



European Ombudsman

Consiglio  
Regionale del  
Piemonte



0002601/SB0500 27/10/2011

# The Ombudsman's synthesis

## The European Ombudsman and Citizens' Rights

### Special Eurobarometer

Conducted by TNS Opinion & Social at the request of the  
European Parliament and the European Ombudsman

Coverage: EU 27 (26 836 European citizens)

Methodology: Face-to-face

Fieldwork: February to March 2011

7 July 2011

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## Introduction

The European Ombudsman investigates complaints from EU citizens, companies, NGOs, associations, and other organisations about maladministration in the EU institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies. Maladministration encompasses all kinds of poor or improper administrative behaviour, from late payment for EU projects to the unjustified refusal to give out a document or information.

The Ombudsman is often seen as a link between European citizens and the EU administration. One of his main priorities is to help the EU administration to become more transparent, effective, and citizen friendly. Furthermore, the Ombudsman is keen to inform European citizens about their new rights, introduced by the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Lisbon Treaty, which made the Charter legally binding, strengthened the role of the European citizens vis-à-vis the EU administration. They provide for a stronger involvement of citizens in the EU's decision-making and introduce the right to good administration, a right which lies at the heart of what the European Ombudsman does.

This Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> aims to assess how informed European citizens feel about the Charter of Fundamental Rights and what importance they attach to European citizens' rights. This is crucial for the work of the Ombudsman. Only citizens who know about their rights and know where to turn in case of problems can put these rights effectively into use.

Furthermore, questioning Europeans about the performance of the EU administration should help to identify areas where there is room for improvement.

The Ombudsman's main audiences include not only European citizens, but also NGOs, companies, associations, and other organisations, in short everybody in the European Union who might encounter problems with the EU administration. He aims to use the results of this survey to improve his own performance and communication activities in order better to reach out to these audiences. He will also feed the results into the European Network of Ombudsmen and ask for the support of national and regional ombudsmen in informing citizens of their rights.

The Ombudsman thanks the European Parliament for having commissioned this survey and TNS Opinion & Social for having carried it out. The full survey, including a wide array of socio-demographic data and other statistics is available on the Ombudsman's website at:  
<http://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/press/statistics.faces>

Some of the text and graphics used in this synthesis have been extracted from the full report produced by TNS Opinion & Social.

<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer survey conducted in the 27 Member States of the EU. 26,836 European citizens aged 15+ were interviewed face to face by the TNS Opinion & Social network between 9 February and 8 March 2011. The methodology used is that of surveys carried out for the Directorate-General for Communication of the European Parliament ("Research and Political Analysis" Unit).



## Key findings

- **Seventy-two percent (72%) of respondents say they do not feel informed about the Charter of Fundamental Rights.** The Ombudsman, the other EU institutions, and the European Network of Ombudsmen clearly have a major role to play in informing citizens better about the Charter.
- **Almost half of the respondents consider the right to move and reside freely in the EU to be the most important citizens' right. The second most important citizens' right, according to the respondents, is the right to good administration, followed by the right to lodge complaints with the Ombudsman.** This result is very encouraging for the Ombudsman's efforts to strengthen his visibility in order to help citizens make use of their right to good administration.
- **Satisfaction with the EU administration is generally low when it comes to its effectiveness, service-mindedness, and transparency.** It is particularly worrying that the EU is felt to perform worst on transparency (42% say they are not satisfied with the level of transparency in the EU administration). As one third of the Ombudsman's inquiries concern lack of transparency, this result reinforces his determination to help the EU institutions become more open, effective, and citizen friendly.
- **A majority of respondents (52%) thinks that the Ombudsman's most important function is to ensure that EU citizens know their rights and how to use them.** 34% of respondents think that it is important for the European Ombudsman to work with ombudsmen in the different EU Member States, while seeking redress for complainants in cases of maladministration is regarded as important by only 27% of respondents. These results underline the importance of the Ombudsman's communication policy vis-à-vis European citizens and the need for close cooperation within the European Network of Ombudsmen. However, the European Ombudsman also has to reinforce his information policy as regards his main task of dealing with complaints, especially towards potential complainants such as companies, NGOs, associations, organisations, and others.
- **Roughly half of respondents would like to know more about what the Ombudsman does.** This result underlines the importance of the Ombudsman's efforts to inform the broader public about his services. It also stresses the need for targeted information to those citizens, companies, and other stakeholders who might actually need the services of the Ombudsman at some point in the future.

