

European Ombudsman asks Parliament to apologise for failing to reply to citizens

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The European Ombudsman, **Mr Jacob Söderman**, has asked the European Parliament to apologise to four citizens who applied for one of its design competitions. The four candidates had complained to the Ombudsman after they had not been notified by the Parliament of the result of the competition, over fifteen months after the closing date for applications. In a draft recommendation to the Parliament, the Ombudsman concludes that the Parliament provided no explanation for its actions and recommends that the institution should therefore apologise as a matter of good administrative behaviour. The complaints, which were submitted independently by the four applicants but treated jointly, concerned the design competition organised by the Parliament for the refurbishing of the Parliament's Léopold Building in Brussels. Although the deadline for the competition was 15 January 1997, by the time that the applicants complained to the Ombudsman in the spring of 1998, the Parliament had still not notified them of the competition outcome. Three of the four candidates had even written to the Parliament to find out, but had received no reply. In June 1998, the Parliament finally informed the four that it had decided to retain none of the candidates of the competition. When asked to explain the delay in notifying the candidates of the result, Parliament merely observed that it *"was caused by the length of time taken by the Selection Board to reach its decision, which in its turn was the result of the parliamentary workload of its members"*. The Ombudsman does not consider this explanation to be satisfactory and concludes that the Parliament failed to explain why the Selection Board needed, after its meeting of 17 April 1997 where it concluded that none of the 15 projects could be retained, another 13 months to confirm this conclusion. The Parliament therefore introduced an unnecessary and unjustifiably long delay in informing the candidates about the outcome of their applications. In his draft recommendation to the Parliament, the Ombudsman proposes that it should: *"as a matter of good administrative behaviour, present to the complainants its apologies for the undue delay in informing them about the outcome of the competition, and for not having answered to the various complainants' letters which explicitly asked for information on the results of the competition."* The European Parliament has until 31 March 2000 to respond to the Ombudsman's recommendation. *For further information, please call Mr Olivier Verheecke, legal officer, tel. + 32 (0)2 284 2003.*