Activities of the European Ombudsman - annual report 2018

2019/2134(INI) - 16/01/2020 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 563 votes to 3, with 41 abstentions, a resolution on the activities of the European Ombudsman - Annual Report 2018.

Parliament welcomed Emily O'Reilly's work and her constructive efforts to improve the quality of the EU's administration and the accessibility and quality of its services to EU citizens.

Enhancing transparency

Stressing that enhancing citizens' trust in the EU institutions was a priority for Parliament, Members insisted on the need for more active citizen participation in decision-making and greater transparency in the functioning of the administration, with a view to strengthening the legitimacy of the Union's institutions.

Parliament stressed the importance of citizens' access to Council documents and a high level of transparency in the legislative process. It considered that the Council should review its confidentiality policy, while urging the Ombudsman to ensure that the trialogue decision-making process becomes more transparent.

Members welcomed the European Ombudsman's strategy to increase the visibility and impact of her mandate among EU citizens. In this context, they encouraged the Ombudsman to propose innovative ways for the EU institutions to better communicate with citizens in all the official languages of the Union.

Parliament called for the Council, as co-legislator, to align its working methods with the standards of a parliamentary democracy rather than acting like a diplomatic forum. It called on the Council to implement without delay the Ombudsman's recommendations from her strategic inquiry, which concluded that the Council's transparency practices constituted acts of maladministration. It also reiterated its call for an update on EU legislation on access to documents and requests that Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents.

Members stressed the need to:

- monitor the implementation of the Commission's revised rules on revolving doors;

- develop more rules and stricter criteria for conflicts of interest;

- ensure transparency in the Union's decision-making process by setting up a Joint Legislative Portal for the services of the three institutions. Members expressed support for the publication of final trilogies documents.

- ensure the integrity of the European Central Bank (ECB) and its independence from private financial interests: members of its Executive Board must abstain from being simultaneously members of fora or other organisations, which include executives of banks supervised by the ECB, and must not participate in fora that are not open to the public.

The Commission was called on, in the phase of informal dialogue with the Member States, to ensure a high level of transparency and access to documents and information with regard to the EU Pilot and infringement procedures including those relating to petitions received. The Commission should also be more involved in solving all instances of maladministration identified by the Ombudsman in the course of its activities.

Lobbying at EU level

Parliament supported the Ombudsman's commitment to improving the transparency of EU lobbying. It insisted on the need for a tripartite agreement between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission, which would be a step towards strengthening the existing rules, while calling for the institutions to continue to take legislative measures binding on all EU institutions and bodies.

The resolution stressed the importance of making available all information on the influence of lobbyists free of charge, fully comprehensible and easily accessible to the public, improving the accuracy of data in the EU Transparency Register.

Members suggested the adoption of a legal act in order to make the Transparency Register fully mandatory and legally-binding for all EU institutions and agencies and third parties, thus ensuring full transparency of lobbying.

Parliament welcomed the Ombudsman's suggestions to improve the transparency of the EU risk assessment model in the food chain. It encouraged the Ombudsman to continue her own initiative inquiry into the transparency of EMA and pharmaceutical companies' pre-submission applications for market authorisation interaction, and to continue monitoring the compliance of the Joint Sickness Insurance Scheme (JSIS) with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Members supported the Ombudsman's initiative to follow-up the #MeToo movement and call for continued monitoring of the EU administration's anti-harassment policies.

Lastly, Parliament reiterated their long-standing call to upgrade the current Code of Good Administrative Behaviour into a properly binding regulation for all EU institutions, agencies and third parties.