

## EU Ombudsman candidates facing MEP grilling

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News

Two of the candidates who have thrown their hats in the ring for the European Ombudsman's job will be quizzed by MEPs this week.



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The elections are in mid-December with candidates going before a public hearing of the petitions committee on 3 December. The only vote is the plenary vote in the December plenary.

The incumbent, Emily O'Reilly, is attending several of the S&D and Greens group's meetings this week to present her candidacy and give MEPs chance to ask questions. Next week she is invited to two more groups.

Some of the other candidates are also speaking to some of the groups, including Nils Muižnieks.

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There are three other candidates: Julia Laffranque, Guiseppe Fortunato and Cecelia Wikström.

The S&D hearing for Muižnieks was on Tuesday night and he appeared at a Greens meeting on Wednesday.

Muižnieks told this website: "I am a political scientist by training, but became a human rights expert by learning on the job over the last 25 years as an NGO leader, a minister in the Latvian government, an academic, the chair of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, and most recently as the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights from 2012 to 2018."

"I am running for the post of European Ombudsman because I firmly believe in the values of the European Union - I have lived them - and I want to help European institutions deliver on their promise of working for the people."

"I am running for the post of European Ombudsman because I firmly believe in the values of the European Union - I have lived them - and I want to help European institutions deliver on their promise of working for the people" **Nils Muižnieks**

"I have very strong pan-European experience in human rights, in-depth practical knowledge of European institutions, much experience cooperating with national Ombudsman institutions, and good managerial and inter-personal skills.

"I intend to continue the office's intense cooperation with the Parliament, focus on access to information and documentation - especially on issues such as policy on climate change - strengthen the fundamental rights component of the Ombudsman's work on issues such as migration and artificial intelligence, and make the office more widely known and used across Europe."

O'Reilly was Irish Ombudsman for ten years before her election as European Ombudsman. As a former journalist, editor and author, her work attracted both national and international recognition including a Harvard Fellowship in 1988.

She was the first woman to be Irish Ombudsman and the first woman to be European Ombudsman.

She says, "Dealing effectively with citizen complaints, working closely with Parliament, liaising with civil society and engaging constructively with all EU institutions, we have helped achieve many positive impacts on the EU administration."

She said her office had handled over 10,000 citizen complaints, with the highest ever number of

complaints received in 2018.

Another achievement, she said, is the time taken to deal with inquiries which has been reduced by 42 percent, plus a “steep” increase in social media outreach.

She says that under her tenure, the office has brought in a ‘Fast-Track’ procedure for access to documents.

She also says she has “strengthened links between the European Network of Ombudsmen and the EU” and that the “Lobbying Dos and Don’ts Guide” is now used by EU civil servants.

The official, based in Brussels, says she takes pride in having a gender-balanced management team and promoting “citizen-friendly ‘plain writing’ in all communications.”

## About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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