



# Strategy of the European Ombudsman 'Towards 2019'

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## Foreword

In November 2014, I adopted the 'European Ombudsman Strategy Towards 2019', which set out the high-level objectives and the priorities for my mandate.

This Strategy has since served as a road map and a basis for what we have done to bring the European Ombudsman on to the next level of influence, relevance, and effectiveness.

The results and feedback to date are very encouraging, but I am nonetheless aware of the high expectations that citizens, civil society and businesses rightly have of the EU. My role as Ombudsman, within my remit and with the support of Parliament, is to help to meet these expectations.

As promised, we conducted a midterm strategy review. The responses and suggestions from our internal and external stakeholders, in addition to the dynamic and ever changing EU landscape, have helped us to refine and reformulate some priorities while maintaining the original high-level objectives.

These changes are reflected in the present document.

My hope and my ambition, for the remainder of my mandate, are to continue to help citizens secure their rights as EU citizens and to promote an even more open, accountable and citizen-friendly EU administration.

Emily O'Reilly

## 1. Mission and overview of role

*Our mission is to serve European democracy by working with the institutions of the European Union to create a more effective, accountable, transparent and ethical administration.*

### How we do it

The Ombudsman's independence is guaranteed by the Treaties.



We employ highly skilled and multilingual staff that assess citizen complaints against the EU institutions and secure redress when appropriate.

The Ombudsman also puts emphasis on conducting inquiries that are in the public interest. She further conducts wider strategic inquiries and initiatives when she considers that there are grounds to do so.

The Ombudsman moreover influences the development of good administrative practice in the EU institutions through outreach, guidelines and codes of good practice.

By acting strategically and using her influence and all tools available, the Ombudsman can maximise her limited resources.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights includes the right of EU citizens to complain to the Ombudsman. Companies, associations, and third country nationals resident in the EU also enjoy this right. The Ombudsman can deal with complaints about breaches of Charter rights, as well as other cases of maladministration. The Ombudsman therefore **empowers citizens** by helping them to realise their fundamental rights. In addition to the right to good administration, citizens have the right to know what the EU institutions are doing (transparency) and the right to participate in their activities. The Ombudsman is therefore central to the task of ensuring that all of those rights are enforced and protected by the EU institutions.

Finally, the Ombudsman promotes **good governance and a culture of public service** by helping the EU administration to work openly, effectively, and with integrity.

## Practising what we preach

We try to practise what we preach. That means acknowledging our own mistakes, welcoming scrutiny and learning from experience.

## Our Internal Charter of Good Practice

We commit to providing a service that demonstrates:

- Independence and neutrality
- Leadership in problem solving
- Innovative approaches to dispute resolution
- Systemic thinking
- External awareness and curiosity
- Responsiveness
- Empathy
- Openness and engagement



## Our commitment to our staff

We aim to provide a positive and collaborative working environment in which each person is treated with dignity and respect and where each person can develop their professional career ambitions in line with the needs and obligations of the institution.

## 2. The Strategy

The Strategy serves multiple purposes:

- it sets the high-level objectives achieved through concrete operations (explained in the Operating Framework [1] );
- it provides a multi-year framework for optimum use of the human and financial resources provided by the budgetary authority;
- it constitutes a benchmark for accountability by our external stakeholders.

## Our strategic objectives

Our strategy is to combine and achieve three **mutually re-enforcing** objectives.

They are: significant **relevance** within the EU and with our stakeholders; high **visibility** in support of our mission and a real and positive **impact** on the EU administration.

These objectives are supported by the internal objective of **efficiency** .

### Objective 1 – ensure relevance

**We want to maximise our value to citizens and other stakeholders by focusing on key systemic issues that are most relevant to their interests and concerns.**

### Priorities

- 1.** Strengthen our role as an acknowledged, trusted and independent authority on issues relevant to the Ombudsman's mandate, providing leadership on transparency, accountability and integrity.
- 2.** Engage with, and learn from, our stakeholders, including relevant influencers such as academics.
- 3.** Increase our awareness of the changing dynamics of the European Union and the political, social, economic and legal context in which we operate, where appropriate, to publicly



engage in, and contribute to, relevant debates and policy developments.

4. Cooperate with the European Network of Ombudsmen, other Member States' bodies and international networks and organisations to identify and promote the highest standards and best practices, for example in relation to human/fundamental rights and governance issues.

5. Contribute to developing, promoting and defending the concept of EU citizenship and the rights attached to it.

## Objective 2 –

### **achieve greater impact**

**We want to make a real difference to the quality of the work of the EU institutions by acting as a driver of change in key areas.**

## Priorities

1. In line with our integrated approach, continue proactively to identify areas of key strategic importance and to target appropriate resources on the investigation of systemic problems.

