

ACCESS INFO EUROPE

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Ms. Marianne Klingbeil,
Deputy Secretary-General
European Commission
1049 Brussels

28 October 2014

Dear Marianne Klingbeil,

Thank you for your letter dated 9 October 2014, which we received on 20 October, in which you inform Access Info Europe of complaints received by the European Commission from requesters in September as a result of technical problems with AsktheEU.org, the platform which facilitates exercise of the right of access to EU documents and makes available to the wider public information released in response to requests.

The cause of the problem with AsktheEU.org was that one of the sub-programmes on the mail server, which sends requests and delivers responses, was "hanging" during the period 19-25 September, causing some messages to be delayed and for a handful of messages from EU institutions to bounce. We regret and apologise for any inconvenience caused to either requesters or EU bodies as a result.

We were alerted to the problem on 24 September by two requesters. One telephoned us regarding a response from DG TRADE and another wrote by email regarding correspondence with the Secretariat General and the European Ombudsman in which the Ombudsman's office had informed him of a bounced message.

Access Info Europe's IT specialist reacted immediately to investigate, and the problem was resolved on 25 September after the company in the Netherlands responsible for the server rebooted it manually. All messages held in the queue were then delivered. Our logs indicate that a small number of responses, particularly those sent on 19 September, had bounced; the relevant EU body would have received a bounce message and would hence be aware of this.

Indeed, on 25 September, we were notified by three EU institutions (European Court of Auditors, DG Financial Programming and Budget, and the European Parliament) that emails they had sent on 19, 24 and 25 September respectively had not been delivered. To resolve this, the responses were posted online by the AsktheEU.org team following the reboot, or were successfully resent by the institutions the following day.

As indicated in our letter dated 30 July 2014, Access Info Europe worked over the summer to upgrade the AsktheEU.org website. The upgrade was necessary to address some technical glitches that had caused some problems in the delivery of requests and responses during the first three years of operation of the platform, resulting in a downtime of around 1.25% of total operating time. To date, we have upgraded the Alaveteli software on which AsktheEU.org runs, installed new security fixes, and also re-designed the entire webpage.

This mail server problem was a new and unexpected issue. We are currently working with the software developers at [mySociety](#) to minimise the possibilities of the same problem re-occurring by re-coding the programme so that it re-boots itself automatically, in a bid to avoid it "freezing" again.

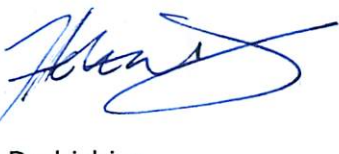
Access Info Europe understands and shares your concern about any delays caused by technical problems. The goal of AsktheEU.org, a civil society-run platform, is to promote citizen engagement in the EU and to make it more transparent and accessible. We aim to ensure a prompt service to users but it is almost inevitable that some technical issues can occur from time to time, as does happen even with websites run by much larger enterprises. Whenever we are alerted to these, we take rapid action to resolve them as soon as possible.

As indicated in our 30 July letter, we encourage EU bodies to contact us if they ever have an issue with delivering a message or any other question or query about AsktheEU.org. The email address team@asktheeu.org is monitored by our staff members, who respond quickly to error alerts. We therefore encourage you to notify us via email in the future the moment there is any technical issue so that we can work to resolve it immediately.

Access Info is committed to the continued and improved functioning of AsktheEU.org as part of our mandate to promote the right of access to information, which includes the right of access to EU documents as enshrined in the EU treaties. We welcome the opportunity to collaborate with EU bodies in facilitating public access to information held by the EU about its work and we are at your disposition to discuss further with the European Commission about how to achieve this common goal.

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you wish to discuss this matter further.

With best wishes,



Helen Darbshire
Executive Director
Access Info Europe

