



# Mastering meetings with EU decision-makers

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András Baneth

Public Affairs Council

[abaneth@pac.org](mailto:abaneth@pac.org)

Connect with me on LinkedIn 

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## Question

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**What's your #1 challenge regarding meetings with MEPs & officials?**

Type in the chat box.



# Engaging with MEPs & policymakers

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1. Before the meeting
2. During the meeting
3. After the meeting

# WORKING WITH EU COMMISSION STAFF

## 1. COMPLIANCE



COM staff value and must respect compliance with regard to financial, ethical and other rules/guidelines. These are valued above everything else (which can greatly limit flexibility regarding your project, even if they personally would want to be flexible).

## 6. RISK AVERSION



COM staff place great emphasis on low risk solutions, ie creative marketing, even ideas or copywriting may get pushed back if they're considered too 'wild' or may risk triggering a social media backlash, even if you are convinced they're excellent.

## 2. HIERARCHY



Be mindful of the multiple layers of hierarchy in the COM, which has a major impact on various aspects of your work:

- a. **Approval:**  
There are multiple steps and layers within the approval process by various managers / department heads, which will impact deadlines/timelines. Do not expect a 24-hour turnaround for issues involving significant budget implications, or internal political discussions, or project scope change.
- b. **Chain of command:**  
Communicating a project manager and going straight to their head of unit, or director, may not go down well if an official feels they're sidelined, especially if you have a dispute in conflict with that person. Don't antagonise anyone unnecessarily.
- c. **CC'ing:**  
Think twice when cc'ing not a manager/staffer, especially if your message is critical of someone or something.

## 7. VISIBILITY



Most COM officials want more recognition and visibility, but when praising/mentioning someone, you may wish to give credit to their superior as well (to avoid jealousy by putting the staffer in an uncomfortable situation). On the other hand, COM officials need to get prior approval when their name appears on a public domain outside the scope of their work.

## 8. TRANSPARENCY



Most of your emails and written communication, including meeting notes, will be searched/scrutinised, and may be disclosed to the public under a Freedom of Information request, so choose your words/comments/commitments carefully.

## 3. UNEQUAL PARTNERSHIP



You're a service provider who's expected to follow the COM's instructions, even if your ideas/solutions are objectively better. Don't try to assert yourself above your client, but remain assertive in your communications.

## 9. DIVERSITY



COM staff come from 28 countries (even after Brexit), and their cultural background/diversity has a major impact on their values, communication style, deadlines, and expectations towards service providers like you.

## 4. LEGITIMACY



The COM is struggling with a legitimacy crisis among many EU citizens: it's trying hard to do the right thing and what's popular, but these two often do not overlap. If you help them with this challenge, they'll be forever grateful (and award you more projects).

## 10. MESSAGING



- a. **Channel:** be mindful of the communication method as channel you choose, depending on the type of communication and the desired outcome.
  - For **controversial issues** (press releases, meetings) are best followed by a brief written memo to confirm what has been agreed.
  - For **open-ended complex questions or brainstorming** (phone calls or meetings) are best with action items or minutes noted.
  - To **align opinions or exchange information** email with minutes/minutes to back. Try to keep your email short, concise and to the point. You are more likely to receive a response in a more timely matter if they can read, review and address our request quickly.
- b. **Proactivity:** open-ended questions in an email may take a long time to get answered, so rather anticipate and insert a B.C. summary in your email so it's easy for the recipient to decide. No matter what problem arises, progress (even) solutions to save their mental effort (and/or the time you need to wait for their response).
- c. **Empathy:** anticipating objections or reservations, and addressing them upfront (even a long way in getting buy-in, instead of exchanging too many emails back-and-forth (e.g. "I understood you might disagree with this approach because it's too costly. On the other hand, it seems significant amounts to the medium-term").
- d. **Language:** ask, but don't demand ("It'd be grateful to receive" vs. "Can you please send me?"). Whenever possible, say "Thank you" instead of "excuse me" ("Thank you for your patience regarding my reply").

## 5. MOTIVATION



At the kick-off meeting, try to understand the core motivation of your COM account manager(s), and remember: "You can get anything in life that you want, if you help others achieve what they want."

