

INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN CONFERENCE

UPHOLDING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

The role of the Ombudsman

WORKING DOCUMENT

MALTA

15 – 16 OCTOBER 2025




OMBUDSMAN

30 Years
1995-2025

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Foreword

This year, the Office of the Ombudsman in Malta commemorates its 30th anniversary since its constitution by virtue of the Ombudsman Act of 1995.

In these three decades, the institution has become a cornerstone in Malta's democratic framework vis-à-vis Government, securing its place as an independent office of Parliament, striving for fairness, accountability and the good administration of public affairs.

A pivotal moment in this evolution came in 2007 when the institution was entrenched in the Constitution of Malta. This milestone guaranteed that the Office could not be undermined, cementing its independence and reinforcing its authority as a permanent lookout on public administration. This constitutional recognition was complemented by another milestone: the establishment of specialised Commissioners in 2010. Today, Commissioners for Health, Environment and Planning, and Education provide expert oversight in areas where a person's rights are most often put to the test, strengthening the institution's capacity to serve the public more effectively.

The Office of the Ombudsman has remained guided by a simple but powerful mission: to ensure that every person is treated with fairness and dignity by the State. In practice, this has meant addressing thousands of complaints, conducting own-initiative investigations, and acting as an impartial mediator between persons and government.

Looking ahead, the next chapter for the Office of the Ombudsman is to strengthen its role in the promotion and protection of the rights of persons.

In other countries, Ombudsman institutions are not only guardians of good public administration but are also as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs). Fairness in public administration and the protection of human rights are deeply related and interconnected. Malta remains one of the very few countries in the European Union still without an NHRI, and the Office of the Ombudsman has consistently advocated, first, that Malta should establish an independent body with that mandate



without delay, and second, that the Office of the Ombudsman is well placed to fulfil this function. To this end, the Office has proactively submitted a draft Ombudsman Bill to Government. We continue to hope and firmly believe that our institution is best positioned to take the function of promoting and protecting human rights.

The overarching theme of this conference, *"Upholding Good Governance in Challenging Times: The Role of the Ombudsman"* reflects both the active progress that has been made, and the challenges that lie ahead. Digital and technological transformations affect the way how we live, economic and social disruptions restrict our operations, and global crises have put pressing scenarios on institutions. In some contexts, even the principles of accountability and the rule of law are under strain.

Nonetheless, the Ombudsman is there to stand to be counted by speaking and acting fearlessly. Its strength is not laid in coercive powers but in the moral authority of its recommendations, impartiality, and credibility. By speaking in clear and unequivocal terms, Ombudsman institutions reassure persons that their rights remain protected.

The Conference is both a celebration and an opportunity for reflection on how Ombudsman institutions in the Mediterranean, in Europe and beyond can fulfil their mandate better and with determination. Through our four panels, we shall address the issues of trust in democracy, the protection of the vulnerable, ethical governance, and the opportunities and risks of technological innovation.

I believe that that the discussions and exchanges in this Conference will help us become more relevant for people to turn to.

Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon
Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta



CONFERENCE RAPPORTEUR

PROFESSOR ANNE-MARIE THAKE

*Academic, Department of Policy, Politics, and Governance
Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy
University of Malta*

Professor Anne Marie Thake lectures with the Department of Policy, Politics and Governance in the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy, University of Malta, where she specialises in public policy, governance, and public management. Her expertise lies in the design and evaluation of policy frameworks, institutional governance, and the intersection between labour markets, employability, and government strategy.

She graduated with a Ph.D. in Social and Policy Sciences from the University of Bath, U.K., with a thesis on graduate employability skills. She also holds an M.Sc. in Human Resource Development from the Victoria University of Manchester and a B.A. (Hons.) in Public Administration from the University of Malta. Professor Thake was appointed Head of the Department of Public Policy in 2017. She has served as a visiting lecturer at the University of Coimbra (Portugal) and the University of California, Irvine (USA), Trinity College and University of Edinburgh, Scotland. Her academic work includes publications in peer-reviewed journals on governance, employability, and public policy.

She has held senior roles in both the public and private sectors, including the Office of the Prime Minister of Malta, Ministry for Finance, Ministry for Health, Bank of Valletta, and Deloitte. She drafted Malta's National HR Policy and Strategy and served on the Commission for Human Resource Policy and Strategy, as well as government boards on scholarships and tertiary education funding.

Her international experience includes work with the European Parliament – Directorate General for Research in Luxembourg, as well as EU-funded COST Action projects on public policy analysis, intergovernmental coordination, energy and Tourism policies and governance practices. A Salzburg Global Fellow, Professor Thake was awarded a U.S. State Department scholarship in 2021 to attend the Study of the U.S. Institutes for Scholars (SUSI) Program at the University of Montana, Missoula. She continues to supervise postgraduate research and coordinates programmes in Policy, Politics, and Governance at the University of Malta, including students' policy-focused study visits to EU institutions.

DAY ONE

Wednesday 15th October 2025

Radisson Blu Resort and Spa – Golden Sands

8:30am – 08:50am Registration – Welcome Coffee

9:00am – 10:00am **Opening Ceremony**

Speeches:

- **Welcome Speech by the Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta**
Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon
- **Speech by the President of the Association of Mediterranean Ombudsmen (AOM)**
Ms Erinda Ballanca, People's Advocate of Albania
- **Speech by the President, IOI European Regional Board**
Mr Reinier van Zutphen, National Ombudsman of the Netherlands
- **Speech by the European Ombudswoman**
Ms Teresa Anjinho
- **Speech by the Speaker of the House of Representatives**
the Hon. Anglu Farrugia

10:00am – 10:30am *Coffee Break*

10:30am – 11:45am **Plenary Session 1**

Building People's Trust: The Ombudsman as a pillar of democracy in times of change

Panel:

- Ms Margaret Kelly, **Public Services Ombudsman of Northern Ireland**
- Dr Michael Frendo, **Venice Commission, Council of Europe**
- Ms Anahit Manasyan, **Human Rights Defender of Armenia**
- Prof Anne Marie Thake, **Academic, University of Malta**
- Mr Mehmet Akarca, **Chief Ombudsman of Türkiye**

Panel discussion and interventions from participants

Moderated by Mr James Cummings, Journalist at The Times of Malta

11:50am – 1:30am **Plenary Session 2**

Protecting the Vulnerable: The role of the Ombudsman in upholding human rights

Panel:

