

2003, the European Year of People with Disabilities: Ombudsman to investigate the integration of people with disabilities

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has opened an own-initiative investigation into the integration of people with disabilities. As the European Year of People with Disabilities draws to an end, the Ombudsman will investigate what measures have been taken by the European Commission to ensure that disabled people are not discriminated against in their relations with the institution. At this stage, the Ombudsman has decided to limit the scope of his inquiry to the Commission, in view of its central institutional role within the EU.

The Ombudsman wants to assess whether the Commission's actions in this area are consistent with the institution's legal obligations and stated commitments. Recognising the Commission's clear commitments towards people who constitute one of the most disadvantaged groups in our society, the Ombudsman said that: "The seriousness of their situation demands that the proclaimed commitments be put into practice by means of effective actions. Good administration requires prompt and effective action to implement these commitments." He has therefore asked the Commission to inform him of:

- the actions it has taken or intends to take in order to ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against, in their relations with the institution, as well as
- the timetable for their adoption.

The Commission has been asked to respond by 29 February 2004.

To ensure that interested parties have the possibility to make their views known, if they so wish, the Ombudsman will be informing relevant governmental and non-governmental organisations of his own initiative inquiry and will be publishing all relevant documents in a specially-created section of his website at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/correspondence.faces/en/3541/html.bookmark> [Link]

Background

People with disabilities constitute a significant proportion of the population of the Community. As both European institutions and Member States have publicly stated, this group of people faces a wide range of obstacles which prevents its members from achieving equal opportunities,



independence and full economic and social integration. Several initiatives have been taken at the Community level to address this issue, many of them by the Commission (1) . Article 26 of the EU's Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right of people with disabilities to benefit from supportive measures which guarantee their independence, social and occupational integration and participation in the life of the community.

For further information, please call José Martínez Aragón, Principal Legal Officer, tel. +33 3 88 17 24 01.

(1) In 1998, the institutions adopted a "*Code of good practice for the employment of people with disabilities*" , which provides a statement of the institutions' policy in this area, as well as guidelines for their services as regards related actions. In a Communication adopted in 2000, entitled "*Towards a barrier-free Europe for people with disabilities*" , the Commission restated the commitments set out in this Code and defined additional measures aimed at fostering the development of best practice within its own organisation.