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EU “cohesion” policy: Ombudsman investigates protection of fundamental rights

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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, Emily O’Reilly, has opened an investigation on her own initiative into respect for fundamental rights in the EU’s “cohesion” policy. The Ombudsman has received many complaints in this area, for example about problems small businesses face when accessing EU funds, or from applicants for EU projects who allege discrimination. The Ombudsman’s investigation focuses on the Commission’s role in ensuring that EU funding is used in ways that comply with the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Emily O’Reilly commented: “It is key for the credibility of the European Union that, wherever EU money is spent, fundamental rights are respected. In many cases, these funds are supposed to help the most vulnerable members of society. But if, for example, there are complaints that EU money is used to “institutionalise” persons with disabilities instead of helping to integrate them, the Commission clearly needs to ensure the matter is investigated and corrective action taken if needed.”

Questions about the implementation of the EU’s 2014-2020 cohesion policy

The EU’s cohesion policy aims at creating growth and jobs, tackling climate change and energy dependence, and reducing poverty and social exclusion with the help of the “European Structural and Investment Funds”. These funds support the less developed regions in the EU and are managed jointly by the European Commission and the Member States. With more than 350 billion euros for 2014-2020, they represent over one third of the EU’s budget.

The Ombudsman’s investigation asks a detailed set of questions to find out how the Commission ensures that its partners in the Member States

respect fundamental rights, how it imposes sanctions when necessary, and how complaints are being dealt with. She has asked the Commission to reply to her questions by 30 September 2014:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/correspondence.faces/en/54419/html.bookmark>