



2026/1593

10.9.2026

RESOLUTION (EU) 2026/1593 OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

of 29 April 2026

**with observations forming an integral part of the decision on discharge in respect of the
implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2024, Section VIII –
European Ombudsman**

THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT,

- having regard to its decision on discharge in respect of the implementation of the general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2024, Section VIII – European Ombudsman,
- having regard to Rule 102 of and Annex V to its Rules of Procedure,
- having regard to the report of the Committee on Budgetary Control (A10-0054/2026),
- A. whereas in the context of the discharge procedure, the discharge authority wishes to stress the particular importance of further strengthening the democratic legitimacy of the Union institutions by improving transparency and accountability, and by implementing the concept of performance-based budgeting, ensuring sound, efficient and results-oriented financial management and good governance of human resources;
- B. whereas Article 228 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union provides for the election of a European Ombudsman (the ‘Ombudsman’) by the European Parliament who shall be empowered to receive complaints from any citizen of the Union or any natural or legal person residing or having its registered office in a Member State concerning instances of maladministration in the activities of the Union institutions, bodies, offices or agencies, with the exception of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) acting in its judicial role, and to examine such complaints and report on them;
- C. whereas Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2021/1163 of the European Parliament ⁽¹⁾ lays down the regulations and general conditions governing the performance of the Ombudsman’s duties (Statute of the European Ombudsman);
- D. whereas, following her election by Parliament on 17 December 2024, the new Ombudsman was sworn in on 27 February 2025, ensuring continuity and effective fulfilment of the Ombudsman’s mandate in promoting transparency, good administration and citizens’ rights within the Union institutions;
- E. whereas maintaining the highest standards of institutional independence and the avoidance of any perception of favouritism in senior appointments are essential to safeguard public trust in the Ombudsman’s role as the Union’s watchdog of good administration;
- F. whereas, following the adoption of Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2021/1163, the Ombudsman adopted its revised implementing provisions ⁽²⁾ on 21 June 2023;
- 1. Notes that the budget of the Ombudsman falls under MFF Heading 7 ‘European public administration’, which amounted to a total of EUR 13,3 billion, i.e. 6,9 % of Union budget spending, in 2024; notes that the budget of the Ombudsman represented 0,10 % of MFF Heading 7 appropriations;
- 2. Notes that the Court of Auditors (the ‘Court’), in its Annual Report for the financial year 2024 (the ‘Court’s report’) examined a sample of 70 transactions under the heading ‘Administration’, the same number as in 2023; takes note that the Court further states that administrative expenditure comprises expenditure on human resources, including expenditure on pensions, which in 2024 accounted for approximately 69 % of the total administrative expenditure, and expenditure on buildings, equipment, energy, communications and information technology (IT), and that its work over many years indicates that, overall, this spending is low risk;

⁽¹⁾ Regulation (EU, Euratom) 2021/1163 of the European Parliament of 24 June 2021 laying down the regulations and general conditions governing the performance of the Ombudsman’s duties (Statute of the European Ombudsman) and repealing Decision 94/262/ECSC, EC, Euratom (OJ L 253, 16.7.2021, p. 1, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2021/1163/oj>).

⁽²⁾ OJ C, C/2023/161, 10.10.2023, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2023/161/oj>.

3. Notes that 16 of the 70 transactions (i.e. 23 %) contained errors but that the Court, based on the three errors which were quantified, estimates the level of error to be below the materiality threshold; notes that the Court's report did not identify any specific issues concerning the Ombudsman;

