

Most EU institutions do not use age limits in recruitment, says European Ombudsman

Press release no. 18/2001 - 03/10/2001

The European Ombudsman, **Jacob Söderman**, today welcomed news from thirteen EU institutions and bodies, including the European Central Bank and Europol, that they do not use age limits in their recruitment procedures. The information came in response to the Ombudsman's own initiative inquiry launched last May into the use of age limits in recruitment to the EU institutions.

These institutions and bodies (1) cited the general principle of equality, the merits of life-long learning and the value of professional expertise and personal experience as reasons for their policy. They also referred to the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU, which guarantees everyone the "right to engage in work" and "the freedom to seek..work" (Article 15) and prohibits age discrimination (Article 21). The Charter was proclaimed at the Nice summit by the Presidents of the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission in December 2000.

Five institutions and bodies admitted that they continue to apply age limits in their recruitment procedures: the Court of Auditors, the Court of Justice, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Office of Harmonisation in the Internal Market. Their Secretary Generals claim that age limits are justified on grounds of sound financial management. They argue, amongst other things, that young workers are more productive and adaptable, more willing to travel and less likely to be absent from work.

The European Parliament, the European Commission and the Committee of Regions have not yet replied to Mr. Söderman's letter, despite the deadline of 31 July 2001. Although the Commission committed itself to abolish age limits from 1 July 2001, it continues to publish notices of competition containing age limits.

Mr. Söderman launched the own initiative inquiry to help ensure that the rights laid down in the Charter of Fundamental Rights become a reality for European citizens. "Failure to respect the rights in the Charter constitutes maladministration" said the Ombudsman. "It is my job to combat maladministration. I will now examine the reasons which a small number of institutions have given for continuing to apply age limits to see if they are legally justified," he concluded.



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(1) European Central Bank, European Investment Bank, Europol, European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, European Environment Agency, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug addiction, Community Plant Variety Office, European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, European Training Foundation, European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, European Agency for the Evaluation of Medicinal Products, Translation Centre for Bodies of the European Union, European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training