1. Introduction

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon!

I am delighted to be here to deliver the Annual lecture at the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence of the University of Manchester. I would particularly like to thank Dr Papadimitriou, Co-Director of the Centre, for giving me the opportunity to share with you my views on “The European Union after Lisbon: where next for European citizens?”

I know that three years ago, the annual lecture was delivered by George Arestis, Cypriot Judge at the Court of Justice of the European Union. His speech was entitled “Towards an EU Citizenship?” Like any good ombudsman, I therefore looked to the court for guidance by consulting the report of Judge Arestis’s speech on your website. I saw that his main conclusion was that although EU citizenship remains secondary to national citizenship, it is having an increasing impact, especially in areas related to the free movement of peoples across Europe. From my experience as European Ombudsman, I can confirm that this is indeed the case and I will build in part on this conclusion during my address.

I will start by outlining the different dimensions of citizenship before focusing on the dimension that I will deal with in detail today, namely, political identity. The idea of citizenship based on rights and duties and how it relates to political identity will be central to this discussion. I will focus, in particular, on political rights which enable citizens to make those who exercise public authority accountable for their actions, and which make it possible for citizens to participate in public activities. I will outline how, from this perspective, the Lisbon Treaty constitutes a real opportunity to empower European citizens. Finally, I will describe the role that the European Ombudsman can play in promoting active citizenship.

Different dimensions of citizenship

"Citizenship" is a rich concept, to which I will not attempt to do full justice in this lecture. In particular, I will not look at citizenship in terms of cultural identity; that is to say, as membership in a community that defines itself through elements such as language, history, religion and shared social norms. That is not the reality of the European Union, nor is it likely to become a reality in the foreseeable future. To focus a discussion of European citizenship
on cultural identity would lead us, therefore, into a blind alley.

I am not, of course, arguing that cultural identity can safely be ignored in practice. On the contrary, if modern European history has any lessons at all, one of them must surely be that we disregard cultural identities, and especially the politics of cultural identity, at our peril. In my view, however, that does not imply, as some would argue, that cultural identity is a necessary precondition of political community and that there can, therefore, be no European citizenship because there is no European demos.

My focus will instead be on citizenship as a bundle of rights and duties, including rights that could lead dynamically to the formation of political identity. More specifically, the focus of this lecture is on a conception of citizenship as an evolving relationship between individuals and those who exercise political power.

My vision of the role of the European Ombudsman includes, as an important component, a special responsibility to nurture and promote this evolving relationship. The office of European Ombudsman was established by the Maastricht Treaty, as one measure to tackle the gap between citizens and the EU institutions, which first began to be recognised as a problem at that time.

A decade later, frustrated by the experience of the inter-governmental conference that produced the Treaty of Nice, European leaders produced the so-called “Laeken declaration”. One of its declared objectives was to increase the democratic legitimacy and transparency of the European Union institutions.

The recent entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon marks the latest stage in an on-going process of recognising and empowering European citizens. During my presentation, I will touch on the many provisions in the Treaty that open up valuable opportunities for closing the gap that exists between individuals and those who exercise political power in the Union and for tackling — what I like to call — the Union’s “legitimacy deficit”.

This is important because legitimacy is not an optional extra, but a fundamental requirement for the long-term success of the European integration process.

The "political identity" dimension of citizenship

Before I trace the evolution of the relationship that is central to our discussion this afternoon, something more needs to be said about the idea of citizenship based on rights and duties and how it relates to political identity.

Rights and duties are, of course, legal concepts, but a purely legal analysis would yield an impoverished account of citizenship. Indeed, one of the most influential accounts of citizenship based on rights and duties is that of a sociologist, T. H. Marshall, who modelled the development of citizenship in Britain in terms of a cumulative historical process, beginning with civil rights, then political rights, and finally social rights [1].
I shall mention social rights again in the course of the lecture, but for now I want to focus on political rights and, in particular, on the purpose of political rights; what are they for?

In my view, the answer is twofold. First, political rights enable citizens to make those who exercise public authority accountable for their actions. Second, they also make it possible for citizens to participate in public activities and in political life, with a view to influencing how they are governed.

Viewed from this perspective, the development of citizenship is about raising the quality of democracy and strengthening the legitimacy of democratic political institutions — just as the Laeken declaration prescribed for the Union almost ten years ago.

Laeken also highlighted the principle of transparency, which is indeed fundamental to both accountability and participation.