Budgetary and financial management

4. Notes that the budget of the Ombudsman amounted to EUR 13 843 160 in 2024, which represents an increase of EUR 630 713 (i.e. + 4,77 %) compared to 2023; takes note, from the Ombudsman's replies to the questionnaire submitted by the Committee on Budgetary Control for the 2024 budgetary discharge (the 'Questionnaire'), that this increase is mainly due to salary adjustments;
5. Notes that the budget monitoring efforts during the financial year 2024 resulted in a budget implementation rate of 97,55 %, representing an increase of 2,16 % compared to 2023; notes that this rate includes appropriations carried over from 2024 to 2025; notes that the current year payment appropriations execution rate was 97,08 %, representing a decrease of 0,50 % compared to 2023; notes an increase of 29,60 % of the appropriations carried-over (C8 credits), i.e. from EUR 304 550 in 2023 to EUR 394 667 in 2024; notes an improvement in the execution rate of the automatic carry-overs of appropriations from the previous year, which in 2024 was 76,59 % compared to 73,27 % in 2023; notes, however, that this rate remained low compared to 2022 (92,59 %), and reiterates its call on the Ombudsman to increase efforts to improve this rate;
6. Notes that in the course of 2024, the Ombudsman made four budgetary transfers pursuant to Article 29 of the Financial Regulation, representing a total of EUR 280 500 or 2,02 % of the appropriations for that financial year, compared to 1,8 % in 2023; notes that those transfers were needed for the reinforcement of various budget lines on, for example, cleaning, maintenance and energy consumption (+ 41 %), mission expenses (+ 38,60 %) and informatics (+ 24,80 %); notes that in 2024 the Ombudsman significantly reduced its expenditure for translation, following the successful integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) into the translation processes for the Ombudsman's website; notes that the resulting savings were used to reinforce other areas via budgetary transfers;
7. Notes with satisfaction from the Ombudsman's Annual Activity Report for 2024 (the 'Annual report') that all payments were made within the regulatory deadline of 30 days in 2024; notes further that the average time for payment of invoices was 13,20 days, an improvement from 2023 (13,50 days); notes, with regard to the Ombudsman's migration to a new financial and accounting system (SUMMA), that the Ombudsman is asked to pay EUR 200 000 for access rights to that system, the same amount that other, much bigger Union institutions, offices, bodies or agencies, are asked to pay; notes that this amount is double the Ombudsman's budget for this type of service; invites the Commission to find a solution allowing the Ombudsman to have access to SUMMA for a price that is proportionate to the size of the Ombudsman operation; calls for the establishment of a transparent, objective and proportional cost model for access to shared corporate financial systems, with fees reflecting the size and budget and the number of users in the institution, office, body or agency concerned, so as to prevent the disproportionate burdening of those that are smaller and to ensure compliance with financial management obligations without undermining resources dedicated to their core mandate;
8. Notes that impact of Russia's illegal war of aggression against Ukraine continued to create budgetary pressure for the Ombudsman in 2024; notes that the Ombudsman was most affected by the increase in energy costs; notes in this context that, in order to address the impact of this increase on the Ombudsman's budget, the lump sum paid by the Ombudsman to Parliament for rental charges had to be recalculated; notes that, as a result, the Ombudsman's actual energy expenditure in 2024 increased by 75 %, rising from EUR 168 900 in 2023 to EUR 295 400 in 2024; notes, from the Questionnaire, that the Ombudsman is of the view that the cumulative effect of the inflationary pressure and the limitation of the non-salary related expenditure to maximum 2 % compared to the previous year will affect the long-term sustainability of the Ombudsman's budget; stresses that such pressures, if not adequately addressed, risk undermining the cost-efficiency, predictability and sustainability of the Ombudsman's operations; acknowledges the need of all Union institutions, offices, bodies or agencies to improve their budget management by also taking into account price volatility, especially in the energy sector, when concluding contracts with service providers; stresses that budgetary discipline must be reconciled with realistic cost assessments in order to safeguard taxpayers' money while maintaining operational continuity;

9. Notes that the budget for staff missions was EUR 120 000 in 2024 (same amount as for 2023); notes nevertheless, that during 2024 a reinforcement of the budget article for missions of + 38,60 % was carried out by means of internal transfer(s); notes the Ombudsman's explanation that reinforcement was necessary due to inflation and an increase in accommodation costs, an increase in the number of necessary missions of the Ombudsman and budgetary estimations based on those of previous years, during which travel was limited due to the COVID-19 pandemic; notes that the initial missions budget for the Ombudsman remained the same in 2024 as in the previous years (2022 and 2023), i.e. EUR 35 000; notes that, after reinforcement of that budget via internal transfers, the expenses actually incurred with the Ombudsman's missions were in total EUR 41 326 in 2024 ^(*); calls for more realistic initial budgetary forecasting for travel to minimise reliance on large mid-year transfers and ensure stable financial planning;