- Ms Debbie Kohner, **Secretary General, ENNHRI**
- Mr Mykhailo Spasov, **Deputy Commissioner for Human Rights, of Ukraine**
- Ms Marina Ceyssac, **High Commissioner for the Protection of Rights, Liberties and for Mediation of Monaco**
- Judge Lorraine Schembri Orland, **Judge at the ECHR**
- Dr Dijana Možina Zupanc, **Deputy Human Rights Ombudsman of Slovenia**
- Dr Tamar Gvaramadze, **First Deputy Public Defender of Georgia**
- Mr Andreas Accardo, **Head of Institutional Cooperation and EU Charter Unit, FRA**

Panel discussion and interventions from participants

Moderated by Mr Matthew Xuereb, Editor-in-Chief, RTK103 and newsbook.com.mt

1:30pm – 2:30pm *Buffet Lunch*

Evening Programme

**Official 30th Anniversary Reception under the auspices of
H.E Myriam Spiteri Debono, President of Malta**

The Palace, Valletta

The official commemoration will be held at the Grand Master's Palace, the historic seat of the President of the Republic and a landmark in the heart of Valletta's St George's Square. Built by the Knights of St John as the first edifice in the new capital, the Palace has served as a centre of power for over 450 years, including as the Governor's Palace during the British period and the seat of Malta's first constitutional parliament in 1921.

Guests will enjoy a private tour of the Palace Armoury, one of the world's finest collections, and the State Rooms before the ceremony.

6:00pm	Departure from Radisson Blu Resort and Spa, Golden Sands
6:40pm	Tour of the Palace Armoury
8:00pm	30th Anniversary Commemoration
10:00pm	Departure to hotel



Opening Ceremony

The opening ceremony of the Conference sets the stage for two days of reflection, dialogue, and forward-looking debate.

Speakers



JUDGE JOSEPH ZAMMIT MCKEON

*Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta
Secretary General and Treasurer of the Association
of Mediterranean Ombudsmen (AOM)
Vice-President of the European Regional Board of
the International Ombudsman Institute (IOI)*

Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon, the Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta, will open the conference by reflecting on the 30-year journey of the institution and outlining its future role. He will emphasise that, though no longer young, the Office remains relevant, dynamic, and indispensable in protecting rights, fostering fairness, and promoting good governance. He will underline that the Ombudsman is neither “toothless” nor a “paper tiger,” but a trusted, credible, and effective constitutional institution.

The Ombudsman will explain that the strength of the Office lies not in issuing executive orders, but in the moral authority of its recommendations, which carry weight in shaping fairer public administration. He will stress that Government and public service must do their part to uphold the rule of law and avoid reputational damage by disregarding Ombudsman findings.

Looking outward, Judge Zammit McKeon will highlight that independent oversight institutions are not isolated but form part of a global framework of accountability and trust. He will argue that good governance is inseparable from the promotion and protection of human rights, and that transparent, accountable, and participatory governance is the foundation of human dignity.

The Ombudsman will also affirm that this anniversary is not only a commemoration but a renewed commitment to the future. The institution’s responsibilities will continue to expand in complexity and importance, especially in emerging areas of concern. He will conclude by calling for continued international cooperation to ensure that oversight remains a living promise—one that guarantees fairness, strengthens trust, and protects every person.



ERINDA BALLANCA
*President of the Association of
Mediterranean Ombudsmen (AOM)
People's Advocate of Albania*

The People's Advocate of Albania and President of the AOM will underscore the imperative of treating good administration not as a managerial standard but as a fundamental right and a moral promise of the state to each person. Delivered on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta, the speech will situate the discussion within the broader context of a global decline in the rule of law.

Drawing on Professor Laurent Pech's 2025 analysis presented before PACE, it will highlight alarming evidence: since 2016, approximately 77% of countries studied have experienced a rule of law recession. This trend, often described as rule of law backsliding, must be understood as the deliberate weakening of checks and balances, often through delayed appointments, institutional paralysis, and the erosion of safeguards.

Against this backdrop, the role of Ombudsman institutions will be reaffirmed as both a bridge between persons and administrations and a mirror of institutional integrity. The Venice Commission's Rule of Law Checklist will be presented as a gold standard for diagnosis and accountability, providing benchmarks on legality, legal certainty, abuse of power, equality, and access to justice. Yet the intervention will stress that measuring "law on the books" is insufficient; the real challenge lies in closing the gap between law in theory and law in practice.

The speech will call for self-reflection within Ombudsman institutions themselves, insisting on responsibility, timeliness, and the duty to "do the right thing because it must be done." It will conclude with a strong appeal: from principles to results—measuring, publishing, correcting, and persisting—as the only path to rebuild trust, the cornerstone of democracy.



REINIER VAN ZUTPHEN
*President of the European
Regional Board of the International
Ombudsman Institute (IOI)
Ombudsman of the Netherlands*

The presentation will highlight the pressing need to defend the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, drawing inspiration from three influential works that caution against authoritarianism: *Autocracy Inc.* by Anne Applebaum (2024), *On Tyranny* by Timothy Snyder (2017), and *Indignez-vous!* by Stéphane Hessel (2010).

Against the backdrop of an increasingly fragile liberal world order, the intervention will stress the vital role of Ombudsman institutions in speaking out. Open and free societies will be described as sources of hope, yet ones that demand active defence. While not without flaws, such societies can be strengthened when Ombudsman institutions embody and promote the principles outlined in these texts.

The speech will emphasise the duty to resist unjust authority and to speak truth to power. It will underline the importance of defending institutions that protect societal decency, maintaining professional ethics to safeguard trust, and resisting the denial of objective truth which undermines democracy. Courage will be presented as indispensable, since freedom requires personal bravery, while dialogue will be highlighted as the key to sustaining the rule of law.

The message will be clear: vigilance, knowledge, and courage are essential. Protecting the rule of law requires not only the Ombudsman's own work but also support for other democratic institutions. As the Ombudsman of the Netherlands supports Parliament, the intervention will challenge peers to reflect: which institutions will Ombudsmen stand beside to safeguard a just society?



TERESA ANJINHO
European Ombudswoman

European Ombudswoman Teresa Anjinho will explore the challenges around ensuring good governance in current times and how to increase citizen trust in public administration. Speaking from an EU perspective, Ms Anjinho will consider the impact of geopolitical changes and recent crises on the EU administration as well as the importance of ensuring that citizens are involved in a meaningful way in decision making. Using inquiry examples from her Office, the Ombudswoman will also underline the importance of maintaining accountability and transparency standards even when there is pressure to simplify legislation or take decisions quickly.

