

## Press Release

Athens, 3<sup>rd</sup> July 2012

### **The Greek Ombudsman on incidents of racist violence**

**The Greek Ombudsman expresses its deep concern about the increase in incidents of racist violence; not only the increasing occurrence of such incidents but also the actions and intensity of violence applied. Organized and systematic action by extremist groups has become apparent recently, which, invoking the insecurity felt by many people, attack members of vulnerable or socially excluded groups (aliens, Roma people etc.). Tolerance or even partial acceptance of this course of action by some members of the population raises further cause for concern about this phenomenon. The Greek Ombudsman calls upon the competent authorities not to allow the development of organized criminal segments that step into the gaps created by the shortcomings or even inertia of the state mechanism.**

Specifically, the Greek Ombudsman has observed an increasing number of organized and systematic cases of violence – targeting mainly aliens - by extremist groups who use as a pretext the protection of public order and safety, to commit serious criminal acts and incite generalized self-applied justice. The use of violence attacks fundamental rights and creates a “vicious circle”, escalating incidents of violence from all sides and provoking group conflicts, resulting in a serious breach of social cohesion and peace.

The Ombudsman reminds us that preserving legality, protecting human rights and combating discrimination, are fundamental principles of the state of law. Furthermore, the legal concept of public safety is specified by safeguarding the human right to safety of every person, Greek and alien, residing in the Greek territory. Violence, mainly racist violence, is the most hideous form of criminal behavior because it usually targets differentiability and takes advantage of the victim’s weakness and social exclusion.

The Ombudsman has on many occasions emphasized the need to take combined measures and coordinated action to confront the phenomenon of racist violence, as well as its causes, especially in areas where the population that has been affected the most by the economic crisis, coexists with other vulnerable social groups. To this end, there is a need not only for legislative initiatives but also for a concrete policing plan in order for the democratic state to better exercise its exclusive constitutional prerogative and obligation to safeguard the safety of every person. The Greek Ombudsman intends to take initiatives in this respect, in consultation with the competent authorities, very soon.