

Ombudsman invites comments on late payment initiative -Third parties asked to contribute their views online

Press release no. 17/2000 - 30/11/2000

The European Ombudsman, **Mr Jacob Söderman**, is asking for comments on the latest developments in his own initiative inquiry into the subject of late payment by the European Commission. The Ombudsman this week added the Definitive Opinion of the European Commission to his Website in 11 languages. Yesterday, the Ombudsman invited third parties to give their comments.

The Ombudsman launched his inquiry in December 1999 after receiving an increasing number of complaints about late payment. An expert claimed 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 claimed that an invoice was not paid for over 16 months. One company waited nine months for payment before approaching the Ombudsman because of concern that a complaint might jeopardise its future relations with the Commission.

All exchanges between the Ombudsman and the Commission during this inquiry have been posted on the Ombudsman's Website in order to encourage public participation. As a result, a considerable number of third parties have written to the Ombudsman in order to welcome his initiative and to give their comments on it.

In its Definitive Opinion, the Commission refers to a "Study on the European Commission's payment times" and to its "Guidelines concerning Commission payment times", which it has made available to the Ombudsman in his inquiry. Both are also available on the Ombudsman's Website.

The European Ombudsman's Website can be found at the following address:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>

For further information, please call Mr Gerhard Grill, Principal Legal Officer, tel. + 33 (0) 3 88 17 2423.