The Ombudswoman will highlight the need to communicate clearly and openly with people, with citizen-friendly administrations defined by a willingness to explain decisions, anticipate concerns, and be proactively transparent.



THE HON. ANGLU FARRUGIA
*Speaker of the House of
Representatives of Malta*

Speaker Anglu Farrugia will emphasise the vital role of the Ombudsman in safeguarding good governance, particularly during moments of crisis and uncertainty. He will stress that today's challenges are not only difficult but decisive for the very future of democracy. Around the world, persons will continue to witness abuses of power left unpunished, decisions taken in secrecy, and truths distorted by convenience. In this context, the Ombudsman will be presented as an independent figure of conscience, committed to truth, justice, and the defence of dignity.

The Speaker will underline that Ombudsmen are not there to comfort governments or parliaments, but to confront them when rights are violated. Their duty will be to act with courage rather than remain silent, and to demonstrate integrity through real actions rather than words. He will note that truth cannot be overturned by institutions, narratives, or political preferences, and that unchecked power is the enemy of good governance.

Drawing on reflections from Jacob Söderman, he will highlight that Ombudsmen need not be popular but effective, while recalling Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon's reminder that the office must also serve as a protector of human rights. Quoting Nelson Mandela, he will reinforce that strong institutions form the shield of democracy and must inspire courage in others.

Finally, Speaker Farrugia will emphasise Parliament's constitutional duty to keep oversight institutions strong and independent. He will insist that Ombudsman recommendations must be respected, acted upon, or debated openly—never ignored. Marking thirty years of the Ombudsman in Malta, he will conclude with a call for renewed commitment to truth, accountability, and courage, affirming that the Ombudsman remains democracy's last line of defence.

Theme 1: Building people's trust: The Ombudsman as a pillar of democracy in times of change

Public trust is the foundation of democratic governance. Without it, institutions lose legitimacy, and the social contract weakens. This session explores how Ombudsman institutions serve as visible and credible guarantors of fairness, helping to strengthen a person's confidence in democracy during times of change.

The Ombudsman, by its very design, embodies independence and impartiality. By investigating maladministration, ensuring fairness, and transparent reporting, the Ombudsman institution demonstrates that no one is above accountability. This trust-building function is particularly critical in moments of transition or crisis, when persons may question whether their rights will continue to be protected.

Accessibility also matters. Because Ombudsman services are free, informal, and approachable, they

offer an avenue of redress to all, including those who cannot pursue judicial remedies. Each resolved complaint and each accepted recommendation reinforces the idea that government can be held accountable, and that fairness is not just an abstract value but a lived reality.

In this panel, experts will share insights on how Ombudsmen can foster trust in an era marked by scepticism, disinformation, and political volatility. They will discuss strategies for enhancing visibility, ensuring effectiveness, and maintaining credibility, so that Ombudsman institutions remain pillars of democracy in changing times.

***This session will be moderated by
James Cummings, Journalist at
The Times of Malta.***

Panellists



MARGARET KELLY
*Northern Ireland Public Services
Ombudsman*

Trust is a commodity which seems to be in shorter supply in our communities and in democracy generally. Trust in government and public services is at an all-time low. Even in our public health service, previously the most trusted and revered, the level of public trust has dipped almost beyond recognition.

Yet government now touches many more parts of our lives. It is a time of change and upheaval in the world community and a time of uncertainty. This brings the role of the Ombudsman in providing access to justice and as such, building and improving the trust of citizens, into stark relief.

The Ombudsman has a key role in promoting accountability and transparency, in ensuring all citizens are treated equitably and fairly and in improving public services through demonstrating not only that government may be questioned by the citizen but that doing so results in improvement and sometimes even in systemic change.

It can, however, be an uphill battle, most ombuds offices are small and with more demands than they can resource. How do we effectively use all the tools at our disposal to deliver and demonstrate the difference we make. Further, it is not just the 'what' we do as ombuds office but the 'how' we do it that builds trust. These are the key challenges as we move forward to remain a 'pillar of democracy.'



DR MICHAEL FREND
*Member of the Venice Commission
Council of Europe*

Trust in democratic institutions is crucial for the furtherance of a pluralistic liberal democracy. In a world of immediate information exchange, social media and constant rapid transition, public trust has become intrinsically fragile. The Venice Commission had identified the institution of the Ombudsman as a pillar of democracy which, as a bridge between the citizen and the State, needs to be bolstered and respected by the other organs of the State. In various of its Opinions the Venice Commission has underlined measures which can be taken to strengthen trust in the Ombudsman and in democracy in general, for example that parliaments should debate key Ombudsman reports and that the Office of the Ombudsman should be occupied at all times.

The Venice Principles developed and adopted by the Venice Commission seek the protection and promotion of the Institution of the Ombudsman by emphasising (a) independence and security of tenure (b) adequate powers of investigation (c) accessibility and (d) transparency and accountability. All are essential to ensure the Ombudsman serves as an effective pillar of democracy.

Dr Michael Frendo, Speaker Emeritus of the Parliament of Malta, and a former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Malta, is a member of the Venice Commission (Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law) where he has also served as Vice-President for two terms. He is Chairman of BNF Bank, and Chairman of St John Ambulance and Rescue (the Malta Association of the Venerable Order of St John).



ANAHIT MANASYAN
*Human Rights Defender
of Armenia*

The Human Rights Defender of Armenia will address the essential role of the Ombudsperson in fostering public trust and consolidating democracy, particularly in times of political and social transformations. Drawing on the experience of Armenia, she will highlight how the Human Rights Defender's Office has acted as an independent and impartial institution in context of polarization and democratic transition. She will emphasize that trust in the Ombudsperson is not given by default, but is earned through transparency, accountability, responsiveness, professionalism, integrity and dedication. Ensuring accessibility for all individuals, including groups in vulnerable situations, and addressing complaints in an impartial manner will be underscored as key prerequisites for building credibility.

In her intervention, the Defender will also underline the importance of constructive cooperation with all the actors, including state authorities, civil society, and international partners. At the same time, she will stress the importance of inviolability of the independence of the Ombudsperson's mandate.

The challenges faced by the Human Rights Defender's Office in contexts of polarisation, democratic transition, or external pressures will be examined, with particular attention to the need for resilience, and a strong public voice. Ms. Manasyan will highlight that in these times, the Ombudsperson is not only a defender of rights but also a pillar of democratic legitimacy, helping citizens to have their rights protected and changing the distorted perceptions on various sensitive human rights issues.



