

Ombudsman opens public consultation on Commission's late payment problems

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has invited individuals, companies, NGOs, associations and other interested persons to participate in a public consultation concerning the European Commission's late payment problems. Since 1995, the Ombudsman has conducted 63 investigations concerning late payments by the Commission. In addition, he has opened three investigations on his own initiative into measures taken by the Commission to improve the situation. The current, ongoing investigation started in February 2009.

In the Ombudsman's view, the Commission has, during the past few years, made progress in this front. Further improvements could, however, be envisaged. Before he takes any further steps in this case, therefore, he is keen to receive feedback from concerned parties about what the Commission can and should, in their view, do further to reduce late payments.

Background

Since the Office was set up in 1995, the Ombudsman has conducted 63 investigations concerning late payments by the Commission. Most of these complaints were lodged by NGOs, companies, research centres, universities and other associations involved in EU-funded projects and contracts.

In 2007, the Ombudsman found that one in five, that is, 20%, of all the Commission's payments was late. At the same time, the Ombudsman commended the Commission for the measures already taken to reduce payment delays, namely, simplifying procedures and ensuring better internal monitoring. He also applauded the decision to pay interest automatically in certain cases when payment has been delayed.

During his current investigation into the Commission's late payment problems, the Commission, in its opinion on the matter, provided data which show that in 2008 delays still occurred in more than 22% of all cases. It also announced new measures to improve the situation, such as stricter time limits and an increased use of lump sum payments.

The Ombudsman welcomes these additional measures. With an eye, however, to ascertaining whether the efforts undertaken by the Commission are sufficient and, if not, to determining what further steps could be taken to reduce payment delays, he invites interested parties in civil



society to express their views on this important issue. To be sure, the aim of the public consultation is not to solve individual late payment cases. Such cases can, as always, be submitted to the Ombudsman as individual complaints, using the on-line form available on the Ombudsman's website.

Contributions to this public consultation may be submitted by 31 March 2010 in any of the 23 official languages.

The Ombudsman's invitation to submit comments is available at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/correspondence.faces/en/4500/html.bookmark> [Link]