2007 discharge: EU general budget, European Ombudsman

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PURPOSE: to present the final annual accounts of the European Communities for the financial year 2007 - Other institutions: section VIII - European Ombudsman.

Note: this summary provides a general overview of the main trends in terms of the European Ombudsman' s expenditure for the financial year 2007. It does not cover the details of the implementation of the expenditure by the institution due to the unavailability of the relevant document.

However, it does cover the figures for the Ombudsman's expenditure as presented in volume I of the consolidated annual accounts of the European Communities for the year 2007.

CONTENT: the summary of the consolidated annual accounts of the European Communities for the year 2007 show that the European Ombudsman's expenditure was as follows:

Commitment appropriations:

- commitment appropriations authorised: EUR 8 million;
- commitments made in 2007: EUR 7 million (implementation rate of 90.48%);
- appropriations carried over to 2008: EUR 1 million (9.52% of total commitments);
- appropriations lapsing: EUR 1 million (9.52% of the budget).

Payment appropriations:

- payment appropriations authorised: EUR 9 million;
- payments made in 2007: EUR 7 million (implementation rate of 84%);
- appropriations carried over to 2008: EUR 1 million (6.42% of total payments);
- appropriations lapsing: EUR 1 million (9.58% of the budget).

Main axes of expenditure for 2007: the Ombudsman's budget focused on the following main elements:

Complaints and enquiries: this is the area that concerns most of the Ombudsman's activities. During 2007, the Ombudsman received 3 211 new complaints, compared to 3 830 in 2006. On the other hand, the number of admissible complaints increased in both absolute and relative terms, from 449 (12% of the total) in 2006 to 518 (16%) in 2007. As a result, 17% more inquiries were opened during the year on the basis of complaints received. In almost 70% of cases, the Ombudsman was able to help the complainant by opening an inquiry into the case, transferring it to a competent body, or giving advice on where to turn for a prompt and effective solution to the problem. A total of 303 new inquiries were opened during the year on the basis of complaints. The Ombudsman also began six inquiries on his own initiative.

Overall, the European Ombudsman dealt with a total of 641 inquiries in 2007, 332 of which were carried over from 2006. As in previous years, most of the inquiries concerned the European Commission (413, or 64% of the total). The main types of maladministration alleged were lack of transparency, including refusal of information (in 28% of cases), unfairness or abuse of power (18%), unsatisfactory procedures (13%), avoidable delay (9%), discrimination (8%), negligence (8%), legal error (4%), and failure to ensure fulfilment of obligations, that is, failure by the European Commission to carry out its role as "guardian of the Treaty" vis-à-vis the Member States (3%).

In total, the Ombudsman handled **10 484 complaints and information requests** from citizens during the year in question.

Better communication: the other main objective of the year was to work with the institutions to promote good administration and refocus communication efforts so that all those who might need to make use of the European Ombudsman's services are properly informed of how to do so. This objective was subject to particular attention because, thanks to an ambitious and carefully targeted information campaign, the number of admissible complaints increased by 17% (see above). In 2007, the European Ombudsman developed an interactive guide that will help citizens find the most appropriate avenue of redress for their grievances. The guide should enable a greater proportion of complainants to address directly the body best equipped to deal with their complaint. Lastly, in terms of communication, 2007 was closed with the publication of the Annual Report of the European Ombudsman, which enables the Ombudsman to provide an account of his work to the European Parliament and to the other institutions.

European Network of Ombudsmen: 2007 was also characterised by the adoption of the European Network of Ombudsmen Statement. The aim of the Statement is to make the EU dimension of the work of ombudsmen better known and to clarify the service that members of the Network provide to people who complain about matters within the scope of EU law.

Staff policy: from an organisational perspective, 2007 saw a slight change with the Ombudsman's complaint-handling secretariat now supervised directly by the Assistant to the Head of the Legal Department. The establishment plan of the Ombudsman showed a total of 57 posts in 2007, the same as for 2006.