PROF ANNE MARIE THAKE
Academic, University of Malta

Professor Anne Marie Thake will address the central role of the Ombudsman in sustaining democracy and good governance, especially in times of transition and uncertainty. At the heart of her intervention will be the concept of trust, described as the lifeblood of democracy. Persons turn to the Ombudsman because they believe in its independence, fairness, and integrity. This trust is sacrosanct, and once betrayed, it is difficult to recover. She will emphasise that the Office carries the responsibility of nurturing and safeguarding this confidence, ensuring that every grievance is treated with impartiality and integrity.

Professor Thake will also underline that trust alone is not enough. The Ombudsman must embrace renewal and regeneration to remain relevant. In a world shaped by social media, artificial intelligence, immigration, and shifting socio-political realities, the Office cannot afford to remain static or rest on its laurels. Renewal must be both external, responding to new forms of rights and challenges, and internal, with Ombudsman officers developing the tools and skills needed to engage with contemporary issues.

Finally, her intervention will explore the challenges for the future. While the Ombudsman examines complaints and recommends forms of redress, it does not enforce its findings. Its effectiveness depends on government and parliamentary responsiveness. If recommendations are ignored, the Office risks being perceived as irrelevant. Questions may also arise on whether Malta, already with three specialised Commissioners, should expand into new areas such as quality-of-life issues.

In conclusion, Professor Thake will argue that the Ombudsman should not be perceived as merely a complaints-report entity. Its mission is more far-reaching: to stand as a fundamental pillar of democracy, entrusted to protect rights, inspire renewal, and strengthen governance.



MEHMET AKARCA
*Chief Ombudsman of the
Republic of Türkiye*

The most valuable asset of democracy is the trust of the people. However, global crises, climate change, migration, natural disasters, pandemics, and challenges arising from digitalisation make citizens' trust in the state and public administration even more critical. For this reason, during times of social change, the role of Ombudsman institutions becomes more important than ever; they undertake a central mission to build a bridge of trust between citizens and the state and to prevent violations of rights.

The greatest strength of Ombudsmen comes from citizens' belief in their impartiality and independence. Therefore, ombudsmen must make decisions that are impartial, independent, swift, and fair; they must also be transparent and easily accessible. In times of social change, the most important duty of ombudsmen is to make the voice of citizens heard and represent them as an institution that not only receives complaints but also produces results. For this reason, ombudsman offices are not only a complaint mechanism but also institutions of trust and stability that ensure the sustainability of democracy.

The Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye has worked closely with the public during crises such as the pandemic, natural disasters, and earthquakes, effectively fulfilling its role as a mediator in protecting rights of the citizens. Through special application channels dedicated for children, Ombudsman clubs established in universities and regional meetings, it contributes to the dissemination of a culture of seeking legal remedies. At the international level, the Ombudsman Institution of Türkiye attaches importance to sharing experiences and cooperation by being a member of various ombudsman networks. With special reports, regional meetings and practices focused on transparency, it has increased its visibility both nationally and internationally.

Ultimately, beyond resolving individual complaints, the Ombudsman strengthens democracy, human rights and good administration by serving as the voice of citizens during times of change. Strong ombudsman institutions reinforce society's faith in justice and make democracy more resilient.

Theme 2: Protecting the vulnerable: The role of the Ombudsman in upholding Human Rights

Vulnerable groups are often the first to experience injustice and the last to secure redress. Ombudsman institutions play a critical role in bridging this gap by providing accessible mechanisms for complaints and by advocating for systemic changes that uphold human rights.

While the Ombudsman's classical mandate is to ensure good administration, this work often overlaps with fundamental rights. Complaints about discrimination, social benefits, housing, or healthcare frequently reveal deeper issues of equality and dignity. By investigating these cases and promoting reforms, Ombudsmen help translate human rights into everyday practice for persons.

In many countries, Ombudsman institutions also serve as National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs), giving them a broader remit to monitor compliance with international human rights standards. Whether or not they carry this formal mandate, Ombudsmen are often at the frontline of protecting persons who might otherwise lack a voice.

This panel will explore how Ombudsmen can protect vulnerable persons—whether migrants, minorities, persons with disabilities, or the elderly—through their traditional complaint-handling role, through advocacy, and through partnerships with other institutions.

This session will be moderated by
Mr Matthew Xuereb
Editor-in-chief newsbook.com.mt

Panellists



DEBBIE KOHNER
Secretary General – ENNHRI

The intervention will highlight the importance of a strong national human rights system to protect individuals and uphold human rights. Within such a system, Ombuds institutions play a vital role for ensuring that public authorities act fairly, transparently, and accountably. Traditionally focused on addressing maladministration and public service complaints, Ombuds institutions are increasingly recognised as human rights actors.

In many countries, their work exists alongside various other national mandates related to human rights, in the same institution or in close cooperation with the Ombuds. National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) are state-mandated bodies, independent of government, with a broad constitutional or legal mandate to promote and protect human rights through a variety of functions, including awareness raising, monitoring, advise to the state and active engagement with civil society and international mechanisms.

NHRIs are fundamental actors for the exercise of checks and balances in a country and central to ensuring respect for the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Each national mandate relating to human rights – from Ombuds, to Equality Bodies, to NHRIs and beyond - is distinct, and yet complementary, forming a more comprehensive system of protection. For Malta, the establishment of an independent NHRI mandate in law would be an essential step to reinforce the protection and promotion of human rights and will serve to significantly contribute to the states' alignment with its regional and international commitments.



MYKHAILO SPASOV
*Deputy Commissioner for
Human Rights, of Ukraine*

The intervention will be focused on the critical role of the Ombudsman in protecting one of the most vulnerable groups during war — children.

Since 2014, and especially following the full-scale invasion, the Russian Federation has carried out the systematic and unlawful deportation of Ukrainian children. These actions — involving forced displacement, identity changes, and illegal adoptions — aim to erase Ukrainian identity and constitute grave violations of international humanitarian law.

Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights plays a significant role in a wide range of efforts to return Ukrainian children. This includes the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children, the Working Group under Point 4 of the Peace Formula, and the initiative of the President of Ukraine Bring Kids Back UA.

The intervention will emphasise Ombudsman's role in times of armed conflict — to monitor, advocate, coordinate and act — and will call for stronger international cooperation.