The basic idea of transparency is that citizens should easily be able to obtain information about what their public authorities have done, what they are doing, and what they plan to do. They need this information both in order to call public authorities to account and in order to participate effectively in the ongoing public debate which is part of a healthy democracy.

Transparency, accountability and participation, therefore, go hand in hand, and are key to building citizens' trust in the relevant public authorities.

“European” citizenship and "duality" of citizenship

Before going any further, we need to acknowledge, and to take account of, one reality pertaining to the European context. Few citizens, probably fewer than 1%, ever have a real need to contact a European institution during their daily lives.

That figure is so low for two reasons.

First, because the European institutions do not provide the public services typical of the welfare state, such as health, housing, social assistance, education and pensions. Those services, which belong to the category of what Marshall called “social rights” are provided by the Member States.

(I should make clear, parenthetically, that I do not mean that the Union and Union law lack a social rights dimension. On the contrary, social rights are an important part of the Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights. My point is that the Union Institutions do not themselves directly provide the public services I have mentioned).

The second reason why so few citizens need to contact the European institutions is that it is the authorities of Member States, not the European institutions, which have primary responsibility for the enforcement of EU law and for guaranteeing the rights it confers on
Any focus on citizenship as a means of empowering Europeans must therefore take account of the fact that such empowerment must take place not only vis-à-vis the EU institutions, but also vis-à-vis national authorities in relation to EU matters.

In this regard, I want to recall that the citizenship of the Union complements national citizenship and does not replace it. However, as Judge Arestis said, it is having an increasing impact.

The duality of citizenship reflects the dual nature of the Union and the Member States. Each Member State has its own constitution and its own political institutions, but at the same time, Member States are also important actors in the Union's institutional framework, through the Council of the EU and the European Council. For this reason, it is not useful to discuss citizens' relationship with the EU institutions in isolation from their relationship with national authorities as regards EU matters.

For most people, their status as European citizens is relevant to them primarily or exclusively in their relations with the authorities of their own Member State. Any discussion of European citizenship must take this reality into account.

If European citizens are to be empowered vis-à-vis those who exercise political power, part of what is needed is to enhance the mechanisms through which they can call national authorities to account for their input into policy-making and legislation at European level and their enforcement of EU law at the national level.

There are two main reasons why this important point has been neglected to date.

First, the concept of European citizenship has often been understood in a way that implies a zero-sum game. The more that people think of themselves as European citizens, the less important becomes their national citizenship. Within this mind-set there has been little room for the idea that the process of European integration might require a systematic focus on the accountability of national public authorities to citizens.

Second, even when it has been understood that European citizenship also involves relationships with Member States' authorities, the main focus is on citizens who have problems with the authorities of another Member State. We can think, for example, of the kinds of problem that arise when citizens exercise the right of free movement.

Increasingly, however, the European Union and European law affect relations between citizens and their own public authorities. This is the case for cross-border health care (the point being that your own Member State should pay); the implementation and enforcement of the directives on discrimination, air passenger rights and roaming charges for mobile phones; and, finally, the phasing out of incandescent light-bulbs.

In light of these developments, it is clear that public authorities of the Member States must
systematically relate to their own citizens as European citizens. Unless this happens, a growing number of people are likely to feel that European integration is a process that excludes and disempowers them.

Especially at the present time of economic crisis, we need to emphasise that legitimacy in the European Union is not a zero-sum game, in which European institutions can gain at the expense of national political institutions, or vice versa. To the contrary, it is by working together, effectively, transparently and ethically, in line with a positive sum logic that national and EU institutions can ensure full accountability and participation, thereby jointly enhancing their legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens.

2. Union citizenship before the Lisbon Treaty

Before Maastricht

Much of what I have said so far is by way of “setting the scene” for our discussion of Union citizenship post-Lisbon, with a view to understanding the dynamics of the relationship between citizens and those exercising political power in the Union.

Let us, however, go back to the beginning of the relationship, to the early years of the European Communities. The emphasis then was on economic matters rather than individual rights and duties. Notions of transparency or legitimacy did not feature explicitly at all.

By the early 1960s, however, it was becoming clear that the Communities were more than just another international organisation. The Treaties had, in fact, established supranational legislative and executive powers, capable of conferring rights and imposing obligations on private persons. Furthermore, the confirmation that EU law has primacy or supremacy over national law, went hand-in-hand with efforts — first and foremost undertaken by the Court of Justice — to safeguard the individual rights that derive from EU law.

