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# Ombudsman calls on Commission to make *ex-gratia* payments to misinformed exchange students

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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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[www.ombudsman.europa.eu](http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu)

**Contact:**  
Gundi Gadesmann,  
Media and External  
Relations Officer,  
T. +32 2 284 26 09  
[gundi.gadesmann@ombudsman.europa.eu](mailto:gundi.gadesmann@ombudsman.europa.eu)

**The European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, has asked the European Commission to make an *ex-gratia* payment of EUR 1 500 to each of several students from outside the European Union, who participated in the EU scholarship programme *Erasmus Mundus I*. This follows a complaint from a Canadian student who claimed that he and his fellow students, who followed a Master's Course in Aeronautics and Space Technology, had been misinformed about the financial aspects of their scholarship.**

**Canadian student complained about *Erasmus Mundus* scholarship**

The *Erasmus Mundus* programme is an EU-funded exchange programme for students from outside the European Union, which aims to enhance the quality of European higher education and to promote the EU as a world centre of excellence in learning.

In April 2007, a Canadian student, who took part in a Master's Course in Aeronautics and Space Technology in Munich and Madrid (EuMAS 2006-2008), turned to the Commission. He explained that he was experiencing serious difficulties in covering his living expenses within his scholarship of EUR 21 000 per year, as the tuition fees for his Master's Course alone amounted to EUR 12 000 per year. The Commission's website stated that the scholarship was to cover "travel and living expenses and tuition in Europe for the full duration of the course". The student, therefore, asked the Commission to grant him and his fellow students financial assistance, since the EUR 400 remaining per month after tuition fees and travel expenses had been paid was not enough to cover basic living expenses in Munich or Madrid.

The Commission rejected the request, arguing that the student should have been aware of the high tuition fees for the EuMAS 2006-2008 course.

Following his investigation, the Ombudsman concluded that the information provided by the Commission regarding the *Erasmus Mundus* programme indeed led EuMAS 2006-2008 students from outside the EU to believe that their scholarship would enable them to have a decent standard of living while in Europe. In his view, this information was inaccurate and the Commission's argument concerning the tuition fees was unfounded. He recommended that the Commission make an *ex-gratia* payment of EUR 1 500 to each of the EuMAS 2006-2008 third-country students for the inconvenience they had experienced. He asked the Commission to submit a detailed opinion on his recommendation by 31 May 2011.

The Ombudsman's recommendation is available at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/draftrecommendation.faces/en/10078/html.bookmark>