

European Parliament press release, The search for Europe's next Ombudsman (4 July 2013)

Caption: On 3 July 2013, Emily O'Reilly is appointed as European Ombudsman. On 4 July 2013, following her appointment, the Press Service of the European Parliament publishes a feature that explains more about the role and tasks of the European Ombudsman.

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The search for Europe's next Ombudsman

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Focus

When Nikiforos Diamandouros steps down as European Ombudsman on 1 October 2013, he will do so with an impressive record: in 10 years he dealt with more than 30,000 complaints. But who will succeed him as Ombudsman? Our special feature will guide you through the election process, explain what the powers of the Ombudsman are and take a look at past achievements.

The six eligible candidates for the position of Ombudsman were announced in Strasbourg on 20 May. The EP's petitions committee held a hearing on 18 June. **On 3 July, Emily O'Reilly, from Ireland, was elected European Ombudsman during the plenary session in Strasbourg. She was backed by 359 MEPs in a secret plenary vote.**

Find out more in our feature.

Emily O'Reilly elected as European Ombudsman

Emily O'Reilly (Ireland) was elected European Ombudsman on Wednesday 3 July. She was backed by 359 MEPs in a secret plenary vote. The European Ombudsman investigates citizens' complaints of maladministration by EU institutions.

Ms O'Reilly is the first woman to become European Ombudsman.

Four candidates took part in the second ballot, following the withdrawal of the candidatures of Markus Jäger (Germany) and Alex Brenninkmeijer (The Netherlands). In the third ballot, Members had to choose between Ria Oomen-Ruijten (The Netherlands) and Ms O'Reilly, the two candidates who won most votes in the second ballot as provided by the rules. The other two candidates were, Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (Germany) and Francesco Speroni (Italy).

On 18 June, all six candidates for the post were questioned by MEPs on what they could offer by way of independence, visibility and transparency, in a series of public hearings held by the Petitions Committee.

EU rules establish that the Ombudsman must "offer every guarantee of independence". The Ombudsman is usually elected by Parliament in a secret vote at the start of each parliamentary term. Ms O'Reilly was elected following the retirement of Nikiforos Diamandouros.

The role of the Ombudsman, established in 1995, is to investigate cases of maladministration by the EU institutions, including lack of transparency and refusal to provide information or documents.

Procedure: Election of the European Ombudsman, Rule 204 of the Rules of Procedure

New EU Ombudsman: candidates make their case in Parliament

Six candidates vying to become the next EU Ombudsman appeared in EP on 18 June to explain why they should be the one to help people with their complaints about EU institutions. During the hearing organised by the petitions committee, the candidates were asked what their priorities would be, how they would ensure visibility, transparency and their independence as well as why they should be chosen. MEPs will vote for the successor of current Ombudsman Nikiforos Diamadouros during the July plenary.

All candidates had the opportunity to make the case why they should be the next European Ombudsman. Alex Brenninkmeijer, who is currently the Dutch national ombudsman, said: "I'm a specialist in negotiations and conflict resolution." Markus Jaeger, a German who works for the Council of Europe's office of the human rights commissioner, pointed out that "defending other people's freedom is my profession".

Ria Oomen-Ruijten, a Dutch member of the EPP group, said: "The need for privacy on the one hand and the need for transparency on the other, must both be defended by the Ombudsman." Francesco Enrico Speroni, an Italian member of the EFD group, explained: "I am in favour of Wikileaks and I will give access to documents, but there are rules that must be respected."

Commenting on what the challenges would be, Emily O'Reilly, who is currently the Irish national ombudsman, said: "It will be to turn the office into a bigger player within the European public administration." Dagmar Roth-Behrend, a German member of the S&D group, added: "The key issue is being transparent."

European Ombudsman: defending people against EU institutional abuses

If you have a complaint about the EU institutions, what should you do? Take it to the European Ombudsman, who is responsible for defending ordinary people's rights and helping them to combat poor administration in the EU institutions.

What does the European Ombudsman do?

The Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the institutions and bodies of the EU, with the exception of the European Court of Justice acting in its judicial role. Once a year an annual report is submitted to the European Parliament on the outcome of the Ombudsman's inquiries.

Who can file a complaint?

Any EU citizen or anyone who lives in the EU can make a complaint to the European Ombudsman, as can businesses, associations or other bodies with a registered office in the EU.

History

The European Ombudsman was established in 1995 by the Maastricht Treaty. Jacob Söderman from Finland became the first Ombudsman in 1995, followed by Nikiforos Diamandouros from Greece, who was elected in 2003 and re-elected in 2005 and 2010. Mr Diamandouros announced on 14 March he intended to retire on 1 October 2013, which is why a new election has been called.

From Article 228 of Treaty on the EU

- "Where the Ombudsman establishes an instance of maladministration, he shall refer the matter to the institution, body, office or agency concerned, which shall have a period of three months in which to inform him of its views. The Ombudsman shall then forward a report to the EP and the institution, body, office or agency concerned. The person lodging the complaint shall be informed of the outcome of such inquiries."

Who will be the new European Ombudsman?

Current European Ombudsman Nikiforos Diamandouros will retire on 1 October 2013, but who will replace him until the end of the current parliamentary term in 2014? The six eligible candidates will be heard by the EP's petition committee on 18 June and the new Ombudsman will be elected during the July plenary session.

The candidates

There are six eligible candidates:

- Alex Brenninkmeijer, who is currently the Dutch national ombudsman
- Markus Jaeger, a German who works for the Council of Europe's office of the human rights commissioner
- Dagmar Roth-Behrend, a German member of the S&D group
- Ria Oomen-Ruijten, a Dutch member of the EPP group
- Emily O'Reilly, who is currently the Irish national ombudsman. She is also a former political editor, broadcaster and author
- Francesco Enrico Speroni, an Italian member of the EFD group

Who can be an Ombudsman?

In order to be eligible candidate are required to:

- Have EU citizenship and full civil and political rights
- Meet the conditions required for the exercise of the highest judicial office in their country or have the acknowledged competence and experience to undertake the duties of Ombudsman
- Perform his or her duties with complete independence, in the general interest of the EU and its people.
- Neither seek nor accept instructions from any government or other body.

Outgoing Ombudsman: Transparency is replacing secrecy among EU officials

Nikiforos Diamandouros has seen a lot of changes in his 10 years as the European Ombudsman. "There's been a change of mindset and the EU has become more transparent and service-minded," said Mr Diamandouros. "European citizens now know where to go. They go to the European ombudsman, pose their questions and allow us to help them." Watch this EuroparITV interview to learn more about his achievements and the reasons behind his decision to leave the office before the end of his term.