MARINA CEYSSAC
*High Commissioner for the
Protection of Rights, Liberties
and Mediation of Monaco*

Protecting vulnerable persons is one of the most essential tasks of Ombudsmans. In Monaco, the Office of the High Commissioner works with a variety of individuals claimants, including persons with disabilities, elder people, prisoners, women in precarious situations, most of the time victims of violence, and children.

The Office of the High Commissioner has noted that this protection takes different forms. It can involve providing support to a vulnerable person to resolve an individual administrative problem, such as adapting social housing or access to certain services, or else involve combating discriminations.

The Office of the High Commissioner has also noted that certain laws or regulations, as well as certain technical developments, can indirectly and unintentionally lead to discriminatory situations that are difficult to predict and resolve.

It also underscores the cumulative nature of certain vulnerability factors that place some individuals in very specific difficulties that require a comprehensive analysis of the situation. It is therefore essential to adopt a cross-cutting approach, both in terms of the issues addressed and cooperation with the institutions and entities concerned.

Special arrangements and precautions are necessary to ensure the proper conditions for receiving and engaging in dialogue with particularly vulnerable persons. In this regard, institutions such as prisons or psychiatric hospital must be subject to constant oversight.

Finally, the Office of the High Commissioner has repeatedly emphasised the need to systematically consider situations of vulnerability in the advice given to the ongoing legislation and regulations.



**JUDGE LORRAINE
SCHEMBRI ORLAND**
*Judge at the European Court
of Human Rights*

Judge Lorraine Schembri Orland will highlight the role of the Ombudsman as an independent gatekeeper for safeguarding the rule of law, fundamental human rights, and democracy within a country. While the powers of the Ombudsman are not synonymous with those of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR)—a supranational court delivering binding judgments—both institutions share the same goal: the protection of human rights in Europe.

She will reflect on the 75th Anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which has evolved through the dynamic interpretation of its Court into a constitutional instrument of European public order (*order public*). Reference will be made to the landmark case *Golder v. the UK*, where the rule of law was recognised as a fundamental component of that order, underpinning every article of the Convention alongside the principle of avoiding arbitrary power.

At the domestic level, Judge Schembri Orland will underline how the Ombudsman serves as a safeguard against arbitrary power, thereby reinforcing both the rule of law and the human rights value system within national frameworks.

Her intervention will explore the impact of both European and domestic Ombudsman offices on the reasoning and judgments of the Court, while examining how the functions of Ombudsman institutions at the national level can, directly or indirectly, influence the enforcement of Convention rights. In doing so, she will demonstrate how the Ombudsman contributes to strengthening the human rights architecture across Europe.



DR DIJANA MOŽINA ZUPANC
*Deputy Human Rights
Ombudsman of Slovenia*

In our fast-moving world, it often feels that we are taught to put ourselves first. From childhood, we learn to compete, to stand out, to chase success. Empathy, care, and shared responsibility are more and more quietly pushed to the sidelines. In this digital age, with its endless screens, notifications, and parallel realities, we sometimes live in a completely closed bubble. The society is often forgetting that behind every statistic, every complaint and every report there is a human being. A frail elderly person waiting for attentive care in a quiet room. A young individual who feels unsafe in a school hallway. A family navigating a system that seems indifferent to their struggle.

Respect for human dignity must be more than an ideal; it must be a part of our daily lives. This can be seen in small gestures such as pausing to listen to a neighbour's story, holding the hand of an elderly person who feels invisible, or acknowledging a child who longs to be heard. Education, public discourse and the media have the power to nurture this awareness by telling stories of care, solidarity and shared humanity rather than conflict or sensation.

The Ombudsman's role is to ensure that no voice is left unheard. Protecting the vulnerable is not just a matter of policy, but a moral duty. Independence - legal, operational, and financial - allows us to confront inequality, advocate for systemic reforms, and speak out to power without fear. Although our recommendations, though not legally binding, can have a significant impact on institutions and individuals when society chooses to listen.

We are not merely complaint handlers. We walk the corridors of institutions, sit with those who feel forgotten, and bear witness to the consequences of inadequate care. We see the courage of those who survive neglect and the resilience of those whom society so often overlooks. By standing with the vulnerable, fostering inclusion and defending human rights, we can build a society in which every voice matters and every life is valued.

Together, through empathy and action, we - The National Human Rights Institutions and Ombudsmen - can shape a fairer, more compassionate and truly humane world - one where dignity is not a privilege, but a right we protect for all. When the question of *What is the future role of those institutions?* occurs - the answer echoes with clarity - an ever greater one than today! This mission calls on all of us to actively act on our shared responsibility in building a fairer, more compassionate and equitable society.



DR. TAMAR GVARAMADZE
*First Deputy Public Defender
of Georgia*

The Public Defender's Office of Georgia, founded slightly later than its Maltese counterpart, will mark its 30th anniversary in 2027. Its constitutional mandate is broad and robust: to protect, promote and prevent violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The institution's core responsibilities include reviewing complaints of violations, conducting investigations, issuing recommendations, submitting *amicus curiae* briefs and constitutional petitions and preparing an annual parliamentary or special report that informs human rights policy and public debate.

Beyond its traditional Ombudsman role, the institution holds A-status accreditation as a National Human Rights Institution, fully compliant with the UN Paris Principles. It also carries three specialised mandates: acting as the National Preventive Mechanism since 2009, serving as the monitoring body of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities since 2014 and functioning as the equality mechanism overseeing the implementation of anti-discrimination legislation since 2014.

These mandates enable the institution to work comprehensively in safeguarding the rights of vulnerable groups. It monitors detention facilities to address overcrowding and prevent ill-treatment; protects the rights of persons with disabilities; and operates a Femicide Watch mechanism to identify systemic shortcomings in response to violence against women. The institution also reviews complaints concerning children and conducts monitoring of schools and care institutions, while actively addressing challenges faced by older persons, including poverty, discrimination and loss of autonomy. Conflict-affected persons and internally displaced populations remain a priority, even where access to occupied territories is limited.

In conclusion, while fulfilling the role of a multi-mandated institution is demanding, it offers a unique advantage: the ability to address human rights violations from multiple perspectives and to ensure that no one is left behind.



ANDREAS ACCARDO
*Head of Institutional
Cooperation and EU Charter
Unit, Fundamental Rights
Agency*

The intervention will focus on the important role of Ombudsman institutions in facilitating access to rights for vulnerable persons, given that they offer easier access than the justice system. To fulfil this mission, Ombudsman institutions will need to forge strong partnerships with other bodies, enabling them to refer persons and guide them through the complex network of authorities that may be competent to handle their cases. Cooperation with civil society will also be highlighted as essential for ensuring outreach to vulnerable communities and promoting awareness of rights.

