

Community law must be respected, says Ombudsman

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The European Ombudsman, **Mr. Jacob Söderman**, today stressed the need for Community law to be respected at all levels of the Union. "The citizens can never fully believe in the European Union unless the law is respected," he said. The Ombudsman insisted that the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights should be made legally binding wherever Community law is being applied.

The Ombudsman called for the network of ombudsmen and petitions committees in the Member States to be strengthened to ensure that Community law is respected all over the Union. This network - established by the European Ombudsman in 1996 - could help to:

- **supervise the correct application of Community law by the Member States** According to the Ombudsman, many complaints about infringements of Community law could be dealt with effectively by ombudsmen and petitions committees in the Member States. This would allow the Commission in its role of "Guardian of the Treaty" to focus its resources on the most important issues of principle;

- **supervise the correct application of the Charter of Fundamental Rights** The network could play an essential role in ensuring the Charter is correctly applied. If a normal ombudsman investigation fails to bring about a solution, the European Ombudsman could refer fundamental rights cases to the Court of Justice.

Mr. Söderman was responding to calls for the European Ombudsman to deal with complaints concerning Community law wherever it is applied in the Union. He outlined his views during the presentation of his Annual Report 2001 to the Parliament.

Commenting on the work of the Union's first Ombudsman, Eurig Wyn - Rapporteur on the Ombudsman's 2001 Report - applauded "the outstanding way in which Mr Söderman has established the role of European Ombudsman".

Mr. Söderman began work as the first European Ombudsman in 1995. The European Parliament re-elected him in October 1999. He will retire in April 2003 at the age of 65.

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