

CONSOLIDATED VERSION OF

**Regulation (EC) no 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council
of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to
European Parliament, Council and Commission documents**

AS AMENDED BY THE COMMISSION'S PROPOSAL

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT AND THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION,

Having regard to the Treaty establishing the European Community, and in particular Article 255(2) thereof,

Having regard to the proposal from the Commission,

Acting in accordance with the procedure referred to in Article 251 of the Treaty,

Whereas:

- (1) The second subparagraph of Article 1 of the Treaty on European Union enshrines the concept of openness, stating that the Treaty marks a new stage in the process of creating an ever closer union among the peoples of Europe, in which decisions are taken as openly as possible and as closely as possible to the citizen.
- (2) Openness enables citizens to participate more closely in the decision-making process and guarantees that the administration enjoys greater legitimacy and is more effective and more accountable to the citizen in a democratic system. Openness contributes to strengthening the principles of democracy and respect for fundamental rights as laid down in Article 6 of the EU Treaty and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
- (3) The conclusions of the European Council meetings held at Birmingham, Edinburgh and Copenhagen stressed the need to introduce greater transparency into the work of the Union institutions. This Regulation consolidates the initiatives that the institutions have already taken with a view to improving the transparency of the decision-making process.
- (4) The purpose of this Regulation is to give the fullest possible effect to the right of public access to documents and to lay down the general principles and limits on such access in accordance with Article 255(2) of the EC Treaty.
- (5) Since the question of access to documents is not covered by provisions of the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community and the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community, the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission should, in accordance with Declaration No 41 attached to the Final Act of the Treaty of Amsterdam, draw guidance from this Regulation as regards documents concerning the activities covered by those two Treaties.

- (6) Wider access should be granted to documents in cases where the institutions are acting in their legislative capacity, including under delegated powers, while at the same time preserving the effectiveness of the institutions' decision-making process. Such documents should be made directly accessible to the greatest possible extent.
- (7) In accordance with Articles 28(1) and 41(1) of the EU Treaty, the right of access also applies to documents relating to the common foreign and security policy and to police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters. Each institution should respect its security rules.
- (8) In order to ensure the full application of this Regulation to all activities of the Union, all agencies established by the institutions should apply the principles laid down in this Regulation.
- (9) On account of their highly sensitive content, certain documents should be given special treatment. Arrangements for informing the European Parliament of the content of such documents should be made through interinstitutional agreement.
- (10) In order to bring about greater openness in the work of the institutions, access to documents should be granted by the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission not only to documents drawn up by the institutions, but also to documents received by them. In this context, it is recalled that Declaration No 35 attached to the Final Act of the Treaty of Amsterdam provides that a Member State may request the Commission or the Council not to communicate to third parties a document originating from that State without its prior agreement.
- (11) In principle, all documents of the institutions should be accessible to the public. However, certain public and private interests should be protected by way of exceptions. The institutions should be entitled to protect their internal consultations and deliberations where necessary to safeguard their ability to carry out their tasks. In assessing the exceptions, the institutions should take account of the principles in Community legislation concerning the protection of personal data, in all areas of Union activities.
- (12) All rules concerning access to documents of the institutions should be in conformity with this Regulation.
- (13) In order to ensure that the right of access is fully respected, a two-stage administrative procedure should apply, with the additional possibility of court proceedings or complaints to the Ombudsman.
- (14) Each institution should take the measures necessary to inform the public of the new provisions in force and to train its staff to assist citizens exercising their rights under this Regulation. In order to make it easier for citizens to exercise their rights, each institution should provide access to a register of documents.
- (15) Even though it is neither the object nor the effect of this Regulation to amend national legislation on access to documents, it is nevertheless clear that, by virtue of the principle of loyal cooperation which governs relations between the institutions and the Member States, Member States should take care not to hamper the proper application of this Regulation and should respect the security rules of the institutions.

- (16) This Regulation is without prejudice to existing rights of access to documents for Member States, judicial authorities or investigative bodies.
- (17) In accordance with Article 255(3) of the EC Treaty, each institution lays down specific provisions regarding access to its documents in its rules of procedure. Council Decision 93/731/EC of 20 December 1993 on public access to Council documents, Commission Decision 94/90/ECSC, EC, Euratom of 8 February 1994 on public access to Commission documents, European Parliament Decision 97/632/EC, ECSC, Euratom of 10 July 1997 on public access to European Parliament documents, and the rules on confidentiality of Schengen documents should therefore, if necessary, be modified or be repealed,

HAVE ADOPTED THIS REGULATION:

Article 1

Purpose

The purpose of this Regulation is:

- (a) to define the principles, conditions and limits on grounds of public or private interest governing the right of public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission (hereinafter referred to as "the institutions") documents provided for in Article 255 of the EC Treaty in such a way as to grant the public the widest possible access to such documents,
- (b) to establish rules ensuring the easiest possible exercise of this right, and
- (c) to promote good administrative practice on access to documents.