Having established that individuals enjoy rights under EU law, the Court went on to hold that these rights include fundamental rights, which must be respected both by the EU institutions and by the national authorities when implementing EU law.

It was, of course, not only the Court of Justice which sought to protect and promote citizens’ rights. Each Treaty update has seen an enrichment of EU citizens’ specific rights, as well as a focus on principles of transparency and accountability.

The Treaty of Maastricht

In this context, the Maastricht Treaty deserves particular attention. This Treaty introduced Union citizenship, which is at the centre of our discussions this afternoon.
Among the special rights of European citizens are the right to freedom of movement and residence, rights of election to the European Parliament and local authorities, the right to claim diplomatic and consular immunity, the right of petition, and the right to address the European Ombudsman.

The Maastricht Treaty also highlighted the principle of subsidiarity, to ensure that decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizen. It was also the first Treaty specifically to mention the principle of transparency.

These measures were introduced partly in an attempt to counter the so-called "democratic deficit", or what I referred to earlier as the Union's "legitimacy deficit".

Post Maastricht

The Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 addressed the Union's legitimacy problem through greater transparency. The Treaty provided that decisions in the Union should be taken as openly as possible and for a right of public access to documents for Union citizens and residents.

The Treaty of Nice, which was agreed at the end of the year 2000, focused on institutional questions. It contained little or nothing for citizens and the inter-governmental conference which had negotiated it recognised that the problem of legitimacy remained unsolved. A year later, the Laeken Declaration told us that people wanted the European institutions to be:

"less unwieldy and rigid and, above all, more efficient and open. Many also feel that the Union should involve itself more with their particular concerns, instead of intervening, in every detail, in matters by their nature better left to Member States' and regions' elected representatives. This is even perceived by some as a threat to their identity. More importantly, however, they feel that deals are all too often cut out of their sight and they want better democratic scrutiny."

A pretty clear diagnosis of the problem, one would think. Despite this, I think it is fair to say that, since Laeken, we have made insufficient progress in satisfying these demands.
- The European Convention that drafted the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe was transparent, but its participants looked inwards, not outwards to citizens;
- The French and Dutch referendums were a setback;
- The Lisbon Treaty went back to the intergovernmental method, whose deficiencies led to the Laeken Declaration;
- The two Irish referendums led to a genuine debate among Irish citizens. But outside Ireland, the process of ratifying Lisbon has probably had a negative impact overall on the perceived legitimacy of the European Union and its institutions.

Nevertheless, while the ratification process was far from glorifying for the EU, the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty constitutes a genuine opportunity to make real progress.

3. The Lisbon Treaty
A legally binding Charter of Fundamental Rights

One of the most significant improvements for citizens brought about by Lisbon is that the Charter of Fundamental Rights now has the same legal value as the Treaties.

To be sure, the Charter has existed since the year 2000, when it was first proclaimed at the summit, held in Nice, where the Treaty of Nice was agreed. It was drafted by a Convention, consisting mainly of representatives of Heads of State or Government, the European Parliament and national Parliaments. The European Ombudsman participated in the Convention as an official Observer and, as I will explain, successfully proposed that the Charter should include the fundamental right to good administration.

The Charter draws together rights already contained in the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Union and in a variety of texts, including the European Convention on Human Rights; the Council of Europe's Social Charter; the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers; and the aforementioned provisions of the former EC Treaty concerning the rights of citizens. It is a broader document than the European Convention on Human Rights, containing not only the classical civil and political rights, but also social and economic rights, such as the right to health care, the rights of the elderly and the protection of the family. Some of its provisions specifically address modern issues, such as bio-ethics and the protection of personal data.

The provisions of the Charter are addressed to the Union institutions and to the Member States when they are implementing Union law.

Fortunately for me, the European Ombudsman’s competence is limited to the Union institutions. I can therefore leave my Polish and British colleagues to work out whether Protocol No.30 annexed to the Treaty of Lisbon concerning the application of the Charter to Poland and the United Kingdom has any significance for their work.

The right to good administration

The European Ombudsman has been applying the Charter in his work since it was proclaimed in Nice in December 2000. Among the provisions that have proved to be of particular relevance in terms of supervising the EU institutions are those on equality and, of course, citizens’ rights.

With regard to the category on citizens’ rights, the Charter includes the right to refer to the Ombudsman, the right to petition Parliament, and the right to good administration.

Let me focus on this latter fundamental right.

The right to good administration was included in the Charter following a proposal by the first
The fundamental right to good administration, as laid down in the Charter, is the right to have one's "affairs handled impartially, fairly and within a reasonable time by the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union".

