European Ombudsman. Annual report 1997

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During the debate preceding the vote on the 1997 report of the European Ombudsman, Mr Jacob SÖDERMAN gave a brief commentary on this institution’s activities during the previous year. He therefore indicated that, between 1996 and 1997, the number of complaints had risen by 40% and that there had been a further increase of 15% in the first half of 1998. He also explained that, even when a complaint was deemed inadmissible, the citizen did not go away empty-handed. In this case, the Ombudsman would explain why the complaint was not admissible and would direct the complainant to the correct institution. Out of a total of 1 412 cases, there had been 1 180 new complaints in 1997 and 101 inquiries had been closed with a reasoned decision. In 40% of cases, a friendly solution had been found. In 59% of cases, no maladministration on the part of the institutions was found. For Mr SÖDERMAN, the first goal was to decide on the admissibility of a complaint within one month. The second goal was to close a case in which an inquiry had been launched within one year. In this case, the Ombudsman said that there was a growing backlog of cases. As regards the initiatives aimed at promoting transparency, the Ombudsman had undertaken three inquiries: - the first concerned the Commission’s procedures for dealing with complaints from citizens regarding the infringement of Community law by the Member States; - the second concerned transparency in relation to the recruitment procedures followed by the Community institutions; this inquiry was still ongoing; - the third concerned public access to documents and was accompanied by recommendations. The Ombudsman therefore noted that a high number of complaints from citizens concerned the enforcement of Community law by public authorities in the Member States. These complaints could, in his opinion, be usefully dealt with either as petitions to the European Parliament or by national ombudsmen. He considered that many complaints could be resolved at national level.