



European Ombudsman

# **Annual Activity Report**

## **of the Principal Authorising Officer by delegation**

**Year 2014**

**Strasbourg  
26 March 2015**

**EN**



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## Highlights of the year

The following is a list of the main achievements of the year 2014:

1. The five-year strategy "**Towards 2019**" was adopted and new **KPIs** were developed;
2. A review of the **senior management structure** is underway;
3. A more **strategic approach** to tackling systemic issues and promoting good administration was introduced;
4. An **own-initiative inquiry (OII) coordinator** was appointed. Nine systemic OIIs were opened on issues of public interest;
5. The office opened **325 inquiries** on the basis of 2079 registered complaints;
6. A working Group was set up to review the **inquiry procedures** to enhance their efficiency and effectiveness;
7. Revised **inquiry document templates** were introduced together with 'plain writing' guidelines;
8. The **new Annual Report** is a shorter, dynamic, reader-friendly, and interactive publication;
9. A new publication "**The European Ombudsman – Good for business**" was created;
10. The Ombudsman's **website** underwent an initial redesign;
11. **MEP Newsletters** were sent several times a year to all Members of Parliament;
12. The transition to a new **complaint management system** was implemented;
13. The **Public Register** of documents went online;
14. **Significant savings** were made on the budget lines for translations and publications;
15. Several administrative procedure changes led to **significant efficiency gains**;
16. Internal rules on **whistleblowing** were adopted;
17. The Ombudsman's **Code of Conduct** was adopted;
18. The number of **Twitter followers** doubled to almost 10 000 in 2014.



## Introduction

The Annual Activity Report (AAR) of the Principal Authorising Officer by delegation of the European Ombudsman is prepared in accordance with Article 66(9) of the Financial Regulation. That provision requires the AAR to "indicate the results of the operations by reference to the objectives set, the risks associated with these operations, the use made of the resources provided and the efficiency and effectiveness of the internal control system, including an overall assessment of the costs and benefits of controls".

The AAR 2014 deals with the implementation of the Ombudsman's Annual Management Plan (AMP) for 2014, which was the last AMP to be based on the Strategy for the mandate that was adopted in September 2010<sup>1</sup>.

The AMP 2014 identified, with reference to the Strategy, the 2014 priorities and actions for each core activity, as well as the relevant indicators of results. It also included a series of targets or reference figures for the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure the office's performance in achieving its objectives. The Ombudsman's Annual Report for 2014, which will be submitted to the European Parliament in accordance with Article 228 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), will give a detailed account of the Ombudsman's handling of complaints and own-initiative work, including own-initiative inquiries (OIs).

The present AAR mainly focuses on the organisational, administrative, budgetary and financial aspects of the Office's activities in 2014. It links the allocation of human resources to the key processes through which the operations of the Ombudsman's office are carried out and which together form the Operating Framework of the office. The Operating Framework is kept under continual review. The latest version, in the form of a PowerPoint presentation, is attached to the report as Annex 1.

Part I of the report explains the organisational structure of the Ombudsman's Office.

Part II of the report identifies the main results in each area of activity, with reference to the Operating Framework. The Operating Framework also forms the basis of a functional analysis of how the resources provided by the budget authority were allocated (Annex 2). Part II of the report also explains measures taken to ensure the efficiency and economy of operations and to promote the effective operation of the system of internal controls. (A visual aid as regards the internal controls is included as Annex 3).

Part III of the report consists of the declarations of assurance concerning the financial operations carried out under the control and responsibility of the Authorising Officers by Delegation during the relevant period.

The AAR also takes into account the detailed report on budgetary and financial management for the year 2014, which was adopted by the Ombudsman on 25 March 2015. That report is attached to the present report as Annex 4.

<sup>1</sup> In November 2014, the Ombudsman adopted a new strategy, *Towards 2019*, on which the AMP 2015 is based. The new Strategy took into account an internal review of the experience of the 2010-14 Strategy.



## Part I: The structure and organisation of the European Ombudsman's office

As the time this report is being prepared (March 2015), the senior management structure of the Ombudsman's office is under review. There is currently only one Director in post, the other having left the office in mid-February 2015. The Secretary-General will be leaving at the end of July 2015 and a recruitment procedure to find a successor is underway.

Pending completion of the review, the Communication Unit, the Media and External Relations Unit and the Registry report directly to the Secretary-General, whilst the four units dealing with complaints and inquiries and the Personnel, Administration and Budget Unit report to the Director.

A table indicating the allocation of staff among the operational entities of the office is provided in annex 1 below. This table also indicates, by reference to the Operating Framework, the main category of process(es) that each operational entity delivers.

The **Cabinet** works under the direct instruction of the Ombudsman. It advises and assists the Ombudsman to help ensure implementation of her vision, strategy and objectives. Cabinet members also liaise and represent the Ombudsman externally and draft speeches and articles on behalf of the Ombudsman. The Cabinet manages the Ombudsman's agenda, correspondence and records.

The **Complaints and Inquiries Units (C&I)** deal with the complaints sent to the Ombudsman. They conduct the inquiries needed to clarify possible cases of maladministration, look for solutions, and prepare proposals for friendly solutions, draft recommendations, decisions closing inquiries and special reports to the European Parliament. The Units also propose and carry out inquiries that are based on the Ombudsman's own-initiative power and deal with Queries sent by other members of the European Network of Ombudsmen.

The role of **Own-initiative coordinator** was created in May 2014. The own-initiative coordinator defines the EO's policy in relation to systemic own-initiative inquiries (OIIs), identifies systemic issues in the EU institutions, establishes and coordinates a programme of OIIs and evaluates results. The own-initiative coordinator reports to the Secretary-General.

The **Media and External Relations Unit (MER)** was created in January 2015 to support the Ombudsman's objective of increasing the visibility of the office. The Head of the MER Unit is the spokesperson of the Ombudsman. The Unit is responsible for social media and media activities and for relations with other external stakeholders, for developing the Ombudsman's policy for reaching out to potential complainants and multipliers and for identifying messages to get across to the media and key events in which the Ombudsman should take part.

The **Registry (REG)** deals with the complaints that fall outside the Ombudsman's mandate and with the registration, distribution and transmission of all complaint-related documents received or sent by the office. The Registry is also in charge of the Ombudsman's archives and library and the public register of documents. As the Ombudsman's Information Officer, the Head of the Registry plays an important role in the handling of requests for information and



access to documents. Finally, the Registry also runs the office's complaint management system.

The **Communication Unit (COM)** is responsible for coordinating the Ombudsman's relations with the European Network of Ombudsmen and the Ombudsman's academic activities. It is in charge of designing and producing the Ombudsman's publications and promotional material, for maintaining and developing the Ombudsman's websites and implementing the institution's visual identity.

The **Personnel, Administration and Budget Unit (PAB)** is responsible for all administrative matters related to the institution's personnel, human resources, and budget. It deals with recruitment, management of individual rights, internal communication and training, buildings, office space and equipment and coordinates translation requests. The Unit prepares the budget estimates and ensures that available resources are used economically and efficiently and in compliance with the applicable financial rules. It also establishes and implements the appropriate internal control mechanisms and prepares information for the various budgetary control authorities.

The provision of IT support for the office is coordinated by the **IT Management Group (ITMG)**, consisting of the heads of PAB, COM and REG. The remit and tasks of the ITMG include (i) drafting and subsequently making proposals for updating an overall multi-year IT plan for the office; (ii) co-ordinating the provision of information for preparation of the annual budget, the Annual Management Plan and the Annual Activity Report, in relation to IT matters; and (iii) ensuring operational cooperation in relation to IT matters.



