

Report on the Ombudsman's 2005 annual report

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Andreas SCHWAB (EPP-ED, DE) on the Ombudsman's 2005 annual report. It declared its satisfaction with the public profile of the Ombudsman, welcomed the generally constructive cooperation between the Ombudsman and the institutions and endorsed him in his role of "external control mechanism and, in addition, as a valuable source of ongoing improvement to European administration".

MEPs expressed their appreciation of the Ombudsman's good cooperation with Parliament's Committee on Petitions, but stressed the need for "a clear definition and demarcation" of his role vis-à-vis that committee and urged him to "continue to remain within his terms of reference" when seeking to assist citizens. They did acknowledge, however, that when the Ombudsman and the Petitions Committee investigate overlapping issues, "they can achieve useful synergy through close cooperation".

The committee particularly welcomed the Ombudsman's special report on the openness of meetings of the Council when acting in its legislative capacity, and called on the Council to act on the Ombudsman's - and Parliament's - recommendations and to ensure in future that all the meetings in which it acts in its legislative capacity are open and accessible to the public. As part of the efforts to boost transparency, the report also called on future Council presidencies to do their best to provide Internet pages in all the official languages of the EU. Other proposals included establishing the entry portal <http://europa.eu> as the uniform entry page for all EU institutions to make life simpler for citizens and avoid unnecessary confusion from sites existing in parallel.

The report welcomed the introduction of new internal procedures at the Commission when it comes to answering inquiries from the Ombudsman, whereby individual Commissioners assume sponsorship for a specific case. It called on the Commission to introduce this kind of procedure for the processing of petitions as well. The committee also welcomed the European Network of Ombudsmen and called for a further strengthening of exchanges of best practice.

Lastly, noting that nearly 70% of complaints still fall outside the European Ombudsman's terms of reference, the committee said that there was a need for a better communication strategy to ensure that the public was given more information about what the Ombudsman can and cannot do. It encouraged the Ombudsman to "continue to place great emphasis himself on events involving citizens and, hence, potential complainants since clearly the demarcation of responsibilities and decision-making processes between the European, national and regional levels are still too hard to grasp for many citizens and businesses".