Internal management, performance and internal control

10. Notes that the Ombudsman has linked to the high level objectives of its strategy 'Towards 2024' nine key performance indicators (KPIs) consisting of 17 components, as set out in the Ombudsman's Annual Management Plan for 2024; observes that 13 of those KPI components have been reached or were exceeded in 2024;
11. Observes that in 2024 the Ombudsman handled 2 264 new complaints (2 392 in 2023), opened 411 inquiries (392 in 2023), including 49 inquiries of public importance (56 in 2023), closed 421 inquiries (372 in 2023) and dealt with a high number of public access complaints which has increased from 167 in 2023 to a (new) record number of 212 in 2024 (160 of them were followed up with inquiries and 193 of them were closed);
12. Commends the Ombudsman for having reduced the time needed to process files at different levels of the procedure, such as the average time for dealing with a complaint (from 39 days in 2023 to 36 days in 2024) and for dealing with a complaint within the mandate (from 91 days in 2023 to 86 days in 2024); notes nevertheless a significant increase in the average time taken to close cases in the area of public access to documents from 42 days in 2023 to 85 working days in 2024; notes that the Ombudsman surpassed its target (100 %) for the rate of clearance (i.e. cases closed compared to new cases registered during the year); regrets however that the average time (168 days) for dealing with an inquiry remained high in 2024 (up from 165 days in 2023), which is well above the target set of 150 days; recommends that the Ombudsman further refine the key performance indicators related to case-handling duration by better reflecting the varying complexity of cases, in order to ensure a more realistic, meaningful and efficiency-oriented performance assessment; recognises that complex cases, particularly those involving several institutions, offices, bodies or agencies, might require longer processing times; stresses, however, that excessive delays in handling access-to-documents cases undermine citizens' rights and public trust in the Union's administration overall; calls for a plan to address these delays and suggests redirecting part of the savings achieved through AI translation to reinforce inquiry teams, particularly for public access cases; notes with satisfaction from the Ombudsman's report to Parliament on the follow-up to the discharge for the financial year 2023 (the 'Follow-up report') that one of the newly elected Ombudsman's key strategic objectives is to reinforce cooperation and dialogue with the Union institutions, offices, bodies and agencies, with a view to ultimately reducing the time needed to process inquiries;
13. Notes, as regards findings, that in 2024 the Ombudsman made a proposal for a solution in 14 cases and recommendations in three cases concerning public access to documents; notes an improvement with regard to positive replies by the Union institutions, offices, bodies or agencies to the Ombudsman's proposals to improve their administration, with an overall acceptance rate of 82 % in 2024 (compared to 81 % in 2023), whereas that rate includes cases closed in 2023; invites the Ombudsman to develop a targeted action plan aimed at identifying and addressing the most common reasons underlying the remaining non-accepted proposals and asks the Ombudsman to continue working towards generating a high level of compliance with its findings, recommendations and suggestions;

^(*) <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/doc/declarations-and-transparency/en/196382> and <https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/doc/declarations-and-transparency/en/198831>.

14. Appreciates that the Ombudsman continued to make efforts in 2024 to enhance citizens' awareness and understanding of its mandate; observes with satisfaction in this context an increase in the share of complaints within the mandate, from 33 % in 2022 and 37 % in 2023 to 39 % in 2024; notes further from the Follow-up report that one of the Ombudsman's new strategic objectives is to launch targeted communication activities to ensure that citizens who need the Ombudsman are aware of their right and use of its services; notes in this context that, as a result, a rise in the number of complaints is expected, which will prompt the need to review and adapt the working methods, and enhance the use of digital tools, in particular AI, in order to further streamline the complaints handling process; invites the Ombudsman to assess the potential budgetary and human resources impact of the expected increase in complaints and to keep the discharge authority informed of the progress made in this matter;
15. Recognises the efforts made by and the positive impact of the Ombudsman in the areas of ethics, transparency and accountability in 2024, especially as a result of inquiries concerning various Union institutions, offices, bodies and agencies; notes that the vast majority of those inquiries (65 %) concerned the Commission in 2025;
16. Notes in particular the Ombudsman's inquiries into: (i) how the Council and the Commission handle public access requests for legislative documents (notably on exceptions to withhold access), whereas the Ombudsman concluded that in many instances the two institutions applied the exceptions under the Union law on access to documents too broadly, using reasoning that has already been dismissed by the CJEU, (ii) the Commission's refusals to grant access to documents concerning the revision of Union rules on food information to consumers, and to provide access to stakeholders' and Member States' input concerning the Union's 'Nature Restoration Law', and (iii) the Commission's failure to identify any documents covering exchanges with Member States or internal exchanges concerning the preparation of high level meetings on the Memorandum of Understanding on a strategic and global partnership between the Union and Tunisia;
17. Welcomes the Ombudsman's inquiries carried out in 2024 in the area of ethics; notes in particular a revolving doors case concerning two former staff members of the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), an inquiry based on an infringement complaint concerning an alleged conflict of interest involving the Commissioner for Agriculture and an inquiry into how the Commission ensures there are no conflicts of interest with the experts who assist it in evaluating proposals to be financed under the European Defence Fund;
18. Notes from the Follow-up report that the Ombudsman continued to monitor transparency and accountability related issues linked to the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF), in the framework of handling complaints in the area of public access to documents, mostly regarding negotiations on the national recovery and resilience plans (RRP); notes with concern among such issues the significant delays encountered by the Commission in replying to requests for access to information, and the level of access granted, which are likely to erode citizen's trust in the Union administration; appreciates that the Commission, in a case regarding the Dutch RRP, following Ombudsman's proposal for a solution, granted wider access to 172 documents; strongly condemns, however, the Commission for having taken 21 months to reply to the complainant's (journalist) confirmatory application, i.e. in July 2024 when the granted access to documents was no longer useful for the purpose intended; agrees that in matters of significant public interest, such as the RRF, there should be no substantial delays in providing access to documents and considers that such delays amount to a denial of transparency and weaken democratic scrutiny; echoes the Ombudsman's view that the Commission should carefully consider the existence of overriding public interest when applying the exceptions to public access under Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council^(*); calls on the Ombudsman to inform Parliament's relevant committees as soon as a Commission delay on RRF-related documents is too lengthy to allow for timely political scrutiny; calls furthermore on the Ombudsman to continue prioritising systemic work on undue delays in access-to-documents procedures, including by identifying recurring administrative bottlenecks and good practices across institutions, offices, bodies or agencies; supports the Ombudsman in promoting a consistent application of the 'overriding public interest' test, particularly for high-impact files, so that access is provided in time to be meaningful for the purposes of public scrutiny;