## Part II: Policy results

The table and the scoreboard below show the results achieved by the office on the basis of the priorities, actions and KPI targets set out in the AMP 2014. The following sections provide a brief analysis of these results and further information on the activities carried out in 2014 with reference to the main processes of the Operating Framework.

### 1. Implementation of AMP 2014 actions

The actions appear under the headings and priorities of the Strategy and the AMP 2014.

Actions under objective 1 - "Listen"

<b>Priority 1.1 - Obtain regular feedback from complainants on their experiences and their views about the quality of service we provide.</b>		
<b>Actions</b>	<b>Implementation</b>	<b>who</b>
Fine-tune the web-based instruments that can be used to obtain input from complainants (e.g., feedback survey, online complaint form) and begin systematic harvesting of comments made by complainants on social media platforms.	The Social Media and Outreach Officer began systematic harvesting of comments from 1 July.	COM
Develop regular internal reporting that integrates the results of the different sources of complainant feedback.	Done.	COM
Analyse the use made by complainants of the request for review and service complaint procedures.	An analysis was carried out and is available online via the Ombudsman's Public Register.	SG
<b>Priority 1.2 - Further develop contacts with EU institutions at all levels to understand better how we can help them nurture and promote a culture of service.</b>		
Share our experience of developing a public register with relevant EU agencies ( <i>also under priority 3.2 below</i> ).	This action was postponed.	REG COM
Follow up the invitation of the Commission's Secretary General to hold joint workshops to discuss categories of complaint.	The discussion has been initiated - a first meeting was held to discuss public access and infringement cases.	Directors SG



Analyse the results of the programme of visits to EU agencies and develop proposals for the Ombudsman's future interaction with the agencies <i>(also under priority 3.4 below)</i> .	The results were analysed by the OII coordinator. The relevant report is available online via the Ombudsman's Public Register.	SG Cabinet Directors C&I
<b>Priority 1.5 - Learn from the European Network of Ombudsmen about best practices in the Member States that could be adopted at EU level.</b>		
Provide guidance and support for EO staff to help them make better use of the Extranet for collaboration with the Network.	Ongoing - Assistance was provided to the LOs in dealing with OIIs, to the President of the Staff Committee and to the Head of Cabinet.	COM
Consult the members of the Network about gender equality policies in their offices with a view to identifying good practices.	The Staff committee launched a consultation on this matter on the Extranet and drew up a report on the results of this consultation.	<b>Cabinet</b> COM
Harvest information from Network members about good practices at national level in the implementation of international human rights obligations (e.g., ECHR, UNCRPD).	Information from the Network was collected and forwarded to the Commission. The Cabinet drafted an analysis of the replies.	<b>Cabinet</b> COM

#### Actions under objective 2 - Deliver

<b>Priority 2.1 - Strengthen the capacity of the office to handle complaints even more effectively and efficiently.</b>		
Review the inquiry-related procedures with the aim of enhancing the overall efficiency and effectiveness of our work.	In progress - The working group on inquiry processes has submitted its report and is currently preparing proposals for implementation.	Directors C&I
Rethink the different kinds of complaints and inquiry documents we produce to make them better focused, clearer and written in language that is more appropriate for their intended purpose and audience (see also priority 4.1 below).	In progress - linked to the actions above and below.	Cabinet SG C&I



In light of the above, revise the templates used for inquiry documents.	In progress - New templates developed by the working group on inquiry documents have been adopted and used. Further updates will be required once the review of the inquiry-related procedure has been finalised.	<b>Directors</b> REG C&I
Rethink the process of proposing friendly solutions so as to increase the rate of acceptance by institutions.	In progress - linked to the first and second actions above.	SG Directors C&I

### Actions under objective 3 - **Persuade**

#### **Priority 3.2 - Emphasise the Ombudsman's role as a rich resource to help institutions improve their administrative practices.**

Share our experience of developing a Public Register with relevant EU agencies ( <i>also under priority 1.2 above</i> ).	This action was postponed.	REG
Develop and promote the concept that, where appropriate, institutions should put in place their own internal complaints procedures.	In progress - An OII was launched on this subject with an agency (EACI). The office also participated in the review of the EIB's complaint mechanism.	SG Directors C&I
Identify potential areas in which the Ombudsman could issue guidelines on good administration and develop a process for producing and issuing such guidelines.	In progress - We issued guidelines in two instances (publication of names of selection board members in competitions & guidelines in revolving doors case). A list of "Public Interest" inquiries has been established as a starting point of the process for identifying potential areas in which guidelines could be issued.	SG Directors C&I

#### **Priority 3.4 - Focus more on systemic questions, by identifying areas of malfunctioning in the EU administration and opportunities for improvement and by using the Ombudsman's power to open own-initiative inquiries.**

Strengthen the institutional capacity of the office to analyse and tackle systemic problems effectively through own-initiative inquiries.	An OII coordinator was appointed in May 2014 to define the EO's policy in relation to systemic OIIs, establish and coordinate a programme of OIIs and evaluate results.	SG Directors
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Analyse the results of the programme of visits to EU agencies and develop proposals for the Ombudsman's future interaction with the agencies (also under priority 1.2 above).	The results were analysed by the OII coordinator. The relevant report is available online via the Ombudsman's Public Register.	<b>SG</b> Cabinet Directors C&I
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#### Actions under objective 4 - **Communicate**

##### **Priority 4.1 - Develop a range of publications in paper and electronic format, targeted to the needs of our specific audiences.**

Rethink the intended purpose and audience of decisions following inquiries (also under priority 2.1 above).	This was done in the framework of the working group on inquiry documents whose proposals were implemented.	Cabinet SG C&I
Merge the annual report and the overview into a short, dynamic, reader-friendly, and interactive publication.	Done.	COM
Produce a legal analysis of cases as a separate publication to the annual report.	Done.	Directors C&I COM
Develop a social media optimised version of the interactive guide for potential complainants.	The re-design of the Ombudsman's website in June 2014 enables the interactive guide to be optimally displayed on mobile devices and on all sizes of screen.	COM
Compile and regularly distribute to MEPs information on cases and on the Ombudsman's activities that could be relevant for them.	Two ongoing actions: (i) Relevant information is sent to MEPs about cases from their countries; (ii) Newsletters with information on the EO's activities are sent to all MEPs periodically.	<b>Cabinet</b>



Actions under objective 5 - **Adapt**

<b>Priority 5.2 - Consistently monitor and increase the quality of our work.</b>		
Review the implementation of the 2010-2014 Strategy and develop a new multi-annual framework. This should include a review of our key performance indicators.	A review of the 2010-2014 Strategy was carried out. The Strategy <i>Towards 2019</i> was adopted in November 2014. New KPIs were developed and included in the AMP for 2015.	SG All
Apply for the next level of recognition by the European Foundation for Quality Management.	The Office will use its continuing involvement with EFQM to help implement the new multi-year Strategy <i>Towards 2019</i> . The application was therefore postponed to allow it to focus on experience with the new strategy.	SG All
Review, and where appropriate increase the use of interinstitutional cooperation to obtain administrative services.	An agreement was signed with the PMO. As a follow-up to the internal auditor's audit on interinstitutional cooperation, negotiations in view of signing a service level agreement with the Publications office will be launched in 2015.	PAB
Revise internal rules and revisit internal policies in light of the new Staff Regulations.	A set of rules were updated and adopted in 2014. The work will continue in 2015. Rules on whistleblowing were drawn up and finalised following consultation of internal and external stakeholders.	PAB
Improve the tools and processes used to monitor the expenditure cycle with a view to maximising the use of information available in the ABAC system and avoiding unnecessary duplication.	All the internal tools were reviewed. Training of the PAB Unit for ABAC and its use in conjunction with older tools is ongoing.	PAB
Establish the role of information officer and review procedures for dealing with requests for public access to documents.	Done.	SG Directors REG
Review the current administrative procedures related to processing acknowledgements of receipt of new complaints with an eye to increasing efficiency.	Done - acknowledgements of receipt are now sent by e-mail where we have an e-mail address for the complainant.	REG