This principle includes:
- the right of every person to be heard, before any individual measure which would adversely affect him or her is taken;
- to have access to his or her file, while respecting legitimate interests of confidentiality and of professional and business secrecy;
- the obligation of the administration to give reasons for its decisions;
- to have the Union make good any damage caused by its institutions or by its servants in the performance of their duties, in accordance with the general principles common to the laws of the Member States;
- to write to the institutions of the Union in one of the Treaty languages and to be provided with an answer in the same language.

When we think of citizenship in terms of "rights and duties", and as an evolving relationship with those exercising political power, it is surely a source of great encouragement that the fundamental right to good administration is included in this legally binding Charter.

The other elements that we have identified as central to citizens' evolving relationship with those exercising political power are accountability, participation and, underpinning both of these, transparency. Let us now focus on how the Lisbon Treaty heralds significant improvements in these areas.

**Greater openness and transparency**

Firstly, transparency. A number of articles in the Lisbon Treaty provide for greater openness and transparency in the activities of the Union institutions:

Article 10(3) of the Treaty on the European Union refers to decisions in the Union being taken "as openly and as closely as possible to citizens". While a similar provision already existed in the Treaty, Article 16(8) is new. That Article stipulates that the Council shall meet in public when it deliberates and votes on a draft legislative act. As Ombudsman, I have long argued that full transparency of the legislative process in the Council should strengthen both national and Union citizenship. It should let Europeans see what the governments they have elected as national citizens are doing at the European level. It would also allow them, as Union citizens, to monitor more effectively the work of a vital EU institution, thereby
promoting accountability.

Article 42 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and Article 15(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU extend the right of public access to documents, which now applies to all the Union institutions, bodies, offices, and agencies, including the European Council. Given the high number of inquiries that the Ombudsman carries out each year into lack of transparency (36% of inquiries in 2009), I will pay particular attention to this fundamental right.

Article 15 (1) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU is new. It requires that all the Union institutions “conduct their work as openly as possible, in order to promote good governance and ensure the participation of civil society”. In my view, this new provision is of very great significance because it requires the institutions to be proactive in ensuring the openness of their work.

Let me give you an example of what it might mean in practice. At the end of last year, the US federal administration issued an “Open Government Directive”, which, among other things, calls on each agency to (i) publish information online, including at least three high-value open format datasets, and (ii) develop and publish an Open Government Plan to improve transparency and integrate public participation and collaboration into its activities. To be sure, there are big differences between the US federal agencies and the EU agencies. My intention here, however, is to reflect on whether, and to what extent, the principles of the US Open Government Directive might be transposable to the EU context.

Participation

Our earlier definition of citizenship embraced the notion of participation and again, in this regard, the Treaty of Lisbon constitutes a step forward.

The introduction of a new form of public participation in the democratic life of the Union, in the form of the “citizens’ initiative”, should make an important contribution to the empowerment of European citizens.

As you know, the European Citizens’ Initiative provides that one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States can call directly on the European Commission to bring forward legislative proposals in an area of EU competence.

In January 2010, I responded to the European Commission's public consultation on how the citizens’ initiative should work in practice. I tried to anticipate questions that could arise in its operation, especially those that could result in complaints to the Ombudsman. By identifying such questions in advance and by proposing effective answers, I sought to promote good administration by the European Commission and thereby contribute to the success of this valuable new instrument.

In my view, the right of one million citizens to petition the Commission should be
implemented in a way that genuinely empowers citizens. In other words, the law putting it into effect should not be written in a way that makes such petitions just another resource for the Commission. In particular, the national and European Parliaments should be involved. I'll explain how in a moment.

The Lisbon Treaty also requires the EU institutions (i) to give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action and (ii) to maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.

These provisions are of great significance because Union law affects every citizen of every Member State. How citizens perceive Union law -- as empowering or constraining, a source of benefits or burdens -- and whether they see themselves as having a voice in its adoption are matters of profound importance for the legitimacy of the Union.

**Accountability**

The third element that I referred to at the outset as key to strengthening the legitimacy of democratic political institutions is the ability of citizens to hold these institutions to account. With regard to the Union, the Lisbon Treaty certainly enhances citizens' ability to do this.

We have just seen how the Treaty promotes their participation in the democratic life of the Union. Let me focus now on democratic control of Union law-making and what I believe to be its necessary complement: that is, strengthening citizens' involvement in making the law work in practice. This is, after all, what was identified by the Laeken declaration as missing and marks a critical step on the road to full citizen empowerment.

