



P. Nikiforos Diamandouros
European Ombudsman

Mr Christian F. Lettmayr
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European Centre for the Development of
Vocational Training (CEDEFOP)
P.O. Box 22427
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Strasbourg, 30 -01- 2012

**Agency visit OI/4/2012/CK - Visit to the European Centre for the
Development of Vocational Training.**

Dear Mr Lettmayr,

In May 2011, I launched a programme of visits to EU agencies, with the aim of identifying and spreading best practices used by the agencies' in their relations with citizens. I initially carried out three "pilot" visits to the EU agencies in the United Kingdom, namely, the European Banking Authority, the European Medicines Agency and the European Police College. Subsequently, on 1 June 2011, I met with the heads of all EU agencies in Brussels and had occasion to familiarise them with this initiative in more detail. In October 2011, I visited the European Environment Agency in Copenhagen and in November the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addition and the European Maritime Safety Agency in Lisbon. Information on my previous visits to the EU agencies is available on the following page of my website:

www.ombudsman.europa.eu/activities/visits.faces

I will be in Thessaloniki in February 2011 to address a seminar organised by the National School for the Judiciary. I would be happy to meet you and relevant members of your team on Wednesday 22 February, preferably in the morning. I expect that my visit would last two to three hours. Please find in annex to this letter a draft programme for our meeting, as well as some additional information concerning the procedural aspects of this type of visits.

In my visit to the Agency, I will be accompanied by Ms Christina Karakosta, Legal Adviser in my Office, who will act as contact person for the organisational aspects of our meeting. Her contact details are: christina.karakosta@ombudsman.europa.eu, 00 32 2 284 11 41. I would be grateful if you could inform me of the name of a relevant contact person in your staff who could liaise with her for all the necessary preparations.

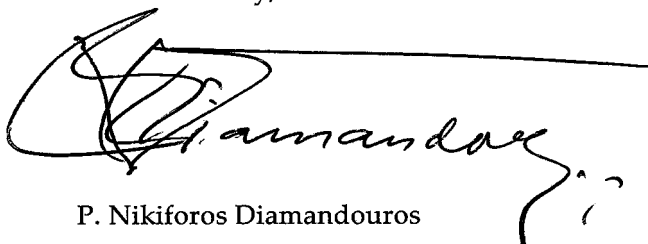
Please note that, following the visit and our meeting covering the substantive points outlined in the note in annex, I will also meet with Cedefop's Staff Committee. My decision to do so follows a request by the Assembly of



Agency Staff Committees (AASC) that I systematically meet with the staff committees of the agencies that are the objects of my own initiative visits.

I would like to thank you again for agreeing to organise this visit, and look forward to what I am certain will prove to be fruitful exchanges on the various themes identified in the note in annex to this letter. I would further like to thank in advance Cedefop's management for organising the practical aspects of my meeting with Cedefop's Staff Committee, which should take place on the same day, Wednesday, 22 February, after the conclusion of our meeting with management.

Yours sincerely,



P. Nikiforos Diamandouros

Attachment: 1



ANNEX:

Procedural aspects and draft agenda of the visit.

Concerning the procedural aspects

The European Ombudsman's visits are formally carried out on the basis of his competence to conduct own initiative inquiries. The correspondence relating to this visit will therefore carry a registration reference number for such own-initiative inquiries (OI/4/2012/CK). The Ombudsman would be grateful if Cedefop could quote this reference number in its correspondence concerning the visit.

An own initiative inquiry implies, among others, that the usual procedural guarantees concerning such inquiries apply. These include the agency's right to request the European Ombudsman to treat information and documents on a confidential basis - see Articles 5.1, 5.2 and 14.2 of the Ombudsman's Implementing Provisions:
www.ombudsman.europa.eu/resources/provisions.faces

As well as informing the agency to be visited of the issues that he intends to raise, the Ombudsman can also ask it to provide in advance certain relevant information and/or documents.

Following each visit, the Ombudsman will inform the agency in writing of his findings. If he makes any specific suggestions, he will normally ask the agency to inform him of any follow-up action it proposes to undertake. Depending on the agency's response, the Ombudsman will either consider closing the inquiry or taking further steps, for instance, by issuing formal recommendations.

Please note that the preparatory letter for this visit, as well as this annex will be published on the European Ombudsman's website. If the Ombudsman decides to make suggestions to the Agency following his visit, the communication containing such suggestions will also be published on that page, as will the Agency's response, any further correspondence, and the Ombudsman's final written conclusions. These exchanges will appear on the following page of the Ombudsman's website:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/activities/visits.faces>

Concerning the issues on the agenda

With regard to the content of the 22 February 2012 visit, the European Ombudsman would like to discuss the following themes:

- Cedefop's initial contacts with the public
- Transparency, dialogue and accountability
- Recruitment
- Tenders and contracts
- Conflicts of interest



The specific issues that the Ombudsman would like to look at under each theme are as follows:

1. Initial contacts with the public

One of the Ombudsman's fundamental tasks is to ensure that the EU administration is open, service-minded and efficient in handling contacts with citizens. The relevant basic principles are laid down in the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour (CGAB). The issue remains significant in our daily work, suggesting that the EU administration still faces some challenges in this area. When appropriate, the European Ombudsman tries to find a rapid solution to complaints that concern grievances about a citizen's initial contacts with the administration. Usually this involves my services' contacting the relevant person by telephone.

