



Ombudsman: Citizens should have greater access to EU documents

The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has called for citizens to have wider access to documents and information, so that they can better understand the role played by the Member States in making and implementing the European Union's policies. The Ombudsman's call was contained in his response to the public consultation, launched by the European Commission, on how to improve the current access to documents legislation. The Ombudsman stressed "that transparency is essential for citizens to participate in the political process and to hold public authorities to account".

According to the Ombudsman, the lack of minimum standards for transparency about EU related matters in the Member States represents a serious weakness in the democratic structure of the Union. For example, a Member State currently has the right to veto public access to its documents at the EU level, without giving any reason. The Ombudsman makes concrete proposals on how to tackle the problem.

Furthermore, the Ombudsman called for shorter review procedures in cases where access to documents has been denied. Citizens, NGOs, enterprises or other organisations who turn to the Ombudsman after an EU institution has refused access to certain documents should not have to wait months for the EU institution to explain its position.

Background

On 18 April 2007, the Commission adopted a Green Paper, launching a public consultation on the rules regarding public access to documents held by the EU institutions (Regulation 1049/2001). Stating that the accumulated experience of five years made this a good moment to revisit the current Regulation, the Commission called on all those involved in issues relating to access to documents to forward to it their proposals on how to make the legislative process of the EU institutions more accessible to the public.

The Ombudsman based his response to the Green Paper on his work investigating complaints. He notes in that connection that one quarter of his inquiries concern lack of transparency, including the refusal of EU institutions to give access to documents and information. For example, he is currently investigating complaints about the quality of the Commission's registers of documents, as well as the treatment of the information available in databases.

To read in full the Ombudsman's response to the Green Paper, please visit:

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: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>

<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/letters/en/20070711-1.htm>

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