

**Ms Emily O'Reilly**  
European Ombudsman



Clara Ponsati Obiols

Membre del Parlament Europeu

Brussels, 13 July 2022

Dear Ms. O'Reilly,

I am writing with regard to the complaints received by your body since 2017 relating to the political situation in Catalonia. According to the information provided by your office, the Ombudsman has received 75 complaints<sup>1</sup> relating to this matter, of which only two resulted in inquiries by your office.<sup>2</sup> 41 of the complaints were deemed to fall outside of the mandate of the Ombudsman because they related to actions of national authorities, 30 were deemed to be within the mandate but inadmissible and 2 were deemed to be admissible but without sufficient grounds to open an inquiry.

After analyzing the complaints and the answers provided by your office, I would like to express my concern firstly, at the apparent lack of information that the citizens that I represent have regarding the mandate of the Ombudsman and secondly, at the difficult and rigid requirements that they must comply with in order to have their concerns addressed by your office.

Regarding the first matter, I would like to ask about initiatives from your office to explain the mandate and role of your office to citizens, to make them more aware of the kinds of complaints the Ombudsman can deal with. I know this is something your office takes into account<sup>3</sup>, but I feel that there should be more information, or information should be provided differently. It is apparent that a significant part of citizens does not understand the scope of the mandate of the Ombudsman and that this leads to their complaints being rejected, which might contribute to a view that the European bodies are not receptive, useful or helpful.

Regarding the second matter, we have detected that, even when citizens address complaints against European Institutions, the most common answer that they receive is that they should address their complaint first to the European institution in question. While I am aware that this is a requirement under the Statute of the European Ombudsman, I am surprised that citizens do not receive any help as to how to address their complaint (besides a general indication or link to the website of the institution) and that there is no follow-up on your part regarding these complaints.

I believe a more hands-on approach on the part of your office to make sure the complaints of the citizens do not remain unanswered, whether by the institution receiving the complaint or your office, would go a long way in making citizens feel respected by the institutions that serve them.

More generally, I would also like to express my regret at the fact that your office has undertaken no action regarding the many complaints it has received from citizens regarding the rule of law breaches occurring in Catalonia. While I understand that many matters do not fall within the mandate of the Ombudsman, I believe your office could have done more to address the citizens' concerns. For

<sup>1</sup> Initially, your office indicated that it had received 77 complaints on this topic but two of the complaints were later deemed not to pertain to the situation of Catalonia.

<sup>2</sup> case 8/2017/CEC and case 1834/2018/AMF.

<sup>3</sup> According to "European Ombudsman strategy: 'Towards 2024' - Sustaining Impact"

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instance, it could have better guided citizens through the difficult process of making their voice heard before the European Union.

I hope that my observations will be helpful to your office as it strives to protect people's rights and enhance relations between the institutions and the European Citizens.

Looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely yours,