<b>Priority 5.3 - Put in place an effective, integrated IT system to manage the office's overall workflow.</b>		
Draw up a multi-year IT strategy, focusing on maximising integration, interoperability, and user-centricity.	A report was produced and submitted to the Ombudsman. The report identifies difficulties in establishing a multi-year strategy and suggests a review of the overall approach to IT matters.	ITMG
Launch the new complaint management system ensuring adequate staff training in its use.	Done - additional training will be provided as needed.	<b>REG</b> PAB
Explore ways to increase interoperability between the website and relevant internal applications.	In progress - Efforts are focused on ensuring interoperability between the website and CMSEO and between the website and RODEO.	<b>COM</b> REG PAB
Cooperate with the European Commission and the European Parliament to introduce a new IT system for the management of human resources (Sysper II).	In progress - The migration to Sysper II is planned for 2015.	PAB



## 2. Scoreboard January-December 2014

	Subject matter	Measurement / Evaluation criteria	Targets or reference figures for 2014	Results 2014
<b>KPI 1</b>	Strategy and Governance	Assessment by the European Ombudsman's staff and external stakeholders.	Reference figure: 72%	69% <sup>2</sup>
<b>KPI 2</b>	Complaints and inquiries	Number of inquiries closed in relation to the number of ongoing inquiries at the end of the previous exercise.	1.1	1.4
		Proportion of cases in which the admissibility decision is taken within one month.	90%	73% <sup>3</sup>
<b>KPI 3</b>	Complaints and inquiries	Proportion of inquiries closed within (i) 12 and (ii) 18 months.	12-m: 75% 18-m: 90%	63% 73%
<b>KPI 4</b>	Complaints and inquiries	Relation between (i) the number of friendly solutions and draft recommendations and (ii) the number of decisions in which maladministration is found.	2.5 <sup>4</sup>	3.3
<b>KPI 5</b>	Complaints and inquiries	Number of systemic own-initiative inquiries launched.	6	9

<sup>2</sup> The score takes account of the results of an assessment by the staff.

<sup>3</sup> Breakdown: 78% in complaints outside the mandate, 70% in cases within the mandate but inadmissible, 69% in cases where an inquiry is opened and 53% in 'no grounds' cases.

<sup>4</sup> To obtain this figure, the sum of friendly solutions and draft recommendations proposed is divided by the number of cases closed with a critical remark in which no friendly solution proposal or draft recommendation was made.



	Subject matter	Measurement / Evaluation criteria	Targets or reference figures for 2014	Results 2014
<b>KPI 6</b>	Provide our external stakeholders with timely, useful and easily accessible information	External stakeholders contacted (frequency and significance).	Press releases: 24	25
			Press cuttings: 2 100	2 032
			Events involving multipliers: 180	187
			Advice given through the Interactive Guide to contact a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen: 12 000	12 822
			Unique visitors to the website: 440 000	443 315
			Queries: 5	3
			Contributions to discussions on the European Network of Ombudsmen Extranet: 130	75
<b>KPI 7</b>	Support Services (HR)	Staffing levels, measured as a proportion of maximum full time equivalents (FTEs)	89.2% (on the basis of 78 FTEs)	88.4% (on the basis of 78 FTEs)
<b>KPI 8<sup>5</sup></b>	Support Services (HR)	Average professional training days per person.	4 days	3.5 days
<b>KPI 9</b>		Degree of satisfaction of the European Ombudsman's staff.	Reference figure: 82.4%	55.4% <sup>6</sup>
<b>KPI 10</b>	Support Services (finance)	Implementation of the budget (composite indicator).	Budget implementation: 92.8%	94%
			Carried-over appropriations paid: 96%	89.6%
			Number of payments beyond 30 days: 0	3

<sup>5</sup> KPI 8 is based on training days (excluding language training) for all staff (including contractual agents and trainees).

<sup>6</sup> This figure was calculated on the basis of the number of positive replies given to a question about 'overall job satisfaction' asked in the framework of a general staff survey as a proportion of the total number of replies given to this question.



### 3. Core Processes

#### **A more strategic approach to tackling systemic issues and promoting good administration**

One of the major developments of 2014 was an enhanced focus on, and a new more strategic approach to, the Ombudsman's proactive work in tackling systemic issues and promoting good administration.

Nine systemic own-initiative inquiries were opened in 2014. The relevant target for KPI 5 (six) was thus surpassed. Eight of these inquiries, listed below, were planned as part of the overall strategy. The Ombudsman also took the opportunity presented by a complaint to identify and tackle a systemic issue through an own-initiative inquiry (OI/15/2014).

- [OI/1/2014](#) (all institutions): Adoption of internal rules on whistleblowing following the entry into force of the new staff regulations
- [OI/3/2014](#) (EMA): Partial refusal to give access to Clinical Studies Report relating to the approval of a medicinal product for the treatment of Crohn's Disease
- [OI/6/2014](#) (Commission): Composition of Commission expert groups
- [OI/7/2014](#) (Commission): Composition of civil dialogue groups hosted by DG AGRI
- [OI/8/2014](#) (Commission): Respect of fundamental rights in the implementation of the EU cohesion policy
- [OI/9/2014](#) (Frontex): Respect for fundamental rights and human dignity of persons residing illegally in the EU in the context of joint return operations coordinated by Frontex
- [OI/10/2014](#) (Commission): Transparency and public participation in relation to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership ('TTIP') negotiations
- [OI/11/2014](#) (Council): Transparency and public participation in relation to the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership ('TTIP') negotiations

OI/11/2014, OI/10/2014, OI/1/2014 were closed on 31 October 2014, 6 January 2015 and 26 February 2015 respectively. The other OIIs listed above are still in progress at the date of preparation of this report (March 2015). Updated information is made available regularly on the website.

Based on the experience with the own-initiative inquiries, a process was put in place towards the end of 2014, to identify, monitor and give visibility to complaint-based inquiries into matters of public interest.

Other actions carried out by the Office in 2014 to promote transparency and good administration within the EU institutions, bodies and agencies included: (i) advising the ECB on drafting its new Ethics Framework, (ii) contact with the Regulatory Agencies to inquire about their plans in relation to the adoption of



transparency policies, (iii) contribution to the EIB's public consultation on its transparency policy, and (iv) contribution to the Commission's public consultation on stakeholder consultation guidelines.

Furthermore, an analysis of the results of the programme of visits to the EU agencies and an analysis of the use made by complainants of the request for review and service complaint procedures were carried out. Both analyses are available online through the Ombudsman's Public Register.

Finally, a detailed analysis of the follow-up given by institutions to the recommendations and remarks made by the Ombudsman in 2013 was carried out and published on our website ("Putting it Right 2013").

## **Complaints**

In 2014, the Ombudsman opened a total of 325 inquiries on the basis of complaints and closed 387 such inquiries.