The intervention will also situate Ombudsman institutions within the broader national human rights infrastructure, which usually incorporates a National Human Rights Institution (NHRI). Against the backdrop of current human rights backsliding—both globally and, to some extent, within the EU—the speaker will stress the importance of bolstering this infrastructure to withstand times of crisis. Particular attention will be drawn to Malta, which remains one of only three EU Member States without an accredited NHRI.

Reference will be made to the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), which in its landmark report *Strong and effective national human rights institutions: challenges, promising practices and opportunities* emphasised the vital contribution of NHRIs to the protection of persons' rights in the EU. Those with a broad and independent mandate can perform key functions under EU law, such as monitoring fundamental rights at the EU's external borders, reporting on the rule of law in their country, or ensuring that EU funds are used in compliance with fundamental rights. The intervention will conclude by noting that while no single NHRI model exists across Member States, it is common for Ombudsman institutions to be accredited as NHRIs, combining multiple mandates—a trend reflected in [FRA's 2025 overview of NHRI mandates](#).

DAY TWO

Thursday 16th October 2025

8:30am	Welcome Coffee
9:00am – 10:15am	Plenary Session 3 <i>Advancing Ethical Governance: Strengthening integrity and the principles of good administration</i> Panel: • Ms Maria Stylianou-Lottides, Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights of Cyprus • Mr Charles Deguara, Auditor General of Malta • Ms Sabina Aliyeva, Commissioner for Human Rights of Azerbaijan • Ms Maija Sakslin, Deputy Parliamentary Ombudsman of Finland • Mr Vit Alexander Schorm, Deputy Public Defender of Rights and Defender of Children's Rights <i>Panel discussion and interventions from participants</i> <i>Moderated by</i> Mr Kurt Sansone, Executive Editor of MaltaToday
10:20am – 11:40am	Plenary Session 4 <i>Embracing Technological Innovation: The Ombudsman's role in the age of digitalisation and artificial intelligence.</i> Panel: • Ms Tena Šimonović Einwalter, Ombudsman of the Republic of Croatia • Ms Ulle Madise, Chancellor of Justice of Estonia • Mr David Bondia, Ombudsman of Barcelona • Ms Simona Granata-Menghini, Director, Secretary of the Venice Commission, Council of Europe • Prof Alexiei Dingli, Professor on AI, University of Malta <i>Panel discussion and interventions from participants</i> <i>Moderated by</i> Ms Rachel Bondi Attard, Head of Media and Communications Strategy, The Malta Chamber
11:40am – 12:00pm	<i>Coffee Break</i> Closing Session 12:00pm – 1:30pm
12:00pm – 12:20pm	Conference Rapporteur's Report Prof Anne Marie Thake, Conference Rapporteur
12.20pm – 12.40pm	Concluding Remarks by the Parliamentary Ombudsman of Malta Judge Joseph Zammit McKeon
12:40pm – 12:50pm	Concluding Address by the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Alex Borg
12:50pm – 1:00pm	Concluding Address by the Prime Minister, the Hon. Robert Abela
	Family Photo
1:30 pm – 2:30pm	<i>Stand-up Lunch</i>

Theme 3: Advancing ethical governance: Strengthening integrity and the principles of good administration

Good governance cannot stand without integrity. Ethical conduct in public administration ensures not only that decisions are lawful but also that they are fair, transparent, and accountable. Ombudsman institutions, by exposing maladministration and promoting principles of good administration, are central actors in advancing ethical governance.

Investigations by Ombudsmen often reveal not only errors of legality but also practices that are unreasonable, unjust, or discriminatory. In such cases, the Ombudsman pushes administrations to live up to higher ethical standards, going beyond compliance to embrace the principles of equity and justice for every person.

Through recommendations, guidance, and public reporting, Ombudsmen encourage administrations to improve systems, adopt codes of conduct, and strengthen internal accountability mechanisms. They help foster a culture where fairness and integrity are seen not as optional, but as essential to the exercise of public authority.

This panel will consider how Ombudsman institutions can promote ethical standards, cooperate with other accountability bodies, and ensure that public power is exercised in the interests of the common good.

This session will be moderated by
**Mr Kurt Sansone, Editor, Executive Editor of
MaltaToday**



Panellists



MARIA STYLIANOULOTTIDES
*Commissioner for Administration
and the Protection of Human
Rights (Ombudsman) Cyprus*

In times of crisis—political, economic, or humanitarian—the principles of good governance are often placed under strain. It is precisely during such periods that the role of the Ombudsman becomes most vital. As both the Ombudsman and the independent National Human Rights Institution of Cyprus, Ms Maria Stylianou-Lottides will emphasise the importance of strengthening public administration by promoting ethical governance, institutional integrity, and the rule of law.

Her intervention will focus on the proactive role of the Ombudsman in ensuring transparency, accountability, and respect for the rights of all persons, particularly those in vulnerable situations. She will reflect on how the work of the Ombudsman extends beyond individual complaint handling to systemic monitoring, public advocacy, and institutional reform.

Ms Stylianou-Lottides will also highlight a recent case in Cyprus which illustrates how independent oversight can lead to concrete improvements in administrative efficiency and fairness.

In advancing the principles of legality, proportionality, impartiality, and participation, she will argue that the Ombudsman contributes to restoring public trust and reinforcing democratic values. Her contribution will also address the ongoing challenges Ombudsman institutions face in ensuring the implementation of their recommendations and in reaching marginalised communities.



CHARLES DEGUARA
Auditor General of Malta

One of the main requisites of every democratic society is that the general public, the media and civil society have the possibility to examine and comment upon the actions and decisions of government institutions. As a consequence, the need for ethical governance on the part of public institutions has never been more critical. This emphasises the importance of invariably embedding the fundamental values of integrity, transparency, accountability, and responsiveness at all levels of governance to ensure just and effective administration. These values form the basis and rationale of all our work assignments within our National Audit Office.

In the publication: State Auditing in Transition, commissioned by the National Audit Office in 2022 in order to commemorate the 25th anniversary of its setting up as a fully independent institution, Professor Edward Warrington rightly remarked that the profound loss of trust in the integrity of politics, public officials and governing institution is perhaps the greatest threat to human flourishing in the twenty first century, because it subverts the only mechanisms that human societies have to provide leadership and undertake collective action on a significant scale. Addressing these complex challenges takes us to the important area of public governance or to take it a step further: ethical public governance.

