



## Ombudsman opens investigation into Commission study on use of non-human primates in research

The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has opened an investigation into how the European Commission conducted a study into the use for research purposes of non-human primates, such as chimpanzees. This follows a complaint from the European Coalition to end Animal Experiments (ECEAE), alleging that the relevant Commission working group lacked expertise in the area and that it failed to take certain evidence into account. The Ombudsman has asked the Commission for its opinion on the matter by 30 April 2010. The Ombudsman's inquiry will examine whether there has been any maladministration by the Commission.

Noting that this issue is of great interest for the general public, Mr Diamandouros said: "The Ombudsman has a vital role to play in promoting effective and transparent policy-making in the EU institutions. I expect this role to become even more important in light of the Lisbon Treaty, which strengthens the right of citizens and associations to participate in the democratic life of the Union. The Treaty also requires the Union institutions to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative organisations and civil society."

### **Alleged insufficient expertise of working group**

In 2007, the European Parliament urged the Commission to set up a timetable for providing alternatives to the use of non-human primates (NHP) in scientific experiments. In May 2008, the Commission asked its Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks (SCHER) to issue an opinion on the possibilities of replacing NHP in research. In October 2008, the Commission organised a public hearing on this issue. A number of animal protection, medical and patient safety organisations, including the ECEAE, subsequently complained to the Commission, alleging that the process had been unfair.

In May 2009, the ECEAE lodged a complaint with the Ombudsman. It alleged that the Commission working group charged with issuing the opinion on such experiments did not have sufficient expertise in the area of NHP research. The complainant also alleged that the Commission did not sufficiently take into account a substantial amount of evidence supplied by interest groups about NHP research and alternatives to it.

The Ombudsman has asked the Commission to provide information about how the experts of the working group were selected. He also wants to know the basis on which the Commission concluded that SCHER had considered all relevant contributions from third parties. The Commission has been invited to submit its opinion regarding ECEAE's allegations by 30 April 2010.

