

Mr Ruslan Stefanchuk
Chairman of the Verkhovna Rada
5, Mykhaila Hrushevskoho Street
01008 Kyiv
Ukraine

24 January 2022

RE: SUPPORT FOR THE UKRAINIAN PARLIAMENT COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Dear Mr Stefanchuk,

It is with great concern that the International Ombudsman Institute ([IOI](#)) has learned about recent developments at the *Verkhovna Rada* (Parliament) of Ukraine regarding the establishment of a Temporary Special Commission to verify a possible violation of oath by the Commissioner for Human Rights (Draft Resolution N° 6322). The resolution has been sent to the Parliament's Plenary, which is expected to discuss the proposal tomorrow, 25 January 2022. If approved, it could initiate a formal process of dismissal of the current Commissioner.

As the only global organization for the cooperation of more than 200 parliamentary Ombudsman worldwide, the IOI follows circumstances that pose a threat to the independence of Ombudsman around the world and we take such circumstances very seriously. We are therefore deeply concerned about the developments in relation with the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. The institution enjoys a very high regard globally; it is a long-standing member of the IOI and an internationally accredited NHRI with A-status.

Ombudsman are officers of Parliament and report to Parliament. Parliaments, in turn, are the cornerstones of national human rights protection. Good working relations between Parliament and oversight bodies such as the Ombudsman are therefore essential. Moreover, strong and independent oversight bodies are a core element of democracy and an integral part of any state ruled by law. It is in the best public interest to fully respect the independence of these institutions. Weakening them will not only restrict citizens' rights, but also impact on the state's compliance with international standards and human rights obligations.

The Council of Europe's "Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution" ([Venice Principles](#)) are a set of internationally recognized standards to inform strong and independent Ombudsman institutions. They affirm an international understanding that Ombudsman institutions should not be hindered in their work, that their mandate should not be diminished, their investigatory powers not be restricted, and the incumbent not be removed from office without clear and reasonable conditions established by law.

The United Nations Resolution on "The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law" ([UN Res/75/186](#)) strongly encourages Member States to strengthen independent and autonomous oversight bodies such as the Ombudsman, and to protect them adequately against reprisals, intimidation or threat.

The IOI recognises and respects the sovereign right of the Parliament to make laws that might affect the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights. In doing so, the Ukrainian Government and Parliament – like all governments and parliaments globally – have the duty to act in line with international standards such as the Venice Principles or the respective UN Resolution and ensure that institutions, which monitor the state, are protected from interference and can exercise their mandate independently and in a secure manner.

The establishment of a commission to verify if the Commissioner has violated her oath might not only trigger a formal process of dismissal of the current incumbent, it would also impact on the institution's independence and standing, as well as the effective discharge of its mandates. The IOI shares the concerns of partner organizations such as the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions ([ENNHRI](#)) and underlines its full support for the office of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights.

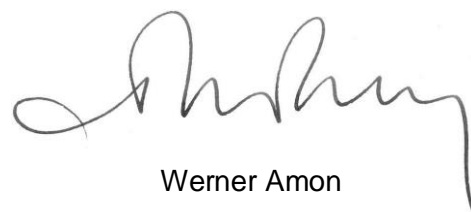
We call upon the *Verkhovna Rada* to uphold the international principles for the protection of oversight bodies such as the Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights, against intimidation, threats or any actions that may negatively impact on their independence and effectiveness, and we strongly encourage a reasoned and professional interaction with the office.



Andreas I. Pottakis
Regional President, IOI Europe



Chris Field
IOI President



Werner Amon
IOI Secretary General