(*) Regulation (EC) No 1049/2001 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 30 May 2001 regarding public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (OJ L 145, 31.5.2001, p. 43, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2001/1049/oj>).

19. Recalls that, according to the Ombudsman, restrictions on access to documents, particularly legislative documents, should be exceptional and limited to what is absolutely necessary; also recalls that any decision denying public access to documents must be based on clearly and strictly defined legal exemptions, accompanied by a reasoned and specific justification, to enable citizens to understand the denial of access and make effective use of the legal remedies available; considers that a more proactive approach would help ensure effective transparency and prevent costly and burdensome legal disputes between citizens and institutions⁽⁹⁾; encourages the Ombudsman to further promote proactive publication practices, notably for legislative and policy-shaping documents, in order to strengthen transparency by design and to reduce the administrative burden and litigation risk associated with repetitive access-to-documents requests;
20. Recalls that the internal auditor carried out a review of the Ombudsman's risk management framework, with a nine-point action plan agreed for implementation by the end of 2024; notes from the Questionnaire and the Follow-up report that all actions have been implemented, including the adoption of a new risk assessment methodology; invites the Ombudsman to keep the discharge authority informed of the outcome of the internal auditor's review of the implementation of that action plan; asks the Ombudsman to also keep the discharge authority informed of the follow-up to the recommendations made under Internal Audit Reports 20/04 (on IT security), 21/03 (on data protection framework) and 22/03 (on the ethical framework);

Human resources, equality and staff well-being

21. Notes a decrease of 4,90 % in the total number of the Ombudsman's staff from 82 in 2023 to 78 in 2024; notes further that, in 2024, 46 officials were employed by the Ombudsman, compared to 40 in 2023 respectively, and 9 contract agents, same as in 2023; notes a slight decrease in the share of staff working on the core-business of the Ombudsman (complaints and inquiries), from 42,68 % in 2023 to 42,30 % in 2024; notes further that the staff occupation rate increased from 95 % in 2023 to 97 % in 2024 and the turnover rate increased from 5,20 % in 2023 to 6,40 % in 2024; reminds the importance of providing permanent contracts in order to maintain skills, continuity and productive working environment; underlines that the declining staff numbers in core operational areas and the significant reliance on temporary contracts may reduce institutional memory and the efficiency of the Ombudsman;
22. Recalls that the post of the Secretary-General of the Ombudsman has been vacant for more than two years, since 1 September 2022; notes that, following several calls by Parliament to fill this vacant post, the Ombudsman launched an interinstitutional procedure for the recruitment of its new Secretary-General by publishing a call for expression of interest (n° OMB/2/2025) on 30 June 2025, which resulted in 14 eligible applications; notes further that the selection procedure was finalised in 2025 and a new Secretary-General has been selected, to take up his post on 1 January 2026; notes that in this case the Selection Board was made of three persons, the Ombudsman herself and two external independent members, who were involved in the assessment of the applications' eligibility and interviews; notes that the Ombudsman is of the view that the appointment of those two members and the involvement of senior members of staff constituted significant safeguards in the entire process ensuring the integrity and lawfulness of the selection process; believes, without prejudice to his experience as Union official for 30 years with 10 years of management experience, that the fact that the selected Secretary-General previously served as head of cabinet to the current Ombudsman, could give rise to perceptions of a conflict of interest even if that process was conducted in full compliance with the applicable framework; calls on the Ombudsman, with a view to future procedures, to continue reflecting on ways to strengthen safeguards in selection procedures and appointing decisions against any perceived conflicts of interest or favouritism, ensuring full guarantees of fairness and transparency;
23. Notes that, following the hearing of the Ombudsman in the meeting of Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control of 6 November 2025, Members of Parliament's Committee on Budgetary Control submitted a series of written follow-up questions on the selection of the new Secretary-General (OMB/2/2025) on 18 November 2025, to which the Ombudsman replied on 21 November 2025; disagrees in this context with the Ombudsman's view that the Meroni case-law (C-9/56 and C-10/56) is applicable, as it does not concern the delegation of powers on staff matters (such as the selection of a staff member), but rather the delegation of discretionary powers to external/private bodies; stresses further that Parliament does not require the Ombudsman to delegate her rights and obligations as the Appointing Authority, while questioning her presence in the Selection Board, since Union law does not require the Appointing Authority to be a member of the SB; underlines that by taking a final decision, which is a task of the