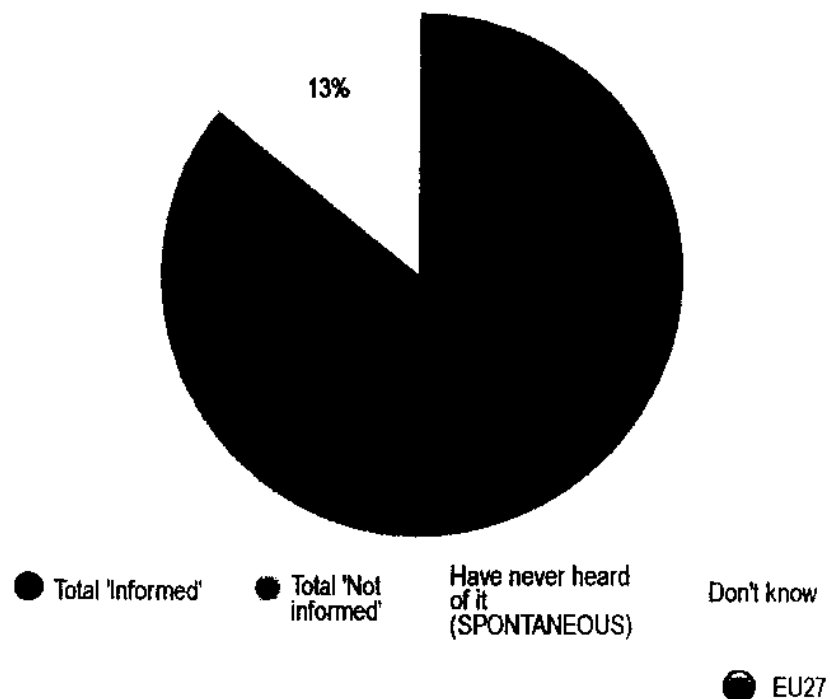


# 1. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and citizens' rights

## 1.1. How informed people feel about the Charter

A clear majority of EU citizens (72%) does not feel informed about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. A further 13% of respondents spontaneously replied that they had never heard of the Charter. By comparison, only 14% of EU respondents claim to be well informed on the subject, with 12% being 'fairly well informed' and just 2% regarding themselves as being 'very well informed'.

QB1. How informed do you feel you are about the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU?



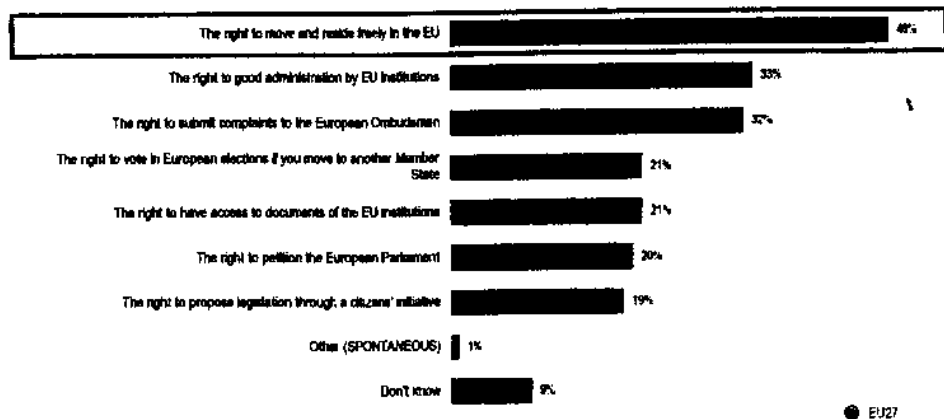
Looking at the results from the **individual Member States**, it emerges that in just three countries: Luxembourg (25%), the Czech Republic (22%), and Italy (21%) over 20% of respondents feel themselves to be well informed. Just 6% of people in Latvia and 8% in France, Lithuania, and Romania consider themselves to be well informed. At least 70% of respondents in 18 Member States say they are not informed, with particularly high proportions being observed in Spain (88%) and Finland (85%). While only 49% of respondents in Portugal view themselves as being not informed, a very high proportion of people there (39%) say spontaneously they have never heard of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, as do 28% in Ireland and 27% in Greece.



