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Ombudsman: what are EU institutions doing to protect whistleblowers?

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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 into whether the EU administration is living up to its obligation to introduce internal whistleblowing rules. She has asked nine EU institutions, including the European Commission, Parliament, and Council, to inform her by 31 October 2014 about the rules they have in place, or intend to introduce.

She explained: "The Commission's EU Anti-Corruption Report warns that corruption can seriously harm the economy and undermine the trust of citizens in democratic institutions.

Whistleblowers play a key role in uncovering serious irregularities. I want to ensure that the EU institutions have in place the necessary rules to protect whistleblowers and to deal with complaints they submit about how they have been treated."

Whistleblowers key in uncovering serious irregularities

EU staff are obliged to report serious irregularities that they uncover in the course of their work. However, people tend to be reluctant to do so within their own organisation and often fear retaliation.

Since January 2014, under the new Staff Regulations agreed by the European Parliament and the Member States, the EU institutions have been legally obliged to introduce internal whistleblowing rules. So far, the Commission has been the most advanced institution by adopting guidelines on whistleblowing, but not yet internal rules.

In her letter opening this inquiry, the Ombudsman asks the institutions for the extent to which staff and the public have been consulted about these rules, as well as about the protection of external whistleblowers, such as contractors or subcontractors in EU funded projects. The letter is available at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/correspondence.faces/en/54615/html.bookmark>

Taking the lead on this issue, the Ombudsman has drafted internal whistleblowing rules, in co-operation with the Ombudsman's staff committee and data protection officer. She has also published them, inviting all interested parties to submit feedback at:

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/correspondence.faces/en/54612/html.bookmark>



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