Article 2

Beneficiaries and scope

1. Any natural or legal person has a right of access to documents of the institutions, subject to the principles, conditions and limits defined in this Regulation.
2. This Regulation shall apply to all documents held by an institution, that is to say, documents drawn up or received by it and in its possession, in all areas of activity of the European Union.
3. Without prejudice to Articles 4 and 9, documents shall be made accessible to the public either following a written application or directly in electronic form or through a register. In particular, documents drawn up or received in the course of a legislative procedure shall be made directly accessible in accordance with Article 12.
4. Sensitive documents as defined in Article 9(1) shall be subject to special treatment in accordance with that Article.

5. Documents submitted to Courts in the course of judicial proceedings are not accessible to the public before a public hearing has taken place. Access can only be granted to the Institutions' own submissions.

6. Without prejudice to specific rights of access for interested parties established by EU law, documents forming part of the file of law enforcement proceedings leading to an administrative act of individual scope are not accessible to the public until such act has become definitive. Information obtained from undertakings in the framework of such proceedings is not accessible to the public.

7. This Regulation shall be without prejudice to rights of public access to documents held by the institutions which might follow from instruments of international law or acts of the institutions implementing them.

Article 3

Definitions

For the purpose of this Regulation:

- (a) "document" shall mean any content whatever its medium (written on paper or stored in electronic form or as a sound, visual or audiovisual recording) drafted or received by an institution and transmitted to one or more recipients or circulated within the institution or otherwise recorded; data contained in electronic storage, processing and retrieval systems are documents if they can be printed or extracted in readable form in an electronic file using the available tools for the exploitation of the system;
- (b) "third party" shall mean any natural or legal person, or any entity outside the institution concerned, including the Member States, other Community or non-Community institutions and bodies and third countries.
- (c) "document originating from a Member State" shall mean a document transmitted to an institution by a public authority in that Member State, unless it was transmitted in the framework of procedures leading to a legislative act or a non-legislative act of general application.

Article 4

Exceptions

1. The institutions shall refuse access to a document where disclosure would undermine the protection of the public interest as regards:

- (a) public security,
- (b) defence and military matters,
- (c) international relations,
- (d) the financial, monetary or economic policy of the Community or a Member State,
- (e) the environment, in particular breeding sites of rare species.

2. The institutions shall refuse access to a document where disclosure would undermine the protection of:

- (a) commercial interests of a natural or legal person; this ground for refusal does not apply to information on emissions which is relevant for the protection of the environment;
- (b) intellectual property rights;
- (c) proceedings in litigation,
- (d) legal advice,
- (e) the purpose of inspections, investigations and audits,
- (f) the objectivity and impartiality of selection procedures,

unless there is an overriding public interest in disclosure.

3. Access to the following documents shall be refused, if their disclosure would seriously undermine the decision-making process of the institutions:

- (a) documents relating to a matter where the decision has not been taken;
- (b) documents containing opinions for internal use as part of deliberations and preliminary consultations within the institution concerned, even after the decision has been taken,

unless there is an overriding public interest in disclosure.

4. Personal data shall be disclosed in accordance with the conditions regarding lawful processing of such data laid down in EU legislation on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data. Disclosure of names, titles and functions of public office holders, civil servants and interest representatives in relation with their professional activities is deemed to be lawful under the data protection legislation unless, given the particular circumstances, disclosure would adversely affect the persons concerned.

5. If only parts of the requested document are covered by any of the exceptions, the remaining parts of the document shall be released.

6. The exceptions as laid down in paragraphs 1 to 3 shall only apply for the period during which protection is justified on the basis of the content of the document. The exceptions may apply for a maximum period of 30 years. In the case of documents covered by the exceptions relating to privacy or commercial interests and in the case of sensitive documents, the exceptions may, if necessary, continue to apply after this period.

Article 5

Consultations

1. As regards third-party documents, the institution shall consult the third party with a view to assessing whether an exception in Article 4 is applicable, unless it is clear that the document shall or shall not be disclosed.

2. Where an application concerns a document originating from a Member State, as defined in Article 3(3), the authorities of that Member State will be consulted, unless the document is already lawfully in the public domain. The institution holding the document will disclose it unless the Member State gives reasons for withholding it, based on exceptions laid down in Article 4 of this Regulation or on specific provisions in its own legislation preventing disclosure of the document concerned.