The overall number of complaints registered in 2014 was 2079, of which 736 were within the mandate, compared to 2420 complaints registered in 2013 and 750 within the mandate. The further reduction in the number and proportion of complaints outside the mandate is matched by the continued effectiveness of the website interactive guide in directing citizens to the body best able to help them (see the section on the website below for statistics on use of the guide).

As regards the Key Performance Indicators, the number of inquiries closed in relation to the number of ongoing inquiries at the end of the previous exercise (KPI 2, first aspect) reached the highest ever level, substantially exceeding the target set. The significance of this result is that it marks progress in closing older cases and preventing the emergence of a new backlog.

The percentage of cases in which the admissibility decision was taken within one month (KPI 2, second aspect) decreased in 2014 to 73% (compared to 89% in 2013). This is a temporary phenomenon linked to the introduction of a new complaint management system at the end of May 2014. The transition involved a one-week suspension of the handling of new complaints in order to put the new system in place and train staff. A month by month analysis of the figures shows that the rate was at 28% for the single month of June but increased to 86% again in December. The 90% target is therefore within reach again in 2015.

The ratio of (i) the number of proposals for friendly solutions and draft recommendations calculated against (ii) the number of decisions in which maladministration was found but where no proposal for a friendly solution or draft recommendation was made (KPI 4) increased from 1.5 in 2013 to 3.3 in 2014, thereby surpassing by far the target of 2.5. The significance of this result is that it shows that we are increasing our efforts to resolve problems and put right maladministration when it is found.

The figures concerning the proportion of inquiries closed within 12 and 18 months (KPI 3) both decreased in 2014. For the third year running, efforts were made in 2014 to complete as many as possible of the inquiries that had been ongoing for more than two years. Paradoxically, however, the very success of this effort (as reflected in KPI 2 above) had a negative effect on KPI 3 as cases that had been open for a long time were closed and thus taken into account in the calculation of this KPI.



## Communication and outreach

### Media Activities

In 2014, the number of press releases issued by the Office slightly increased compared to 2013. The number of media articles remained at the high level of 2013, while the number of Twitter followers doubled to almost 10 000 in 2014.

### Outreach Activities

In 2014, the Ombudsman invested considerable time and effort in meetings with key stakeholders, including civil society organisations, business associations, human rights organisations and other NGOs. These meetings provided valuable information and perspectives in the context of the new more strategic approach to inquiries and participation in topical debates. A number of high-profile complaints were also submitted as a result of these meetings.

Three events were organised relating to the Ombudsman's strategic work in 2014. "*Beyond the crisis? Business in Europe 2014*" focused on what the Ombudsman can do for businesses. At the second event, "*Your wish list for Europe*", the Ombudsman was joined by the Presidents of the Commission and the European Parliament to interact with citizens. The third event, "*Transparency and public health – how accessible is scientific data?*", was the fifth event of the kind organised on the International Right to Know Day. In total, the Office organised 187 events involving multipliers, slightly surpassing the target of 180.

### Publications

A new publication, entitled "The European Ombudsman – Good for business", was published in 24 languages in 2014. The Ombudsman's Annual Report, also in 24 languages, was transformed into an interactive publication containing video, social media posts, infographics, and other rich content. It was produced not only in print and PDF formats, but also, for the first time, as an ePUB electronic book.

The needs of persons with disabilities continued to be addressed throughout 2014, by actively publicising and providing on-demand, large print and audio versions of Ombudsman publications.

### Website

The number of unique visitors to the website increased from 435 086 in 2013 to 443 315 in 2014, exceeding the target of 440 000, as the Ombudsman's active presence on social media continued to drive traffic to the website.

The 12 822 figure for advice given through the Interactive Guide to contact a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen exceeded the target of 12 000, while a further 6 348 users of the Interactive Guide were advised to contact other problem-solving mechanisms, such as SOLVIT and Europe Direct.

The design of the homepage of the website was transformed in June 2014, making key material more visible, increasing the relevance of the content displayed, and introducing new interactive features such as a social media wall.



## European Network of Ombudsmen

The Ninth Regional Seminar of the European Network of Ombudsmen was held in Cardiff in June 2014, on the theme of "Ombudsmen and committees on petitions: voices for the voiceless". The seminar was organised jointly by the Ombudsman of Wales and the European Ombudsman. The Ninth Liaison Seminar of the Network was held in Strasbourg in April 2014, and brought together staff members from the national ombudsman offices of the EU Member States and other EEA countries.

Only three queries were submitted to the European Ombudsman by members of the European Network of Ombudsmen in 2014, compared to a target of five. Measures were taken in 2014 to simplify and speed up the handling of straightforward queries and improvements to the Network's Extranet are planned for the first semester of 2015. These changes should make the query procedure more effective and better known.

The figure for contributions to discussions on the European Network of Ombudsmen Extranet was 75 in 2014 compared to 125 in 2013. The planned improvements to the Network's Extranet will also facilitate discussions between Network members, thus enhancing both the usefulness of, and the contributions to, the Extranet discussion fora.

*Allocation of resources to information and outreach activities (comparison 2013/2014)<sup>7</sup>*

<b>Outreach activities</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2013)</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2014)</b>	<b>Budget line</b>
Publications, events, etc.	160 818	151 202	3210-3030
Translation	23 487	77 162	2310
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>184 305</b>	<b>228 364</b>	

<b>European Network of Ombudsmen</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2013)</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2014)</b>	<b>Budget line</b>
Publications	17 054	0	3210
Translation	73 875	0	2310
National Ombudsmen Seminar	6 591	42 744	3301-3030
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>97 520</b>	<b>42 744</b>	

<sup>7</sup> In preparing the present AAR, it came to our attention that the information regarding two items included in the 2013 AAR (translations in outreach activities and translations in European Network of Ombudsmen as well as the relevant totals for each category) was wrong because the translation of a newsletter had wrongly been classified under 'publications' rather than under 'European Network of Ombudsmen'. The figures and the relevant subtotals have been corrected in the above table. The overall total expenditure remains unchanged.



<b>Annual Report</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2013)</b>	<b>Expenditure in EUR (2014)</b>	<b>Budget line</b>
Production	92 634	36 270	3210
Translation <sup>8</sup>	211 879	150 958	2310
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>304 513</b>	<b>187 228</b>	

In terms of human resources, the work of approximately eight and a half full-time equivalents (FTEs) was devoted to outreach activities and two FTEs to the European Network of Ombudsmen.

## 4. Management Processes

In 2014, the Office carried out a review of the implementation of the 2010-2014 Strategy, including the evolution of the results in terms of the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) over the period.

Preparatory work for a new Strategy was also completed, culminating in the Ombudsman's adoption in November 2014 of *Towards 2019*. A Working Group developed new KPIs to help measure progress in achieving the objectives of the strategy.

In May 2014, the Office's capacity to carry out own-initiative work was strengthened by re-assigning an administrator to the Secretariat-General to act as own-initiative coordinator. The co-ordinator prepares the Ombudsman's policy in relation to own-initiative inquiries, establishes and coordinates a programme of OIIs and evaluates the results.

Late in 2014, the four units dealing with complaints and inquiries were brought under the management of a single Director, rather than being divided between two Directors as was previously the case.

The reference figure score for KPI 1, which is relevant for the management processes, was calculated on the basis of the replies to questions related to strategy and governance in a general staff survey conducted in December 2014.

The Office continued to work with EFQM in 2014, drawing on its fundamental concepts in both the review of the 2010-14 Strategy and the preparation of *Towards 2019*.

## 5. Supporting processes

### Information management

2014 saw many important developments in the field of information management.

