



International Ombudsman Institute – European Region
Instituto Internacional del Ombudsman – Región Europea
Institut International de l’Ombudsman – Région Européenne

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Newsletter No 8

Dear colleague,

Hong Kong Board of Directors meeting

The annual meeting of IOI’s international Board was held November, 5 – 7, 2008 in Hong Kong, China. At the meeting, which was graciously hosted by IOI Secretary and Hong Kong Ombudsman, Alice Tai, the European Region was represented by Chairman Peter Kostelka / Austria, Riitta-Leena Paunio / Finland, Rafael Ribó / Catalonia (Spain) and Mats Melin / Sweden.

The selection of the future host of IOI’s head office was the main focus of the Hong Kong Board of Directors meeting. As set out in our previous newsletter, the Board had received proposals from the Catalan Ombudsman and the Austrian Ombudsman Board. According to the Assessment Committee, both proposals were well thought out and had much to offer. In the final analysis, however, the Committee supported Austria’s proposal, which covers all requirements for an active, competent and well-resourced Secretariat: government support, long term commitment, strong IT and foreign language skills, three full-time staff dealing with international and IOI’s business, links to other international professional bodies, a solid budget, a valid model for incorporation and a comprehensive plan for transition.

After detailed discussion, the Board agreed to recommend Vienna as the location for the new headquarters of the IOI; this proposal will be subject to ratification by the General Assembly in Stockholm. In the meantime, a Transition Committee including President Bill Angrick as chairman, the Executive Committee and the regional vice-presidents will oversee the transition process. It is envisaged that the new General Secretariat will be fully operational in early 2010.

Board of Directors

Mr. Peter Kostelka
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Mrs. Riitta-Leena Paunio
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Mr. Rafael Ribó
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Mr. Mats Melin
Chief Parliamentary
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In addition to the crucial head office question, the Board dealt with the following key issues: membership policy, financial standing, the Regions' activities, election of officers, the preparations for the Stockholm Conference.

As regards IOI's officers, no changes will occur in the run-up to the Stockholm Conference. President Bill Angrick, Vice-President Tom Frawley, Treasurer David Percy and Secretary Alice Tai will continue to carry out their functions until the Stockholm Conference in June 2009. Moreover, Linda Reif will serve as IOI editor until mid-2009.

Current status of IOI European membership

In 2007/2008, six European ombudspersons joined IOI as institutional members. We are pleased to welcome the following colleagues to our international community: Mr. Catello Aprea, Basilicata / Italy; Ms. Burgi Volgger, South Tyrol / Italy; Mr. Ullrich Galle, Rhineland-Palatinate / Germany; Mr. Francisco Javier Eneriz Olaechea, Navarra / Spain; Ms. Sólja í Ólavsstovu, Faroe Islands / Denmark and Ms Birgit Wille-Handels, Schleswig-Holstein / Germany. We are also pleased that Mr. William McKinney from the European Centre for Minority Issues Library successfully applied for library membership.

Unfortunately, membership had to be cancelled in the following cases: Human Rights Ombudsman of Bosnia & Herzegovina (institutional membership) and Nikolaus Schwärzler (individual membership). Non-payment of fees over an extended period of time was the reason for the cancellations.

Events

Albania

Within the framework of the Eunomia project, the Greek Ombudsman and the People's Advocate of the Republic of Albania will conduct a workshop on 'Access to information: what can the Ombudsman do?' on 9 – 10 March 2009 in Tirana.

European Union

The European Ombudsman and the Ombudsman of Cyprus will hold the Seventh Seminar of the National Ombudsmen of EU Member States and Candidate Countries on 5 – 7 April 2009 in Paphos / Cyprus.

Armenia

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia will host a conference entitled 'The Right to Freedom of Expression and Fair Trial' on 25 – 26 May 2009 in Yerevan.

Sweden

By now, all of you will have received an invitation to attend the 9th International IOI World Conference on 9 – 12 June 2009 in Stockholm. Please keep in mind that the deadline for registration is 17 March 2009. You should also consider that members who have not paid their fees will not be eligible to vote at the General Assembly.

Co-operation projects and support

Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

The Peer-to-Peer Project, which was initiated by the Commissioner in 2007, will continue to provide training opportunities for ombudsmen and their staff in 2009.

EOI

The President of the European Ombudsman Institute (EOI), OM Ullrich Galle from Rhineland-Palatinate / Germany, has recently become a member of IOI. It is envisaged that EOI and IOI Europe will co-operate more closely and develop common projects.

European Fundamental Rights Agency

Attempts have been made to establish co-operation with the Vienna-based European Fundamental Rights Agency.

Support for a colleague

Recently, one of our colleagues informed us of serious incidents affecting his independence. The public authorities of his country, a post-communist democracy, repeatedly tried to intimidate him and his staff after they had carried out some delicate investigations. In this context, the ombudsman, who prefers to remain anonymous, asked us to initiate a discussion on the independence of ombudsman institutions. We would be very grateful if you could answer the following questions:

1. How do you deal with public authorities trying to influence your work?
2. Are there any measures you can take to protect your staff against pressure from outside?

If yes, how do these measures work? What is their legal basis?

If no, wouldn't such measures make sense?

3. Is it possible for somebody to file a lawsuit against you or your staff as a more or less direct reaction to your inquiry, investigation or recommendation? How is this handled in your legal system and in practice?

Please send your answers to peter.kostelka@volksanwaltschaft.gv.at by 30 March 2009.

'European Ombudsman Institutions' ed. by Prof. Kucsko-Stadlmayer

Many of you helped Prof. Kucsko-Stadlmayer and her team from the Faculty of Law / University of Vienna carry out the study of 49 European legal systems providing for ombudsman institutions. In recognition of your contribution, you have recently been provided with free copies of the study, published in German and English in May and October 2008 respectively. If you have not yet received your copy, please contact the Austrian Ombudsman Board at peter.kostelka@volksanwaltschaft.gv.at .

Peter Kostelka