⁽⁹⁾ OJ C, C/2024/4014, 17.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/C/2024/4014/oj>

Appointing Authority, the latter also confirms that the whole selection procedure has been lawful, including the compliance of the candidate with all admissibility and eligibility criteria; notes, however, that this role may appear less distinct where the Appointing Authority has also chaired the Selection Board in certain stages of the selection procedure, as was the case in the current process; understands, nevertheless, that the Ombudsman, as office-holder, might need to be involved in the latest stages of certain selection procedures; takes note of the Ombudsman's explanation that legal constraints related to confidentiality, aimed at safeguarding the independence and integrity of the selection process, limit the extent to which documents related to the eligibility check can be shared with the discharge authority; nevertheless recalls Parliament's right to obtain the information necessary for discharge and underlines that providing such information does not amount to making it public, and stresses that Parliament has adequate safeguards in place to handle sensitive material securely; urges, in light of the above, the Ombudsman to further consider Parliament's request and provide the discharge authority with all documents regarding the eligibility checks, assessment of applications, the actual interviews of shortlisted candidates with the Selection Board and the bilateral interview with the Ombudsman in connection with the procedure for the selection of the Secretary-General of the Ombudsman (OMB/2/2025); encourages the Ombudsman to consider conducting an internal *ex post* reflection on highly scrutinised appointment procedures, with a view to identifying lessons learned and possible improvements for future processes, and to inform the discharge authority of the outcomes;

24. Underlines that the Ombudsman has the role of promoting good administration, including by ensuring that the ethical framework of all Union institutions, offices, bodies, and agencies is robust and capable of guaranteeing transparency and accountability; firmly believes that the Ombudsman must meet the highest standards of independence, impartiality, and integrity, and that any perception of favouritism or conflicts of interest must be avoided, since such perceptions could undermine the Ombudsman's credibility, mission, and the trust of Union citizens; recalls that, since the Ombudsman is entrusted by the Union with promoting ethical standards and good administration, the Ombudsman is expected to apply particularly stringent standards to its own governance and senior appointments, setting a benchmark for other institutions, offices, bodies and agencies;
25. Notes that, despite being a small Union institution, office, body or agency, the Ombudsman managed to have 19 nationalities represented in its staff in 2024, same as in 2023; observes, however, an overrepresentation of some nationalities (one of them accounting for more than 30 % of the staff of the Ombudsman); stresses that in view of its relatively small size, such a high concentration of a single nationality could impact the interinstitutional perception of the office's diversity; calls on the Ombudsman to adopt targeted recruitment and outreach measures specifically aimed at underrepresented Member States to ensure the office remains a reflection of the Union's diversity;
26. Notes that, in terms of gender balance, the Ombudsman employs more women than men in all categories of staff, in particular at management level where all posts are held by women; notes an overall staff representation of 68 % women and 32 % men, compared to 67 % women and 33 % men in 2023; invites the Ombudsman to strive for a more balanced gender representation of its staff; urges the Ombudsman to develop a strategy to address the fact that men are currently entirely absent from management roles; believes that ensuring that the Ombudsman better reflects the diverse composition of the Union's citizens is essential for maintaining a balanced and inclusive working environment across all levels of the hierarchy;
27. Notes that the Ombudsman makes efforts to ensure the physical and mental well-being of its staff at work and focuses on reinforcing team spirit; notes in this context that the Ombudsman organised trainings, with some of them being mandatory, on conflict resolution, giving and receiving feedback, disability and inclusion as well as on first aid in 2024; takes note that the Ombudsman adopted a policy on parental leave in 2004, which, in conjunction with its policy on working time and hybrid adopted in 2021, provides flexible working arrangements which are used and appreciated by the staff; notes that in 2024 the medical service of Parliament did not alert the Ombudsman to any long-term sickness that originated in burnout;
28. Notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire that no harassment cases were reported in 2024; acknowledges the efforts made by the Ombudsman to provide a working environment that is free from sexual and psychological harassment, in particular through awareness raising and training; notes further that the Ombudsman carried out a survey focused on staff awareness on ethical matters which showed high levels of staff awareness about the Ombudsman's policy and guidelines on psychological and sexual harassment;

29. Notes that the Ombudsman welcomed 18 paid trainees in 2024 (the same number as in 2023), one of which was selected under the Ombudsman's commendable traineeship programme for persons with disabilities; renews its emphasis that traineeships should be remunerated in compliance with Parliament resolution of 14 June 2023 on quality traineeships in the Union (2020/2005(INL)), which calls for all internships in the Union to be paid; stresses that paid traineeships are essential to ensure equal opportunities;