3. Where a Member State receives a request for a document in its possession, originating from an institution, unless it is clear that the document shall or shall not be disclosed, the Member State shall consult with the institution concerned in order to take a decision that does not jeopardise the attainment of the objectives of this Regulation. The Member State may instead refer the request to the institution.

Article 6

Applications

1. Applications for access to a document shall be made in any written form, including electronic form, in one of the languages referred to in Article 314 of the EC Treaty and in a sufficiently precise manner to enable the institution to identify the document. The applicant is not obliged to state reasons for the application.

2. If an application is not sufficiently precise or if the requested documents cannot be easily identified, the institution shall ask the applicant to clarify the application and shall assist the applicant in doing so, for example, by providing information on the use of the public registers of documents.

3. In the event of an application relating to a very long document or to a very large number of documents, the institution concerned may confer with the applicant informally, with a view to finding a fair solution.

4. The institutions shall provide information and assistance to citizens on how and where applications for access to documents can be made.

Article 7

Processing of initial applications

1. An application for access to a document shall be handled promptly. An acknowledgement of receipt shall be sent to the applicant. Within 15 working days from registration of the application, the institution shall either grant access to the document requested and provide access in accordance with Article 10 within that period or, in a written reply, state the reasons for the total or partial refusal and inform the applicant of his or her right to make a confirmatory application in accordance with paragraph 4 of this Article.
2. In case Article 6(2) applies, the time limit starts to run when the institution has received the requested clarifications.
3. In exceptional cases, for example in the event of an application relating to a very long document or to a very large number of documents, the time-limit provided for in paragraph 1 may be extended by 15 working days, provided that the applicant is notified in advance and that detailed reasons are given.
4. In the event of a total or partial refusal, the applicant may, within 15 working days of receiving the institution's reply, make a confirmatory application asking the institution to reconsider its position.
5. Failure by the institution to reply within the prescribed time-limit shall entitle the applicant to make a confirmatory application.

Article 8

Processing of confirmatory applications

1. A confirmatory application shall be handled promptly. Within 30 working days from registration of such an application, the institution shall either grant access to the document requested and provide access in accordance with Article 10 within that period or, in a written reply, state the reasons for the total or partial refusal. In the event of a total or partial refusal, the institution shall inform the applicant of the remedies open to him or her.
2. In case Article 6(2) applies, the time limit starts to run when the institution has received the requested clarifications.
3. In exceptional cases, for example in the event of an application relating to a very long document or to a very large number of documents, the time limit provided for in paragraph 1 may be extended by 15 working days, provided that the applicant is notified in advance and that detailed reasons are given.
4. In the event of a total or partial refusal, the applicant may bring proceedings before the Court of First Instance against the institution and/or make a complaint to the European Ombudsman, under the conditions laid down in Articles 230 and 195 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, respectively,

5. Failure by the institution to reply within the prescribed time limit shall be considered as a negative reply and entitle the applicant to institute court proceedings against the institution and/or make a complaint to the Ombudsman, under the relevant provisions of the EC Treaty.

Article 9

Treatment of sensitive documents

1. Sensitive documents are documents originating from the institutions or the agencies established by them, from Member States, third countries or International Organisations, classified as "TRÈS SECRET/TOP SECRET", "SECRET" or "CONFIDENTIEL" in accordance with the rules of the institution concerned, which protect essential interests of the European Union or of one or more of its Member States in the areas covered by Article 4(1)(a), notably public security, defence and military matters.
2. Applications for access to sensitive documents under the procedures laid down in Articles 7 and 8 shall be handled only by those persons who have a right to acquaint themselves with those documents. These persons shall also, without prejudice to Article 11(2), assess which references to sensitive documents could be made in the public register.
3. Sensitive documents shall be recorded in the register or released only with the consent of the originator.
4. An institution which decides to refuse access to a sensitive document shall give the reasons for its decision in a manner which does not harm the interests protected in Article 4.
5. Member States shall take appropriate measures to ensure that when handling applications for sensitive documents the principles in this Article and Article 4 are respected.
6. The rules of the institutions concerning sensitive documents shall be made public.
7. The Commission and the Council shall inform the European Parliament regarding sensitive documents in accordance with arrangements agreed between the institutions.

Article 10

Access following an application

1. The applicant shall have access to documents either by consulting them on the spot or by receiving a copy, including, where available, an electronic copy, according to the applicant's preference
2. If a document is publicly available and is easily accessible to the applicant, the institution may fulfill its obligation of granting access to documents by informing the applicant how to obtain the requested document.
3. Documents shall be supplied in an existing version and format (including electronically or in an alternative format such as Braille, large print or tape) with full regard to the applicant's preference.
4. The cost of producing and sending copies may be charged to the applicant. This charge shall not exceed the real cost of producing and sending the copies. Consultation on the spot, copies of less than 20 A4 pages and direct access in electronic form or through the register shall be free of charge.
5. Documents will be made accessible in accordance with specific modalities laid down in EU or national law, such as the payment of a fee or a consultation without the right to take copies.'

