

## Ombudsman accepts Commission proposals to promote equal opportunities

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The European Ombudsman, **Jacob Söderman**, today welcomed the news from the European Commission that its Action Plan to promote equal opportunities will be presented for adoption in the near future. This comes in response to his criticism that the Commission's first reply to a complaint about possible racism in recruitment disclosed a passive attitude towards the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the workforce of the Community institutions.

According to the Commission, positive actions to encourage applications from members of minority communities to recruitment competitions are already in preparation. The Action Plan aims to improve publicity for future competitions so that it reaches the broadest range of communities in the Member States. The Commission also plans to discuss the issue of racial and ethnic diversity of its staff in a meeting of Heads of Member States' national civil services in the coming months.

During the Ombudsman's inquiry, the Commission failed to provide statistics on the number of people of ethnic minority origin in its workforce, citing the lack of a definition of the term ethnic minority and data protection. The Ombudsman pointed out that the Commission's arguments would not apply to an invitation to applicants to complete a form, on a voluntary basis, stating whether they belong to an ethnic minority. This statistical information, already gathered in a number of Member States, would allow it to monitor the effectiveness of its stated policy of encouraging applications from members of minority communities. The Ombudsman considers, however, that there is currently no legal obligation on the Commission to collect such statistics.

### **Background**

A Dutch citizen complained to the Ombudsman about possible racism in EU recruitment. He pointed out that while more than 30 million people of ethnic minority origin live in the EU, hardly any of them are employed in the structure of the European Communities.

The Ombudsman's Decision in this case can be found on the Internet at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/decision/en/010777.htm>



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