

Citizens make increasing use of the European Ombudsman

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Citizens are making increasing use of their right to complain to the European Ombudsman, with complaints rising by an unprecedented 54% in the first ten months of 2004 compared to the same period in 2003. According to the Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, "I am confident that the rise in complaints reflects citizens' increasing knowledge about their rights rather than worsening administrative behaviour by European institutions". Nevertheless, there is always room for improvement. With this in mind, the Ombudsman will highlight a number of issues during the upcoming European Parliament debate on his Annual Report 2003, focusing on:

Greater transparency: "We should not underestimate the importance of transparency in winning the trust of citizens," says the Ombudsman. The De Rossa Report (1) rightly highlights this area as a matter of concern, as evidenced by the fact that lack or refusal of information still accounts for the greatest proportion of admissible complaints to the Ombudsman. "It is for this reason that only last week, in response to a complaint from a Member of the European Parliament, I called on the Council of the European Union to review its refusal to decide to meet publicly whenever it is acting in its legislative capacity. The Constitution for Europe provides for the Council to meet in public when considering and voting on a draft legislative act. As the Constitution has already been signed by all of the Member States, citizens should not have to wait until it enters into force for this basic advance in openness. I firmly believe that deliberating behind closed doors - on issues that affect the daily lives of our citizens - is something we cannot defend," the Ombudsman argues.

Good Administrative Behaviour: The European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour, endorsed by the European Parliament back in 2001, is not yet fully applied by all the EU institutions and bodies. "I am concerned that the present situation, in which there are many different and overlapping Codes, makes it difficult for citizens to understand their rights," says the Ombudsman. "I expect the incoming Commission to build upon the commitments of its predecessor by beginning to work promptly on a European Administrative Law, for which there is a legal basis in the Constitution."

Further information

The European Parliament will hold its debate on the work of the European Ombudsman in 2003 on 18 November at 10.00 am in Strasbourg. The Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2003 - along with a separate "Executive Summary and Statistics" - is available in 20 languages on his



website at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/report/en/default.htm> [Link]

The 2003 Report records the progress made by the institution in handling complaints, promoting good administration and making itself better known to citizens.

For further information, including more details about complaints received in 2004, please call Ms Rosita Agnew, Press and Communications Officer, tel. +33 6 78 16 06 19.

(1) Report on the annual report on the activities of the European Ombudsman for the year 2003, available on:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/omk/sipade2?PROG=REPORT&L=EN&MAX=40&WS=10&XSL=LAST&NAV=S>
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