In essence, ethical public governance refers to the management of public affairs in a manner that upholds the common good. Effective ethical governance ensures that citizens' trust in government is strengthened by decisions and policies that are not only efficient but also just and inclusive. For this vision to be achieved in practice, mechanisms such as strong legal frameworks, independent oversight bodies, such as the NAO and the Office of the Parliamentary Ombudsman, transparent reporting systems, ethical leadership, citizen participation, and, if so required, sanctions for misconduct must be firmly in place. In short: Ethical public governance is about governing with values not just rules.

Innovations within our Office, such as performance and IT audits, have expanded the scope of our work beyond financial oversight, offering deeper insights into policy implementation, institutional capacity, and long-term sustainability. Thus, by combining public visibility with discretion and impartiality, the NAO has sustained high levels of trust with its stakeholders and reinforced ethical governance by promoting transparency, accountability, and value for money in Malta's public sector.



MAIJA SAKSLIN
*Deputy Parliamentary
Ombudsman of Finland*

The Right to Good Administration and the role of Ombudsman in promoting legality of administrative activities.

Every person's right to good administration is explicitly guaranteed as a Fundamental Right in the Constitution of Finland. This Fundamental Right creates a strong legal foundation for the obligations of Public Administration and all those who perform public tasks.

The right to good administration has obtained concrete and legally binding content through the Ombudsman's established practices very quickly after it was safeguarded in the Constitution of Finland thirty years ago. In fact, it was Ombudsman's practice which partly formed the basis for the adoption of more detailed legislation on good administration.

The implementation of the principles of good administration is essential in protecting Fundamental Rights and everyone's right to have his or her case dealt with appropriately and without undue delay by a legally competent authority, the right to be heard and the right to receive a reasoned decision.

In her presentation, Maija Sakslin will elaborate on the constructive role of the Ombudsman for the promotion of legality of administrative activities, public trust, legitimacy, transparency and preventing misuse of power.



SABINA ALIYEVA,
*Commissioner for Human Rights
(Ombudsman) of the Republic
of Azerbaijan*

The Role of Ombudsman Institutions in Promoting Ethical Governance

In her speech, the Commissioner for Human Rights (Ombudsman) of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Ms Sabina Aliyeva, will focus on the key pillars of ethical management, built on the protection of human rights and the principles of transparency, honesty, responsibility, and accountability in public administration. She will stress that, in order to ensure good governance, state officials must act impartially and provide equal service to all persons in their daily activities.

Ms Aliyeva will highlight that, in today's context of globalisation and technological development, while transparency and accountability are being strengthened, there is also a growing need to combat corruption and promote ethical standards. She will emphasise that Ombudsman institutions should not only investigate complaints but also monitor the implementation of ethical conduct in public administration.

She will note that, in practice, she regularly issues specific recommendations aimed at improving ethical standards, increasing civic satisfaction, and strengthening social protection, and that these recommendations are reflected in the Ombudsman's annual report.

Looking ahead, Ms Aliyeva will emphasise the need to establish new priorities in ethical management, including the protection of digital rights, addressing climate change, and fostering active participation of youth and civil society. She will underline the importance of ensuring ethical governance through the submission of inquiries and recommendations to relevant state institutions, as well as through public statements to the media.

In conclusion, she will stress that closer cooperation and joint efforts among Ombudsman institutions will contribute to advancing ethical management and strengthening public trust in the future.



VIT ALEXANDER SCHORM
*Deputy Ombudsman of Czech
Republic*

Principles of Good Administration in the Czech context

This contribution focuses on the experience of the Public Defender of Rights (Ombudsman) of the Czech Republic with the promotion of the principles of good administration, which represent informal yet binding standards for the ethical and predictable governance of public affairs. Our law requires good administration and tasks the Ombudsman with monitoring compliance of the authorities. However, good administration was not explicitly defined. The Ombudsman therefore introduced the so called Ten Principles in 2006 to clarify it. He drew inspiration from international standards and from his inquiries (e.g. apologising for mistakes, providing comprehensible reasons for decisions, timely information about the extension of proceedings).

The Ombudsman's promotion of these principles contributes, for example, to improving communication between authorities and citizens – greater clarity of outputs (e.g. instructions on appeals or complaint handling). Thanks to our activities, clarity of outputs is now part of the evaluation criteria for civil servants. Yet, there are also limitations – remote access to files, for example, cannot be ensured by principles alone, but requires changes to the legislation.

As part of a current project, we are considering revising the principles in light of changes since their introduction, such as digitalisation, participation, artificial intelligence, needs of vulnerable people, integrity and sustainability. The aim is to update and modernise the principles to ensure that public authorities follow effective, fair and predictable procedures in the contemporary world.

We draw international inspiration from the recommendations of the Council of Europe, the OECD, and the EU, in particular the Principles of Public Administration (PPA) of the SIGMA initiative.

Theme 4: Embracing technological innovation: The Ombudsman's role in the age of digitalisation and artificial intelligence

Digitalisation and artificial intelligence are reshaping public administration. They bring opportunities for greater efficiency and accessibility but also risks of exclusion, bias, and opacity. Ombudsman institutions have a dual responsibility: to modernise their own operations through digital tools, and to scrutinise how governments use technology in ways that may affect a person's rights.

AI-driven decision-making and data collection pose new questions about accountability and transparency. Persons must be able to understand and challenge decisions that affect them, whether made by humans or algorithms. Ombudsmen have a crucial role in ensuring that new technologies respect principles of fairness, non-discrimination, and due process.

At the same time, Ombudsman institutions themselves must embrace innovation to better serve persons—through online complaint platforms, digital case management, and the use of data to identify systemic issues. However, digitalisation must not leave anyone behind: Ombudsmen must insist that services remain accessible to persons without the skills or resources to navigate digital systems.

This panel will explore how Ombudsman institutions can adapt to the digital age, balance innovation with accountability, and ensure that the principles of good governance continue to guide public administration in the era of technology.

***This session will be moderated by
Ms Rachel Attard, Head of Media &
Communication Strategist, the Malta Chamber***



Panellists



TENA ŠIMONOVIĆ EINWALTER
Ombudswoman of Croatia

The intervention will examine how Artificial Intelligence (AI) creates both opportunities and challenges for persons in situations of vulnerability, including those disadvantaged on the basis of age, race, national origin, or belief. While AI has the potential to improve accessibility, independence, and social participation, it will also pose serious risks such as algorithmic bias, exclusion from digital platforms, and underrepresentation in AI development processes, all of which may widen existing inequalities.

