

## ReNEUAL conference - Closing remarks by the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly

Speech - **City** Brussels - **Country** Belgium - **Date** 19/05/2014

**ReNEUAL conference** *Tuesday, 20 May 2014, European Parliament, room ASP A1G-2 Closing remarks by the European Ombudsman, Emily O'Reilly*

When I gave the oath of office as European Ombudsman at the Court of Justice last year, I said that my ambition is to help the EU institutions to live up to their own best selves.

That is in the interest of the institutions and their staff.

It is in the interest of persons who have direct dealings with the institutions.

But above all, it is in the interest of European citizens generally.

As European Ombudsman, the gap between the governing institutions of the European Union and its citizens is my particular concern. Those of us who work in the institutions need to understand that we face a crisis of European citizenship. And one key aspect of that crisis is that many citizens see the EU and its institutions as remote and alien.

This is the week of the elections for the European Parliament. For the first time, the choice that citizens make in voting for Members of Parliament should also have a direct impact on who will lead the European Commission for the next five years. As *Ruling the Void*, the late Peter Mair's posthumously published work reminds us, democracy must have a popular component, in the form of elections and electoral competition between political parties and formations, in order to thrive.

Legal and other non-majoritarian forms of accountability --including, I would add, the Ombudsman -- should not be seen as an alternative to, or replacement for, popular democracy. But in my view, they do constitute an essential complement to popular democracy, not least because the complexity of the contemporary world makes it a practical impossibility for a small group of elected politicians fully to control the exercise of power by public authorities and institutions.

The enormous work the Research Network in European Union Administrative law has undertaken and successfully accomplished over the five years since it was founded makes



more visible, and more understandable, the administrative framework through which the EU institutions carry out their functions. I am convinced that this work could have a significant long-term impact in helping the EU institutions to live up to their own best selves by acting fairly, transparently, effectively and in a way that is open to participation by affected interests and by citizens generally.

No set of rules can possibly hope to cover every conceivable issue or situation. There must always be room for the exercise of good judgment in applying principles. The law should not become a shield for the administration to hide behind by saying that a particular action is not expressly allowed or forbidden.

To my mind it is of fundamental importance that ReNEUAL has succeeded in avoiding rules that are excessively detailed. The draft model rules do not invite a box ticking approach, nor do they create an obstacle course that inhibits sound judgment or defies common sense.

I am not going to try to summarise the rich discussions that have taken place yesterday and today. I know that the ReNEUAL organisers will themselves ensure that their final product fully reflects the many useful suggestions and comments that have been made during our conference.

I would, however, like to take the opportunity of this closing address to add one suggestion of my own. The language of the draft model rules is plain and clear. But necessarily, it is a language that addresses a specialist audience with legal training, rather than the ordinary citizen. To my mind, one of the most useful innovations of the European Commission in the communication field has been the introduction of "citizens' summaries" of proposed legislation. I very much hope that, once the text of the model rules has been finalised, our ReNEUAL colleagues will also produce a citizens' summary, so that ordinary citizens without legal training can understand their purpose and content. I would be happy for my Office to cooperate with you in that task.

I think that producing a citizens' summary could make a real contribution to convincing citizens that the Union institutions work on their behalf and are accountable to them.

Before concluding, I would like to thank the many people who have contributed their time, effort and skill to make this conference a success. My special thanks go to the European Parliament for allowing us to use its facilities and to Mr MARTÍNEZ and Mr BERLINGUER for their presence at this busy time.

I would like to thank all the speakers, discussants and chairs, as well as the academic colleagues of the ReNEUAL steering committee who liaised with us in planning the conference: Professor Herwig HOFMANN of the University of Luxembourg, Professor Jens-Peter SCHNEIDER of the University of Freiburg and Professor Jacques ZILLER of the University of Pavia.

As usual, the Ombudsman's Communication Unit have done a wonderful job of organising the



conference.

Last, but by no means least, I would like to thank Maria PSARROU, the assistant to the Secretary General. She has been the key point of contact between ReNEUAL and the Ombudsman's office and has provided the drive and energy to make sure the conference actually happened. Thank you, Maria!

All of us will, I am sure, now want to get to wherever we are going to cast our vote in the European elections.

I wish you all a safe journey.