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Ombudsman resolves payment dispute between Commission and German association

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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.

For more information:
www.ombudsman.europa.eu

Contact:

Gundi Gadesmann,
Media and External
Relations Officer,
T. +32 2 284 26 09
gundi.gadesmann@ombudsman.europa.eu

The European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, has helped the European Commission to settle a payment dispute with a German cultural association. This follows a complaint from the association that the Commission had reduced by more than EUR 6 000 the final payment for an exhibition on 28 European regions. The total costs of the project amounted to EUR 290 000. The Commission initially refused to pay the outstanding sum, arguing that it had not been duly notified about reallocations in the budget. The Commission accepted the Ombudsman's proposal for a friendly solution to the complaint and agreed to pay the outstanding sum of EUR 6 000 plus more than EUR 1 500 interest.

EU-funded exhibition on 28 European regions between Bordeaux and Kiev

In 2005, the German cultural association VIA REGIA - *Kultur für Europa* e.V. organised an EU-funded exhibition on 28 European regions between Bordeaux and Kiev. The project was carried out in the framework of the 2004 enlargement of the European Union. The Commission agreed to pay 71 % of the total budgeted costs of EUR 290 000.

The exhibition turned out to be a major success and was shown in 50 cities instead of the five originally foreseen. In August 2005, the association requested a change to the budget. A Commission official agreed to the proposed changes. The Commission, however, reduced its final payment to the association by more than EUR 6 000, arguing that it had not been properly notified about the budget change.

In December 2008, the association turned to the Ombudsman, claiming that the Commission

wrongfully reduced the final payment for the project. After his investigation, the Ombudsman concluded that the Commission had not given a reasonable account of how it dealt with the complainant's payment claim. He asked the Commission, in a friendly solution proposal, to reconsider the association's claim. The Commission accepted the proposal and paid the complainant the outstanding EUR 6 000 plus more than EUR 1 500 in interest.

To read the Ombudsman's decision, please go to:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/cases/decision.faces/en/5451/html.bookmark>