<sup>8</sup> This figure does not include the cost (148 711 EUR in 2013 and 103 946 EUR in 2014) of the translation of summaries of decisions that are only published on the website.



Decisions were prepared and adopted on 26 May 2014 on (i) internal procedures for dealing with requests for information and applications for public access to documents and (ii) the appointment of an Information Officer.

The Ombudsman's public register of documents went live on 30 June 2014.

The transition to a new complaint management system was successfully implemented at the end of May 2014.

The lead Unit in all the above developments was the Registry.

The Ombudsman's Data Protection Officer (DPO) worked mainly in the following areas.

1. Whistleblowing: advice and follow-up on the notification sent to the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) for prior checking, as well as the Ombudsman's internal rules,
2. Transfers of personal data in the context of the future review of Regulation 45/2001),
3. Subject access requests: follow-up to the Ombudsman's consultation with the EDPS on this issue,
4. Conflicts of interest: draft guidelines circulated by the EDPS,
5. Anonymisation: advice on the guidelines prepared on the redaction of names and biometric data,
6. Code of conduct for the Ombudsman: advice on the draft text, and
7. Public procurement: follow-up to the EDPS opinion on the Ombudsman's notification on this procedure.

### **Human resources and Administration**

During 2014, five officials were transferred to other EU institutions. All the vacant positions were filled, either permanently or on a temporary basis, within two months. However, KPI 7 (staffing levels) was slightly below the target, primarily because of an unusually high number of long medical absences.

The result for KPI 8 (training) was also slightly below the target. However, language training, especially in relation to the third language requirement, represents a significant part (39%) of the overall training activities and is not included in the calculation of KPI 8.

The Office's internal provisions concerning teleworking were broadened and extended to all staff members.

Changes were made to the internal implementing provisions to adapt them to the amended Staff Regulations which entered into force on 1 January 2014.

The changes in the Staff Regulations imposed additional work on the European Commission in terms of revisiting the processes in SYSPER 2, the staff management tool which the Commission has agreed to make available to the



Ombudsman. As a result, implementation of the migration to SYSPER 2 had to be further delayed.

### **Budget and Finance**

The results for 2014 are presented in detail in the Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2014, which is attached to the present report as Annex 4.

The total final appropriations available in the Ombudsman's budget for 2014 amounted to EUR 9 857 002. Title 1 (Expenditure relating to persons working for the institution) amounted to EUR 7 977 702. Title 2 (Buildings, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure) amounted to EUR 1 346 800. Title 3 (Expenditure resulting from special functions carried out by the institution) amounted to EUR 532 500.

The following table shows expenditure in 2014 in terms of appropriations committed and paid (in Euros).

<b>Title</b>	<b>Initial budget 2014</b>	<b>Final budget 2014<sup>9</sup></b>	<b>Committed</b>	<b>Paid</b>
Title 1	7 709 002	7 977 702	7 927 143	7 889 177
Title 2	1 550 000	1 346 800	1 286 594	1 093 488
Title 3	598 000	532 500	433 775	278 971
<b>Total</b>	<b>9 857 002</b>	<b>9 857 002</b>	<b>9 647 512</b>	<b>9 261 636</b>

Of the total appropriations, 97.87 % were committed (compared to 98.20 % in 2013) and 93.96 % paid (compared to 91.82 % in 2013). The appropriations carried over from 2014 to 2015 amounted to EUR 385 876. The utilisation rate (including appropriations carried over from 2014 to 2015) was 97.87 % (compared to 98.20 % for 2013).

Furthermore, 89.6 % of the appropriations carried over to 2014 from 2013 were used (compared to 92.7 % in 2013).

### **Transfers**

During 2014, five transfers of appropriations were necessary. These modifications of the initial budget are presented in detail in the annexed 'Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year'.

The total amount transferred was EUR 344 300 (3.49 % of total appropriations for 2014).

### **Procurement**

In 2014, the Office launched nine procurement procedures, all for low-value contracts.

<sup>9</sup> After transfers.



## Indicators 2014

In the following table, all totals are cumulative.

<b>Indicators</b>	<b>Target 2014</b>	<b>Q1</b>	<b>Q1+Q2</b>	<b>Q1-Q3</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>(2013)</b>
F1: Percentage of budget implementation	Total : 92.8 %	26.5 %	43.25 %	65 %	93.96 %	(91.80 %)
F2: Percentage of carryover appropriations paid	Total : 96 %	46 %	56.96 %	63.95 %	89.59 %	(92.70 %)
F3: Number of operations paid over the 30-day time limit	Total : 0	2	2	3	3	(18)

The average time for payment of invoices from private providers of goods and services was 15.64 days (15.6 days in 2013).

### Preparation and presentation of the 2015 budget

The 2015 budget, which was prepared during 2014, provides for an establishment plan of 66 posts.

Total appropriations for 2015 are EUR 10 346 105. Title 1 (Expenditure relating to persons working with the institution) amounts to EUR 8 256 305. Title 2 (Buildings, equipment and miscellaneous operating expenditure) amounts to EUR 1 512 500. Title 3 (Expenditure resulting from general functions carried out by the institution) amounts to EUR 577 300.

The 2015 budget provides for total revenue of EUR 1 224 812.

## 6. Efficiency and economy

During 2014, the Office made great efforts to improve the efficiency of its operations and achieve economies wherever possible.

Working groups were established to review (i) the documents generated by inquiries and (ii) the internal processes related to the conduct of inquiries. Their recommendations for reducing the length of documents and simplification of internal administrative procedures led to significant efficiency gains and economies. The Registry, the Communication Unit and PAB also identified and implemented efficiency and economy gains. Key measures are detailed below:

1. A new computerised complaint management system was introduced, providing immediate efficiency gains through simplification of data entry and records management.
2. The administrative circuit for the complaint-handling process was streamlined to eliminate unnecessary duplication and delays.
3. Administrative procedures for acknowledgements of receipt of new complaints were streamlined.



4. Hard-copy internal transmission (electronic only) of information and drafts related to complaints and inquiries was eliminated.
5. Hard-copy external transmission (electronic only) of all correspondence related to complaints that fall outside the Ombudsman's mandate was eliminated.
6. The use of electronic-only transfer of case-related correspondence with the EU institutions was further extended and preparations were made with a view to 100% electronic-only transfer as regards the Commission.
7. Financial processes were streamlined through the introduction of the ABAC system.
8. Arrangements were made to deal with accident, pension and, more generally, end of service files through interinstitutional co-operation, in the form of a service-level agreement with the PMO.
9. Significant savings were made on the budget lines for translations (minus 221 000 EUR<sup>10</sup> compared to 2013) and for communication and publications (minus 95 575 EUR<sup>11</sup> compared to 2013).
10. In accordance with the timetable agreed with the budgetary authority, the 2015 Budget Estimates (submitted in March 2014) reduced the establishment plan by one post. Later in 2014, a second post was identified for elimination in the framework of the 2016 Budget Estimates (to be submitted in March 2015).
11. The backdated increase in salaries for 2012, which had to be paid in 2014, was financed through savings from economy measures.

## 7. Management of internal controls

### Section 1 - Recommendations from the Internal Auditor

In 2014, the Ombudsman's Internal Auditor issued three reports:

- Report N°14/01: Internal auditor's annual report for 2013.

The Internal Auditor's report on the 2013 audit work concluded that, subject to full implementation of agreed actions, the Institution's internal management and control systems are effective and efficient and provide reasonable assurance of attaining its control objectives on a consistent basis.

