

Network local ombudsmen Europe started in Amsterdam

On February 4 and 5, the ombudspersons of Antwerp, Athens, Barcelona, Groningen, Paris, Rotterdam, The Hague and Zurich met with the ombudsman of Amsterdam to discuss shared points of interest in setting up a network for local ombudsmen. This is a result of a request from the European board of the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI) to the ombudsman of Amsterdam to assess the need for such a network. The aim is to create a practical platform for mutual support and sharing experiences, in order to strengthen the position of local ombudsmen. The network also includes local ombudspersons who are not members of IOI.

During the meeting, issues such as reaching out to the public, contact with unofficial ombudspersons, integrity and whistle blowing and defending human rights were discussed. Apart from the many similarities between the different offices, there are also differences, for instance in the use of social media and volunteers. Some ombudsmen are not yet familiar with the social media, considering it would ask for additional human resources or concluding that the public approach them more and more through traditional means, whereas others reach out through twitter or facebook daily with a positive impact on their work. An example of a common experience is that human rights, even when mainly applied in an implicit manner, are an important topic for the ombudswork.

The participants returned home committing to share more examples from their practice, for instance on how their work relates to protection of human rights. Some ombudsmen will draw up a position paper on themes they are dedicated to, such the added value of social media. In the future, topics like the effects of e-governance, outsourcing of public services and use of social media will be discussed further. The participants agreed that meeting on a regular basis provides valuable practical input for their daily work. The report of the meeting will be on the agenda of the IOI Europe board meeting in April 2013.