## 1.2. European citizens' rights

The right to move and reside freely in the EU is considered important by the highest number of respondents (48%), with the right to good administration by EU institutions in second place (33%), and the right to submit complaints to the European Ombudsman (32%) emerging as the third most important citizens' right. 21% of people regard the right to vote in European elections if you move to another Member State as one of their most important rights, with the same number citing the right to have access to documents of the EU institutions. 20% of people consider the right to petition the European Parliament as one of their most significant rights, while the right to propose legislation through a citizens' initiative is valued as an important right by 19% of respondents.

Q65. From the following European citizens' rights, which are the most important to you personally?



The right to move and reside freely in the EU is seen as the most important right in 21 Member States. The right to good administration by EU institutions is seen as the most important in three countries (Greece, Spain, and Italy), while the right to submit complaints to the European Ombudsman is considered the most important in the remaining three (the Czech Republic, Malta, and Portugal).

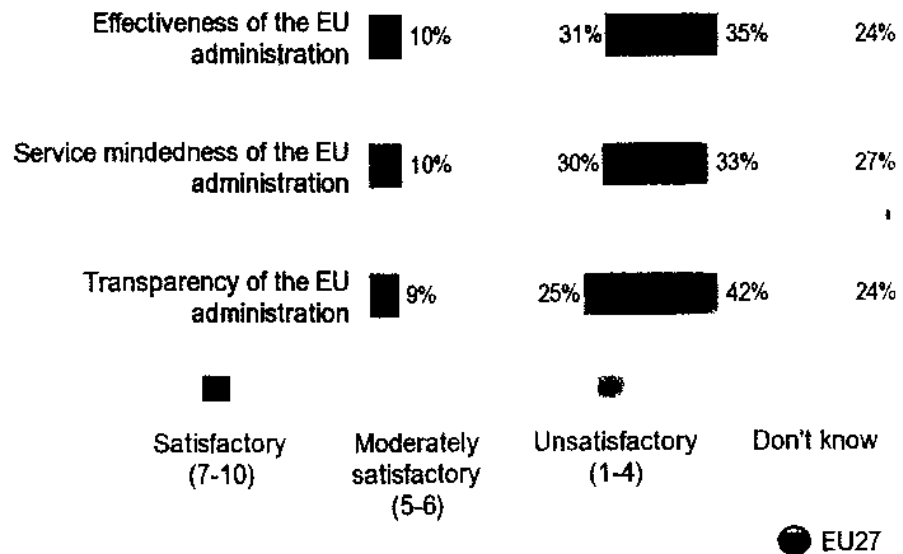
The right to move and reside freely in the EU is seen as being particularly important in Finland (74%) and Sweden (73%), although respondents in Italy (28%) and Spain (31%) see this as less of a priority. The right to submit complaints to the European Ombudsman is most prized in Greece (46%) and Slovenia (44%), but only 16% of people in Lithuania and 21% of those in Latvia see this as an important right. 32% of people in Denmark and Sweden believe that the right to have access to the documents of the EU institutions is an important right, while only 13% of those in Spain and Lithuania see it as such.



## 2. The performance of the EU administration

The public's impression of the EU administration in terms of three criteria under examination – effectiveness, service-mindedness, and transparency – is that the level of performance is low. On all three counts, more people say that the performance is 'unsatisfactory' than say that it is 'moderately satisfactory' or 'satisfactory'.

QB2. Based on what you know and using a scale from 1 to 10, how would you judge the performance of the EU administration in each of the following areas? '1' means that the EU administration's performance in a specific area is "not at all satisfactory" and '10' means that its performance is "very satisfactory".