Drawing on Council of Europe findings on age discrimination, the presentation will underline how the digitalisation of welfare and social services risks marginalising older persons. Reference will also be made to the EU's AI Act, which classifies AI systems used in recruitment, worker evaluation, promotion, dismissal, and monitoring as "high risk" due to their potential to affect livelihoods. Algorithmic hiring is spreading rapidly across Europe, raising pressing concerns about fairness and accountability.

The intervention will stress the crucial role of Ombudsman institutions and National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in the context of the AI Act. These bodies will contribute expertise on fundamental rights in the design of impact assessments, provide guidelines on high-risk AI, and monitor compliance with prohibitions, particularly in sensitive areas such as biometric surveillance, social scoring, predictive policing, and exploitation of vulnerabilities.

Finally, the presentation will highlight structural challenges within the AI Act, including the risks of provider self-assessment and loopholes in defining high-risk systems. Ombudsman and NHRI institutions will be called to strengthen oversight and ensure AI systems respect fundamental rights in practice, not just in principle.





SIMONA GRANATA-MENGHINI
*Director, Secretary of the Venice
Commission, Council of Europe*

Digital technologies, which have become deeply embedded in people's lives, introduce new challenges for the effective implementation of traditional human rights and require revisiting the approach to their respect, protection, and fulfilment. Against this backdrop, Ombudsman institutions retain a paramount role in protecting human rights. Ombudsman Institutions have the task to make governments and parliaments aware of these challenges, calling on them to embrace a human rights perspective when developing legislation and policies; they can act against alleged violations of human rights, and including those rights which protection needs to be enhanced in the digital age. At the same time, amidst this fast-developing landscape, Ombudsman Institutions need to be equipped to address these challenges.

The Council of Europe has been promoting and protecting Ombudsman institutions since 1985 and continues providing them with the necessary tools to fulfil this important mission. The Venice Principles, adopted by the Venice Commission in 2019 and immediately risen to global standard, are there to strengthen the institutional framework regulating the institution of the Ombudsman. Among other instruments, the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, opened for signature in September 2024, commits the Parties to adopt or maintain appropriate measures to ensure that activities within the lifecycle of artificial intelligence systems are fully consistent with human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The Council of Europe remains the right forum to support Ombudsman Institutions in their mission of protecting human rights and making governments and parliaments accountable before the obligations they have committed to undertake.



ULLE MADISE
Chancellor of Justice of Estonia

Some believe that complete safety can be achieved if every step of human life is monitored and controlled. With artificial intelligence, this idea seems possible: total surveillance might reduce crime and prevent accidents. But is such control compatible with human rights?

The Ombudsman's role is to remind society that while technology allows it, democracy and human dignity cannot survive under total control. Estonia's history under Soviet occupation shows how mass surveillance and censorship destroyed trust and freedoms. This grievous lesson warns us not to repeat past mistakes in the digital era.

Europe has now drawn clear boundaries. The GDPR underlines that personal data which is not strictly necessary must never be collected or stored. The EU AI Act and the Council of Europe's convention on artificial intelligence both stress the same principle: humans must remain in charge of technology. Innovation should be used for people's benefit, never against them.

The Ombudsman's mission is therefore twofold: to support the positive potential of digitalisation and AI, while ensuring that these tools do not undermine rights, freedoms or the rule of law. Only by protecting human dignity and human rights can technological progress truly strengthen our societies.



DAVID BONDIA
Ombudsman of Barcelona

The Barcelona Ombudsman (Sindicatura de Greuges de Barcelona) is an independent institution that defends the fundamental rights and public freedoms of all individuals living in or present in the city. It monitors the actions of the municipal administration and public services, ensuring that principles of justice, equity, and transparency are upheld.

In today's context—marked by digitalisation and the growing use of artificial intelligence (AI)—ombudsman institutions face the challenge of adapting in order to continue protecting citizens' rights. This means incorporating digital tools that improve access to information and enhance the transparency of public processes.

In line with this commitment, the Barcelona Ombudsman is participating in the European project iDEM (*Innovative and Inclusive Democratic Spaces for Deliberation and Participation*), funded by Horizon Europe and coordinated by Pompeu Fabra University. The aim of iDEM is to develop AI-based tools that simplify public information and make it more accessible to groups traditionally excluded from participatory processes—such as people with intellectual disabilities, older adults, or migrants with communication difficulties.

The project, which will conclude in December 2026, includes the analysis of language barriers and the creation of multilingual models that automatically adapt texts to individual needs. The tools will be available in Catalan, Spanish, Italian, and English, and will be open-access.

Through this initiative, the Barcelona Ombudsman aims to promote a more inclusive democracy, where technology supports citizen participation and social justice.



PROF. ALEXIEI DINGLI
*Professor of Artificial
Intelligence at the University of
Malta
Faculty of Information &
Communication Technology*

The Ombudsman Reloaded

Imagine an Ombudsman who can spot problems before they become scandals, reach every citizen instantly, and push for reform faster than bureaucracy can slow it down. That's the future of the Ombudsman, same trusted role, now powered by innovative technology. AI tools can read every complaint, group similar cases, and uncover deeper issues across government departments and agencies.

This means faster responses, fewer delays, and complete protection of your privacy. Instead of waiting for things to go wrong, AI can help the Ombudsman detect risks early by analysing data from public services and policy changes. This allows investigations to start before harm is done. As AI becomes part of welfare, healthcare, and policing, the Ombudsman can act as a guardian of fairness, making sure algorithms treat people equally and respect their rights. Secure, multilingual digital assistants can guide citizens, companies, and NGOs through the complaint process, anytime, anywhere. This helps people in remote or underserved areas get the support they need. Live dashboards can show trends in complaints, how quickly they're resolved, and whether recommendations are being followed while keeping personal data private. AI helps, but people still make the decisions. Investigators stay in charge, explanations are clear, and legal confidentiality is fully respected.

The Result? A Better Ombudsman! Faster at sorting cases, quicker to prevent harm, stronger on digital fairness, and easier for the public to understand and trust. With AI, the Ombudsman can become a powerful force for good governance and real change.

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INTERNATIONAL OMBUDSMAN CONFERENCE

UPHOLDING GOOD GOVERNANCE IN CHALLENGING TIMES

The role of the Ombudsman



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