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Ombudsman publishes ethical principles for EU officials

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The European Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in the EU institutions and bodies. Any EU citizen, resident, or an enterprise or association in a Member State, can lodge a complaint with the Ombudsman. The Ombudsman offers a fast, flexible and free means of solving problems with the EU administration.

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The European Ombudsman, **P. Nikiforos Diamandouros**, has published a set of “public service principles” that should guide the conduct of EU civil servants. The principles take account of best practice in the Member States and were established through an initial consultation with the European Network of Ombudsmen. The Ombudsman also carried out a public consultation on a first draft of the principles. The responses to the consultation from citizens, civil servants, interest groups, EU institutions and other organisations were of great value in finalising the principles.

Mr Diamandouros commented: “The public service principles embody fundamental ethical standards. As such, they constitute a vital component of the administrative culture of service to which the EU institutions adhere. At a time when the European Union is facing a severe crisis, the principles can help to build greater trust between citizens and the EU institutions.”

The five public service principles:

1. Commitment to the European Union and its citizens

Civil servants should be conscious that the Union’s institutions exist in order to serve the interests of the Union and of its citizens in fulfilling the objectives of the Treaties.

They should make recommendations and decisions only to serve these interests.

Civil servants should carry out their functions to the best of their abilities and strive to meet the highest professional standards at all times.

They should be mindful of their position of public trust and set a good example to others.

2. Integrity

Civil servants should be guided by a sense of propriety and conduct themselves at all times in a manner that would bear the closest public scrutiny. This obligation is not fully discharged merely by acting within the law.

Civil servants should not place themselves under any financial or other obligation that might influence them in the performance of their functions, including by the receipt of gifts. They should promptly declare any private interests relating to their functions.

Civil servants should take steps to avoid conflicts of interest and the appearance of such conflicts. They should take swift action to resolve any conflict that arises. This obligation continues after leaving office.

3. Objectivity

Civil servants should be impartial, open-minded, guided by evidence, and willing to hear different viewpoints. They should be ready to acknowledge and correct mistakes.

In procedures involving comparative evaluations, civil servants should base recommendations and decisions only on merit and any other factors expressly prescribed by law.

Civil servants should not discriminate or allow the fact that they like, or dislike, a particular person to influence their professional conduct.

4. Respect for others

Civil servants should act respectfully to each other and to citizens. They should be polite, helpful, timely and co-operative.

They should make genuine efforts to understand what others are saying and express themselves clearly, using plain language.



5. Transparency

Civil servants should be willing to explain their activities and to give reasons for their actions. They should keep proper records and welcome public scrutiny of their conduct, including their compliance with these public service principles.

The public service principles are available in the 23 EU languages at:
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/resources/publicserviceprinciples.faces>