

The final event in the series of workshops entitled open dialogue between institutions chances and challenges, was organised on 14th March in Brussels, as an opportunity to discuss the progress and the challenges still lying ahead in terms of civil dialogue.

Considering the progress made, some mechanisms of dialogue and new legal provisions (Lisbon Treat art.11) are in place today which represent an improvement to preceding conditions. Without detracting from the importance of these steps, a stronger and more coordinated effort is needed on the part of institutions and civil society if we are to reach the objective of an open transparent and regular dialogue.

The quality of the relationship between the EU and its citizens must be enhanced in order to gain their trust. The risk is otherwise of a widening gap and an increasing feeling of disconnection from the EU.

The European Ombudsman, Mr Nikiforos Diamandourous, present at the event, stressed that without transparency there can be no satisfactory process of dialogue. He pointed out that transparency means especially making sure that citizens have access to documents in the various stages of the EU decision-making process, thus from the draft documents to the final adopted decision.

According to the results of a Eurobarometer survey conducted jointly by the Ombudsman and the European institutions, almost 42% of citizens are unsatisfied with the level of transparency of EU administration. Most of the time, complaints are related to the refusal to have access to documents.

In this respect, the European Ombudsman can help citizens in holding the EU administration to account. The office of the Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration in EU institutions, bodies, offices and agencies received by EU citizens, associations and businesses. The cases of maladministration may involve institutions failing to respect fundamental rights, legal rules or principles or the principles of good administration.

Normally, it is possible to submit a complaint in writing after having first contacted the EU

institution concerned to try to resolve the matter.

Examples of problems the Ombudsman deals with are :

- Late payments
- Contractual disputes
- Refusal of access to documents
- Unnecessary delay
- Violation of fundamental rights

Businesses and associations frequently participating in EU projects and calls for tender have direct contact with EU institutions and therefore they are the ones who are the most often turning for advice to the Ombudsman.