



Ombudsman sends Special Report to Parliament on lack of Council legislative accountability

Press release no. 6/2018 - 17/05/2018

European Ombudsman Emily O'Reilly has for only the second time during her mandate sent a Special Report to the European Parliament, on her inquiry to improve the accountability of the Council's legislative work.

The Ombudsman issued a number of Recommendations to the Council of the EU in February, following a year long inquiry, including that it systematically record Member State positions both in its preparatory meetings and in COREPER (ambassador) meetings; and that it draw up clear and appropriate criteria for the classification of Council documents as the current practice severely limits their timely accessibility.

The Council however failed to respond to the Recommendations by the legal three-month deadline on 9 May, and so given its importance for the democratic legitimacy of the EU, the Ombudsman decided to call now on Parliament's support.

"Europeans need to know what their national governments are doing in Brussels, especially when making new EU laws which affect their daily lives. Making more information public would also help discourage national Ministers from 'blaming Brussels' for EU laws they themselves helped to shape and adopt.

"The Council and the Parliament are equal legislators for the vast majority of EU laws, yet there is a large accountability discrepancy between them vis-à-vis the transparency of their work. While it is easy to follow an evolving piece of draft legislation in the Parliament, the same cannot be said of the Council where the national governments are represented.

"This is only the second Special Report I have launched, as normally EU institutions cooperate very well with my office.

"My ultimate aim is to help citizens participate in the democratic life of the EU. Parliament's support and action on this matter will be important ahead of the European elections next year," said the Ombudsman.

Background

There have been 19 Special Reports from the Ombudsman to Parliament since 1995 and all have been successfully supported. Four previous reports have concerned the Council, including one about the importance of the Council legislating in public.



The Ombudsman's Special Report can be found here .

Annual Report 2017

Today, the Ombudsman also launches her Annual Report for 2017. Concerns about transparency in the EU administration accounted for the biggest proportion of the Ombudsman's cases (20.6%) in 2017. The year also saw the number of complaints rise again due mainly to increased visibility of the office.

In 2017, the Ombudsman's interventions led to progress in several areas, including Commission Expert Groups being made more transparent, the Code of Conduct for Commissioners being tightened; and the conflict of interest rules for Special Advisers improved.

The Ombudsman also launched a Fast-Track procedure for handling access to documents complaints and hosted the first ever EU Award for Good Administration , handing out prizes in seven different categories.

The complete Annual Report 2017 is available here .