
ELECTION OF EU OMBUDSMAN: THINK BEFORE YOU CHOOSE

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The EU Ombudsman institution is one of the most important branches of our democracy.

It ensures transparency, fairness and accountability. It is who we turn to if authorities violate citizen's rights and who we can trust will investigate our complaints thoroughly, if they are admissible.

It is no secret that many people doubt the work of MEPs here in Brussels. The bureaucracy, the lack of transparency and the intricate system, creates uncertainty about what is actually going on politically as well as administratively.

To ensure our democracy □ and people's confidence in it □ is not undermined, we need a strong ombudsman.

On Tuesday (17 December), we vote in plenary on who will lead this post for the next five years. Therefore, I believe it is vital that a majority of the parliament recognises the role of the ombudsman.

Soft power

Throughout the hearings of the candidates in the political groups and the petitions committee, it has come to my attention that there is some confusion regarding the responsibilities of an ombudsman.

Importantly: the ombudsman serves as soft power; it is neither a judge nor a mediator. She helps citizens by investigating claims concerning maladministration in the EU institutions and thus presents advice on how to adjust the problem.

Her most vital tools are the citizen's trust and respect for the institution and its outstanding professional level, which in turn gives her authority in the public sector.

Emily O'Reilly, our current ombudsman, has delivered this. Her own initiative reports such as her call for transparency in the council's legislative work in order to eliminate the democratic deficit in EU and the improvements of the transparency register, are to name a few.

From her work stemming from complaints, one prominent episode was the Martin Selmayr case. Here, it is important to remember her role as an ombudsman.

Her investigation resulted in sharp critique of the process of Selmayr's advancement to secretary general in the commission and advice on how to change the procedure in the future (these recommendations have been adopted by the commission, an obvious success).

Please be aware that she did not recommend his resignation, that would not be appropriate for an ombudsman. It was the parliament who, with a solid majority, passed a resolution calling for it.

Therefore, it is disconcerting that some prominent members of parliament use this case to accuse O'Reilly for party political actions.

Impartiality

The independence of the ombudsman is crucial. There cannot be the slightest affiliation to neither economic nor party political interests. It is not enough to merely declare it, it must be objectively perceived.

An ombudsman must be as independent as a judge must. While there previously has been attempts to get members of parliament elected as ombudsman, to be crystal clear a large majority of the parliament decided in their contribution to the improve of the statute of the EU Ombudsman, to insist on a three-year cooling-down period.

Tomorrow, I truly hope that the parliament will secure the EU Ombudsman institution.

Kaynak/Source: