

Ombudsman annual report 2008

2009/2088(INI) - 01/10/2009

The Committee on Petitions adopted the own-initiative report drawn up by Chrysoula PALIADELI (S&D, EL) on the annual report on the European Ombudsman's activities in 2008. It approves the annual report and its structure, combining: (i) a summary of the year's activities with an overview of the complaints and inquiries; (ii) a thematic analysis of the Ombudsman's decisions, covering the most significant findings of law and fact contained in the Ombudsman's decisions in 2008; (iii) as well as the problems raised at various stages of the procedure.

MEPs consider that the **Ombudsman has continued to exercise his powers in an active and balanced way**, both with regard to examining and handling complaints and conducting and concluding enquiries and with regard to maintaining constructive relations with the European Union's institutions and bodies and encouraging citizens to make use of their rights in relation to those institutions and bodies.

The report welcomes the revision of the Ombudsman's Statute, in particular the Ombudsman's **strengthened powers of investigation** which will help to ensure that citizens can have full confidence in his ability to conduct a thorough investigation of their complaints without restrictions.

MEPs consider that the number of inadmissible complaints remains unsatisfactory and recommends in view of this that a continued information campaign be conducted amongst European citizens designed to raise their awareness of the functions and competence of the members of the European Network of Ombudsmen.

The committee asks:

- for all EU institutions and bodies to be given the **necessary budgetary and human resources** to ensure that citizens receive prompt and substantive responses to their enquiries, complaints and petitions;
- for the **term 'maladministration' to be continued to be broadly interpreted** so as to include not only unlawful administrative acts or infringements of binding legal rules or principles but also, for example, cases where the administrative authorities have been sloppy, negligent in their duty to their citizens or lacking in transparency or have infringed other principles of good administration;
- for a **common website of the European institutions** be put in place to help citizens and refer them directly to the institution competent to handle their complaint, thereby reducing the number of inadmissible complaints filed with the European Ombudsman.

MEPs repeat their call for all EU institutions and bodies to adopt a **common approach with regard to the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour**. They note that the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour proposed by the Ombudsman, as approved by Parliament on 6 September 2001, serves as a guide and resource for the staff of all Community institutions and bodies and has been regularly updated and published on the Ombudsman's website.

Furthermore, the Ombudsman is called upon to:

- pursue his efforts in raising awareness of his work and to promote his activities effectively and transparently;
- maintain a watching brief and ensure that the Commission makes proper use of its discretionary powers to initiate infringement proceedings under Article 226 of the EC Treaty or to propose penalties under Article 228 of the EC Treaty;
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continue to place great emphasis on events involving information for citizens and, hence, potential complainants.

In addition, MEPs reiterate that, **if an institution refuses to follow a recommendation** contained in a special report by the Ombudsman despite Parliament having approved that recommendation, Parliament could legitimately use its powers to bring an action before the Court of Justice in respect of the act or omission which was the subject of the Ombudsman's recommendation. In this respect, they invite the committee responsible for the Rules of Procedure to propose appropriate provisions, to be introduced into the Rules, for the initiation of such an action.

Lastly, MEPs welcome the enhanced **information campaign** promoted by the communications strategy adopted by the Ombudsman, which leads to greater awareness of citizens' rights and Community competences, as well as a greater understanding of the Ombudsman's sphere of competence.