Article 11

Registers

1. To make citizens' rights under this Regulation effective, each institution shall provide public access to a register of documents. Access to the register should be provided in electronic form. References to documents shall be recorded in the register without delay.
2. For each document the register shall contain a reference number (including, where applicable, the interinstitutional reference), the subject matter and/or a short description of the content of the document and the date on which it was received or drawn up and recorded in the register. References shall be made in a manner which does not undermine protection of the interests in Article 4.
3. The institutions shall immediately take the measures necessary to establish a register which shall be operational by 3 June 2002.

Article 12

Direct access in electronic form or through a register

1. Documents drawn up or received in the course of procedures for the adoption of EU legislative acts or non-legislative acts of general application shall, subject to Articles 4 and 9, be made directly accessible to the public.

2. Where possible, other documents, notably documents relating to the development of policy or strategy, should be made directly accessible in electronic form.
3. Where direct access is not given through the register, the register shall as far as possible indicate where the document is located.
4. Each institution shall define in its rules of procedure which other categories of documents are directly accessible to the public.'

Article 13

Publication in the Official Journal

1. In addition to the acts referred to in Article 254(1) and (2) of the EC Treaty and the first paragraph of Article 163 of the Euratom Treaty, the following documents shall, subject to Articles 4 and 9 of this Regulation, be published in the Official Journal:

- (a) Commission proposals;
- (b) common positions adopted by the Council in accordance with the procedures referred to in Articles 251 and 252 of the EC Treaty and the reasons underlying those common positions, as well as the European Parliament's positions in these procedures;
- (c) framework decisions and decisions referred to in Article 34(2) of the EU Treaty;
- (d) conventions established by the Council in accordance with Article 34(2) of the EU Treaty;
- (e) conventions signed between Member States on the basis of Article 293 of the EC Treaty;
- (f) international agreements concluded by the Community or in accordance with Article 24 of the EU Treaty.

2. As far as possible, the following documents shall be published in the Official Journal:

- (a) initiatives presented to the Council by a Member State pursuant to Article 67(1) of the EC Treaty or pursuant to Article 34(2) of the EU Treaty;
- (b) common positions referred to in Article 34(2) of the EU Treaty;
- (c) directives other than those referred to in Article 254(1) and (2) of the EC Treaty, decisions other than those referred to in Article 254(1) of the EC Treaty, recommendations and opinions.

3. Each institution may in its rules of procedure establish which further documents shall be published in the Official Journal.

Article 14

Information

1. Each institution shall take the requisite measures to inform the public of the rights they enjoy under this Regulation.
2. The Member States shall cooperate with the institutions in providing information to the citizens.

Article 15

Administrative practice in the institutions

1. The institutions shall develop good administrative practices in order to facilitate the exercise of the right of access guaranteed by this Regulation.
2. The institutions shall establish an interinstitutional committee to examine best practice, address possible conflicts and discuss future developments on public access to documents.

Article 16

Reproduction of documents

This Regulation shall be without prejudice to any existing rules on copyright which may limit a third party's right to reproduce or exploit released documents.

Article 17

Reports

1. Each institution shall publish annually a report for the preceding year including the number of cases in which the institution refused to grant access to documents, the reasons for such refusals and the number of sensitive documents not recorded in the register.
2. At the latest by 31 January 2004, the Commission shall publish a report on the implementation of the principles of this Regulation and shall make recommendations, including, if appropriate, proposals for the revision of this Regulation and an action programme of measures to be taken by the institutions.

Article 18

Application measures

1. Each institution shall adapt its rules of procedure to the provisions of this Regulation. The adaptations shall take effect from 3 December 2001.
2. Within six months of the entry into force of this Regulation, the Commission shall examine the conformity of Council Regulation (EEC, Euratom) No 354/83 of 1 February 1983 concerning the opening to the public of the historical archives of the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community¹ with this Regulation in order to ensure the preservation and archiving of documents to the fullest extent possible.
3. Within six months of the entry into force of this Regulation, the Commission shall examine the conformity of the existing rules on access to documents with this Regulation.

Article 19

Entry into force

This Regulation shall enter into force on the third day following that of its publication in the Official Journal of the European Communities.

It shall be applicable from

This Regulation shall be binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States.

¹ OJ L 43, 15.2.1983, p. 1.