On the question of the administration's effectiveness, more respondents (35%) think that the EU administration displays an unsatisfactory level of effectiveness than do those who record a moderate or high degree of satisfaction. Three in ten respondents regard the EU's performance as being moderately satisfactory (31%), while just 10% see it as being satisfactory.

In terms of the EU administration's approach to service, EU respondents are more inclined to think that the EU performs unsatisfactorily (33%) than they are to think that it is moderately satisfactory (30%) or satisfactory (10%).

The EU is generally thought to perform less well on transparency than it does on effectiveness and service-mindedness. 42% of people are dissatisfied with the EU's approach to transparency, with 25% saying they are moderately satisfied and only 9% expressing satisfaction.

Analysis of the individual country data reveals a clear pattern as to which countries have the most favourable impression of the EU administration's performance. Respondents in Malta and Slovakia have the most positive impression of the EU on all three performance measures, and approval is also consistently high in Bulgaria and Romania. At the other end of the scale, respondents in Germany and the UK have a consistently poor impression of the EU administration's performance.

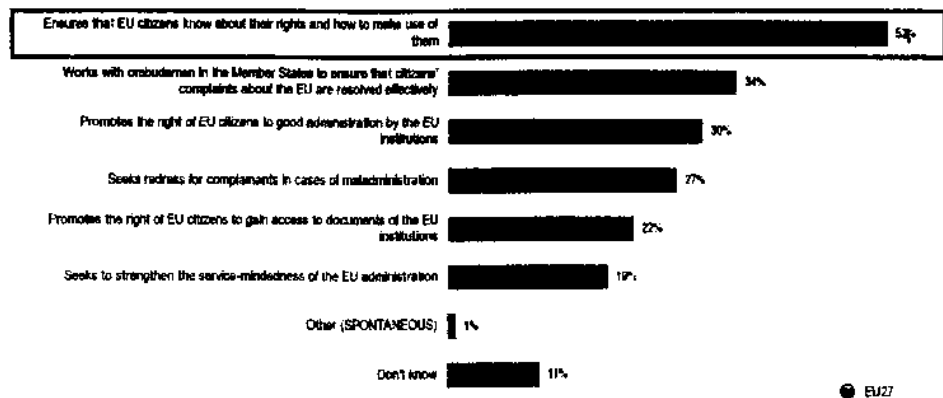


### 3. The European Ombudsman

#### 3.1. The responsibilities of the Ombudsman

Ensuring that EU citizens know about their rights and how to make use of them is widely seen as the Ombudsman's most important responsibility, with 52% of respondents citing this as one of the Ombudsman's key functions. 34% of respondents think that it is important for the European Ombudsman to work with ombudsmen in the different EU Member States to ensure that citizens' complaints about the EU are resolved effectively, while 30% see it as the Ombudsman's job to promote the right of EU citizens to good administration by the EU institutions. Seeking redress for complainants in cases of maladministration is regarded as important by 27% of respondents, with 22% thinking a priority for the Ombudsman should be promoting the right of EU citizens to gain access to EU documents. 19% of people say they want the Ombudsman to focus on strengthening the service-mindedness of the EU.

Q83. According to you, which of the following responsibilities of the European Ombudsmen are the most important?



'Ensuring that EU citizens know about their rights and how to make use of them' is the first answer given in all Member States, except for the Netherlands, where 'working with ombudsmen in Member States to ensure that citizens' complaints about the EU are resolved effectively' is the most common response; and Ireland, where 'promoting the right of EU citizens to good administration by the EU institutions' is deemed to be equally as important as 'ensuring that EU citizens know about their rights'.

'Ensuring that EU citizens know about their rights and how to make use of them' is regarded as a particularly important responsibility in Denmark and Sweden, where 69% of people choose this answer, though it is not considered quite so essential in Romania (38%), Ireland (43%), and Portugal (43%).