# What are policy makers thinking?

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What is the problem and why is it a problem?

Why should we [the government] act?

What should be achieved?

What are the various options to achieve the objectives?





# What are policy makers thinking?

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What are the [economic, social and environmental] impacts and who will be affected?

How do the different options compare to each other?

How will monitoring and evaluation happen?



**Outreach emails to MEPs**



# Is this a good email...? Why?



Subject: Request for Meeting on [Name of the Legislation]



Dear [Name of the MEP],

We are writing on behalf of [Name of the European Trade Association], a prominent trade association in the European Union representing [Insert the Industry/sector]. Our association has been following the developments related to the proposed legislation [Name of the Legislation] that you are responsible for, and we would like to request a meeting with you to discuss the impact of the proposed legislation on our industry.

As a leading trade association, we are deeply committed to ensuring the success of our industry and the well-being of our members. We believe that [Name of the Legislation] would have a significant impact on our industry, and we would appreciate the opportunity to discuss our concerns and suggestions with you.

We understand that you have a busy schedule, but we would be honored if you could find some time to meet with us. We are available to meet with you at your convenience, either in Brussels or Strasbourg. We are also open to a virtual meeting if that is more convenient for you.

Please let us know your availability, and we will coordinate with your office to schedule the meeting at a mutually convenient time.

Thank you for considering our request. We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

[Your Title]

[Name of the European Trade Association]

 Regenerate response



# Is this a good email...?

## Why?

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Subject: ABCD conference invitation

Dear MEP Smith,

I'm contacting you on behalf of ABCD regarding the upcoming 'Combating microplastic pollution 2030' conference.

We'd like to invite you to address the topic of "What is the EU doing to improve the recycling rate of plastics?" in a short presentation.

I understand you'd need to discuss the invitation with your political group, but we'd very much need to receive a reply within a week.

The event will take place online, using Zoom, on 27 March 2023.. We very much hope you can accept our invitation.

Thank you in advance,  
[name]

Subject: Invitation as speaker - ABCD conference - 27 March 2023 (online)

Dear MEP Smith,

I'm contacting you on behalf of ABCD, Europe's largest association of 120 plastic packaging companies to invite you as speaker at the upcoming 'Combating microplastic pollution 2030' conference.

We'd be delighted if you can join the online event on 27 March to address the topic of "What is the EU doing to improve the recycling rate of plastics?" in a short presentation.

The event will welcome the UN rapporteur for "Saving the Oceans", the Finnish Minister for the Environment, and the European Commissioner for Sustainability, along with 500 participants from Europe and the United States.

I understand it's very short notice and you may have other obligations already. As the most prominent voice in this field, we'd nevertheless be very grateful to have you speak at the event.

Do you think you can accept our invitation?

We'd be grateful for your confirmation in the next three days, if possible. I'm available to answer any questions you may have via email, or phone, any time.

Thank you in advance, yours sincerely,

# THE BODY



**OPENING (DEAR, 1ST NAME ONLY, HI)**

**APOLOGISE VS THANK THEM**

**REFERENCE TO PREVIOUS EXCHANGE (IF ANY)**

**WHEN ASKING A QUESTION  
(STANDALONE + QUESTION + SCOPE)**

**HOW MANY HYPERLINKS?**

# THE BODY



**SHOULD YOU BOLD OR UNDERLINE?**

**TITLES, BULLETS, NUMBERING, @**

**CAREFUL WITH RELATIVE DATES (TOMORROW ETC.)**

**SIGN-OFF AND SIGNATURE**

# 7 THINGS

MEPs & policy-makers are thinking  
before giving you their attention

## #1

### Why care?

Is this topic relevant to my  
(political/personal)  
interests?

## #2

### Why me?

Was this sent to others too?  
Am I a key player on this  
topic? If not, why do they  
contact me?

## #3

### Context

is this the right time to  
discuss this? Isn't it too  
early/late in the  
process?

## #5

### Cost of 'no'

If I decline the  
meeting, will it  
have any negative  
consequence? Will  
I look bad?

