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**Joint Press Conference with the new
European Ombudsman Nikiforos
Diamandouros**

*Check Against Delivery
Seul le texte prononcé fait foi
Es gilt das gesprochene Wort*

Press Conference
Brussels, 2nd April 2003

I would like to welcome Professor Nikiforos Diamandouros, who is taking up his new duties as European Ombudsman today following his appointment by the vote of the European Parliament.

The Commission has just had a fruitful exchange of views with Mr Diamandouros about many points of common interest between our two Institutions. It is a promising start to what I am sure will be a productive working relationship. The fact that Prof Diamandouros is the former Greek Ombudsman and member of Greek National Council for Administrative Reform means, of course, that he has impressive experience of the dynamics of reform and of their implications for the concept and practise of "good administration".

The Commission obviously has direct and indirect dealings every day with thousands of citizens, businesses, administrations, NGOs and many other types of organisations and we naturally take great interest in the activities and the views of the European Ombudsman. As the Annual Report of the last Ombudsman Mr Söderman shows, the number of citizens who are aware of their rights of complaint and willing to use them is increasing. We consider this to be a positive trend, not least because of the stimulus which it gives to service conscientiousness and to the culture of accountability.

Cooperation with the Ombudsman is obviously valued by the Prodi Commission. Since we have been making consistent and productive efforts to improve our service performance from the outset, we actively support the mission of the Ombudsman which is to uphold the right of citizens to good administration.

I will not detail all of the actions which this Commission has undertaken in efforts to give greater effectiveness to the right of citizens to receive high quality public service but, for illustration, I will highlight a few which have been particularly directed to ensuring "good administration":

- In 2000, we adopted and implemented the Code of Good Administrative Behaviour for Commission staff;
- In 2001, along with the Council and the European Parliament, we adopted the Regulation on Public Access to Documents and followed that with the provision of access to the register of the President's correspondence;
- We have abolished age limits for all recruitment competitions organised by the Commission;
- We have decreased the average payment times to contractors from over 54 days in 1999 to less than 44 days in 2002.

Meanwhile, as a context for these examples, the whole of Administrative Reform has been designed to contribute to better administration:

- The implementation of the Strategy for improving planning, programming and matching our tasks and our resources, means – for instance – that we are making advances in ensuring that departments are equipped to carry out their duties effectively;
- By radically improving financial management and control, including the modernisation of the accounting system, we are increasingly providing greater security and efficiency in the use of funds;
- By updating staff policy we are fostering better management, more precise allocation of responsibility, and clear recognition for high standards of service to the public.

All of these reforms have been initiated and largely implemented during the mandate of Mr Söderman, the first European Ombudsman. His constructive criticism and his suggestions helped to ensure that we keep up the momentum and the sense of direction. Even if we sometimes disagreed on a particular item – as is probably inevitable – the general result of our exchanges was to promote continuous improvement in awareness and performance.

I am sure that our work with Mr Diamandouros will have the same positive impact, and I wish him enjoyment and fulfilment in his new tasks.