'Working with ombudsmen in Member States to ensure that citizens' complaints about the EU are resolved effectively' is once again thought to be a core function of the Ombudsman in Denmark (61%), Sweden (59%), and the Netherlands (53%), whereas relatively few respondents in Romania (16%) and Lithuania (22%) attach this level of importance to it.

Respondents in Cyprus (49%), Sweden (43%), and Ireland (43%, first response given, equally with 'Ensuring that EU citizens know about their rights and how to make use of them') regard 'promoting the right of EU citizens to good





**administration** by the EU institutions' as one of the Ombudsman's most important responsibilities, but only 18% of those in Poland and 20% of those in Lithuania agree.

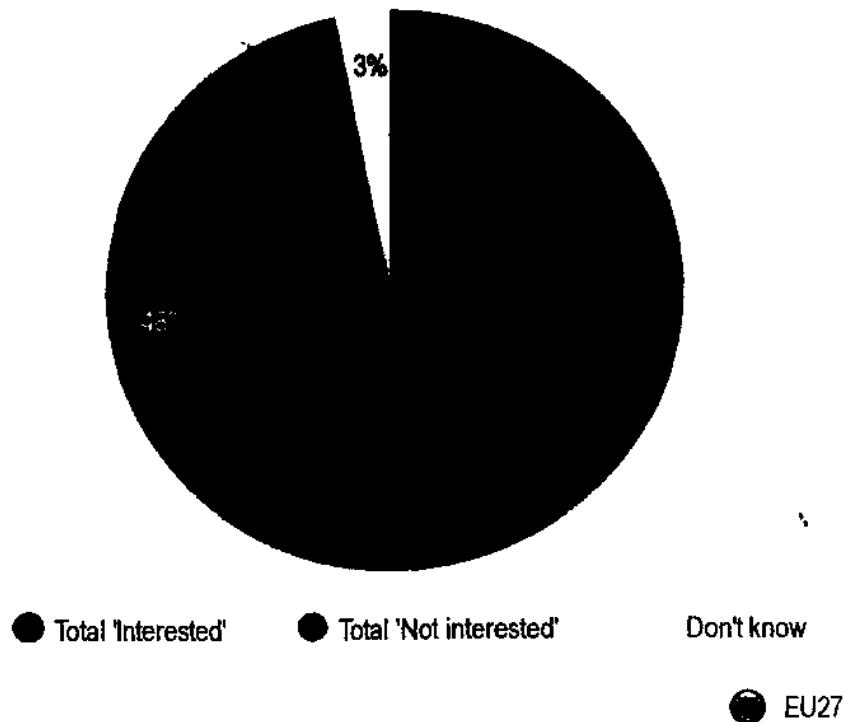
'**Seeking redress for complainants in cases of maladministration**' is considered very important by 52% of people in Finland and 48% of those in Cyprus. By contrast, only 12% of people in Estonia and 16% in Sweden see this as a priority. People in Sweden (38%) and Denmark (36%) regard '**promoting the right of EU citizens to gain access to EU documents**' as a core responsibility, whereas only 13% of those in Lithuania and 14% of those in the Czech Republic, Latvia, and Poland see it this way. '**Focusing on strengthening the service-mindedness of the EU**' is a top priority according to 36% of people in Austria and 31% of people in Greece, but it is not seen as so much of a priority in Latvia (11%), Luxembourg (13%), or the United Kingdom (13%). Relatively high numbers of people in Romania (26%), Estonia (22%), and Lithuania (22%) say they do not know what the Ombudsman's most important responsibilities should be.

### 3.2. Public interest in learning about the role of the Ombudsman

EU citizens are divided on the question of whether they are interested in knowing more about the responsibilities of the European Ombudsman, with roughly half saying they are interested (49%) and half saying they are not (48%). Just 10% of people say that they are 'very interested', while 39% say they are 'somewhat interested'. Conversely, 29% describe themselves as being 'not very interested', with 19% saying they are 'not at all interested'.



QB4. How interested are you personally to get informed about the responsibilities of the European Ombudsman? Would you say you are...?



