



EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

2009 - 2014

Committee on Petitions

2011/2020(BUD)

18.7.2011

OPINION

of the Committee on Petitions

for the Committee on Budgets

on Parliament's position on the 2012 Draft Budget as modified by the Council
– all sections
(2011/2020(BUD))

Rapporteur: Silvana Koch-Mehrin

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SUGGESTIONS

The Committee on Petitions calls on the Committee on Budgets, as the committee responsible, to incorporate the following suggestions in its motion for a resolution:

1. Considers that the budgetary resources requested by the European Ombudsman will enable him to meet the obligations under his Statute, the implementing provisions and the co-operation agreements and will allow him to perform his tasks effectively; notes that very positive results have been recorded in recent years, with inquiries having been closed in shorter deadlines without affecting quality; points out that these results have been achieved through an increase in human resources and the use of new methods of inquiry; encourages the Ombudsman to continue his efforts in order to keep up these excellent results;
2. Notes with satisfaction that the increase in the Ombudsman's budget estimates for 2012 is limited to 0.47% (+ EUR 44,605) and that the Ombudsman does not request any new posts; notes that, given the current financial and economic crisis and with a view to showing solidarity with his national and regional counterparts going through a difficult budgetary period, the Ombudsman has endeavoured, as far as possible, to limit budget increases;
3. Commends the Ombudsman for exercising restraint in his budget estimates and showing solidarity with his partners in the Member States; takes note of the Ombudsman's intention to exercise the maximum possible level of restraint in future budgets;
4. Supports the Ombudsman's request for upgrades for 11 posts (7 AST and 4 AD) in accordance with the Staff Regulations (Article 6.2); recalls that authorisation for these upgrades does not automatically mean 11 promotions;
5. Notes with satisfaction that the Ombudsman continues his policy of multiannual planning, systematically scrutinising budget lines and redeploying means with a view to generating savings; notes that the implementation of the budget line review strategy has made it possible to realise savings on 16 out of 23 budget lines; urges the other EU institutions to follow the Ombudsman's best practice by applying this method;
6. Notes that for 2012 this policy has produced savings of EUR 57,870, which represents 56.5 % of the total increases in the other budget lines;
7. Endorses the Ombudsman's training policy including the intention to enter the Interinstitutional Framework Contract, which allows access to a large number of courses for people linked to the institution in order to make them more efficient and to harmonise the aims of the institution;
8. Takes note of the Ombudsman's new strategy for the mandate 2009-2014, which is based on five objectives, namely to listen to stakeholders, to deliver results faster, to persuade institutions to improve their administrative culture, to communicate effectively and to adapt working methods where appropriate;

9. Encourages the Ombudsman to continue the good cooperation with the Committee on Petitions as well as with SOLVIT and the national ombudsmen with a view to sending complaints that do not fall within his remit rapidly and efficiently to the appropriate authority so as to best defend the rights of European citizens;

SHORT JUSTIFICATION

The Committee on Petitions has taken note of the European Ombudsman's estimates of his budgetary requirements for the financial year 2012, which he submitted to the budgetary authority in accordance with Article 31 of the Financial Regulation¹.

The Ombudsman's budget estimates for 2012 show a total of EUR 9,472,000 which amounts to an increase of 0.47% (+ EUR 44,605) compared with the 2011 budget (+ 0.67%). This includes the impact of inflation and the increased cost of living based on the Commission's calculations. In view of the current economic situation and to show solidarity with his partners in the Member States, the Ombudsman has again exercised restraint in his budget estimates for 2012.

The European Ombudsman's mission

The European Ombudsman's mission, based on Article 228 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, is to seek fair and equitable outcomes to complaints from citizens, associations or enterprises against European Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies. The Ombudsman encourages transparency and promotes an administrative culture of service. He aims to build trust through dialogue between citizens and the European Union and to foster the highest standards of behaviour in the Union's institutions.

In order to fulfil this mission the Ombudsman cooperates closely with the other EU institutions and bodies and with a network of national and regional ombudsmen in the Member States. In this way, he is able to deliver a prompt and effective service to help citizens and associations.

Mr Nikiforos Diamandouros was re-elected as European Ombudsman by the European Parliament on 20 January 2010. On 27 September 2010, the Ombudsman institution celebrated its fifteenth anniversary. This event was used as an opportunity to determine and launch a new strategy for the Ombudsman's 2009-2014 mandate. This strategy comprises five objectives summarised in a key word and a short statement.

