

## **IOI European Region Quarterly Newsletter**

January 2025 - March 2025

*The IOI European Regional Board wants to be transparent about its activities and therefore sends you this quarterly newsletter. Feel free to share it with whomever is interested.*

### **The IOI European Regional Board**

The Board convened from 20 to 22 in Cyprus in the period covered by this Quarterly Newsletter. The Board will next meet online on 6 May and during the IOI World Board meeting in Rabat on 12 May.

The composition of the members of the IOI European Regional Board has changed. As of 1 March, Peter Svetina is no longer a member of the board and the Commissioner for Administration and Protection of Human Rights of Cyprus, Maria Stylianou, has now become a member of the world board. The vacancy for the European seat in the IOI European Regional Board will be opened for election after the World Board meeting in Rabat.

### **Council of Europe conference ombudsman and human rights institutions**



In 2024, the Basque Ombudsman, Manual Lezertua, together with the President of the IOI European Region, visited Strasbourg. The purpose of their visit was to revive the practice of organizing conferences for ombuds institutions, a tradition that had previously been upheld by the Commissioner for Human Rights. The Basque Ombudsman proposed the reinstatement of this initiative and in this way played a crucial role to bring into being the High-Level Conference in Strasbourg in March 2025

for National Human Rights and Ombuds Institutions. The conference was already part of the Luxembourg Presidency in which the ombudsman of Luxembourg, Claudia Monti was involved. This was the first international conference where ombuds institutions and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) will come together to discuss shared topics of concern.

### **Closer cooperation with ENRHI**

Inspired by the high-level conference organised by the Council of Europe for ombuds institutions and human rights institutions, the IOI European Regional president contacted the ENRHI Secretary General Debbie Kohner to explore a closer working relationship. During two online meetings and one during the conference, the conclusion was that a joined conferences on themes that concern both ombudsman institutions and national human rights institutions would be a first way to move forward. Potential themes for further collaboration include:

- Rule of law
- Travellers / Roma communities
- AI/privacy/data

By intensifying cooperation, we can share our findings and contribute to the protection and promotion of fundamental rights. An annual conference would provide the ideal platform to exchange knowledge and experiences and to take further steps in this direction. We will keep you updated on any further developments.

### **Funding secretariat European Region**

For some time, the idea has been voiced that with almost 100 members, attributing a secretariat to the institution of a presiding IOI European Regional President is a risk to the sustainability and transparency of the office. Marc Bertrand and Reinier van Zutphen had a meeting in Brussels in 2023 with the Head of Unit Fundamental Rights Policy of the European Commission to explore the possibilities available to apply for funding for a permanent secretariat for the IOI European Region. ENHRI has already such a secretariat as have the Children's Ombuds institutions. There seems to be room for such financial support, and this will be further explored. This topic will continue to be explored by the IOI European board.

### **Policy of representation of IOI European Board in conferences**

There is no financial support for IOI European Regional Board members for taking part in international meetings as a representative of the board. However, the IOI European Regional Board attaches importance to the presence of board members in international activities in Europe and therefore would like to have one of the board members present. The IOI European Board therefore asks you all to inform them of any international conference you are organising.

### **Representation IOI European Board Working Groups**

There are several IOI working groups in which the IOI European Regional Directors take part.

#### **STANDING BY-LAWS COMMITTEE**

Reinier van Zutphen

Joseph Zammit MCKeon

#### **UN WORKING GROUP**

Reinier van Zutphen

#### **TRAVEL POLICY WORKING GROUP**

Marino Fardelli

Reinier van Zutphen

#### **CODE OF ETHICS WORKING GROUP**

Marc Bertrand (chair)

Reinier van Zutphen

Joseph Zammit McKeon

Any outcome of these working groups will be shared by either the IOI Secretariat in Vienna or via this Quarterly Newsletter.

### Code of Ethics and Venice Commission



There is ongoing research by the University of Leuven on the way the Belgium ombuds institutions comply with the Venice Principles. More on this can be found on this website:

<https://research.kuleuven.be/portal/en/project/3H240319>

There is no further effort from the IOI to do anything with the Venice Principles. This should not be the position of the IOI European Region and activities will have to be organised that may lead to an active implementation agenda for the Venice Principles. The outcome of the University of Leuven research may be helpful in this. In the plan for the IOI European Region for the coming years, this topic will be listed.

### Peer Review

There has not been any Peer Review in the past two year. The board thinks that the reason lies in the complicated set up of the Peer Review. It is also very expensive and time consuming. Especially for small offices. Furthermore, once you have become a member of the IOI, there is never any review of your institution to see if you still comply with the goals of the organisation. This too prevents a more explorative approach to the functioning of your own institution. The board wants to evaluate the Peer Review and see if another set up can be developed that is closer to the possibilities institutions have.

### Ombuds Academy on challenging complaint behaviour



There was another Ombuds Academy activity on challenging complaint behaviour, in The Hague on 29 January. Over 20 complaint handlers from 18 ombuds institutions took part. It was a big success, and it may lead to a follow up on this topic as it is a recurring topic in the daily work of our staff. A next Ombuds Academy activity has not yet been chosen.

### Poldershop

In February the IOI European Regional President organised a Poldershop on the Migration Pact of the European Union. The Pact on Migration and Asylum (migration pact) is a set of new rules managing migration and establishing a common asylum system in the European Union (EU). A group of ombuds institutions with their staff members were invited to explore what the implications and opportunities are for the ombuds institutions at this moment.

From the discussion there were five topics that the participants thought worthwhile to further pursue. First and foremost is the Fundamental Rights Monitoring Mechanism. The creation of this new structure will directly affect the ombuds institutions. The other topics that were identified were the care of (unaccompanied) minors, the provision of legal aid, the push backs at the borders and the interpretation of the directives. In the coming months contact will be made with other ombuds institutions that may be interested in joining the discussion.

#### **Upcoming conferences**

- On the occasion of the 45th anniversary of the Lazio Region Civic Defender, the institution organised an international event in Rome, on 8 April. The European Directors Maria Stylianou and Joseph Zammit McKeon will represent the IOI European Regional Board during this conference.
- There will be a conference in Malta celebrating the 30th anniversary of the institution on 15 and 16 October. The theme is: Upholding Good Governance in Challenging Times. The role of the ombudsman. The IOI Regional President will provide a keynote speech during the opening.