- Report N°13/03: Audit of Communication and Outreach: Planning and performance measurement

The audit found that, overall, the processes within the Institution provide reasonable assurance that the management of communication and outreach activities complies with the principles of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The report also agreed a three-point action plan with the Institution: (i) formally adopt a communication strategy which makes the link between the

<sup>10</sup> Based on the implementation of budget line 2310

<sup>11</sup> Based on the implementation of budget line 3210



Ombudsman's objectives for the next mandate and the planning of communication activities, (ii) develop an annual activity plan for the Communication Unit that covers all activities requiring significant financial or human resources, support and contribute to the AMP and be clearly linked to the communication strategy, and (iii) define clear and measurable communication objectives and identify the most relevant performance indicators and data sources for performance evaluation.

The agreed implementation date for these actions was the end of February 2015.

- Report N°14/02: Audit of the Institution's recourse to interinstitutional cooperation.

The audit found that, overall, the European Ombudsman's interinstitutional cooperation is based on adequate agreements with other institutions and bodies concerned, is cost-effective and is implemented in all areas where it is relevant. It also contained the following two recommendations: (i) to clarify the circumstances and recover the portion of payment for audit services that was unduly invoiced by Parliament in 2013 and (ii) to conclude a Service Level Agreement with the Publications Office to clarify the modalities of the cooperation in the publishing area, in order to maximise its effectiveness.

The recommendations made in the above reports will be implemented in 2015.

## **Section 2 - Observations from the Court of Auditors**

In the framework of the DAS 2013, the Court of Auditors indicated in its annual report that the audit did not give rise to any significant observations as regards the European Ombudsman.

## **Section 3 - Follow-up of recommendations from the Committee on Budgetary Control in the framework of the discharge procedures**

### 2012 discharge

In its decision of 3 April 2014 on discharge in respect of the implementation of the European Union general budget for the financial year 2012, Section VIII – European Ombudsman, Parliament made the following recommendations:

- It endorsed the improvements made to ensure a more efficient budget; and called for this effort to continue in the next budgetary exercises

As reported above, the utilisation rate in 2014 was 97.87 %, above that of 2012 (95.88%) and very slightly below that of 2013 (98.20%).

- It considered positive the increase of the percentage of decisions on admissibility taken within one month of receiving a complaint and called for an even better target for the coming years

As mentioned in the AAR for 2013, the percentage of cases in which the decision on admissibility was taken within one month increased to 89 % in 2013 (compared to 85% in 2012). In 2014, due to the reasons explained in section II.3 above, the rate decreased temporarily but the trend is positive at the end of 2014 and the 90% target is achievable in 2015.



- It called on the Ombudsman to specify the number of cases involving more than one round of enquiry and when there is a need for a second round of enquiries

The percentage of inquiries closed in 2013 after more than one round of inquiries was 36%. The corresponding rate in 2014 was 31%.

- It requested to be informed of the actions that have been put in place to overcome the Commission's decision to refuse the organisation of an independent external audit of the European Schools.

This appears to relate to the Ombudsman's critical remark to the Commission in case 814/2010/JF, which is now closed. The follow-up was dealt with in *Putting it Right 2012*.

- It called on the Ombudsman to cooperate with other institutions to come up with a unified methodology of presenting the translation costs in order to simplify the analysis and comparison of the costs.

The Ombudsman does not have a translation service. Translation is provided by the translation services of Parliament and the Translation Centre. The Ombudsman is charged a fixed cost per page decided by these two service providers.

- It called on the Ombudsman to state in detail in its activity report how much of its budget it spends on promoting itself and on reaching out to citizens.

Information on the amount of funding allocated to informing Parliament and citizens about the Ombudsman's role and activities is included in Section II.3, above.

#### 2013 Discharge

At the time of the drafting of this report, the European Parliament's decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the European Union general budget for the financial year 2013, Section VIII – European Ombudsman was not yet available.

#### **Section 4 - Management of the internal control systems**

In 2014, a number of actions were taken that enhanced the internal control systems.

The review of the 2010-2014 Strategy provided an opportunity to evaluate the office's activities and to develop new performance indicators (Internal Control 14 - Evaluation of activities and Internal Control 5 - Objectives and performance indicators).

The appointment of the own-initiative coordinator strengthened institutional capacity to analyse and tackle systemic problems effectively (Internal Control 3 - allocation of staff and mobility).

On the basis of the assessment of internal controls (Annex 3), actions have been, or will be, initiated with a view to enhancing the following internal controls in 2015:



Internal Control 2 - Ethics and organisational values: on 20 February 2015, internal rules on whistleblowing were adopted, in accordance with Article 22(a) of the Staff Regulations.

Internal Control 8 - Processes and procedures: the working group on inquiry processes is on-going and is expected to identify further opportunities for improvements.

Internal Control 11 - Document management: working groups on (i) public access to documents and (ii) records management have been established to improve processes in these areas in line with the applicable legislation.

Internal Control 15 - Evaluation of internal control systems: this will be reviewed in the framework of the overall restructuring of the office.

### **Section 5 - Quality management**

The Ombudsman is a member of the European Foundation for Quality Management, which provides a methodology and a toolkit that can help achieve a sustainable level of quality.

The Ombudsman intends to continue its involvement with EFQM to help in delivering the new multi-year Strategy adopted in November 2014.

### **Section 6 - Disclosure in the public interest (whistleblowing)**

In 2014, there were no cases in which staff of the Ombudsman provided information to management under Article 22(a) of the Staff Regulations, nor are we aware of any cases in which such information was provided to OLAF.

During the year, internal consultations and a public consultation were conducted on draft internal rules concerning disclosure in the public interest. As mentioned above the rules were adopted on 20 February 2015.



## **Part III: Declarations of the Authorising Officers by Delegation**

### **1. Declaration of the Authorising Officer by Sub-Delegation**

I, the undersigned,

Head of the Personnel, Administration and Budget Unit,

In my capacity as Principal Authorising Officer by Sub-Delegation hereby declare that I have reasonable assurance that:

1. The information contained in the report presents a true and fair view;
2. The resources assigned to the activities described in the report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principle of sound financial management;
3. The control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgment and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of self-assessment, ex-post controls and remarks by the Internal Auditor of the Ombudsman, as well as information derived from the reports of the Court of Auditors on financial years preceding that in which this declaration is made.

I certify that I am not aware of any fact which has not been stated which could damage the interests of the institution of the Ombudsman.

Done at Strasbourg, on 26 March 2015

Alessandro Del Bon  
Head of the Personnel, Administration, and Budget Unit



## 2. Declaration of the Authorising Officer by Delegation

I, the undersigned,

Director in charge of Personnel, Administration and Budget of the Ombudsman

In my capacity as Authorising Officer by Delegation hereby declare that I have reasonable assurance that:

1. The information contained in the report presents a true and fair view;
2. The resources assigned to the activities described in the report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principle of sound financial management;
3. The control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgment and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of self-assessment, ex-post controls and remarks by the Internal Auditor of the Ombudsman, as well as information derived from the reports of the Court of Auditors on financial years preceding that in which this declaration is made.

I certify that I am not aware of any fact which has not been stated which could damage the interests of the institution of the Ombudsman.

Done at Strasbourg, on 26 March 2015

Gerhard Grill  
Director



### 3. Declaration of the Principal Authorising Officer by Delegation

I, the undersigned,

Secretary-General of the Ombudsman

In my capacity as Principal Authorising Officer by Delegation hereby declare that I have reasonable assurance that:

1. The information contained in the report presents a true and fair view;
2. The resources assigned to the activities described in the report have been used for their intended purpose and in accordance with the principle of sound financial management;
3. The control procedures put in place give the necessary guarantees concerning the legality and regularity of the underlying transactions.

