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International Right to Know Day: Ombudsman calls for more pro-active transparency in the EU

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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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On the occasion of the “**International Right to Know Day**”, the European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, called on the EU administration to be more pro-active as regards access to documents and information. Speaking at an event, entitled “**What the EU can learn from others**”, which he held in Brussels, the Ombudsman said: “**I am concerned about the consistently high number of transparency-related complaints I receive every year. Many EU institutions are still too reactive in their approach to public access and some even seem to be defensive in their thinking.**”

Proposal to appoint information officers in the EU administration

More than one third of the Ombudsman’s inquiries concern complaints about lack of transparency in the activities of the EU administration. Access to information or documents, the composition of expert groups, or an institution’s policy making process constitute the subject matter of most such complaints.

Mr Diamandouros stressed: “It would be good administration for all EU documents to be drafted with a view to ensuring that citizens, organisations, and businesses can have the widest possible access to them. To facilitate public access to documents, I propose the appointment of information officers in the EU institutions and bodies. Their role should be to secure the citizens’ right of access to EU documents by encouraging the institutions to adopt a proactive approach, as well as ensuring that they react correctly to requests for access.”

The Ombudsman also called for useful, citizen-friendly, online registers of documents that not only inform citizens of the documents available, but, wherever possible, make those documents directly accessible to the public. In this way, citizens can obtain the document immediately, without having to make an application for access.

In this context, Mr Diamandouros mentioned a “best practice” example from the United States where the government is developing a single website bringing together all rulemaking proposals generated by nearly 300 federal agencies.

More information about the “International Right to Know Day” event is available at:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/activities/calendarevent.faces/en/544/html.bookmark>