



## Press release No. 9/2013

# Ombudsman welcomes European Chemicals Agency's new measures to prevent conflicts of interest

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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, welcomed the positive reply of the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) to suggestions he made with an eye to helping the Agency improve its administration. The suggestions, which were formulated following the Ombudsman's recent visit to the Agency, concerned potential conflict of interest situations, the handling of access to documents requests, and the information provided to tenderers and contractors. ECHA has taken the necessary steps to implement them.**

#### **ECHA complies with a series of suggestions by the Ombudsman**

The European Chemicals Agency is based in Helsinki and was set up in the framework of the *REACH Regulation* concerning the registration, evaluation, authorisation, and restriction of chemicals. The Regulation was adopted to protect human health and the environment from risks arising from the use of chemicals, as well as to make sure that the EU's chemical industry increases its competitiveness.

The Ombudsman's programme of visits to EU Agencies is designed to ensure that they respect principles of good administration, such as transparency and high ethical standards. He visited ECHA in October 2012 and made several suggestions afterwards.

He called on ECHA to improve its procedures for tackling potential conflicts of interest concerning the Agency's staff and members of its Board of Appeal. This suggestion also took into account the findings made by the European Court of Auditors in a recent report.

Furthermore, he suggested that ECHA should become more transparent as regards its handling of access to documents requests and the disclosure of the names of its selection board members. The Ombudsman also asked ECHA to include references to the Ombudsman not only in its Code of Good Administrative Behaviour, but also in its dealings with tenderers and contractors.

In its reply, ECHA highlighted concrete measures, such as the adoption of a new conflict of interest policy and measures to ensure greater transparency, which it is taking in order to comply with the Ombudsman's various suggestions.

The Ombudsman concluded that ECHA has taken appropriate steps to adopt all his suggestions and commended the Agency for so doing.

The Ombudsman's decision is available at: <http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/cases/decision.faces/en/50278/html.bookmark>