

COMBATING DISCRIMINATION

Special report 2014 (art. 20(3) of Law 3304/2005)

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INTRODUCTION

This report reflects the work of the Greek Ombudsman in 2014, as the body responsible for promoting the principle of equal treatment regardless of racial or ethnic origin, religion or faith, disability, age or sexual orientation, according to its competence based on Law 3304/2005. The Report also includes cases in which the institutional tools provided for under Law 3304/2005 were not used, because they did not fall *sensu stricto* within the scope of the law. These cases were examined in the light of the Ombudsman's general competence regarding the protection of rights, as well as its more specific one as the national body promoting the principle of equal treatment (Article 19(1) of Law 3304/2005).

In more detail, in 2014, according to the above criteria, the Ombudsman investigated 216 cases, where there was alleged discriminatory treatment against one or more persons. From these, the cases pending from prior years are 77. Among all the cases, 38 were closed, as they fell beyond the Ombudsman's mandate, were unfounded, or their investigation was terminated due to the lack of sufficient information provided by the interested parties. The outcome of the 56 cases whose investigation was completed in 2014 was initially positive in 25 cases, whereas in 20 cases the Administration refused to comply and in 11 of them it was found that the administration had acted legitimately. The remaining 122 cases are still under investigation. There are 53 cases that have remained pending in the long-term, mainly related to the housing issue of the Roma. These pending issues are due to the structural-systemic character of discrimination in this area and the Ombudsman's choice to keep its intervention active in these cases in all their stages, until the final resolution of the problem.

Statistics per area of discrimination

RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

The manifestation and tolerance of racist behaviour clearly has an impact on discrimination and how it is addressed. Racism is the ideological basis of discrimination and its tolerance undermines any attempt to effectively tackle discrimination.

In the special report of 2013 on the phenomenon of racist violence and its tackling*, the Greek Ombudsman referred to the escalation of racist violence cases during the 2012-2013 period, linked also to the activity of organised groups. The discrepancy between the official record and the triple number of incidents which the Ombudsman collected from citizen reports, the Recording Network of the NGOs and the press (see Annual Report 2013, pg. 102), the inaction and tardiness of police officers and the ineffective investigation of the complaints regarding their involvement, as well as the shortcomings of the legislative framework in addressing crimes with a racist motive and the protection of the victims were included, *inter alia*, in the report's findings. Its publication in September of 2013 coincided with the prosecution against members of the "Golden Dawn" party, and contributed to the

extensive publicity of the racist attacks against foreigners (as well as attacks based on the criterion of religion or sexual orientation), which were not being addressed these past years. The Internal Affairs Division of the Hellenic Police, at the Prosecutor's order, started investigating cases of participation of police officers in attacks of organised groups against foreigners, and the Deputy Ombudsman for Human Rights testified in the relevant process.

Various divisions of the Hellenic Police started investigating racist attack incidents from the Ombudsman's special report and its specific references to complaints made to the Recording Network of NGOs or the media.

The Ombudsman is waiting for the outcome of these investigations, following the completion of the preliminary or sworn administrative inquiries, in order to assess them. However, it views the inclusion of the report in the substantiation of the racist violence phenomenon as a positive step, as well as the fact that the Hellenic Police launched internal investigations, albeit belatedly.

There were three significant changes to the legal framework for addressing racist violence in 2014. Article 10 of Law 4249/2014 modified the composition of the Committee of Article 1(1) of Law 3938/2011, which evaluates the complaints and cases of abuse by officers of security forces, with provision for the Ombudsman's attendance, without right to vote, in the works of the committee, its function being critical for the review of cases after the issue of related rulings by the European Court of Human Rights. This is a major institutional step in the direction of transparency and accountability; however we note that the Committee and the Office for Abuse Incidents have never been established nor have they commenced operations since 2011, when they were planned for the first time, to this day (see special report, pg. 31, 32, 46, regarding the necessity for their independence).

The second regulatory amendment is related to the Ombudsman's proposal for the need to effectively protect the victims and material witnesses of racist violence (special report, pg. 46-49, 76). The Ombudsman returned to the issue with a public statement*, noting the protection gap created due to the removal of the article that provided for leave for humanitarian reasons by the new Immigration Code (law 4251/2014). This gap was then temporarily filled with Joint Ministerial Decision 30651/2014 by authorisation of this law. The Ombudsman noted to the Ministry of Interior, that the supporting documents required, among them "a document of the competent prosecution authority that criminal proceedings have been instituted", were - and still are - inconsistent with the conditions set out by the JMD regarding the determination of victims and material witnesses of criminal acts. A preliminary investigation ordered in accordance with Article 1b of the JMD (case 189297/2014) is sufficient for protecting a victim or witness of racist violence (case 189297/2014). It remains to be seen how this amendment will be implemented by the prosecution authorities.