I believe that there are further concrete measures that could be taken and which would stand a good chance of helping reverse the growing disengagement of citizens from the European project.

The Lisbon Treaty provides an excellent starting point. It reinforces the powers of both the European Parliament and national parliaments in the law-making process. The greater role for national parliaments gives citizens and organised civil society at the Member State level the opportunity to be involved in Union law-making also within their national democratic framework, where some of them may feel better able to participate than at the Union level.

But the process of making laws at the Union level and transposing them, if necessary, into national legislation is only half the story. Legislation is (or should be) more than a symbolic process. The other half of the story is about how legislation is applied and enforced in practice. Good administration implies that European laws should be effective. Europe will not get closer to its citizens merely by enacting good laws. Unless those laws are effectively applied and enforced, they will have no worthwhile results.

The authorities of the Member States have primary legal responsibility for enforcing Union
law and for guaranteeing the rights that it confers on citizens, enterprises and associations. National courts give effect to this legal responsibility at the Member State level by providing remedies to those whose rights are not respected, including remedies against other public authorities of that Member State. The Commission, in its role of “guardian of the Treaties”, acts as gatekeeper for legal responsibility at the Union level by referring cases to the Court of Justice.

As regards political accountability in the enforcement and application of Union law, citizens have access to a mechanism at the Union level, in the form of the right to petition the European Parliament. What is missing, however -- in most, if not all, Member States -- is a political mechanism to call public authorities to account at the national level in relation to problems that arise in the enforcement and application of Union law.

The lack of such a mechanism produces several undesirable effects. Most notably, it deprives citizens and their representatives of the opportunity to examine, concretely and in detail, an important aspect of the EU-related activities of their Member State's public authorities. It also deprives the Union level of potentially valuable information that should be fed back into the policy-making and legislative processes in order to improve Union law in the future.

Although the lack of political mechanisms to call public authorities to account in the Member States has consequences for the Union, there is no Union competence to require such mechanisms. Nor would it be desirable for the Union to acquire such a competence. The Union institutions could and should, however, encourage and facilitate the voluntary adoption of such mechanisms by the Member States.

The European Parliament could take the lead in this regard by, for example, selecting one or more existing Union laws for evaluation each year. Possible examples are: the Citizens’ Rights Directive; the Equality Directives; subjects pertaining to the protection of the environment; air passenger rights; or roaming charges.

I believe that this proposed focus on making Union law work for citizens would help:
- improve the substance of Union law (and thus contribute also to the “better regulation” agenda);
- empower citizens and their representatives in the European and national parliaments;
- help realise the promises and goals concerning citizens contained in the Lisbon Treaty; and
- contribute tangibly to addressing the Union’s “legitimacy deficit”.

4. The European Ombudsman

The final part of my address this evening will focus on how the European Ombudsman can contribute to enhancing the legitimacy of the overall system of EU governance and thereby to tackling the “legitimacy deficit”.

As you know the Maastricht Treaty established the European Ombudsman in 1993 to enhance relations between citizens and the Union level of governance. With the EU
institutions seen as remote and "impersonal", technocratic and far removed from ordinary citizens, it was deemed important to give the EU administration a human face.

The Ombudsman is currently in its fifteenth year of operation. Much has been done during that time to ensure a more open, accountable, citizen-centred, and service-minded EU administration.

Last year, I devoted some time to reflection on the mission of the Ombudsman. I finally adopted a formulation that reads as follows:

"The European Ombudsman seeks fair outcomes to complaints against European Union institutions, encourages transparency and promotes an administrative culture of service. He aims to build trust through dialogue between citizens and the European Union and to foster the highest standards of behaviour in the Union's institutions."

Following my re-election by the European Parliament earlier this year, I am developing a strategy that will translate this mission into a set of objectives for the new mandate. I aim to publish a document detailing this strategy later this year, after a process that will take account of the aspirations of our various stakeholders, including, of course, citizens and the variety of civil society organisations through which citizens seek to advance their views and interests.

One of most important aspects of the Ombudsman's mission is building trust through dialogue between citizens and the European Union. To do that, I have to reach out to both citizens and the institutions.

In reaching out to the latter, I aim to convince them that, in order to win public trust and acceptance, the institutions need to demonstrate that they are accountable and responsive. Among other things, that means being ready to explain and to justify their conduct through genuine and meaningful dialogue with citizens, both about matters that affect them personally and about how the public interest is identified and pursued.