Ethical framework and transparency

30. Welcomes the Ombudsman's continued efforts to strengthen and raise awareness about its ethical framework; notes that the Ombudsman organised trainings on ethical matters for the Ombudsman's newly appointed confidential counsellors and the members of the conciliation committee, as well as mandatory tailor-made trainings on conflict resolution for all staff; notes that the Ombudsman reworked in 2024 and adopted in 2025 a revised policy on ethics and good conduct to clarify the approval and authorisation workflows and address gaps in the implementation of ethics related rules; appreciates that an IT solution was deployed allowing each inquiry officer to confirm the absence of conflicts of interest in cases assigned to them; notes further that all Ombudsman's staff, including senior ones, are asked to revise annually their declarations of their spouses/partners' professional activities, as well as their own conflicts of interest declarations;
31. Notes regarding the internal audit (Report 22/03) on the Ombudsman's ethical framework, that of the six recommendations issued, five were implemented and one was ongoing at the end of 2024; notes in this context that the Ombudsman established a disciplinary board and adopted an anti-fraud policy, also applicable to seconded national experts, trainees and external contractors, to further strengthen the Ombudsman's ethical framework;
32. Notes with satisfaction that no cases of conflicts of interest and no cases of whistleblowing were reported in 2024;
33. Notes from the Questionnaire that the Ombudsman did not formally join the Union transparency register (set up by the Interinstitutional Agreement of 20 May 2021 between Parliament, the Council and the Commission on a mandatory transparency register) in order to ensure that the Ombudsman can also look into potential complaints concerning the secretariat of that transparency register; notes, however, that the Ombudsman has aligned its practices on the principles of the transparency register, checking that speakers or interlocutors in events or meetings organised by the Ombudsman are registered therein; welcomes the high degree of transparency achieved by the Ombudsman by the publication on its website of information on inquiries, missions (and related expenses), meetings and events in which the Ombudsman takes part, as well as the assessment on requests from senior managers or cabinet members to engage in a professional activity after having left the Ombudsman;

Buildings

34. Notes that the Ombudsman's final (after transfers) budget for buildings and associated costs increased by approximately 13,60 %, from EUR 1 373 000 in 2023 to EUR 1 560 709 in 2024; notes that the appropriations for rent increased by approximately 7 %, from EUR 866 100 in 2023 to EUR 926 620 in 2024; notes a payment execution rate in both years of close to 100 %;
35. Notes from the Questionnaire that no changes were made to the Ombudsman's individual offices' conditions previously brought to the attention of the discharge authority; notes with satisfaction that the Havel building in Strasbourg is fully accessible to persons with reduced mobility or other disabilities; supports the Ombudsman in its endeavours to improve the accessibility of the premises rented in Brussels;

Digitalisation, cybersecurity and data protection

36. Commends the Ombudsman for finalising in 2024 a key project regarding the digitalisation of its historical archives, before transferring them to the Historical Archives of the Union in Florence; notes with satisfaction that the Ombudsman's archives are now preserved and accessible for future generations;

