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Answer given by Ms Ivanova
on behalf of the European Commission
(19.11.2024)

As a general rule, both the Commission and its executive agencies must respect the scientific independence and scientific integrity of researchers and therefore do not intervene on the personnel choices of the beneficiaries' research teams involved in specific projects.

In exceptional cases the evaluators may formulate recommendations to address shortcomings detected during the evaluation (potentially including cost-related recommendations) and accordingly these issues should be addressed at the grant agreement preparation stage. This possibility following a recommendation by evaluators should however not interfere with the autonomy of beneficiaries to appoint the researchers working on projects.

The Commission is not aware of any case such as the one mentioned by the Honourable Member (i.e. beneficiaries being asked to replace senior researchers with more junior ones), and while it is part of the duties of the Commission and its agencies to monitor the grant implementation and, if needed, to intervene in complex projects by suggesting corrective measures, this should be done respecting the scientific independence of beneficiaries. On the contrary, during project implementation, the general rule is that key researchers (whose involvement in the proposal may have been one factor being considered by evaluators when scoring it) should remain in the project during its implementation and not be replaced by more junior ones.

Should the Honourable Member consider that a potential abuse on this matter has taken place, the Commission is willing to look into it upon reception of the specific details of the case.