I understand that all the EU agencies agreed to adopt the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour at a meeting of the heads of the agencies held in Lisbon in October 2008. I am pleased that Cedefop's website contains a link to the European Code of Good Administrative Behaviour. Nevertheless, I am not aware of how Cedefop has implemented this decision, and how it goes about ensuring that its staff complies with the principles laid down in the above-mentioned Code. I have not been able to find references to this matter on Cedefop's website and would therefore be grateful for a presentation on this subject.

2. Transparency, dialogue and accountability

The European Ombudsman also places a premium on promoting transparency and increasing accountability in the EU administration. This requirement is, among others, reflected in the EU legislation on public access to documents, which expressly mentions the Ombudsman as a review body. It is also reflected in the Ombudsman's extensive powers of investigation, which enable us thoroughly to clarify the facts and issues raised in our inquiries.

I would therefore be grateful to know more about the following issues:

- a) How does Cedefop deal in practice with requests for public access to documents? What are its guidelines and/or practical arrangements for handling such requests? Please provide examples, such as the main correspondence in the Agency's handling of the last three requests for public access to documents dealt with under Regulation 1049/2001. (The *substance* of Cedefop's decision in these examples will not be examined, as this is not the purpose of this visit.)



- b) Does Cedefop produce an annual report (internal or external) on its handling of public access to documents?
- c) Does Cedefop operate, or intend to operate, a public register in the sense of Article 11 of Regulation 1049/2001?
- d) Cedefop handles a vast amount of information and data. Its website is user-friendly and contains large volume of data, publications and information relating to Cedefop's main activities. In particular, the section "contact-us" provides a detailed contact list and different contact persons for a range of issues. How Cedefop deals with requests for information? Please provide us with information concerning the feedback Cedefop's services receive from users and stakeholders regarding access to information.

3. Selection and recruitment

With regard to the substance of selection and recruitment decisions, the Ombudsman takes an approach similar to that of the EU Courts. This means, among others, that he recognises the very wide discretionary powers of the Administration in selecting its staff.

With regard to the procedural aspects of selection and recruitment, the Ombudsman has very actively worked to increase the transparency of EU recruitment. This has, for instance, led to enhanced transparency regarding the names of members of selection boards, and more detailed evaluation sheets that provide candidates with a better insight into how they were assessed.

Cedefop has adopted and published on its website guidelines for the selection procedures it organises. I would be grateful to receive additional clarification on the following issues:

- a) How does Cedefop ensure an effective communication with candidates to selection procedures concerning the status of their applications and/or the outcome of the selection procedure?
- b) Are the names of selection board members known to candidates? To what extent does Cedefop provide job candidates with access to the assessments of their applications?
- c) To what extent does Cedefop seek quicker and less formal means to resolve disputes about selection and recruitment decisions than the ones foreseen in Article 90 of the Staff Regulations?



- d) Does Cedefop systematically inform candidates that they may complain to the Ombudsman, as provided for in Article 19 of the above-mentioned Code of Good Administrative Behaviour?

4. Tenders and contracts

At the review level, disputes in relation to tender decisions and contractual relationships are most commonly dealt with by the courts. However, a significant proportion of the Ombudsman's cases has over the years concerned these areas as well. In relation to tenders, the Ombudsman draws inspiration from the Court's approach, which is to recognise the administration's broad discretionary powers in assessing the substantive aspects of tender proposals, while carefully checking whether it gave valid and adequate reasons for its decisions and whether it adequately respected applicable procedures and information rights. In relation to contractual disputes, the Ombudsman does not as such assess whether there is a breach of contract. He does, however, thoroughly examine whether the administration provided good reasons for its position, and also looks into the fairness of the administrative actions or omissions.

Questions:

- a) How does Cedefop handle disputes in relation to these areas?
- b) Are tenderers and contractors informed that they can complain to the Ombudsman?

5. Conflicts of interest

Conflicts of interest arise when persons who work for the public administration may be perceived to have an inappropriate personal interest in a matter with which they are dealing. Such conflicts need to be appropriately handled in order to ensure objective decision-making, and to enhance the public's trust in the administration. Recent events and cases show that the EU administration does not clearly enjoy the public's full confidence in relation to this issue.

In light of these considerations, I would be interested to know what concrete measures Cedefop applies in order to avoid conflicts of interest in relation to the following areas:

- a) Recruitment of staff, including senior staff
- b) Current and former staff members, notably regarding external activities during and after their service at Cedefop (see for instance articles 11, 11a, 12b, and 16 of the Staff Regulations).