

European Ombudsman welcomes Parliament's reform of the allowances system -MEPs have to justify expenses claims

Press release no. 2/1998 - 06/07/1998

European Ombudsman, **Mr Jacob SÖDERMAN**, welcomes the European Parliament's recent reform of the rules governing payment of allowances to MEPs. In his decision on four complaints received from European citizens, the Ombudsman states that the Parliament's move to reform the allowances system is in accordance with good administrative behaviour. The Ombudsman has closed his investigation, because the Court of Auditors, a specialized institution with more far-reaching powers in the field, has begun an audit of the allowances system. The Ombudsman began investigating the system of MEPs allowances in December 1996, after receiving four complaints about the matter from citizens in the UK, Sweden and Denmark. The complaints referred to media reports that public money was being spent irregularly. According to the complaints, the allowances system was being used to give MEPs extra pay, contrary to the rule that MEPs are paid by the Member State from which they are elected. They also alleged that MEPs could receive allowances without having to justify the expenses they were meant to cover. The Ombudsman's inquiry dealt only with the system of allowances, the position of individual MEPs not being within his remit. On 30 October 1997, the Parliament informed the Ombudsman that it had decided to set up a system of permanent control of the allowances. From November 1997, MEPs have been required to submit supporting documents for travel expenses. From December 1997, the daily allowances of MEPs absent from more than half of the votes or plenary sessions are reduced by 50%. The Parliament has indicated that the reform process will continue. In reply, the complainants expressed satisfaction that the Parliament has adopted new rules. According to available information, the Court of Auditors is currently evaluating the system of MEPs allowances and expenses. The Court of Auditors has special expertise and responsibility in relation to regular spending of public funds and issues of sound financial management. Applying to normal principle that operates in the Member States an Ombudsmen with a general remit should not normally continue to deal with a matter which is being considered by a specialized supervisory body, the European Ombudsman has decided to end his investigation. The final results of the Court of Auditors' work will be published in due course. *For further information, please contact Mr Peter DYRBERG, Principal legal adviser, tel. 32 2 284 2003*