

10 years, 20 000 complaints for the European Ombudsman

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The European Ombudsman institution celebrates its 10th anniversary this autumn. Recently, it received its 20 000th complaint. Commenting on this milestone, the Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, said: "Much has been achieved for citizens over the past decade but a lot still needs to be done to ensure a top class EU administration. We will work hard to ensure that each inquiry we carry out brings us one step closer to making a reality the citizens' fundamental right to good administration, promised to them in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. When we cannot deal directly with the complaint, we will endeavour to advise the complainant where to turn for a prompt and effective resolution of their problem." The Mavrommatis report on the activities of the European Ombudsman in 2004 (1) echoes these aims, urging the Ombudsman "...to continue his efforts and to develop his activities ... so that he will be seen by citizens as the guardian of good administration" The Mavrommatis report will be debated by the European Parliament on 27 October at 10.00 am, in Strasbourg.

Ten years of the Ombudsman

Ten years of the European Ombudsman has led to a more open, accountable and service-minded EU administration. From promoting greater transparency to guaranteeing fair treatment for contractors and grant holders, and from ensuring equality in recruitment to insisting that the institutions and bodies give reasons for their decisions, the Ombudsman has worked hard so that citizens' affairs are handled "impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the EU institutions and bodies", as explicitly provided for in "the right to good administration" contained in Article 41 of the EU Charter.

The European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour (2) explains to citizens what this right means in practice and gives essential guidance to public officials as to what is expected of them in this regard. The Code has been adopted and is applied in national, regional and local administrations from Portugal to Italy, from Wallonia to Greece, and from Romania to Croatia. Further afield, the Civil Service Reform Commission of Afghanistan has recently asked for the Code to be distributed to its administrators. "This truly is an example of best practice in Europe having a global impact," says Mr Diamandouros.

"In light of the fact that public administrations all over Europe have adopted the Code, it is surely baffling for the citizen to discover that different EU institutions and bodies apply different



Codes," the Ombudsman argues. "This can only lead to confusion. Surely the time has come for all institutions and bodies to follow the European Code." The Mavrommatis report backs this call, while President Barroso signaled his support when the Ombudsman met the College of Commissioners in May this year. "A common Code followed by all EU institutions and bodies would go a long way towards making the citizen's fundamental right to good administration a reality. For the Ombudsman, that would be a very welcome anniversary gift, indeed," Mr Diamandouros concludes.

For further information, please call Ms Rosita Agnew, Head of the Communications Sector, tel. +32 485 933 850.

(1) Report on the Annual Report on the activities of the European Ombudsman for the year 2004, available on:

<http://www.europarl.europa.eu/omk/sipade3?TYPE-DOC=REPORT&REF=A6-2005-0276&MODE=SIP&L=EN&LST>

[Link] The Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2004 - 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 Report records the progress made by the institution in handling complaints, promoting good administration and making itself better known to citizens in 2004.

(2) A new edition of the Code was published recently in 24 languages. It is available on the Ombudsman's website at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/code/en/default.htm> [Link]