

## Decision of the European Ombudsman on complaint 1365/98/JMA against the European Commission

Decision

**Case 1365/98/JMA - Opened on 20/01/1999 - Decision on 27/05/1999**

Strasbourg, 27 May 1999 Dear Mr R., On 24 December 1998, you sent a complaint to the European Ombudsman concerning the failure of the European Commission to properly explain the reasons for not granting you a paid traineeship, as well as the criteria used by the institution to distinguish between paid and non-paid trainees. I forwarded your complaint to the President of the Commission on 20 January 1999, with a request for comments by the end of April. On 5 March 1999, the Commission forwarded its comments on this matter to me which I sent to you on 12 March, with an invitation to reply. On 8 April 1999, you sent your observations. I am writing now to let you know the result of the inquiries that have been made.

### THE COMPLAINT

The complainant was selected for a non-paid traineeship to begin in March 1999 in the Directorate General for Transport (DG VII) of the European Commission. He requested information on how to obtain some stipend for his work, since he was unemployed and had no financial means to move temporarily to Brussels. The reply stated that the selection was based on geographical considerations, and that the institution uses the best available means to carry out a difficult task. The complainant was not satisfied with this explanation. He indicated that the allocation of grants in a different Directorate General was based on different criteria. According to the complainant, this situation does not respect the principles of solidarity and fairness. He therefore suggested that the practice be changed.

### THE INQUIRY

**The Commission's opinion** In its opinion, the Commission indicated that it recruits about 1240 trainees annually and that the institution is able to offer grants to about 85 % of them. It explained that each Directorate General has a quota of trainees to be recruited with and without grant. The allocation of these grants is the responsibility of each DG, which bases its decisions on a careful examination of the individual dossiers and following personal contacts during the recruitment procedure. Some candidates may receive funding from other sources and are able to accept an unpaid place. The Commission recognised that the system is not ideal. It can create differences in approach between different Directorates General. In order to introduce a better system and to eliminate any form of discrimination, the Commission indicated that it had



decided to phase out unpaid traineeships through an increase in the budget devoted to traineeships. The Commission would be seeking an annual increase of 10% in the budget line, and it hoped that all the trainees will receive a grant by 2001 at the latest. As regards the complaint, the Commission stated that the competent Directorate General (DG VII) had been able to allocate a grant to the complainant as a result of the withdrawal of another candidate.

**The complainant's observations** In his observations, the complainant first expressed his gratitude for the Ombudsman's help in getting the appropriate explanation concerning the selection of paid and non paid trainees. He expressed his satisfaction for having received a grant during his traineeship period. The complainant welcomed the Commission's efforts towards trainees, and the initiatives taken by the institution to improve transparency in the selection procedures.

## **The DECISION**

On the basis of the information provided by the complainant and the opinion submitted by the European Commission, the Ombudsman concludes that the case has been settled to the complainant's full satisfaction. The European Ombudsman has therefore decided to close the case. The President of the European Commission will be also informed of this decision. Yours sincerely, Jacob SÖDERMAN