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Significant amendments to the Rules of Procedure of the General Court of the European Union will come into force on 1 April

With those amendments, the General Court continues to promote modern and efficient justice

The General Court has amended its **Rules of Procedure** to make the best use of the Court's time, in particular by clarifying or simplifying certain provisions. Those amendments also respond to certain needs, such as the possibility of using videoconferencing for hearings. They also foster proactive case management and take account of developments in the rules on the protection of personal data of natural persons.

The proposed amendments have been endorsed by the Court of Justice and approved by the Council of the European Union. ¹

The General Court has also amended its **Practice Rules for the Implementation of its Rules of Procedure**. ²

What is changing?

The amendments to the Rules of Procedure **clarify, supplement or simplify certain provisions**. In particular, they will limit the cases in which written submissions are to be put in order and also reflect the **responses** of the General Court and its Registry **to certain needs**.

Videoconferencing

Thus, the General Court provides in its texts for the possibility of using **videoconferencing for hearings**, having adopted a legal and technical framework for that purpose. Videoconferencing proved essential to ensuring the continuity of justice during the health crisis. Any request for the use of videoconferencing made by a representative who is prevented from participating in a hearing in person must be based on 'health, security or other serious reasons' (Article 107a of the Rules of Procedure). The technical conditions to be satisfied by those wishing to participate in hearings by videoconference are laid down in the Practice Rules for the Implementation of the Rules of Procedure. The document 'Practical recommendations for representatives making oral submissions by videoconference' completes the set.

Electronic signature

In an effort to promote modern and efficient justice, the General Court began signing its judgments and orders electronically in March 2022. The Practice Rules for the Implementation of the Rules of Procedure of the General Court therefore specify the arrangements for the **qualified electronic signature of its decisions** and the rules for the long-term secure storage of the original electronic versions of those documents.

Proactive management

¹ The amendments were published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* on 14 February 2023 ([OJ 2023 L 44, p. 8](#)).

² The amendments were published in the *Official Journal of the European Union* on 10 March 2023 ([OJ 2023 L 73, p. 58](#)).

The changes made to the Rules of Procedure offer new possibilities to the General Court that are consistent with the requirement of **proactive case management** and in line with the reflections set out in the Court of Justice's 2020 report.

Pilot cases

Article 71a of the Rules of Procedure establishes the concept of the '**pilot case**' and specifies the circumstances in which, where pending cases raise the same issue of law, one of those cases is to be identified as the pilot case and the others stayed. New guarantees are offered: the pilot case will be given priority over others and the parties in the stayed cases will be heard once their cases are resumed.

Joint hearings

Article 106a of the Rules of Procedure will allow the General Court to organise **joint hearings** of two or more cases where there are similarities between them, irrespective of whether the conditions for joinder are met.

Data protection

The General Court also takes account of developments in the rules on the **protection of personal data of natural persons** in the European Union. Its Rules of Procedure now clearly distinguish between the processing of personal data of natural persons (Article 66) and the processing of data other than personal data (Article 66a). The notice 'Omission of data vis-à-vis the public in judicial proceedings' points to the need to make an application for the omission of data by a separate document as soon as the relevant procedural document is lodged in order to avoid the data already being published on the internet.

Useful documents for parties

Lastly, the General Court has updated a series of useful documents for parties' representatives (**Aide-mémoire - Application, Model summary of the pleas in law and main arguments relied on in the application, Aide-mémoire - Hearing of oral argument, Notice on the omission of data vis-à-vis the public in judicial proceedings**). New documents have also been drawn up to assist parties' representatives in preparing their actions (provision of **indicative model applications**) and to guide them where they are authorised to make oral submissions by videoconference (**Practical recommendations for representatives making oral submissions by videoconference**).

The new Rules of Procedure will be available on the Curia website under 'General Court/Procedure' at https://curia.europa.eu/jcms/jcms/Jo2_7040/.

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