37. Welcomes the positive impact of Ombudsman's use of automatic translations, which enhanced the accessibility of the Ombudsman's website, streamlined case allocation and accelerated the processing of complaints, leading to a reduction in translation costs by over 65 % (from 2022 to 2024) and in administrative burden; encourages the Ombudsman to continue testing and evaluating AI tools and use cases, while taking a prudent approach to their development and deployment; calls in this context on the Ombudsman to take into account the medium-term budgetary implications related to maintenance, scalability, staff skills and potential dependencies on digital tools and service providers and ensure that deployment remains secure and subject to appropriate human oversight;
38. Notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire that the Ombudsman has put in place internal guidelines on the use of third-party generative AI tools which should provide clarity and direction on the safe and effective integration of AI tools into the Ombudsman's workflows; looks forward to the planned expansion of AI use beyond translation, for example for the integration of the 'ombudsprudence' within a Large Language Model of the Commission and to leverage historical case law that will feed in future inquiries; encourages the Ombudsman to continue testing and deploying AI tools where they demonstrably improve accessibility and efficiency; stresses, however, the need for clear governance, human oversight, transparency towards users, and robust data-protection safeguards, including documented risk assessments and quality controls for automated outputs, in particular where AI may influence case handling, allocation or external communications; calls on the Ombudsman to ensure that all AI-generated legal insights are verified by human inquiry officers and prioritise human-provided interpretation over AI-based solutions; further requests reporting on the technical measures adopted to eliminate algorithmic bias and safeguard the objectivity of the Ombudsman's findings;
39. Notes from the Questionnaire that in 2024, with appreciation, that one staff member completed an intensive two-month training in data science and artificial intelligence with a view to strengthening the Ombudsman's expertise in this field and that that staff member now represents the Ombudsman in the AI Correspondents Network established by the European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) following the entry into force of Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁶⁾ (the 'Artificial Intelligence Act'); takes further note the Ombudsman's commitment to develop a training on the safe and ethical use of AI tools for all its staff; notes further that the Ombudsman held monthly a targeted mandatory training to enhance staff awareness and skills in cybersecurity best practices throughout 2024; notes with satisfaction that the Ombudsman requires all its staff to complete regular cybersecurity trainings; encourages the Ombudsman to continue developing its digitalisation strategy, ensuring that the deployment of artificial intelligence tools remains fully compliant with principles of ethical use, transparency, data protection, human oversight, and protection against algorithmic bias or misuse;
40. Stresses the importance of procurement as a tool to advance policy objectives such as environmental and social agenda; calls on the Ombudsman to strengthen in its procurement procedures the inclusion of strategic criteria on social responsibility and environmental sustainability;
41. Notes that, in terms of IT, the Ombudsman relies on Parliament's infrastructure and cybersecurity framework and cooperates closely with the Commission concerning the integration and maintenance of the Union's corporate tools (SYSPER, ABAC, MiPS and ARES) and the use of IT framework contracts; acknowledges the success of the Ombudsman's long-standing approach of leveraging integrated systems and resources from those two institutions, in order to optimise budget utilisation and enhance coordination, for example in the area of digitalisation; notes that for core operations, the Ombudsman retains direct control over tool development and maintenance within Parliament's secure environment, ensuring flexibility, data protection, and enhanced cybersecurity; notes that the Ombudsman did not experience any cyberattacks in 2024;

⁽⁶⁾ Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 13 June 2024 laying down harmonised rules on artificial intelligence and amending Regulations (EC) No 300/2008, (EU) No 167/2013, (EU) No 168/2013, (EU) 2018/858, (EU) 2018/1139 and (EU) 2019/2144 and Directives 2014/90/EU, (EU) 2016/797 and (EU) 2020/1828 (Artificial Intelligence Act) (OJ L, 2024/1689, 12.7.2024, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2024/1689/oj>).

42. Notes from the Questionnaire that in December 2024, following a complaint from a data subject, the EDPS opened a case against the Ombudsman under Article 57(1), point (e), of Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council ⁽⁷⁾; takes note that after the Ombudsman provided the requested clarifications, the EDPS closed the case in 2025, concluding that the data subject had received sufficient information;

Environment and sustainability

43. Notes from the Annual Report and the Questionnaire that the Ombudsman continued to reduce its environmental footprint through the digitalisation of its processes, the removal of individual printers, the non-replacement of central processing units when reaching end of life, and the near-complete shift to digital publications; welcomes Ombudsman's efforts to make events more sustainable, including by using QR codes and locally sourced catering, and by implementing food waste prevention measures; notes with satisfaction that both buildings in which the Ombudsman has offices run on 100 % renewable electricity supplied under Parliament's contracts and that Parliament's installation of solar panels on its Strasbourg buildings, including the Havel building, began generating power in 2024;
44. Notes that, as the Ombudsman rents its premises from Parliament, it benefits from the latter's environmental management under EMAS, including measures such as temperature settings of 19 °C in winter, selective waste sorting, bio-waste collection introduced in 2024, and the replacement of disposable kitchen items with durable tableware; welcomes the application by the Ombudsman of Green Public Procurement principles, both through its own contracts and through cooperation agreements with other Union institutions;
45. Welcomes the Ombudsman's continued promotion of sustainable mobility, through flat-rate contribution for the use of sustainable transport modes which has been received by 67 % of the Ombudsman's eligible staff (up to grade AST 8/AD 8) in 2024, the organisation of annual bicycle maintenance sessions, and the regular participation of its staff in the interinstitutional cycling and walking challenges; notes that car parking remains limited while bicycle infrastructure continues to improve;
46. Notes with satisfaction the Ombudsman's efforts to reduce travel-related emissions by systematically promoting videoconferencing and digital solutions as alternatives to missions, and by encouraging train travel over air travel; encourages the Ombudsman to continue integrating sustainability considerations into its risk management and awareness-raising activities, in line with its operational objective for 2024 to promote green and social responsibility;

Interinstitutional cooperation

47. Welcomes the financial and administrative savings achieved through inter-institutional cooperation, in particular the wide-range of service-level agreements concluded by the Ombudsman with Parliament and the Commission in a variety of areas and the participation in interinstitutional procurement procedures; welcomes the formalisation of the collaboration between Parliament and the Ombudsman in October 2024 in the field of cybersecurity through a revised inter-institutional agreement which provides a framework for Parliament to continue providing solid cybersecurity support to the Ombudsman; stresses that such cooperation is essential to avoid duplication of structures and to ensure efficient use of Union resources; encourages the Ombudsman to ensure that regular and up-to-date cybersecurity training is provided to all staff, in order to maintain a high level of awareness and resilience against evolving cyber threats;

⁽⁷⁾ Regulation (EU) 2018/1725 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2018 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data by the Union institutions, bodies, offices and agencies and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Regulation (EC) No 45/2001 and Decision No 1247/2002/EC (OJ L 295, 21.11.2018, p. 39, ELI: <http://data.europa.eu/eli/reg/2018/1725/oj>).

