

Use your right to complain, says the European Ombudsman

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EU citizens, residents, NGOs, enterprises, regional and local authorities, interest groups and the media should be made aware of the right to complain to the European Ombudsman. According to **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, "Complaints are our lifeblood; they give us an insight into what is going wrong in the EU institutions and bodies. So using the right to complain is essential to improving the administration."

This conviction encouraged the Ombudsman to mark ten years of the institution by holding a press seminar and public workshop entitled **"The European Ombudsman: 10 years, 20,000 complaints - too many? too few?"** These two events focused on how to raise awareness about the right to complain to the Ombudsman and on areas for improvement within the EU administration.

Background

Since 1995, the European Ombudsman has dealt with more than 20,000 complaints and opened more than 2,750 inquiries. The result: greater access to documents, the abolition of age discrimination in recruitment, fewer problems with late payment, to name but a few of the outcomes. Ten years of the European Ombudsman have led to a more open and accountable EU administration.

Too many complaints?

There are areas that still give cause for concern. Over one-fifth of the Ombudsman's inquiries concern a "lack of transparency" in the EU administration. Sometimes, the institutions could go further but choose not to. One example: The Ombudsman recently called on the Council to review its refusal to meet publicly whenever it is acting in its legislative capacity.

More has to be done, therefore. "While I recognise and salute the great efforts that have been made over the past decade to instill a service culture in the EU institutions and bodies, I know that problems persist and that there is still cause for complaints," says the Ombudsman.

Too few complaints?



"And yet many of those potential complaints are not reaching us. While the overall number of complaints increases each year, there is much room for improvement in terms of getting the right information out to the right people," argues Mr Diamandouros. More than 70% of complaints received fall outside the Ombudsman's mandate, while many are not aware that it is limited to the EU institutions and bodies. Only a very small percentage of complaints come from companies, NGOs and associations (5%), even though these entities often have legitimate cause to complain about tenders, contracts and late payment. Journalists also rarely complain to the Ombudsman, accounting for less than 1% of total complaints.

As the institution embarks upon its second decade, the Ombudsman is determined to raise awareness about what he can do to make a top class European administration a reality.

To find out more about the events and to review the programme, please visit:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/10anniversary/en/default.htm> [Link]