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Ombudsman welcomes proposals to strengthen Commissioner ethics and transparency rules

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The Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions, agencies and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in the EU, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman.

The Ombudsman's powers include the right to inspect EU documents, call officials to testify, and to open strategic inquiries on her own initiative.

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The European Ombudsman, **Emily O'Reilly**, welcomes the College of Commissioners' decision to strengthen the ethics and transparency rules governing Commissioners' activities, while in office and after they leave.

The measures, which include a much more detailed Code of Conduct for Commissioners and publishing the Independent Ethical Committee's opinions on Commissioners' post-mandate jobs, have previously been called for by the Ombudsman.

Ms O'Reilly said: "*EU politicians and public officials must be held to the highest transparency and ethical standards. It is important that the public sees that the checks and balances the Commission has in place are working.*"

"Extending the cooling-off period during which former Commissioners and Commission Presidents must inform the Commission of their intention to take up a new post and tightening the rules on the declaration of interests should positively contribute to this impression."

Moves to make more information available about Commissioners' travel expenses are also encouraging as this has led to complaints to the Ombudsman in the past.

"I will examine the proposed changes in detail, in particular to verify that the new rules satisfactorily address issues that have been raised with my office," said the Ombudsman.

Background

The European Ombudsman has one on-going **case** concerning the Ad Hoc Ethical Committee. As part of the case, Ms O'Reilly asked nine questions about the role of the Ad Hoc Ethical Committee and how the Commission deals with the post-mandate activities of Commissioners, including its President. Among the changes proposed by the Ombudsman were giving the Committee a stronger base and the routine publication of its opinions.

In an inquiry **Decision** from December 2013 on the work of the Ethics Committee, the Ombudsman looked into whether the Commission should reform the Committee, with a broader and better defined mandate.

In a **case** - closed in 2016 - concerning a former Commissioner, the Ombudsman suggested ways of strengthening the Code of Conduct governing Commissioners.

The Ombudsman has an ongoing case concerning Commissioners' travel expenses. Proposed transparency changes in this area will feed into the Ombudsman's final analysis in this inquiry.