



Promoting good governance and democracy in the Mediterranean region

The Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen was set up in December 2008 in Marseille on the occasion of the second meeting of the network of Ombudsmen and Mediators in the Mediterranean region.

On the initiative of the *Wali Al Madhalim* (the Mediator of the Kingdom of Morocco), the *Defensor del Pueblo* of Spain and the *Médiateur de la république* of France, the Association was launched with a view to the promotion by ombudsman and mediation institutions in the Mediterranean of shared common values such as democracy, the rule of law and social peace and respect for human rights in Mediterranean member states.

The main objectives of the Association are:

- to consolidate the action and competences of Ombudsmen and to promote knowledge of the role of institutions of Ombudsmen and Mediators in the Mediterranean basin;
- to design and organize training sessions and programmes for the exchange of information and experience among its members; and
- to develop relations with institutions and organizations that share the same mission of the Association in the field of human rights and good governance.

The headquarters of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen in Tangier, Morocco were inaugurated in November 2009.

In recent years the Association has organized conferences in Athens (December 2009) and Madrid (June 2010) while the fifth conference is due to take place in Malta on 30-31 May 2011. The Athens conference centred mainly on the Ombudsman's role to promote transparency in the public service while the Madrid conference considered the challenges that immigration and respect for the human rights of immigrants bring upon ombudsman institutions. The main theme for the Malta Conference is *The role of the Ombudsman in reinforcing good governance and democracy*.

Mindful of the fact that good governance by the public administration constitutes a vital component in a country's efforts to meet the rights of

citizens under administrative law, the meeting in Malta will be considering in the plenary sessions on its first day how Ombudsmen in different Mediterranean cultures, contexts and backgrounds are to fulfil their obligations towards citizens.

One of the topics that is due for consideration includes the impact of political changes on the functions and actions of Ombudsmen – an issue that is particularly relevant at a time of deep change in the political landscape of various countries that are members of the Association. Another topic is the vision that should guide the work of Mediterranean Ombudsmen and Mediators as their region undergoes a process of structural transformation that will require them to sharpen their responses to demands brought about by a new political scenario and by a new economic and social order that are gradually evolving in their countries.

In the first plenary session on the second day of the Malta Conference delegates will discuss the relevance of Quality Service Charters and Codes of Conduct as vehicles that can further promote good governance by the public administration. The second session will in turn evaluate the work done so far by the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen and put forward new proposals regarding the way in which the Association should operate in the future.

The list of speakers on the various topics of the Malta Conference is interesting and varied especially since conference organizers have sought to ensure that in each plenary session each of the main speakers will come respectively from countries in the north and in the south of the Association. This set up promises to allow speakers to present their perspectives on issues that are under discussion in a manner that is likely to be in contrast yet complementary to each other. These contributions are likely to reflect the direction that has been followed in recent years by the various institutional models of Ombudsmen and Mediators in the Mediterranean region as well as the path that could be taken by these institutions in the light of recent upheavals in the region.

An interesting feature of the Malta Conference is the fact that for the first time Mr P. Nikiforos Diamandouros, the European Ombudsman, will be participating in a conference of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen. Also for the first time Mr Diamandouros will be participating by means of video link between the conference venue in Malta and Brussels during the first plenary session of the Conference on the challenges faced by Ombudsmen to promote good governance in different Mediterranean political and economic environments.