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Ombudsman: Commission clarifies permitted food contamination levels after Fukushima nuclear accident

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The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in a Member State, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman offers a fast, flexible and free means of solving problems with the EU administration.

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has welcomed the European Commission's clarifications concerning the maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination for foodstuffs in the EU, following the Fukushima nuclear accident in Japan. The Ombudsman had asked the Commission for these clarifications after several citizens complained about a lack of information concerning changes made to the maximum levels. In its opinion, the Commission explained that, immediately after the Fukushima nuclear accident, the maximum radiation levels permitted in foodstuffs imported from Japan to the EU were higher than those permitted in Japan itself, but were lowered to the Japanese levels a few weeks later.

Complaints about lack of information concerning contamination levels

In March 2011, an earthquake and tsunami damaged the nuclear power plant in Fukushima, Japan, which led to increased radioactive contamination in the surrounding area. In the weeks following the accident, the Ombudsman received several complaints from citizens suggesting that there was a lack of information about changes made to the maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination for foodstuffs, imported from Japan to the EU.

The Ombudsman opened an inquiry to obtain precise information on the maximum permitted levels before and after the Fukushima accident. In its opinion, the Commission explained that immediately after the accident, the EU activated the emergency mechanisms it had adopted in the wake of the Chernobyl accident. These included maximum permitted levels of radioactive contamination for foodstuffs, such as baby food or

dairy products, as well as for feed. These levels were higher than the Japanese levels. In April 2011, therefore, the Commission decreased the maximum permitted levels to bring them into line with the Japanese levels.

The Ombudsman commended the Commission's detailed explanations which he considers useful for European citizens. In the interest of providing citizens with a maximum of information on the matter, he decided to publish the Commission's opinion together with his decision. Both documents are available at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/decision.faces/en/10827/html.bookmark>