1. Listen - listen to stakeholders, be open to their suggestions and identify best practices.
2. Deliver - find ways to achieve results faster.
3. Persuade - have a positive impact on the administrative culture of the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies.
4. Communicate - provide stakeholders and the public with timely, useful and easily accessible information.

¹ Council Regulation (EC, Euratom) No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002 on the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities (OJ L 248 of 16.09.2002, p. 1).

5. Adapt - constantly rethink the use of resources with a view to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the work.

With this strategy in mind the Ombudsman's draft budget for 2012 was prepared.

The workload

In 2010 the Ombudsman registered 2 667 complaints 774 of which were within his mandate (3 098 and 727 respectively in 2009). He opened 335 new inquiries (339 in 2009) and completed 326 inquiries (318 in 2009). The total number of complaints and requests for information in 2010 amounted to 3 700. In 179 cases closed in 2010 a positive outcome was obtained.

In over 70% of the cases processed (1 997) the Ombudsman was able to help the complainant by opening an inquiry, transferring the case to a competent body or giving advice on where to turn. Complainants were transferred to a member of the European Network of Ombudsmen, the Parliament's Committee on Petitions, the Commission or other bodies such as the SOLVIT network.

Main features of the Ombudsman's budget

The Ombudsman's budget is composed of 3 Titles:

Title I - Expenditure relating to persons with the institution (79%)

Title II - Buildings, furniture, equipment and other operating expenditure (14%)

Title III - Expenditure for general functions (7%)

Title I

The largest part of the budget concerns expenditure related to the personnel of the institution (salaries, entitlements, etc.) this part is inherently inflexible and increases automatically according to the provisions and the implementation of the Staff Regulations (promotions, steps and annual adjustments).

The Ombudsman's establishment plan currently comprises 64 posts. For 2012 the Ombudsman foresees upgrades for 11 posts (7 AST and 4 AD). It should be noted that authorisation for these upgrades does not automatically mean eleven promotions. Decisions on promotion for deserving officials are fully within the Ombudsman's discretionary power. In the budget for 2012, the Ombudsman requests no new posts.

In line with the new training policy launched in 2010 the Ombudsman for 2012 requests an increase in appropriations for training. In 2012 the institution will enter in the Interinstitutional Framework Contract. On the one hand this provides more training possibilities and access to a large number of courses, on the other it will raise the expenses for training.

Title II & III

As regards buildings the Ombudsman does not have any plans, in the near future, to change the current arrangements in which he rents offices in Strasbourg and Brussels from the European Parliament for a total amount of EUR 488,000 which is slightly up from EUR 479,200 in 2010.

The expenditure under Title II and III shows an increase of 0.77% (+ EUR 15,400). This figure is the result of a total increase of EUR 63,300 which is offset by savings amounting to EUR 47,900.

The Ombudsman is continuing his strategy of scrutinising all budget lines in order to identify and generate savings. The institution operates a multiannual perspective which allows it to schedule projects over several years, spread the need for appropriations, effect redeployments between budget lines and thus make savings. This systematic approach has led to decreases on sixteen budget lines out of a total of 23.

Conclusions

- The total amount of budgetary resources as requested by the Ombudsman will enable him to meet his obligations and carry out his tasks effectively.
- The modest increase in the budget estimates is appropriate in view of the current financial and economic situation, as is the consolidation of the Ombudsman's establishment plan.
- The training policy should be continued and justifies the requested increase in resources for training.
- The strategy of using a multiannual perspective, redeployments and systematic scrutiny of budget lines in order to generate savings has proved to be productive and should be continued.

RESULT OF FINAL VOTE IN COMMITTEE

Date adopted	13.7.2011
Result of final vote	+ : 18 - : 0 0 : 0
Members present for the final vote	Margrete Auken, Elena Băsescu, Heinz K. Becker, Victor Boştinaru, Peter Jahr, Lena Kolarska-Bobińska, Erminia Mazzoni, Edward McMillan-Scott, Mariya Nedelcheva, Chrysoula Paliadeli, Nikolaos Salavrakos, Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa, Angelika Werthmann, Rainer Wieland, Tatjana Ždanoka
Substitute(s) present for the final vote	Kinga Göncz, Cristian Dan Preda, Phil Prendergast