

Report on the Ombudsman's annual report in 2017

2018/2105(INI) - 13/12/2018 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 368 votes to 15 with 135 abstentions a resolution on the annual report on the activities of the European Ombudsman in 2017.

It approved the annual report for 2017 presented by the European Ombudsman and congratulated Emily O'Reilly for her excellent work and constructive efforts to improve the quality of the EU's administration and highlighted the Ombudsman's structural work in bringing instances of maladministration to light by adopting a case-by-case approach and launching an increasing number of own-initiative enquiries.

Parliament welcomed the Ombudsman's five-year strategy 'Towards 2019', which aims to increase the impact and visibility of her office.

Statistics

Parliament noted that in 2017, 15 837 citizens called on the Ombudsman's services for help, of whom 12 521 were given advice through the Interactive Guide on the Ombudsman's website, while of the remaining requests 1135 were forwarded elsewhere for information and 2181 were handled by the Ombudsman as complaints.

In 2017, the Ombudsman opened 447 inquiries, of which 433 were complaint-based and 14 were own-initiative inquiries, while closing 363 inquiries (348 complaint-based and 15 own-initiative inquiries). Most of the inquiries concerned the Commission (256 inquiries or 57.3 %), followed by the EU agencies (35 inquiries or 7.8 %), the European Personnel Selection Office (EPSO) (34 inquiries or 7.6 %), the European Parliament (22 inquiries or 4.9 %), the European External Action Service (EEAS) (17 inquiries or 3.8 %), the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) (16 inquiries or 3.6 %) and other institutions (67 inquiries or 15.0%).

Main concerns

The Ombudsman's top three concerns in the inquiries closed in 2017 were: **transparency, accountability and public access to information** and documents (20.6 %), culture of service (16.8 %) and respect for procedural rights (16.5 %). Other concerns include ethical issues, public participation in EU decision-making, respect for fundamental rights, proper use of discretion including in infringement procedures, sound financial management of EU tenders, grants and contracts, recruitment and good management of EU personnel issues.

Members reiterated their call for a **central transparency hub** for all EU institutions and agencies. They also stressed the importance of adopting an appropriate legislative act to make the **EU transparency register mandatory and legally binding** for all EU institutions and agencies and interest representatives, thereby ensuring full transparency of lobbying.

Parliament stressed the importance of regularly updating and greatly improving the accuracy of data on the EU transparency register, including the obligation for law firms that lobby to declare all their clients and for all information on the influence of lobbyists to be available free of charge and easily accessible to the public. Full transparency of the funding of all interest representatives must be ensured. Parliament called for any organisation that breaks the **revolving doors rules** to be suspended from the transparency

register. It also highlighted the Ombudsman's findings that the ECB President's continued membership of the G30 constituted maladministration as it gave rise to a public perception that the ECB's independence from private financial interests could be compromised.

Members went on to state that the Commission failed to respect the principles of transparency, ethics and the rule of law in the procedure it used to appoint Martin Selmayr as its new Secretary-General. They noted that the Ombudsman found four instances of maladministration in Mr Selmayr's appointment due to the Commission's failure to follow the relevant rules correctly, both in letter and spirit.

Parliament emphasised that Mr Selmayr must resign as Secretary-General and called on the Commission to adopt a new procedure for appointing its Secretary-General. The Ombudsman was asked to continue her work on strengthening ethics rules within the EU institutions in order to solve revolving door issues and Parliament looked forward to the Ombudsman's analysis into how the Commission is implementing her guidelines.

Members urged the Ombudsman to launch a strategic inquiry in order to assess whether EU Institutions, offices and agencies, such as the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA), the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) and the EMA, ensure that the collection, examination and publication of scientific evidence is fully independent, transparent, impartial, accurate and free from conflict of interests, and whether the proper policies and procedural safeguards are in place, notably when dealing with GMOs, glyphosate, pesticides, phytosanitary and biocidal products and medicines. They suggested, in this regard, a further inquiry into the composition and selection procedures of the scientific committees and panels of these agencies, in order to ensure that they are completely independent and to put into place the most stringent mechanisms **preventing any possible conflict of interests**

Lastly, Parliament called for greater financial and human resources to be allocated to the office of the Ombudsman, with a view to upholding its crucial duty of enhancing good administrative practices within the EU, a service of vital importance to the citizens of the Union.