The third important change to the legal framework is the new Article 81a of the Criminal Code on investigating the racist motive as an aggravating circumstance in misdemeanours and felonies (Article 10 of Law 4285/2014). First came the express inclusion (Article 10 of Law 4249/2014) in the investigated abuse incidents of Article 1(1) of Law 3938/2011, with the new section d and also of "illegal behaviour where there are indications that it was

based on a racist motive or involves another type of discrimination". The goal in order to tackle discrimination in practice is to effectively investigate racist motives in what are usually composite offences.

This amendment of the Criminal Code with new Article 81a is included in the new anti-racist law, which is also a symbolic and significant legislative change, considering that the first bill was pending since 2011 and until its passing, 3 years later, was an area of acute political contention. In its special report (pg. 75), the Ombudsman had stressed the need to reform Law 927/1979 according to the content of the European Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA to more effectively address, through criminal law, manifestations of racism and xenophobia, as well as the crimes committed with racist motives, estimating that the failure to put into practice Law 927/1979 for decades should serve as an opportunity for reflection.

The Ombudsman notes as a very positive development the fact that sexual orientation and gender identity are included among the things that require protection (together with race, colour, religion, descent, national or ethnic origin and disability) of Article 1 of the new anti-racist law 4285/2014, and it is important also from the aspect of its educational role for law enforcement officers with respect to what constitutes prohibited discrimination even going against social stereotypes and prejudices that continue to exist.

In its special report (pg. 76), the Greek Ombudsman listed the necessary conditions for the success of the new legislative initiative:

- perpetrators and victims must be aware of the existence of the law
- the reporting of attacks and the provision of protection must be encouraged
- the diligent police investigation of incidents must be ensured
- consistency by public prosecutors and courts in the implementation of the law must be ensured
- such cases must receive adequate and systematic publicity.

The Ombudsman assesses that these conditions are still current even after the passing of Law 4285/2014.

DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF RACIAL OR ETHNIC ORIGIN

Discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin

The different treatment which the Greek State has in store for third-country nationals who reside or stay in Greece is in several cases justified in view of the special political and social rights, related to Greek citizenship. This fact however, does not mean that citizens residing in Greece don't have any rights or have rights where a reduced sensitivity in their protection

is allowed. The general clause of exemption from the regulatory scope of Law 3304/2005 of discrimination on grounds of citizenship, in combination with the limitations set out in the law's scope, maintains a vagueness regarding the exact protection status. The Administration quite often addresses with hesitation the rights of citizens who do not have Greek citizenship or origin. The hesitation or awkward attitude shown by the Greek Administration in the granting of rights, where there is evidence of ethnic diversity, is not only towards foreign third-country nationals, but frequently also citizens of the European Union, as well as naturalised Greeks.

A case in point is that of a naturalised Greek, who was born in Greece, completed her studies in primary and secondary education, was admitted and completed her studies in Law School, and after acquiring Greek citizenship in July of 2012, applied for participation in the competition of the National School of Judges. Her application however was rejected on the grounds that five years had not yet elapsed since she acquired citizenship, as required by Article 36(3) of the Court Regulation and Court Officers' Status Code.

The Greek Ombudsman assessed that this provision introduces an unfair discrimination on grounds of ethnic origin, since it places citizens of non-Greek descent who acquired Greek citizenship in a disadvantageous position compared to naturalised repatriates or Greek citizens by birth, without any objective justification. The particularity of the judge's public office in principle allows the exclusion of foreigners from its exercise, but it cannot be considered a criterion for unfair discrimination between Greek citizens.

Moreover, any need for naturalised individuals to adapt to Greek legal and social reality is adequately met during the time of their studies in the school, and may be ascertained with the relevant examinations. In this context, the Ombudsman found that this provision has already been repealed since the entry into force of Law 3304/2005 (Article 26) and with its intervention towards the National School of Judges and the Ministry of Justice, asked that it not be implemented. The School, without making any substantial comments on the Ombudsman's positions, replied that it was obliged to implement this provision, since it has not been found contrary to legal order, and there is no other related decision which could serve as a case law guideline for the administration. Similarly, the General Secretary of the Ministry insisted on the implementation of the provision in question. The Ombudsman, considering that its argumentation is supported by recent decision No. 3317/2014 of the Council of State*, is preparing a conclusion on the case, which will be published (case 175919/2013).

