Role of the Ombudsman

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The Committee on Petitions adopted the report by Mr Newman on the role of the European ombudsman. Mr Newman considered in his report that the appointment of an ombudsman would enable: - the rights of European citizens to be defended against cases of maladministration by the European institutions; - relations to be enhanced between the institutions and the European citizens. He was also of the opinion that the Committee on Petitions and the ombudsman together formed an efficient system for defending citizens' interests and would help Community to work more democratically. He reiterated the respective remits of the ombudsman and the Committee on Petitions, the task of the former being to investigate cases of maladministration by the Community institutions and the purpose of the latter being to respond to any complaint, request for an opinion or action or reaction by citizens to resolutions of the European Parliament or decisions by the other institutions. He emphasised the importance of establishing close cooperation between the ombudsman and the Committee on Petitions, mainly in the interest of those affected by the complaints. At the same time, the rapporteur undertook to support the ombudsman in his activities by considering his reports and, if the committee considered necessary, taking steps to protect the interests of the persons in question where the other institutions had given inadequate assistance. Finally, he called on the Council and the Commission to cooperate with the ombudsman by supplying him with the information needed for the performance of his duties. At the same time, he called on the three institutions to publish a joint statement setting out guiding principles for the number of staff employed by the ombudsman and the status of temporary agents or persons in charge of the investigations conducted by the ombudsman. In this respect, the rapporteur stated that he was concerned by the fact that the draft 1995 budget provided that only staff dealing with enquiries would have the status of temporary staff, while other human resources would be provided by the Secretariat of the European Parliament. He therefore called for all the ombudsman's staff to be assigned to him for the duration of his term of office, in order to maintain his independence and efficiency.