# European Ombudsman. Annual report 1997

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OBJECTIVE: annual report of the European Ombudsman for 1997. SUBSTANCE: this is the third annual report by the European Ombudsman giving further information concerning the work of the Ombudsman since 1995 when he was first appointed. The report outlines as in previous years the complaints received and considered giving particular emphasis to inquiries initiated by the Ombudsman. For the first time it was possible to reach amicable settlements regarding cases of maladministration. Details are also given concerning other measures such as the Ombudsman's special report on access to Community documents. The inquiry was the subject of a special report to the European Parliament (COS0690) concerning organisational matters the Ombudsman indicates that in 1997 all the offices and infrastructures were operational in Brussels and in Strasbourg. A network of liaison bodies were set up with the national Ombudsman's office and similar bodies in the Member States thereby facilitating effective communication. The Ombudsman indicates that 1181 new complaints were made to him during 1997. 1067 of these were sent directly by individual citizens, 57 came from associations and 38 from companies. 17 complaints were transmitted by Members of the European Parliament and 227 were brought forward from the year 1996. The Ombudsman also began four own-initiative inquiries. In all he dealt with 1412 cases, a 40% increase over the number of complaints received in 1996. The number of complaints ruled admissible also increased. The Ombudsman also indicates that a number of complaints were forwarded to the European Parliament's Committee on Petitions (13 complaints and two petitions) as provided for under the European Parliament's Rules of Procedure. In accordance with Parliament's wishes expressed in its resolution of 1997 concerning the Ombudsman's second annual report (COS0525) he proposed a definition of what is understood by 'case of maladministration' based on previous experience of national ombudsmen and the relevant legal texts. The Ombudsman also indicated that he had launched a significant policy seeking to provide information for citizens in 1997 and setting up a website on the Internet to give citizens easier access to the Ombudsman and giving general information about the right to complain and table petitions. Finally, the Ombudsman indicates that he wishes to speed up the procedure for ruling a complaint admissible and for this purpose wishes for further staff, particularly in view of the new responsibilities arising from the implementation of the Treaty of Amsterdam. To this end, he expresses the hope that suitable funding will be provided for the years 1999 and 2000.