

## Ombudsman achieves friendly solution to complaint about VIP tickets

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has helped settle a dispute between the Commission and the NGO *Friends of the Earth Europe* concerning two high ranking Commission officials who accepted VIP tickets for the Rugby World Cup in Paris from a sportswear supplier. According to *Friends of the Earth Europe*, this could have resulted in a conflict of interest.

The Ombudsman found no reason to think that the judgement or impartiality of the officials had been compromised. However, he suggested that the Commission should acknowledge that it would have been better not to allow its officials to accept the hospitality in question. The Commission agreed with this proposal and the complainant was satisfied with its statement.

Mr Diamandouros commented: "I very much welcome the Commission's positive reply to my friendly solution proposal. I also welcome the Commission's announcement that it will update its internal rules on accepting gifts and hospitality. I encourage the Commission to publish the updated rules in order to help strengthen public confidence in the EU institutions."

### **VIP tickets for Rugby World Cup from sportswear supplier**

In April 2008, *Friends of the Earth Europe* complained that two high ranking Commission officials had accepted VIP tickets from a sportswear supplier for the Rugby World Cup in Paris. According to the complainant, this could have resulted in a conflict of interest, since both officials dealt with anti-dumping cases in which the sportswear supplier could be interested. The NGO claimed that the Commission should implement strict guidelines regarding gifts, favours or payments from third parties.

The Commission stated that it already had clear rules concerning the ethics of its officials. It clarified that the two officials had asked for permission to accept the tickets, which was granted in accordance with its internal rules.

During his investigation, the Ombudsman found no evidence to suggest an actual conflict of interest. However, he stressed the importance for the Commission to maintain public confidence in its work and to protect its staff from unjustified suspicion. In a friendly solution proposal, the Ombudsman, therefore, asked the Commission to acknowledge that it would have been better



not to have allowed the officials to accept the tickets.

The Commission agreed with the proposal and informed the Ombudsman that it is currently updating its internal rules relating to the acceptance of gifts.

The Ombudsman's decision is available at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/decision.faces/en/4356/html.bookmark> [Link]