

**Question for written answer E-006993/2020  
to the Commission**

Rule 138

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**Subject:** Decision of the European Ombudsman regarding the Commission's decision to award a contract to BlackRock for a study on integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives into EU banking rules

On 23 November 2020, the European Ombudsman published her decision regarding the case of the Commission awarding to BlackRock Investment Management a contract to carry out a study on integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives into EU banking rules<sup>1</sup>. The Ombudsman mentions that the Commission's internal guidance document falls seriously short on providing sufficient clarity to its staff on the issue of assessing conflicts of interest. The Ombudsman also mentions that the obligation to treat applicants equally does not relieve the Commission of its obligation to critically examine all factors likely to affect the execution of a contract, not all of which apply equally to every bidding company. The Ombudsman concludes that the Commission should have been more vigilant and that its decision to award the contract to BlackRock did not provide sufficient guarantees to exclude any legitimate doubt as to the risk of conflicts of interest.

1. Will the Commission update its guidelines for public procurement procedures in order to provide clarity on possible conflicts of interest to its staff dealing with relevant procedures for policy-related service contracts?
2. Will it submit a proposal for the update and strengthening of the applicable rules, given that the EU will soon enter a period of unprecedented levels of public spending and investment, which will involve significant links with the private sector?

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<sup>1</sup> Decision of the European Ombudsman of 23 November 2020 in joint inquiry 853/2020/KR on the European Commission's decision to award a contract to BlackRock Investment Management to carry out a study on integrating environmental, social and governance (ESG) objectives into EU banking rules, <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/decision/en/135363>