

## Ombudsman welcomes Parliament's resolution as victory for openness

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The European Ombudsman, **Jacob Söderman**, has hailed the Parliamentary resolution on his special report in the Bavarian Lager case as a "victory for openness". Adopting the report by Jean Lambert, MEPs called on the Commission to give out information requested by an EU citizen on a complaint he had filed with it. The Commission has so far refused.

Mr Andrew Ronnan requested the names of persons invited by the Commission to a meeting to give their opinions and advice on his complaint. Mr. Ronnan was not allowed to attend the meeting. He also asked for the names of persons who made written submissions to the Commission about his complaint. The Commission insisted that, under the Data Protection Directive, it must keep the names secret unless the persons concerned agree to their identities being revealed.

Rejecting this argument as a misinterpretation of the Directive, MEPs have now called on the Commission to inform Mr Ronnan of the names. To ensure that concerns about data protection are not abused, they also recommend that model codes of conduct be drawn up.

Welcoming the EP resolution, Mr. Söderman said: "The EU institutions should take decisions as openly as possible. The Commission has wrongly tried to use the Data Protection Directive to keep secret information about how it discharges its responsibilities as Guardian of the Treaty. I hope that the Commission will stop trying to distort the purpose of data protection rules so as to use them as a cloak of secrecy for its own activities."

Given the clear support shown by MEPs in yesterday's vote, the Commission should delay no further in giving the information to Mr. Ronnan.

### Background

Mr Ronnan complained to the Commission on behalf of the Bavarian Lager Company about restrictive UK laws on beer purchases. He turned to the Ombudsman after he was refused information relating to the Commission's investigation of his complaint. The Ombudsman presented a special report on the case in November 2000 calling on the Parliament to intervene after the Commission refused to back down.



*The Ombudsman's special report on complaint 713/98/IJH can be found on the Internet at:*

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/specialreport.faces/en/380/html.bookmark> [Link]

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