In reaching out to citizens, I aim to promote active citizenship, by helping citizens and civil society organisations to learn about their rights and duties, encouraging their participation in the democratic life of the Union, promoting their ability to hold the EU institutions to account, and strengthening their involvement in making the law work in practice.

This should help develop European citizenship, by raising the quality of democracy and strengthening the legitimacy of democratic political institutions.

As I hope is clear from my remarks so far, the Lisbon Treaty should greatly facilitate these activities.

Helping to ensure that the EU delivers the benefits for citizens promised by the Treaty of Lisbon
One of my main priorities over the next five years will be to help ensure that the EU delivers the benefits for citizens promised by the Treaty of Lisbon.

Of particular importance is the legally binding Charter of Fundamental Rights and, in particular, Article 41 on good administration.

Already in December 2009, as part of our contribution to the public consultation on the reform of the EU’s Financial Regulation, the Ombudsman stressed that the relevant rules should take account of Article 41 by providing guidance to officials as to how they should ensure both sound financial management and good administration. By way of example, the Financial Regulation should, in exceptional cases, provide for ex gratia payments, as redress for serious inconvenience or severe distress caused by maladministration. To my mind, the reform of the Financial Regulation offers an excellent opportunity to put the fundamental right to good administration into practice.

Given the high number of inquiries that the Ombudsman carries out each year into lack of transparency, I will continue to insist on the fundamental right of access to documents, as provided for in Article 42 of the Charter and Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union.

Finally, I shall endeavour to ensure that citizens, representative associations, and civil society benefit from the new provisions in the Treaty concerning consultation, dialogue, and the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views, and will contribute to the success of the valuable new instrument for citizens that is the citizens’ initiative.

**Working with the institutions to ensure a culture of service**

Part of an ombudsman’s function in any modern democracy is to see to it that the public administration is oriented towards serving citizens and tries to meet their increasingly high expectations.

This idea is reflected in the Ombudsman’s mission statement that I referred to earlier. As Ombudsman, I will continue to work with the EU institutions to ensure a culture of service to citizens.

With regard to the EU institutions, however, it is important to note that they were not set up to deal with citizens. Furthermore, as I have already mentioned, they do not provide the public services typical of the welfare state. This means that they have historically lacked the stimulus to develop an orientation towards citizens and a culture of service.

Of course, the institutions and their staff say, and no doubt, believe, that what they are doing is for the benefit of citizens, but that is not the same as engaging with citizens. This situation can and should be changed. As Ombudsman, I am fully committed to facilitating that change.
One model that comes to mind is the European Investment Bank. Under the inspired leadership of its current president, the Bank seeks active engagement with NGOs, which are often highly critical of its operations.

As I have described, the Lisbon Treaty offers the opportunity for all the institutions to go even further down this road. The provisions on exchanging views and maintaining a dialogue can and should mean seeking genuine debate on policy, with civil society organisations that may criticise and oppose the institutions’ initiatives as well as support them.

The institutions also need to do more to encourage their own staff to become active citizens where they work and to keep in touch with their Member States through initiatives such as “back-to-school”. This would have a double benefit. The institutions’ staff would gain insight into citizens’ views and experiences and vice versa.

Promoting remedies for citizens

A final important aspect of my work in enhancing the Union’s legitimacy is promoting remedies for citizens who have problems obtaining their rights under EU law. Citizens should have effective remedies available to them if their rights are not respected.

Since my mandate is limited to investigating complaints about maladministration in the EU administration, complaints against public authorities of the Member States are not within my mandate, even if they concern matters falling within the scope of EU law. Many such complaints are within the mandate of national and regional ombudsmen in the European Network of Ombudsmen. I co-operate closely with my colleagues in the Network to ensure that EU law is correctly applied.

The Network promotes both the good administration of EU law at the national level and effective local remedies. My national colleagues all support the principles on which the EU is founded. They are also committed to dealing impartially, effectively and fairly with complaints about EU-related activities of authorities of the Member States.

I look forward to strengthening this co-operation through the Network to make certain that citizens can fully enjoy their rights under EU law. I will also endeavour to ensure that the quality of information provided to citizens regarding their rights and how to seek redress is improved. In particular, I will promote awareness of the right to address the Ombudsman and to petition Parliament (Articles 43 and 44 of the Charter respectively), so that citizens can best seek redress.

Thank you for your attention. I look forward to discussing with you.