This reasonable assurance is based on my own judgment and on the information at my disposal, such as the results of self-assessment, ex-post controls and remarks by the Internal Auditor of the Ombudsman, as well as information derived from the reports of the Court of Auditors on financial years preceding that in which this declaration is made.

I certify that I am not aware of any fact which has not been stated which could damage the interests of the institution of the Ombudsman.

Done at Strasbourg, on 26 March 2015

Ian Harden  
Secretary-General



## **Annexes**

Annex 1: The European Ombudsman's Operating Framework

Annex 2: Human resources and professional training charts

Annex 3: Internal control assessment chart

Annex 4: Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2014



## Annex 1: The Ombudsman's Operating Framework (PowerPoint Presentation)



## Annex 2: Human resources and professional training charts

### A. Breakdown of human resources available to the Ombudsman

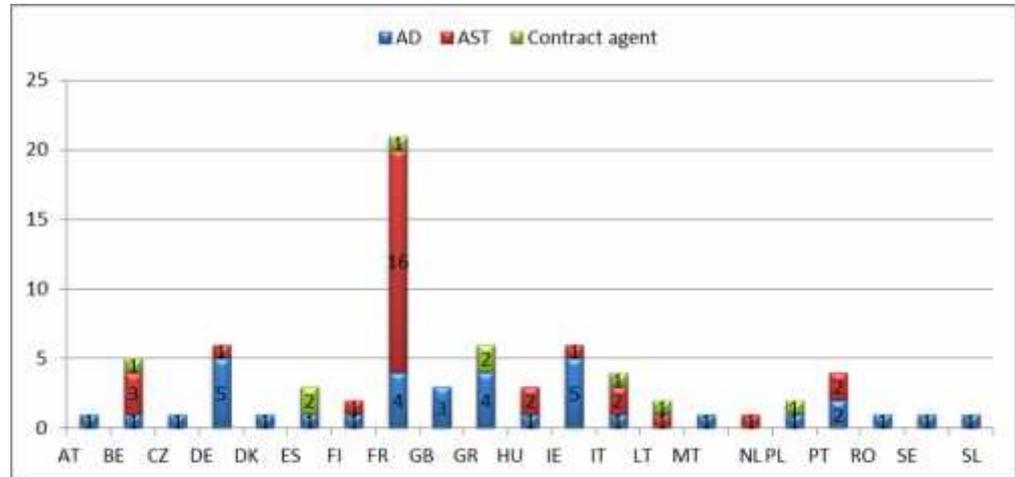
The table below shows the allocation of human resources among the operational entities of the office in December 2014 and the category of process(es) of the Operating Framework that each of these entities predominantly delivered.

	Allocation of resources	Management processes	Core processes	Supporting processes
<b>Ombudsman Cabinet</b>	AD: 3 AST: 2		X	
<b>Secretariat-General</b>	AD: 3 AST: 1 SNO: 1 Trainee: 1	X	X	
<b>Directors</b>	AD: 2 AST: 1	X	X	
<b>Complaints and inquiries</b>	AD: 22 Trainees: 3		X	
<b>Communication</b>	AD: 3 AST: 6 Contract agents: 1.5			
<b>Registry</b>	AD: 1 AST: 11 Contract agents: 2.5		X	X
<b>Personnel, Administration and Budget</b>	AD: 3 AST: 9 Contract agents: 4			X

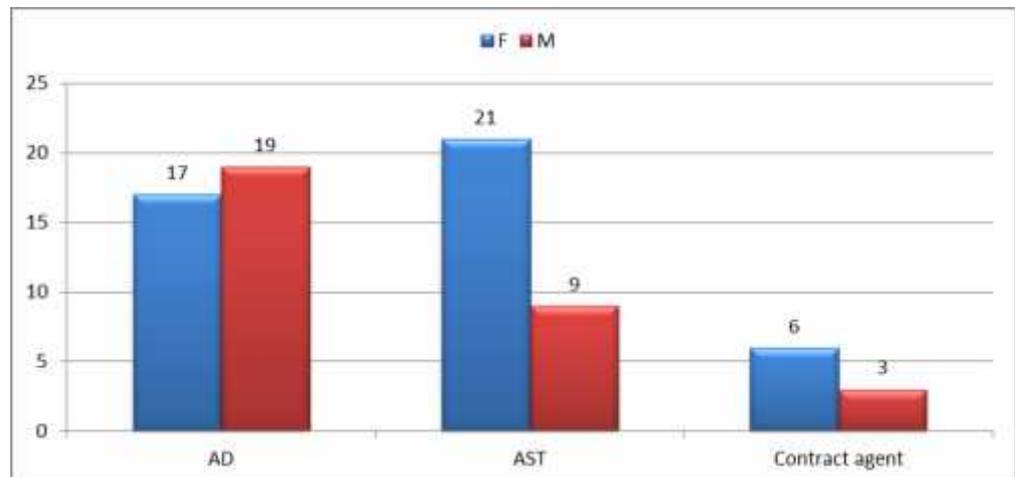


Graphs 1 and 2 below show the breakdown of the various categories of staff by nationality and by gender.

Graph 1 - Nationality per grade: Snapshot on 31 December 2014



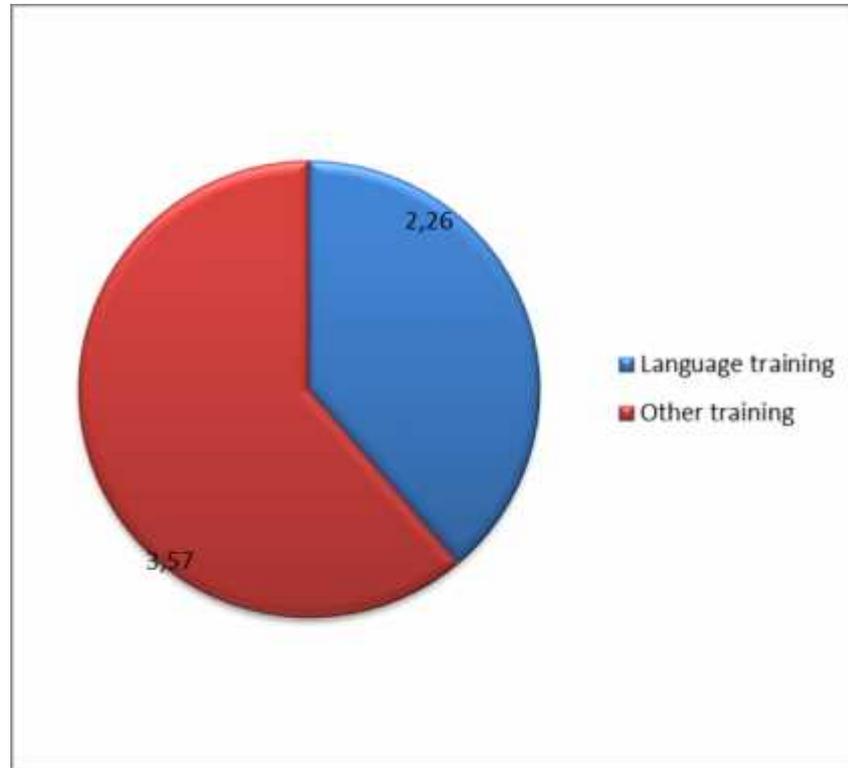
Graph 2 - Gender per grade: Snapshot on 31 December 2014



