



Press release No. 8/2013

Ombudsman dealt with more than 30 000 complaints in the past ten years

27 May 2013

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

Twitter:
[@GundiGadesmann](https://twitter.com/GundiGadesmann)
[@EUombudsman](https://twitter.com/EUombudsman)

The European Ombudsman, P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, dealt with more than 30 000 complaints and opened almost 3 500 investigations into alleged maladministration in the EU administration during his ten years in office. In 2012 alone, he received 2 442 complaints (2 510 in 2011) and opened a record number of 465 inquiries (396 in 2011). Most of the 2012 inquiries were about lack of transparency (21.5%), including refusal to release documents or information. Other cases concerned problems with the execution of EU contracts or calls for tender, conflicts of interest, unfairness, delays, and discrimination.

At the presentation of his **Annual Report 2012** in Brussels, Mr Diamandouros said: "In the past ten years, the EU administration has become a lot more transparent, citizen-friendly, and service-minded. The independent and impartial work of the Ombudsman has hopefully contributed to this notable progress in the administrative culture of the EU civil service. As I never tire of saying, however, there is always room for improvement, especially when it comes to enhancing the capacity of the EU institutions and bodies to be proactive in promoting a culture of service towards citizens."

In 2012, the Ombudsman received the greatest number of complaints from Spain (340), Germany (273), Poland (235), and Belgium (182). After analysis, almost 1 500 complaints were referred to national or regional ombudsmen in the Member States, to the European Parliament's Petitions Committee, the European Commission, and to other problem-solving mechanisms, such as SOLVIT and Your Europe Advice.

Most of the investigations opened by the European Ombudsman were based on complaints from Belgium (103), Italy (42), Spain (39), and Germany (39). They concerned the European Commission (53%), followed by the European Personnel Selection Office (17%), the EU Agencies taken together (13%), and the European Parliament (5%).

In 80 cases (21%), the institutions concerned agreed to a friendly solution proposal or settled the matter. The Ombudsman found maladministration in 56 cases (47 in 2011) and made critical remarks in 47 cases (35 in 2011).

The Ombudsman's *Overview 2012* (in 24 languages) and the full *Annual Report* (currently available in English, with 23 other language versions to follow in July) are available at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/activities/annualreports.faces>



Selection of 2012 cases

European Medicines Agency releases adverse reaction reports

The London-based European Medicines Agency (EMA) approves and monitors medicines placed on the EU market, with a view to protecting public health. It receives information concerning suspected adverse reactions to drugs from the national authorities and from pharmaceutical companies. A Greek law firm asked EMA for public access to adverse reaction reports related to a medicine for the treatment of bacterial infections. EMA refused at first, arguing that it needed to protect commercial interests. However, EMA eventually followed the Ombudsman's recommendation to disclose the documents, having first removed personal data.

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release.faces/en/11152/html.bookmark>

ECB letter did not suggest changes to the Spanish Constitution

In September 2011, the Spanish Constitution was amended with the aim of limiting public debt. Shortly before this, the President of the European Central Bank (ECB) sent a confidential letter to the Spanish Prime Minister, expressing the bank's concerns about the difficult situation of the Spanish economy and the need for swift action. A Spanish lawyer wanted to know whether the ECB had requested an amendment to the Spanish Constitution, but the ECB refused access to the letter. The Ombudsman concluded that the ECB was right to refuse disclosure. However, with the express prior consent of the ECB President, he confirmed to the complainant that the letter did not suggest any amendments to the Spanish Constitution. The complainant was satisfied with this response.

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release.faces/en/11810/html.bookmark>

Commission takes actions to combat increased bee mortality

The Commission had in previous years authorised the use of a number of insecticides, known as neonicotinoids, for plant protection purposes. In March 2012, the Austrian Ombudsman Board turned to the European Ombudsman, explaining that new scientific evidence suggested that certain neonicotinoids have led to increased bee mortality. It alleged that the Commission failed to take appropriate measures to address the

problem. After the Commission submitted a whole set of new measures it had taken, including a risk assessment, the complainant was satisfied and the Ombudsman closed the case.

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release.faces/en/12018/html.bookmark>

Commission reimburses EUR 100 000 to an NGO

A Belgian NGO successfully carried out an EU project helping set up 59 micro-businesses in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). Because it experienced difficulties in obtaining proper invoices from local contract partners, the NGO received written consent from the Commission to use a simpler cost reporting method. However, following an audit, the Commission recovered EUR 150 000 from the NGO, arguing that certain costs were not sufficiently documented. After the Ombudsman proposed a friendly solution, the Commission refunded more than EUR 100 000 to the NGO.

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/press/release.faces/en/11701/html.bookmark>