

European Ombudsman launches public inquiry into late payment by the Commission

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The European Ombudsman has opened an own-initiative inquiry into late payment by the Commission after receiving an increasing number of complaints about the matter. In recent complaints to the Ombudsman, an expert claims to have waited over seven and a half months for payment of expenses and to have been told that "delays are inherent in the system"; a Brussels-based policy centre claims that an invoice was not paid for over 16 months and a company waited nine months for payment before approaching the Ombudsman because of concern that a complaint might jeopardise its future relations with the Commission. In the own-initiative inquiry, the Ombudsman asks the Commission to: - inform him of the steps which it has taken to identify and deal with the causes of delay in making payments to contractors and to the beneficiaries of grants and subsidies; - present an analysis of the causes of the problem of late payment and the possible ways in which it could be dealt with; - consider improvements in the procedures that contractors can use to obtain redress in case of a dispute with the Commission about the adequacy of the contractor's performance, or of the documentation the contractor has supplied. The number of undertakings and citizens who may be affected by problems arising from late payment by the Commission is potentially very large. The Ombudsman will therefore send a copy of his letter announcing the inquiry to representative organisations and publish it on his website (<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu> [Link]). This will provide an opportunity for the public to submit observations relevant to the inquiry. The own-initiative inquiry will not deal with individual cases, which could be the subject of separate complaints to the Ombudsman. *For further information, please call Mr Ian Harden, Head of Secretariat, tel. + 33 (0)3 88 17 23 84.*