

Maladministration in Europe -the Ombudsman strikes

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The European Ombudsman, **Mr Jacob SÖDERMAN**, will present his Annual Report for 1997 to the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament at its meeting on 20 April 1998. The Report describes a 40% increase in cases he received during the last year. Of the 200 inquiries initiated, 16 were settled by the institution after the Ombudsman had started inquiring into the complaint. A friendly settlement was reached in 3 cases. In 21 cases a critical remark was given to the institution or body concerned. No maladministration was found in 59 cases. But far more interesting than the statistics are the individual cases behind the numbers. Every complaint received is a personal story of dissatisfaction. Every case of maladministration uncovered affects real people. At the press conference, the European Ombudsman highlights the most interesting cases of 1997 including

- alleged maladministration in a European Parliament tendering procedure concerning accessibility of disabled people to the Parliament buildings,
- failure by the European Commission to respect medical secrecy,
- alleged infringement of a European Commission official's freedom of expression,
- lack of transparency in running of a European Union recruitment competition.

The European Ombudsman will also describe his special investigations into

- lack of transparency in recruitment procedures,
- use of age limits in the recruitment of personnel to the Community institutions,
- access to documents held by the Community institutions.

In the first two of these own initiative inquiries investigations are still continuing in 1998. All the cases that were closed last year can be found in the Annual Report for 1997 of the European Ombudsman. *The Report is available at the press conference, and from the European Ombudsman's offices in Strasbourg, Ilta HELKAMA (33) (0)3 88 17 23 98, and in Brussels, Ms Ursula GARDERET, (32) (0)2 284 23 00.*