

IOI European Region Quarterly Newsletter

January 2026 – March 2026

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 IOI European board met once online on Monday 2 February 2026.

Ombudsman attending:

Reinier van Zutphen
Joseph Zammit McKeon
Maria Stylianou
Marino Fardelli

Absent with notification

Dmytro Lubinets

Staff present:

Paul Borg
Jurgen Cassar
Stephan Sjouke
Mykhailo Spasov

High-Level Conference

The Regional President, the Regional Vice President and Regional Director Maria Stylianou have participated in the Council of Europe High-Level Conference with Ombudsperson Institutions and NHRI's, that took place on March 12-13. The Regional president took part in the panel on *Erosion of checks and balances*. In his contribution, he emphasized, among other things, the need to always keep talking to each other, regardless of who is on the other side of the table. It is important to communicate clearly and understandably. The use of language is essential in this context and can be decisive. More information can be found on the [Council's website](#).

First meeting ENNHRI and IOI European Board

The European Regional Board of the International Ombudsman Institute held its first meeting with the European Network of National Human Rights Institutions to explore opportunities for closer collaboration and exchange of practices in addressing evolving human rights challenges across Europe.

The meeting brought together representatives from both organisations to discuss how Ombudsman institutions and National Human Rights Institutions can strengthen cooperation in promoting and protecting human rights, while supporting good governance and accountability.

Opening the meeting, the President of the IOI European Region, Reinier van Zutphen, noted that the objectives of the two organisations are closely aligned. He emphasised the importance of building practical forms of cooperation and resilience at a time when democratic institutions and human rights standards are facing increasing pressures.

The Chair of ENNHRI, Louise Holck, Director of the Danish Institute for Human Rights, observed that developments in the international landscape in recent months have created new challenges for human rights institutions. She stressed that cooperation between organisations allows institutions to learn from one another and strengthens their collective capacity to respond to shared challenges.

Participants also discussed the forthcoming entry into force of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum on 12 June. The discussion highlighted that the new framework places Ombudsman institutions and National Human Rights Institutions at the centre of monitoring mechanisms aimed at safeguarding fundamental rights. This development reinforces the responsibility of oversight institutions to ensure that the rights of vulnerable persons are effectively protected.

Both organisations agreed on the value of continued dialogue and cooperation and expressed their intention to maintain regular exchanges in the future.



Participants from the IOI European Regional Board included Reinier van Zutphen, President of the IOI European Region, Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon, Vice President of the IOI European Regional Board, Maria Stylianou Lottides, Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights of Cyprus, and Olena Kolobrodova representing the Parliamentary Commissioner for Human Rights of Ukraine. Participants from ENNHRI included Louise Holck, Chair of ENNHRI and Director of the Danish Institute for Human Rights, Simona Drenik Bavdek, Human Rights Ombudswoman of Slovenia, and Marta Gattini from the ENNHRI Secretariat.

Ombuds Academy

An Ombuds Academy will be organised by the Greek ombudsman office in Athens on 4 and 5 June. The focus of the training will be on the topic “Ombudsman giving voice to the voiceless”

The goal of the training is to share and exchange experience. On the first day of the training the relevant tools and approaches developed by the Greek Ombudsman and the National Ombudsman of The Netherlands will be presented and discussed, namely large scale investigations, own initiative investigations, special reports, on-site visits and outreach activities. On the second day, two former Ombudsmen will kindly join us and share with us their valuable experience.

The intended participants are staff members of the institutions, who plan and are involved in Ombudsman activities reaching out to people who cannot have access to the Ombudsman services and addressing systemic problems that would not easily be identified through individual case-handling.



Venice Principles

The survey on the Venice Principles was closed and a report was drafted and approved by the members of the sub-committee of the UN international organisations working group of the IOI. The IOI European Regional President, had a meeting with the Simona Granata-Menghini, Director, Secretary of the Venice Commission. They discussed the practical side of how to take the activities to the next level. In April the IOI European Regional President will meet with the Dutch member of the Venice Commission and put the outcome of earlier talks into a concrete plan. The aim is to first have the report presented to the IOI World Board in Curacao and receive a mandate to further develop the cooperation with the Venice Commission. Once more concrete steps have been taken, the IOI President will come to Europe and meet with the Venice Commission and explore and establish the future working relation with them.

Migration Pact

The National Ombudsman of the Netherlands is working on the organisation of a migration pact conference in Rotterdam in June this year, just before the migration pact enters into force. The idea is to explore with the ombudsinstitutions that are confronted with the implementation of the pact, what possible shared topics we might address in the future.

Upcoming conference

Director Marino Fardelli informed the IOI European Board that his term will end in December this year and has therefore invited fellow Ombudsmen to participate in the Conference of Ombudsmen - Italian edition - to be held on 28-29 May 2026 in Rome, as an event intended to serve as a prologue to the establishment of the Italian National Ombudsman, following a

legislative proposal prepared by the National Coordination of Italian Ombudsmen and submitted to the Constitutional Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies for the relevant legislative considerations.

IOI World Board meeting

From 10 till 14 May the IOI World Board will convene in Curacao.