



Election of the new EU Ombudsman: Members hear candidates

Committees Committee on Petitions [19-06-2013 - 12:21]

Members asked the six candidates for the post of European Ombudsman what they could offer by way of independence, visibility and transparency, in a series of public hearings held by the Petitions Committee on Tuesday. The new Ombudsman will be elected by the full Parliament in July.

Alex Brenninkmeijer (The Netherlands)

"I'm a specialist in negotiations and conflict-resolution" said Dutch candidate Mr Brenninkmeijer in his introduction. He said that if elected, he would ensure visibility of the EU Ombudsman and get European citizens to know his work. He would try to achieve, within his term, a code good administration for the EU that would clarify the institutions' obligations in this field. Asked what is paramount to gain people's trust, he replied: "Listen to people and act in a responsive way and resolve conflicts faster".

Markus Jaeger (Germany)

"Defending other people's freedom is my profession", Mr Jaeger told Members in his presentation. He said that if elected, he would improve the EU Ombudsman's profile through "own-initiative investigations" and "proactive participation in Commission public consultations". Asked how independent he would be, he replied: "You need to know how much independence you want to give to the Ombudsman". He also stressed the importance of eliminating not only actual conflicts of interest, but also people's perception that they might exist.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (The Netherlands)

"Twenty-four percent of EU citizens find that EU administration is not open at the moment", said Ms Oomen-Ruijten in her introductory remarks. Her main goal, if elected, would be to help regain citizens' trust in Europe, by responding quickly to complaints. Fundamental rights, transparency and data protection would be her polar star, she added. Asked about on transparency and data protection, she said "The need for privacy, on the one hand, and the need for transparency on the other, must both be defended by the Ombudsman".

Emily O'Reilly (Ireland)

"The challenge for the third European Ombudsman will be to turn the office into a bigger player within the European public administration", said Ms O'Reilly, stressing the importance of media visibility and social networks to this end. If elected, "visibility" and "impact" would be the keywords of her mandate, she said. Asked about conflicts of interest, she backed the idea of investigating how Commissioners deal with them.

Dagmar Roth-Behrendt (Germany)

Press release

"I am highly familiar with the complexity of the EU institutions' administration and very sensitive to the citizens' needs", said Mrs Roth-Behrendt. If elected, she would try to make the office of the European Ombudsman more visible, ensure faster replies to complaints and propose a new law for administrative procedures in EU institutions. Replying to MEPs' questions on independence, she said that "being impartial means that you treat cases the same way and I know I am impartial". "The key issue is being transparent", she concluded.

Francesco Speroni (Italy)

"The Ombudsman must play a crucial role in bringing citizens closer to the EU institutions and I am committed to do so", said Mr Speroni in his initial statement. Boosting cooperation with Parliament's Petitions Committee and maintaining good relations with national Ombudsmen are key priorities, he said. Asked how he would deal with transparency, he replied that "I am in favour of Wikileaks and I will give access to documents, but there are rules that must be respected". He stressed that "I am an impartial and transparent person".

Next steps

At its July plenary session in Strasbourg, the European Parliament will elect one of the six candidates as the new Ombudsman, who will serve until the next European elections, on 22-25 May 2014.

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