

Ombudsman criticises Commission's passive attitude towards possible racism in recruitment

Press release no. 4/2002 - 20/02/2002

The European Ombudsman, **Jacob Söderman**, is not satisfied with the Commission's response to a complaint he received about possible racism in EU recruitment. The complainant - a Dutch citizen - points out that while more than 30 million people of ethnic minority origin live in the EU, hardly any of them are employed in the structure of the European Communities.

Mr. Söderman says that the Commission's opinion in this case discloses a passive attitude towards the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the EU institutions and bodies. This is hard to reconcile with numerous guidelines and rules that have been adopted, including:

- the Employment Guidelines 2000 agreed by the European Council in Helsinki in December 1999. These call for a coherent set of policies aimed at combating discrimination against groups such as ethnic minorities;
- Council Directive 2000/43 (1) that requires the Member States to designate bodies for the promotion of equal treatment without discrimination on the grounds of racial or ethnic origin;
- the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, proclaimed in Nice in December 2000.

The Commission considers the under-representation of ethnic minorities in the workforce of the Community institutions and bodies to result from a disproportionately small number of applications from them. It is, however, unable to provide evidence to exclude other possible explanations. The Commission should thus consider taking measures to obtain information concerning the chances of people of ethnic minority origin in the recruitment procedure. It is to respond to the Ombudsman before 30 April, 2002.

For further information, please call Ian Harden, Head of the Legal Department, tel: +32 (0) 2 284 38 49.

(1) Council Directive 2000/43/EC of 29 June 2000 implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin 2000 OJ L 180/22.