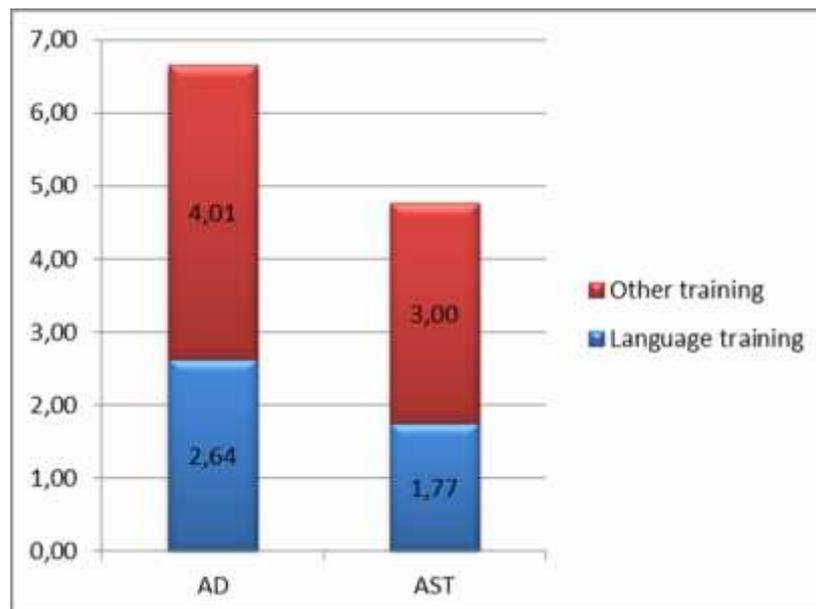


## B. Number of days of professional training in 2014

Graph 3 - Average number of days of language training and other training per person

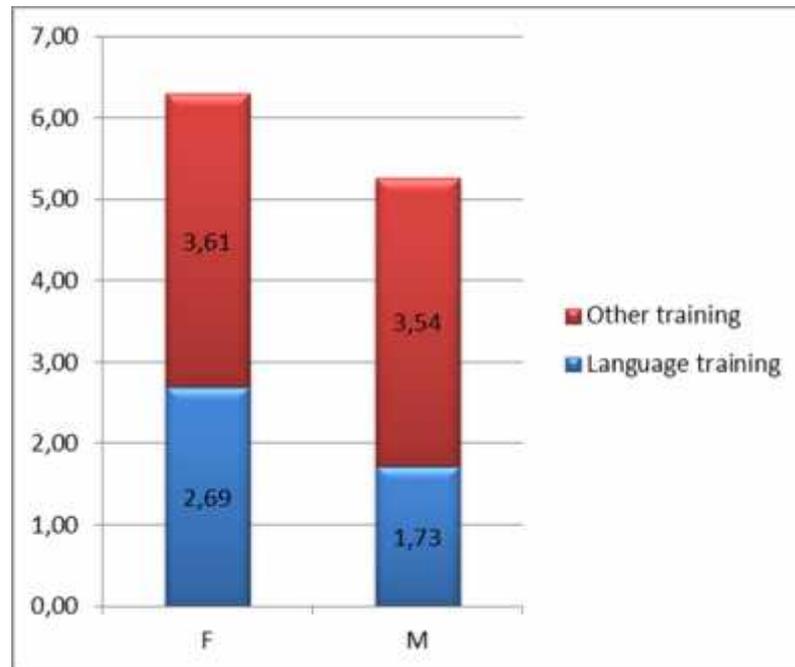


Graph 4 - Average number of training days per person by grade



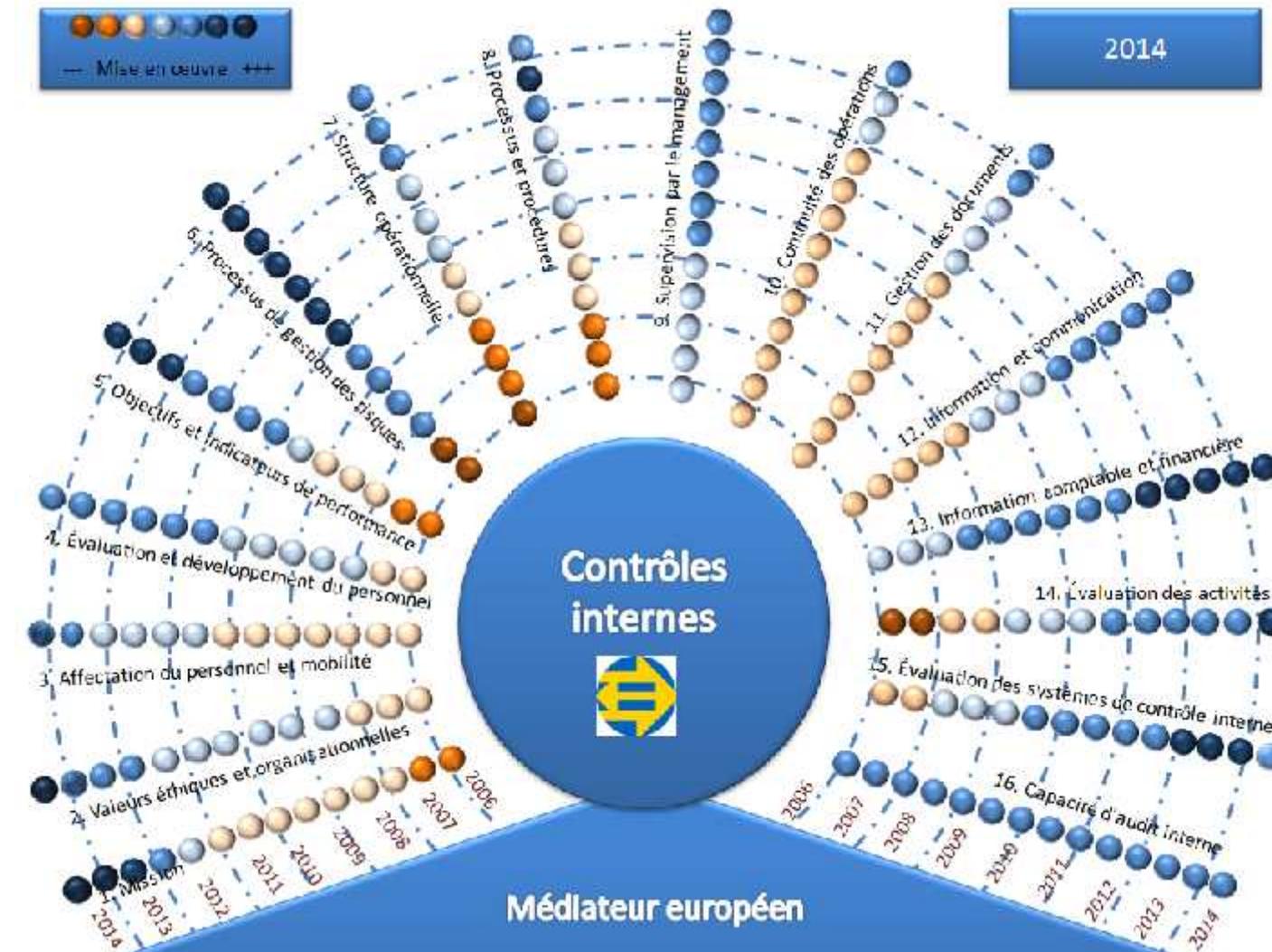


Graph 5 - Average number of training days per person by gender





### Annex 3: Internal control assessment chart





## Annex 4: Report on budgetary and financial management for the financial year 2014



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