## #6

### Logistics & Optics

Timing, platform,  
pre-approval,  
Transparency Reg.,  
Media

## #4

### WIIFM?

What's in it for me? Will  
I get new  
information/data/  
perspective? Do I NEED  
to meet them?

## #7

### Expectations

How will the  
meeting run?  
What will we  
discuss?





# Clarify Beforehand

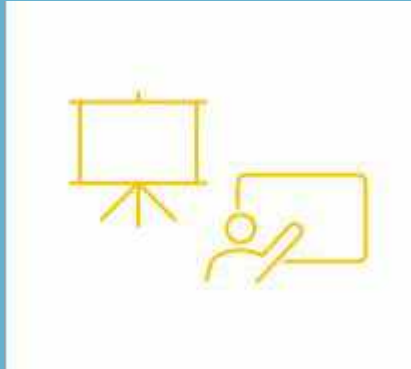
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- Will the discussion be recorded?
- Who else will be joining?
- Can you share info about the meeting online (the meeting only, or content)?
- If online: will you use PPT, video, screen sharing or other?
- Will someone from your on-site team or subject matter expert join in?
- Have you trained them or did they rehearse beforehand?
- What are your key messages (max. 3)?
- What does a successful meeting look like? (focus on the outcome)

# For Hybrid/Online



**Have cabled internet (not wireless) + 4G in case the cabled fails**



**If multiple presenters, make sure everyone has all the slides (so they can display / advance it from their end if needed)**



**If your internet fails, have the dial-in number ready**



**Consider pre-recording critical parts or speeches to use as a backup**



# Meeting with MEPs & policymakers

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- 2. During the meeting**
3. After the meeting



# Look Good





# Framing Your Video Shot

**Headroom**

**Eye Height**

**Angle**

**Distance (arms length)**

**Center vs. Rule of Thirds**

**Hands**



# Framing Your Video Shot

## SETUP

1. LIGHT YOUR FACE
2. CAMERA EYE LEVEL
3. HEADPHONE MIC





Your Secret Method

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**How do you make your hybrid meetings effective?**

Type in the chat box or put your virtual hand up so we can unmute you.

# How to keep the interest up

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Play with  
your voice

Make it  
a dialogue\*  
[\*listen more]

Keep it short

Use visuals

Use pauses  
and breaks

“Read the  
[virtual] room”

Consider using  
co-presenters

# How to keep the interest up

---

Play with  
your voice

Make it  
a dialogue\*  
[\*listen more



SCAN ME

“Read the  
[virtual] room”

Keep it short

Use visuals

Use pauses  
and breaks

Consider using  
co-presenters



# Slides: What to do (and what not to do)



Make your slides *interesting*



Limited or no **animation**



- Split bullets into multiple slides



Minimal on-screen text (or annotate)



Send as pre-reading **handout**



*On-screen and post-event versions*



# Engaging with MEPs & policymakers

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# You may consider...

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- Send a follow-up “thank you” email (with extra data/background info)
- Informing them about your take-away from the meeting
- Sharing your social media message about the meeting (if pre-agreed)
- Sending them useful information about something they mentioned at the meeting



# USE “CONTENT REPURPOSING”

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If you have a recording, you may: (if agreed/approved)

- Have it transcribed and published
- Cut it into smaller chunks and post them on your website or social media
- Share notable quotes on LinkedIn, Slideshare or Scribd
- Turn the audio into a podcast
- Write a memo about your take-away
- Create an infographic from the content

# ANY FINAL QUESTIONS, COMMENTS?



Connect with me:  
[linkedin.com/in/andras-baneth/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/andras-baneth/)





Public Affairs Council

EXPERTISE

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# How to work with the European Parliament

Register



## Hybrid workshop

4 April 2023

2:00pm to 4:00pm CET

Engaging ethically and effectively with the European Parliament (EP) is critical for companies and associations who wish to influence the EU policy-making process. This workshop will focus on explaining how the European Parliament works, what are the main files keeping the institution busy, who are the MEPs occupying key positions in your files, and some strategies to engage with EU legislators.