



THE EUROPEAN OMBUDSMAN

The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration by institutions and bodies of the European Union. He cannot deal with complaints concerning national, regional or local administrations.

➤ Who can complain to the Ombudsman ?

If you are a citizen of a Member State of the Union or living in a Member State, you can make a complaint to the European Ombudsman. Businesses, associations or other bodies with a registered office in the Union may also complain to the Ombudsman.

➤ About what ?

You can complain to the Ombudsman about maladministration in the activities of the institutions and bodies of the European Union.

➤ What is maladministration ?

Maladministration means poor or failed administration. This occurs if an institution fails to act in accordance with the law, fails to respect the principles of good administration, or if it violates human rights. Some examples are:

- ↪ administrative irregularities
- ↪ unfairness
- ↪ discrimination
- ↪ abuse of power
- ↪ failure to reply
- ↪ refusal of information
- ↪ unnecessary delay (e.g. in payments)

➤ What are the institutions and bodies ?

The institutions and bodies of the European Union include:

- ↪ European Commission
- ↪ Council of the European Union
- ↪ European Parliament



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- ↗ European Court of Auditors
- ↗ Court of Justice of the European Communities (except in its judicial role)
- ↗ European Economic and Social Committee
- ↗ Committee of the Regions of the European Union
- ↗ European Central Bank
- ↗ European Investment Bank
- ↗ European Personnel Selection Office
- ↗ European Anti-Fraud Office
- ↗ Europol
- ↗ Decentralised agencies (such as the European Environment Agency, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, the Office for Harmonisation in the Internal Market, etc.)

This list is not exhaustive. An overview of the European Union's institutions and other bodies is available at: http://europa.eu/institutions/index_en.htm

➤ How to complain ?

Write to the Ombudsman in any EU language, setting out clearly who you are, which institution or body of the European Union you are complaining against and the grounds for your complaint.

- A complaint must be made within two years of the date when you became aware of the facts on which your complaint is based.
- You need not be individually affected by the maladministration.
- You must already have contacted the institution or body concerned, for example by sending a letter.

The Ombudsman will examine your complaint, and you will be informed of the outcome of his investigation. A complaint can be made by writing a letter to the European Ombudsman or by using the form enclosed. An electronic version of the official complaint form is available on the Ombudsman's website at: <http://www.euro-ombudsman.eu.int/form/en/default.htm>

➤ In which cases is the Ombudsman not the right interlocutor ?

The Ombudsman has no judicial role and cannot intervene in issues falling within the remit of courts. He is not an appeals body for decisions taken by national courts or ombudsmen. The Ombudsman cannot investigate complaints against businesses or private individuals. He cannot investigate complaints against national, regional or local authorities in the Member States, even when the complaints are about European Union matters. Examples of such authorities are government departments, state agencies and local councils.

How can the Ombudsman help companies ?

Many companies and associations complain about late payment for EU projects. This is a problem that can quickly threaten the running of the project in question, especially as far as small and medium-sized enterprises are concerned. To give an example:

A small German company which participated in the European Galileo Project complained to the Ombudsman about the failure to receive an outstanding sum of EUR 13,000. After the Ombudsman's intervention, the Commission settled the amount and promised to take the needs of SMEs into account to a greater extent in future EU projects.

How can I contact the Ombudsman ?

The European Ombudsman, 1 Avenue du Président Robert Schuman, B.P. 403,
FR-67001 Strasbourg Cedex

By telephone: +33 (0) 3 88 17 23 13

By fax: +33 (0) 3 88 17 90 62

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Website: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu>