

Remarks by the European Ombudsman, Professor P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, on the Occasion of the Reception to Celebrate the 10th Anniversary of the European Ombudsman Institution

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Mr President, Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Honourable Members of the European Commission, colleagues and friends.

I am delighted to welcome you all to this reception, which is being held to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the European Ombudsman institution.

This event is one of a series being held throughout the autumn to mark this important milestone.

But this evening's gathering has particular significance for one special reason:

The creation and development of the European Ombudsman would, quite simply, not have been possible were it not for the active support consistently provided by the European Parliament, its Members and its Presidents over the years.

It is therefore a great pleasure for me to welcome the President of the European Parliament, Mr Josep Borrell Fontelles and to ask him to take the floor and to address you.

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Thank you, Mr President!

As I stated in my introduction, your presence here this evening is a great honour for my institution.

I already mentioned the important role of the European Parliament in the creation and development of the European Ombudsman.

But I should perhaps add that it was the Spanish delegation at the Intergovernmental Conference that, in February 1991, first suggested the creation of a European Ombudsman as



part of the Maastricht Treaty.

Over the years, my office has developed an ever closer co-operation with ombudsmen at every level throughout the Union.

One of our closest collaborators during the last decade has undoubtedly been the *Sindic de Greuges Catalan*, the regional ombudsman of your region, Catalonia.

I wish, therefore, to take advantage of your triple identity, as Catalan, Spanish and European, to pass, through you, my sincere thanks to Catalonia, Spain and the European Parliament for their contributions to the establishment of the European Ombudsman!

Over the last decade, the Ombudsman has come a long way in carving a role for itself within the institutional landscape of the European Union.

The amazing number of you who have honoured the institution with your presence here this evening confirms this.

This notwithstanding, it is, above all, a testament to the perseverance of my predecessor, Jacob Söderman, that we can all be here to celebrate ten years of service to European citizens.

I am, therefore, delighted that Jacob has travelled from Helsinki to be with us for this reception.

When Jacob officially took office on 27 September 1995, that is, exactly ten years ago today, he began with just two members of staff, M. Jean-Guy Giraud and Mme Nathalie Christmann.

Both of them kindly accepted to be with us this evening, and I would like to thank them for their pioneering work.

In the first full year, 1996, 843 complaints were received from citizens of the then 15 EU Member States.

This year will be the first full year since the enlargement to 25 Member States, and we are anticipating that the total number of complaints that will have been received by the end of the year will exceed 4,000.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to my dedicated and hard-working staff for all they have done to deal effectively and promptly with this major increase in complaints and, in so doing, to help citizens. I especially wish to thank Jacob for bequeathing me such an excellent team.

Allow me to note that of the admissible complaints received by the European Ombudsman, around 70% concern the European Commission.

The inquiries launched by the Ombudsman into these complaints would, undoubtedly, have



been much less effective, were it not for the good co-operation of the Commission.

Several Commissioners and Commission staff have taken time out of their busy schedules to be with us this evening, and I would like to thank, through them, the whole Commission and its staff for their active and constructive support of the Ombudsman's work, which, in turn makes it possible for him effectively to serve citizens.

Even with a staff of over 50, the Ombudsman still depends on close co-operation with the European Parliament's administration.

The use of Parliament's services in areas as diverse as buildings, information technology, training, research and translation, to mention but a few, has been invaluable to the Ombudsman and has avoided large areas of duplication.

Many of the Parliament staff responsible for these and other services are here this evening.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to you for your support, and for joining us here at the busiest moment for all of you - the middle of the Strasbourg plenary week!

Last, but very certainly not least, I would like to thank the Members of the European Parliament for their support over the years.

To have so many of you here this evening, on the busiest day of the part-session, is not merely an honour but also a most convincing affirmation of your continuing commitment to the institution whose leadership you have, by a very large majority, entrusted me with.

In particular, I would like to thank the Members of the Committee on Petitions for following the work of the Ombudsman with such rigour over the last decade and for their support and advice on many key issues.

I look forward to our continuing co-operation over the coming years.

Just over a year ago, I decided to bring together the key 'founding parents' of the Ombudsman institution in order to ensure that the important moments both leading up to and following its birth would be adequately recorded before memory, whether personal or institutional, begins to fade.

Following an impressively intensive two day workshop in Strasbourg in June 2004, the participants were invited to each contribute a chapter to a commemorative volume.

It is a great pleasure for me to present President Borrell with a copy of this book and to thank him once again for his institution's continuing support of the Ombudsman. I hope that you will all derive as much interest and enjoyment from reading its contents as we derived from producing it.



It now just remains for me to thank you all for being here this evening.

I very much look forward to discussing with as many of you as possible during the rest of this reception.

Thank you!