

Topic : Raising awareness through public television

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For many years now the Austrian Ombudsman Board (AOB) has held a very close and successful cooperation with the Austrian public broadcaster ORF. Since 2002 the weekly TV show “BürgerAnwalt”, which translates into “Advocate for the People”, has given the AOB an opportunity to address various problems citizens have with Austrian authorities by showing real-life examples of complaints that have been brought to the AOB’s attention. The TV show has thus become an important platform and advertising medium for the AOB. On the one hand, it helps to increase awareness about the AOB’s work. On the other hand, it contributes significantly to driving forward solutions to sometimes long running problems people encounter in their interaction with public administration. The presentation will give more insight on how the TV show is structured and prepared, which cases are chosen for the broadcast and how they are presented in the studio set-up. It will demonstrate how the “David against Goliath”-principle of the show provides the AOB with an essential source of support in finding humane solutions for even the most complicated problems. It will also serve to prove that mistakes made by the authorities cannot be suppressed, that stubbornness comes to light and that compliance with the law is not politically negotiable. The success of the show is obvious from the large number of viewers and the high market shares. It therefore presents an absolute win-win situation for all parties concerned. The ORF as broadcaster can produce remarkable audience ratings during a highly contested airtime. The AOB as control mechanism can showcase its work and raise public awareness. And first and foremost the citizens concerned can fight against injustices by bringing their concerns and problems with public authorities to the attention of a wider public. The presentation aims at giving every Ombudsperson the necessary arguments to set up a similar TV show in their respective countries.