

Dear participants from the universities,

dear ombudspersons,

On behalf of the Regional Governor of Tyrol, Günther Platter, as well as the President of the Tyrolean Regional Government, Herwig Van Staa, it is a particular pleasure for me to welcome you to the university city of Innsbruck.

We are honoured that the European Network of Ombudsmen in Higher Education is meeting in Innsbruck.

It is thanks to Josef Leidenfrost, the Austrian Student Ombudsman, and Josef Siegele, the Secretary General of the European Ombudsman Institute, that in the next few days you will get to enjoy Innsbruck from its most beautiful sides and maybe even have the opportunity to explore the mountains, discover the many cultural highlights no offer or experience the city's nightlife.

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome the Mayor of Innsbruck, Christine Oppitz Plörer, who acts as 'ombudswoman' for the citizens of Innsbruck.

I hope that in the next few days you will not need an ombudsman or ombudswoman and that Innsbruck will show itself to be an 'ombudsman-friendly' city.

Dear ombudspersons,

In future, all of you will have a particular significance and play a more important role. Why? Because according to EUROSTAT citizens in the EU are increasingly losing trust in administrative and political bodies. Instead, they are turning to impartial and independent institutions. This shift represents a challenge for both politics and administration.

The second reason is that citizens expect more quality, justice, transparency, efficiency and reliability on a partnership basis.

Instead of treating citizens as 'supplicants', administrative bodies are increasingly becoming service providers.

This is the context within which ombudspersons, also known as public advocates, find themselves as representatives of the citizens in the sense of the Nordic word 'ombud'.

However, ombud does not mean that 'society can do as it wishes' and if there's a problem then ombuds will sort it out. Even if this may often appear to be the case, it is not the role of ombuds.

Instead, ombuds are there to advise, to help and to mediate in a competent, friendly and honest manner – quickly and clearly.

They are an independent voice which can act without political rivalry in an independent and impartial manner.

And, much more importantly, ombuds are listeners. They listen, understand, help and show tact and sensitivity. They have little pathos but a burning passion for helping people and work towards solving problems.

Indeed, their role even stretches to further developing social, economic and cultural rights.

That is the common goal of administration, politics and ombudspersons.

Thank you for your attention.

Hermann Weratschnig