

Decision of the European Ombudsman on complaint 6/2000/VK against the European Parliament

Decision

Case 6/2000/VK - Opened on 10/02/2000 - Decision on 27/10/2000

Strasbourg, 27 October 2000 Dear Ms L., On 29 December 1999, you made a complaint to the European Ombudsman. In your complaint you alleged that the European Parliament had failed to reimburse you correctly for your travel expenses following an invitation to participate in Competition PE/210/LA. On 17 February 2000, I forwarded the complaint to the President of the European Parliament. The Parliament sent its opinion on 5 July and 22 August 2000 and I forwarded it to you with an invitation to make observations, which you sent on 24 October 2000. I am writing now to let you know the results of the inquiries that have been made.

THE COMPLAINT

The complainant expressed her interest in participating in Competition PE/210/LA of the European Parliament in 1998, when she was working and living in Uganda. She therefore provided the Parliament services with her Ugandan address. The complainant then received an invitation to participate in the competition at her Ugandan address. The complainant's place of residence was fixed as being Uganda. The complainant stated that in its letters of 13 July and 12 August 1999, the Parliament refused to acknowledge her place of residence being Uganda and to reimburse her for her travel expenses correctly. The complainant referred to the rules for the reimbursement of travel expenses which were attached to the invitation, according to which

- The reimbursement of travel expenses was dependant on the distance between the place of residence and the place where the competition takes place;
- The place of residence was defined as the place where the Parliament had sent the invitation to participate in the competition;
- Any changes of address after this invitation was sent could not be taken into account.

The complainant thereafter complained to the Ombudsman. She alleged that she has not been reimbursed correctly.

THE INQUIRY

The European Parliament's opinion In its opinion, the Parliament referred to the "Provisions concerning the contribution to travel and accommodation expenses for candidates invited by the European Parliament to attend written tests in connection with competitions or notices of vacancy". Paragraph 3 provides that: "For the purposes of calculating the European Parliament's contribution to travel expenses, the candidate's place of residence is deemed to be the place to which Parliament sent the invitation to the competition. No subsequent change of address will be taken into account". The Parliament stated that as the address in question was



in Uganda, it fully accepts its obligation to reimburse the complainant at a rate of 180 EUR. Since the complainant has already received 60 EUR, the balance payable is 120 EUR. Instructions to make this payment have been issued to the appropriate services. The Parliament further explained that its officials make every effort to observe the rules applicable to the activities of the institution with due regard for the principle of sound financial management required by Article 2 of the Financial Regulation. In this particular case, the fact that the complainant was known to have travelled to Brussels from Helsinki rather than from Uganda led to some difficulty with the approval of payment at the maximum rate. Nonetheless, instructions have been issued to the staff concerned to ensure that the rules governing the reimbursement of travel expenses in respect of participation in the written tests for a competition are applied in their entirety. **The complainant's observations** The Ombudsman's services contacted the complainant on 4 October 2000 by telephone. During this conversation, the complainant declared that she was satisfied with the outcome of the complaint. A written note was sent by the complainant on 24 October 2000, in which she further stated that the amount reimbursed by the Parliament does not cover the full travel expenses. She also considered it reasonable that the Parliament should contribute to the accommodation costs.

THE DECISION

1 Full reimbursement of travel expenses The complainant claimed that she has not been reimbursed correctly for her travel expenses given that her place of residence and work was Uganda at the time she was invited for the competition. The Parliament confirmed that according to paragraph 3 of the relevant provision governing the reimbursement of travel expenses, candidate's place of residence is deemed to be the place to which Parliament sent the invitation to the competition, which, in the complainant's case, was Uganda. It therefore issued instructions for the maximum payment of EUR 180 to the complainant. **2 Conclusion** The Ombudsman therefore considers that the Parliament has taken steps to settle the matter. The Ombudsman decided to close the case. The President of the European Parliament will also be informed of this decision. Yours sincerely Jacob SÖDERMAN