48. Commends the Ombudsman for its good collaboration with the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) and the Court which in 2024 took the form of meetings and exchanges of views between the Ombudsman, the members of the Court and OLAF's Director-General; notes that the Ombudsman also spoke at a conference of the Court on the transparency of recovery of Union funds; notes further that in 2024 the Ombudsman presented the findings of key investigations to the relevant committees of Parliament and continued its good cooperation with the national and regional ombudsmen through the query procedure, whereby members of the European Network of Ombudsmen (ENO) can ask questions about Union law that arise during their inquiries and the Ombudsman obtains expert replies from the Union institutions; notes in this context that the Ombudsman organised an ENO webinar in 2024 on various topics, including the implementation of the Union's Whistleblower Directive and issues linked to free movement;
49. Notes from the Questionnaire that the Ombudsman and the EDPS cooperate mainly on an ad-hoc and informal basis aiming for a quick and efficient collaboration when needed; notes further with satisfaction that the Ombudsman and the EDPS have a Memorandum of Understanding in place to regulate their respective competences in complaint handling and avoid duplication of procedures;
50. Welcomes the fact that the Ombudsman in 2024 continued its close cooperation with relevant Parliament's Committees (Committee on Petitions, Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, Subcommittee on Human Rights) on important inquiries either by presenting the work directly in Committee meetings or through information being sent to the Committee Chairs; underlines that the strategic initiatives and inquiries conducted by the Ombudsman are key to improving the transparency and accountability of the Union's administration;

Communication

51. Notes from the Questionnaire that the overall budget for communication and promotional activities (publications, event organisation, digital communication, etc.) decreased by approximately 38 % from EUR 155 200 in 2023 to EUR 96 515 in 2024; stresses that, while budgetary allocations must be strategic and results-oriented, the Ombudsman should remain focused on informing citizens about the Ombudsman's mandate and retain sufficient communication capacity in particular for citizens turning to the Ombudsman to address concerns at the Union level; invites the Ombudsman to consider reallocating savings to ensure the Ombudsman maintains necessary visibility and outreach;
52. Recognises the efforts undertaken by the Ombudsman to provide transparent information and publish data (including statistics on its caseload) in an informative and user-friendly format on the Ombudsman website; welcomes the publication on the website of a timeline for all inquiries into complaints providing information about past and future milestones in each inquiry;
53. Notes from the Questionnaire and the Annual Report that in 2024 the Ombudsman broadened its outreach efforts by launching accounts on Threads and Bluesky, thereby diversifying its social media presence; observes that the Ombudsman continued to spotlight key thematic areas through dedicated social media campaigns and web stories, with the communication being centred on ethical standards within the Union institutions in 2024; welcomes from the Follow-up report the key strategic objective of the newly elected Ombudsman, to empower citizens, which will involve targeted communication activities to ensure that citizens who need the Ombudsman are aware of their rights and use the Ombudsman's services;
54. Welcomes the Ombudsman's regular newsletter (EO express) which keeps subscribers updated through promotion across platforms; highlights that the Ombudsman participated in a wide range of events organised by the Union and international bodies and gave frequent media interviews to clarify the Ombudsman's mandate, explain which types of complaints it can handle, and inform citizens about when they may seek support from the Ombudsman;

55. Notes with satisfaction from the Questionnaire the Ombudsman's website is designed to conform with the Union's accessibility standards and guidelines and provides users with an inclusive and barrier-free online environment equipped with various accessibility features; notes that an audit of the accessibility and usability of the Ombudsman's website that was carried out in 2025 gave an average compliance of almost 90 %; encourages the Ombudsman to continue doing regular audits on this matter;
 56. Welcomes the sustained level of media attention, with roughly 5 000 articles referencing the Ombudsman's work in 2024; notes that the Ombudsman primarily gauges public engagement through social media growth and website traffic, whereas follower numbers increased steadily during the year; observes that the Ombudsman's Instagram, LinkedIn and X accounts gained a total of 9 186 additional followers, surpassing its targets for social media activities in 2024, as well as with regard to the number of unique visitors to its website; stresses the importance of continuing to prioritise external communication in order to enhance public awareness of the Ombudsman's mandate and the services it provides to Union citizens.
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