At **individual country level**, in only 11 Member States do at least half of the respondents say they are interested in learning more about the Ombudsman's role. The levels of interest are highest in Cyprus, where 74% of people are interested, in Luxembourg (64%), and Malta (62%). By contrast, only 21% of people in Slovakia, 30% in Latvia, and 32% in Denmark declare any interest in the subject. The number of respondents saying they are not interested in what the Ombudsman does is highest in Slovakia (78%), Latvia (68%), and Denmark (67%). 'Very interested' is the most common response in just one Member State – Cyprus (40%) – while 'not very interested' is the answer most often given in eight countries: Denmark (49%), Latvia (47%), Finland (45%), the Czech Republic (43%), Slovakia (40%), Hungary (36%), Poland (36%), and Bulgaria (32%).



## Conclusion

The lack of knowledge among the respondents to the survey about the Charter of Fundamental Rights is worrying. At the same time, a majority of respondents thinks that the Ombudsman's most important function is to ensure that EU citizens know their rights and how to use them. **These results clearly demonstrate the importance that the European Ombudsman, as well as the other EU institutions and the European Network of Ombudsmen, have to give to informing citizens better about the Charter and their rights.**

It is very encouraging for the Ombudsman to see that one in three respondents thinks that the right to good administration is one of their most important citizens' rights. Almost the same number of respondents attaches great importance to the right to submit complaints to the Ombudsman. **These results underline the importance of the Ombudsman's work and strengthen his role as a crucial link between the European citizens and the EU administration.**

As regards the survey results about the performance of the EU administration, it is particularly worrying that 42% say that they are not satisfied with the level of transparency in the EU institutions. The satisfaction with the institutions' effectiveness and service-mindedness is also low. One of the Ombudsman's main priorities is to help the EU administration to become more transparent, effective, and citizen friendly. **The Ombudsman clearly needs to step up his proactive role vis-à-vis the EU institutions with a view to increasing the citizens' trust in the EU administration. The Ombudsman is best placed to identify shortcomings in the EU administration and proactively to work with the institutions to tackle them.**

However, the perception of the EU institutions' performance strongly varies from country to country, thus indicating that the subjective feeling of inefficiency is not necessarily consistent with the objective performance of the EU administration. This is also supported by the fact that the better people are informed about the Charter of Fundamental Rights - and thus the EU - the more highly they rate the performance of the EU administration. **Educating the public is therefore desirable not just to make people more aware of their rights, but also to improve their impression of the EU institutions. Lack of knowledge by the public is as big a problem for the EU's reputation as any shortcomings in the EU's institutions.**

Asked about the role of the Ombudsman, a majority of respondents thinks that his most important function is to inform citizens about their rights, followed by the importance to cooperate with ombudsmen in the different Member States. Only 27% of respondents think that the Ombudsman's most important task is to seek redress for complainants in cases of maladministration. These results obviously stem from the fact that citizens first want to know about their rights before they start thinking about safeguarding them.

**The results underline the importance of the Ombudsman's communication policy vis-à-vis European citizens and the need for close cooperation within the European Network of Ombudsmen. However, the European Ombudsman must also reinforce his information policy as regards his core task of dealing with complaints towards potential complainants, such as companies, NGOs, associations, organisations, and others.**

Roughly half of respondents would like to know more about what the Ombudsman does. This result is very encouraging and underlines the



importance of the Ombudsman's efforts to inform the broader public about his services. It also stresses the need for targeted information to those citizens, companies, and other stakeholders who might actually need the services of the Ombudsman at some point in the future. **For both informing the broader public and targeting information to potential complainants, the Ombudsman needs the support of the European Network of Ombudsmen.**

The survey demonstrates that the project of connecting citizens with the EU remains a work in progress. The Ombudsman is determined to use the results to improve his own communication activities as well as his efforts to help to improve the EU administration's performance. He will also feed the results into the European Network of Ombudsmen in order to spread information about citizens' rights to the national and regional levels in the EU. The Ombudsman reiterates his thanks to the European Parliament and to TNS Opinion & Social for their efforts in carrying out this survey. He is convinced that a regular monitoring of citizens' opinions on these questions is crucial in order to improve the performance of all EU institutions.