.

Several meetings between the staff representatives and DG HR have taken place over the past days and weeks and although some concessions were proposed by the administration, fundamental differences unfortunately remain. DG HR considers any salary compensation out of the question and instead proposes to stop the movement with "social measures" such as - for instance – the ludicrous proposal of reducing the price of (some) meals in the cafeteria. The idea of being silenced with a baguette springs to mind instantly, doesn't it? Or Marie Antoinette's infamous proposal to "let them eat cake", when faced by the first uprisings of the French revolution.

A few interesting lines emerged, such as:

- when HR representative Deputy DG Lévassieur reminded Union Syndicale that after all it was them who signed the 2004 reform, thereby creating the class of Contract Agents;
- when Generation 2004 suggested to obtain the resources for a sufficient salary compensation by merely delaying the creation of some 60 Senior Expert posts by a single year, the answer was a laugh... and a statement that "we don't think we want to delay Senior Experts"!

In the meantime, the fight goes on as we again implore all of you to support the weakest of our post-2004 colleagues by donating something on the following account opened by the LUX Local Staff Committee:

IBAN: LU29 0019 4455 4253 8000

BIC: BCEELULL

Message: AC fonds solidarité grève

NEW - the “Speakers' Corner”

Beginning with this edition of our newsletter, the “speakers’ corner” is intended to provide a space where anyone can express an individual opinion which does not necessarily have to be the official opinion of Generation 2004. Please send us your contributions for coming editions.

The somewhat inconsistent *sprachenpolitik dans les institutions européennes* – a politically incorrect proposal for refurbishing the tower of Babel – by “the rock” from Ispra

One of the lesser known features of the 2004 reform was the introduction of what is commonly known as the third language requirement. In the beautiful prose of the legislator, it is stated that “officials shall be required to demonstrate before their first promotion after recruitment the ability to work in a third language among those referred to in ... the EC Treaty.” In the corresponding recital, the legislator informs us that the requirement had been introduced “in order to preserve the multilingual character of the institutions”. Of course, you may wonder how multilingual the institutions really were at the time. After all, much of the case law of the European Court of Justice for instance has only recently been translated into other languages. But that’s a side issue, since if wishful thinking was a crime, most parliaments would be rather empty.

So what should concern us now is whether after 10 years of service, this provision has done any good. How multilingual have the institutions really become? On the face of it, very much so, one might think. If ever a blueprint was needed for constructing a new tower of Babel, just take the institutions and their tremendous efforts to translate trainloads of documents into most of the official languages day after day; and of course, thanks to several enlargement rounds, more languages than ever before can now be heard in the corridors and in the canteens. Add to that the thousands of colleagues who are learning additional languages and things seem to look absolutely marvellous indeed. The problem is they don’t, not really.

In truth, and this article is testimony to it, English has become the *lingua franca* of the institutions. Whilst the Commission’s staff complement is arguably more linguistically versatile than ever and the third language requirement has certainly played a role in this, English is *de facto* the only working language. All of “Brussels” is under Anglo-Saxon control, except maybe for one or two DGs of indomitable Gauls that still hold out against the Britons (or at least their tongue). But complete surrender is just a matter of time unless some magic potion will be invented and it is perhaps rather ironic that this happens at a time when Britain leaving the Union is a realistic possibility. But then history has never bothered with irony hasn’t it?

Although it is nowhere stated explicitly, the third language requirement has arguably been introduced to protect the dominance of French in the institutions from the onslaught of thousands of colleagues from the East who happily embraced the language of the free world (and McDonalds) as the most useful linguistic tool on offer. After all, try your French in a Café in Paris and chances are high that the waiter responds in English (or some such ... *désolé*). So, by giving preference to no language in particular (doing so would have been politically unfeasible), the provision did not stop the advance of English. In fact, it is likely to have promoted it because it prevented any other option from being considered.

Here is one such option (sincere thanks to an unknown German professor from the Sorbonne who suggested it some years ago during a meeting of the Goethe-Institut in Brussels): Every new official should be required to learn English, French and German. At least one of these three languages should also be mastered to a very high level so as to be

able to draft official documents in that language and express him/herself as clearly as possible. For the other two languages, the requirement would be to understand both languages perfectly including, if necessary Shakespearean vocabulary, German tapeworm words and the nuances of the French *subjunctif* ... but not to speak or write it flawlessly. In addition, officials would be encouraged to learn any other language for which there is a need in the institutions, be it Arabic, Mandarin or Russian for that matter (for native speakers of the above three languages, this could even become mandatory).

The advantages of such a language regime are obvious: the institutions would become *really* trilingual instead of *de facto* monolingual. Language training could be tailor-made and thus become more effective than in the past while language skills could be applied more often in practice. After all, all three languages could be used for communication since everybody would understand them. Moreover, everyone could speak the language s/he would be most familiar with, having the choice among three options rather than at most two like today. This would make life also easier for the listeners who less often had to cope with funny if not incomprehensible accents and strange grammar. Last but not least, important non-EU languages could be promoted without having to increase the language training budget.

Whilst at first glance, favouring just three languages may appear to be politically incorrect, doing nothing, by default, means favouring just one. It's a tough choice, but it's probably *alternativlos* to slightly abuse a quote from the German chancellor.

..... and finally some lighter moments 😊😊😊

After giving birth to Generation 2004 and watching it begin to grow, we are now well on the way to prepare for Generation 2015. Indeed, G2004 Secretary – **Stefan Nistor** - and G2004-LUX board member – **Attila Gecse** - have recently begun contributing in this sense by fathering two lovely baby girls 😊 Congratulations to both proud daddies and mummies of course 😊

G2004 message song of the month (*with kind permission*) especially requested by LS from DG BUDG –



click [here](#) sit back, turn up the volume and listen well (P.S. don't forget to work for an extra 2 minutes 38 seconds before you go home today).

Got any ideas for the G2004 song for next month? Send them along (with "Newsletter" in subject) to our DJ [here](#), together with any letters, ideas, articles, poems and other assorted forms of expression.

If you identify with what you have read, and share our objectives, [please give us your support TANGIBLY by becoming a member here.](#)

Whilst **Generation 2004** is the home of EVERYONE who believes in equality, justice and solidarity, it is

✓ **the natural home of ALL staff recruited after 01 May 2004**

and *de facto*,

✓ **the natural home of ALL staff recruited from the "new" (2004+) Member States**



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