



Council of the
European Union

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'I' ITEM NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Permanent Representatives Committee
Subject: Accreditation of media representatives for European Councils and summits

I. BACKGROUND

1. In everyday business at the Council, journalists are admitted to press facilities upon presentation of their permanent Commission press card, their national press card or upon special authorisation of the Council press service. These checks allow us to verify that they are *bona fide* media representatives.
2. Additional checks apply for media representatives (including technical personnel) attending European Councils and other summit meetings with a view to mitigating any security risks due to close proximity to heads of state or government. As is standard practice in other international fora, once their professional status has been confirmed, media representatives must give their consent to undergo security background screening by the relevant national authorities.
3. This note aims to improve arrangements for accrediting media representatives by offering a better quality of service while enhancing the efficiency of the security background screening process.

II. CURRENT SITUATION

4. Under arrangements applied since 2002 (when European Council meetings were assigned to Brussels), media representatives resident in Belgium are security background screened by the Belgian national security authority (NSA)¹. All others (EU and third country journalists) are processed by each rotating presidency (working in liaison with relevant national authorities in member states and third states).
5. Late accreditation for European Councils has always been possible, although it has been restricted for some bilateral summits. More limited background checks are conducted on a best endeavours basis for media representatives who apply for late accreditation unless the GSC's records show they have previously been background screened. European Councils are sometimes convened at short notice with a very short accreditation period, which *de facto* means that all media representatives who have not previously been screened are handled as late accreditation requests.
6. Screening is undertaken every six-months. Media representatives are issued with a single event badge or, in the case of EU citizens resident in Belgium, may receive a six-month badge valid for all summits during that period (although not all take up this possibility).

III. IMPROVEMENTS

7. The aim is to issue to media representatives (including technical personnel) who are both citizens and residents in the EU, EEA and Switzerland an annual media accreditation badge valid for all European Councils and summits². The GSC will issue single event only badges for other media representatives (or for certain media events (e.g. multilateral summits)).

¹ Where media representatives have been resident in Belgium less than five years, the Belgian NSA verifies information for the duration of their residence in Belgium.

² The GSC would also issue such badges to non-EU, non-EEA and non-Switzerland nationals who have been resident in these countries for more than five years.

8. In due course, it will be possible to request badges throughout the year via the GSC's online registration web portal. Depending on the date on which a request is made, processing it and issuing the badge may take up to a maximum of three months (for operational reasons processing of requests through national authorities occurs in regular batches).
9. The GSC Press Office will be responsible for establishing the press credentials of media representatives (*bona fide* check) as they do for all journalists visiting the Council premises.
10. Those whose credentials have been established will undergo security background screening as is the case for summit meetings in other international fora. As the GSC has no legal means to undertake security background screening itself, the following approach will be followed³:
 - i) requests for security background screening of media representatives (including technical personnel) resident in Belgium (i.e. who possess a Belgian national identification number found on ID cards or residence permits) and who submit an accreditation request will be forwarded by the GSC to the Belgian National Security Authority (which will liaise as appropriate with national authorities in member states and third states);
 - ii) requests for security background screening of media representatives (including technical personnel) resident in other Member States will be forwarded by the GSC to the relevant authority of that Member State (which will liaise as appropriate with national authorities in member states and third states);
 - iii) screening requests for media representatives resident in third countries will be forwarded by the GSC to the relevant authority of the Member State holding the rotating Council presidency.

³ The same arrangements will apply, *mutatis mutandis*, regarding security background screening for private contractors working for European Councils and summits. Background screening of such contractors will continue to be undertaken every six months; any adverse information in the intervening period will be notified immediately to the GSC.

11. Each delegation will designate a contact point within the competent national authority responsible for coordinating background screening to which questions relating to background screening requests could be directed.⁴ The GSC will seek from the relevant authorities of the EEA member states and Switzerland the names of equivalent the contact points. Contact points will respond promptly to any requests addressed by their counterparts. A list of contact points will be managed maintained by the Council Security Committee, which will determine practical arrangements as necessary to facilitate contacts.
12. Security background screening advice provided for media representatives would be accepted as valid for six months. Once the security background screening has been completed, an accreditation badge for European Councils and summits for the concerned year will be issued for citizens of the EU, EEA and Switzerland who are residents⁵. Badges will be issued in frequent batches throughout the year. Other media representatives will receive a single event badge.
13. While encouraging use of the general badge will reduce the number of late accreditation requests, it is unavoidable that some media representatives will seek late accreditation (i.e. ten working days or fewer before the event). The GSC may grant late accreditation (for that event only) provided (i) the *bona fide* status as a media representative is established by means of a letter from their media organisation; (ii) the individual has signed the consent form for security background screening; (iii) open source background checks do not indicate a security risk; and (iv) the individual has held a summit badge in the course of the previous year or, exceptionally, the GSC decides to accept the accreditation. Individuals accepted under late accreditation will undergo subsequently the normal security background screening and will be entitled to receive the general badge.

⁴ All member states may exchange classified information in the interest of the EU under the intergovernmental agreement on the protection of classified information exchanged in the interests of the EU (OJ C 202 of 8.7.2011, p. 5).

⁵ Media representatives who are citizens and resident in the EU, EEA and Switzerland may receive an annual media accreditation badge valid for all European Councils and summits, but will accept from the start of the initial registration procedure to undergo a second security background screening after 6 months. The GSC would also issue such badges to non-EU, non-EEA and non-Switzerland nationals who have been resident in these countries for more than five years.

14. It is recalled that background screening is one risk mitigation measure among many protective security measures in place to ensure the safety and security of heads of state and government and other persons working for the European council.
15. Accreditation badges delivered under this procedure cannot be considered the equivalent of an official press card and may be withdrawn by the GSC at any time for security reasons.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

16. The new system for screening will apply from January 2018. Pending the upgrading of the web portal for summit registration to enable it to handle badge requests for one year (which is linked to other IT modernisations to be completed by the first half of 2018), summit media badges may provisionally be issued with a six-monthly validity period (renewable).

V. CONCLUSIONS

17. The approach outlined above has been examined by the Council Security Committee on 13 December 2016 which has confirmed its broad support.
18. The Permanent Representatives Committee is accordingly invited to agree to the approach set out in section III. above, in particular points 10, 11, 12 and 13 and that it be applied from 1 January 2018.