2. Optimise inquiry processes to deal with complaints of key strategic importance promptly and effectively. This is particularly important where the successful outcome of an inquiry is time-sensitive.

3. Use the full scope of the Ombudsman's powers to achieve positive outcomes from complaint handling and inquiry processes.

4. Continue to develop a more systematic and thorough follow-up of the outcomes of the Ombudsman's recommendations and suggestions to maximise compliance.

5. Strengthen and leverage broader co-operation and dialogue with the EU institutions and other stakeholders to ensure the continuous improvement of administrative practice.

## Objective 3 –

### **maintain high visibility**

**We want to enhance our ability to influence. Public and institutional awareness of the Ombudsman needs to be stronger and deeper.**

## Priorities

1. Ensure our communications are delivered with maximum clarity.

2. Continue to develop and use our online tools and channels and ensure maximum



adaptability in a dynamic online environment.

3. Strategically engage with the European Parliament and its committees on the broad range of issues of mutual concern, while being conscious always of our independence.
4. Co-operate with the European Network of Ombudsmen and other relevant umbrella organisations in informing citizens of their rights and of the Ombudsman's work.
5. Ensure that the Ombudsman is represented appropriately at key events and conferences, and encourage office representatives to identify and pursue networking and outreach opportunities.

## Objective 4 –

### **improve our efficiency**

We want to use our resources to achieve the best possible results.

## **Priorities**

1. Ensure the Ombudsman's budgetary resources are aligned with the strategy.
2. Maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of our processes and units, including IT systems. Where appropriate, consider adopting 'corporate' solutions of larger scale EU administrations.
3. Prioritise and resolve complaints as rapidly and efficiently as possible by using smart, flexible, tailored and robust working practices.
4. Encourage an internal culture of transparency, ethics, innovation and service to citizens.
5. Further develop the Office as an attractive, dynamic and important place to work for motivated, talented and ambitious people, by ensuring that our human resources framework and policies are fully implemented and updated as necessary.

## **3. Implementation and measurement**

Concrete actions to achieve the above objectives and priorities are planned and evaluated on an annual basis through the Annual Management Plan (AMP) and the Annual Activity Report (AAR). In the period covered by the current Strategy, the process for establishing the AMP is as follows:

In the Autumn, the Ombudsman's Secretary-General invites the managers of operational units to propose concrete actions to implement the Strategy based on the financial and human resources expected to be available to the Office in the following year. The proposals



will detail:

- how the actions will contribute to achieving the objectives and priorities of the Strategy;
- the resources necessary; and
- how the resources will be realised (for example, through efficiency gains and/or by reducing the resources devoted to other activities).

Following internal discussion and coordination, the Ombudsman decides on the AMP.

## Evaluation, measurement and reporting

Progress in achieving our objectives is measured using Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The KPIs adopted in 2015 are set out below, together with the targets established for 2017.

The KPIs and relevant targets are reviewed and, if necessary, revised on an annual basis.

Strategy objective

Measurement

Targets for 2017

KPI 1

Relevance

Perception of our external stakeholders

(rate of positive evaluation)

70%

KPI 2

Relevance

Percentage of complaints within the mandate

33%

KPI 3

Impact

Number of inquiries opened in public interest cases



(complaints & strategic inquiries & strategic initiatives)

30

KPI 4

Impact

Compliance (composite indicator)

4a - Overall compliance

4b- Compliance in public interest cases

90%

90%

KPI 5

Visibility

Media and social media activities

(composite indicator)

5a- Number of media articles

5b - Engagement on Twitter

3 300

20 000

KPI 6

Visibility

Web activities (composite indicator)

6a- Visitors to the website

6b - Advice given through the interactive guide to contact a member of the ENO

400 000



8 000

KPI 7

Efficiency

Handling of complaints and inquiries

(composite indicator)

7a- Proportion of cases in which the admissibility decision is taken in one month

7b- Proportion of inquiries closed within 6 months

7c- Proportion of inquiries closed within 18 months

90%

50%

80%

KPI 8

Efficiency

Budget implementation (composite indicator)

8a- Rate of budget implementation

8b- Number of payments beyond 30 days

93%

0

Scoreboards to monitor and report on our performance against the KPI targets are updated periodically.

Overall evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy is done in the Ombudsman's Annual Report and in the Annual Activity Report by the Ombudsman's Secretary-General.





[1] <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/strategy/home.faces>