



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
MISSION IN KOSOVO

**Remarks of Ambassador Werner Wnendt,
Head of OSCE Mission in Kosovo,**

At the first conference of Ombudsman institutions of Southeast Europe

Prishtinë / Priština, 8 June 2007

Dear Mr. President Sejdiu,

Dear Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure and exceptional pride that I address you this morning at this very first regional ombudsman conference hosted by the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo.

To explain to you the source of that pride, I will have to take you back to the morning of November 21, 2000, when the Ombudsperson Institution first opened its doors to receive its very first complainant: an elderly gentleman involved in a labour dispute.

In the months running up to that morning, the OSCE Mission assisted in drafting the Regulation establishing the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo. It was also the OSCE that recruited as Kosovo's first Ombudsperson a dedicated human rights lawyer from Poland: Mr. Marek Antoni Nowicki.

In the months and years that came, the OSCE would help the Institution expand its staff of 15 to the 50 employees that are now based in the Prishtinë/Priština Head Office and in regional offices located throughout Kosovo.

So I am proud, ladies and gentlemen, to be attending this conference on behalf of an organization that has played a central role in establishing this important institution.

Today this institution is an independent Kosovo Institution and only two OSCE advisors, are based at the Institution's main offices, counsel staff on various legal, human rights, policy and public affairs issues.

The transition, however, can only be successful and sustainable with the support and co-operation of partners, in other words, the Ombudsperson Institution in Kosovo depends on you.

I therefore take this opportunity to urge our colleagues from the international community to continue pledging funds for the Institution's capacity-building and awareness-raising initiatives.

I urge civil society groups to work with the Institution in areas of common concern. By co-operating on specific human rights issues, the Institution and its civil society partners can jointly shape government policy and legal frameworks. The media, too, is a valuable partner in raising awareness of specific issues and promoting the Institution's mandate to the wider public.

I would like to close my remarks by highlighting the responsibilities of the Kosovo Government and particularly the Assembly in ensuring the continued independence and sustainability of the Ombudsperson Institution. Allocating an annual budget that fully meets the Institution's requirements is one such responsibility. Properly addressing and implementing the Ombudsperson's formal requests and recommendations is another.

But what concerns me most is that, more than a year after the new regulation was put into force, the Assembly has still not yet finalised the process of appointing the Ombudsperson. Although, I know for a fact that it is not done on purpose, this situation illustrates that independent institutions, though vital for the democratic development of Kosovo, have not yet gained the level of support they ought to command.

While we wait to mark that final milestone, I am glad to be able to witness another step forward a step of regional cooperation as this conference unfolds over the next two days. Thank-you.