A case of discrimination against an EU citizen on grounds of ethnic origin is also that of a Polish student, who was born and resides permanently in Greece. Her request for the granting of an undergraduate scholarship and a prize of the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY), was rejected, with the justification that she does not have Greek citizenship or origin, a necessary condition according to the Foundation's internal regulations. The Ombudsman asked the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY), to immediately restore legality, noting that the implementation of the principle of equal treatment and the exercise on equal terms of a right or enjoyment of a legitimate demand for the citizens of the EU who reside in Greece requires the prohibition of direct or indirect discrimination, with only exclusions those

specially provided for in the legislation. However, the exception of EU citizens from the beneficiaries of this student benefit does not arise from the relevant legislation, a fact that renders the implementation of this provision unlawful, and in any case repealed since the entry into force of Law 3304/2005. In response, the State Scholarships Foundation (IKY) announced the amendment of its Internal Regulations and the inclusion of both EU citizens and foreign students legally residing in the country among the beneficiaries of a scholarship (case 187042/2014).

A case of violation of the principle of equality was examined in relations to participation of repatriate and foreign students in Greek inter-club championships. According to applicable legal framework the participation of repatriates and third-country nationals in Greek inter-club championships and cup events is allowed, by exception, by a decision of the competent minister, following a recommendation by the relevant federation. The relevant provision however does not regulate the case of other sports events (panhellenic championships, world championships, etc.), while the few issued ministerial decisions introduce additional criteria, especially related to ethnic origin, without any apparent legal reason. At the same time, according to the interpretation to date of the framework by the administration, it is claimed that the participation of third-country nationals in sport events precludes the granting of privileges to Greek (co-)athletes who stand out in such events, especially as regards access to tertiary education. This exclusion on the one hand leads to the refusal by federations to include in the games third-country nationals, and on the other hand constitutes unfair treatment against Greeks, compared to the other athletes who stand out, in whose teams there are no foreign nationals. The Greek Ombudsman asked for the adjustment and clarification of the legislative framework governing the participation of repatriates and foreign nationals in the Greek inter-club championships and cup games (Article 33 (7) of Law 2725/1999), in order to ensure on an equal basis - and not leave to the discretion of the federations - the participation of foreign athletes, in particular of minors, in events that do not require a specific citizenship (case 188163/2014).

Discrimination on grounds of racial origin: The case of the Roma

The social exclusion conditions of the Roma and the need to address them have been repeatedly noted in the Ombudsman's reports. The current situation as regards issues of housing, education, access to the labour market and Public services, and the general living conditions of the Roma in our country, shows that there have been no serious steps towards progress. It is indicative that the need for special - focused state care for our fellow citizens is not easily viewed as an issue of restoration of equality and combating discrimination. In this context, any special measures that are taken or planned are frequently seen by certain of our fellow citizens, or even the administration, as favourable - preferential treatment of this racial group compared to other citizens. This - clearly wrong - perception, artificially undermines any attempt made to effectively address the problem.

The need to take measures for the Roma is an obligation for the restoration of a generalised disadvantage observed in the access of this population group to vital commodities (education, housing, health, work). This need is not due to their specific racial

characteristics, but the fact that they live under specific conditions of extreme social exclusion, which the competent authorities have in fact been perpetuating in the long-term through their omissions.

This extreme social fact, and not the racial characteristic, is therefore what imposes the taking of measures as a positive duty. The fact that the majority, or at least a significant percentage of the Roma, have been living under social exclusion conditions for a long time, allows the assessment of any biased inaction by the competent authorities or any discrimination in the planning of solutions due to their racial origin*.

The National Strategy for the Roma sets out four central pillars for addressing social exclusion: housing, education, work and health. However, despite this Strategy and its declared goals, in practice we see a serious failure in the implementation of actions in harmonisation with these goals.

Relocation and further exclusion

One would expect that any attempt of relocation would take into consideration and ensure, to the greatest degree possible, the combined achievement of the above four main goals of the National Strategy for the Roma (housing, education, work, health).

In practice however, most efforts for relocation appear to be connected with pursuing the removal of existing Roma settlements from areas inside the urban fabric, and their installation in remote locations, which barely ensure decent living conditions or any planning and connection of this settlement with easy access to education, healthcare and work.

This inconsistency not only raises issues of legality, but seems rather to cater to the actual or presumed local displeasure, instead of trying to fulfil the declared and binding - at least at political level - targets of the National Strategy.

An indicative case is the relocation of the Roma from the Nomismatokoepio area, in Chalandri (Annual Report 2013, pg. 106), where the failure of the attempt to relocate the Roma in an initially available area close to the existing settlement and within the boundaries of the Municipality of Chalandri led to the rushed decision to relocate the settlement to Pateras Mount, of the Municipality of Megara, without the slightest connection with the area where these Roma had developed their livelihood or had ensured access to key commodities and services. The Mayor of Chalandri in a report noted the unsuitability of the location at Pateras Mount, and his objections regarding the planned relocation (case 193004/2014). In any case, crucial in this case will also be the decision of the Council of State, since a request has been submitted for cancellation of the decision of the General Secretary of the Decentralised Administration, by the Municipality of Megara, which was heard in October of 2014. The Ombudsman will return with an intervention on the subject after reviewing the new data, including the court's decision.

A case of a rushed relocation to a remote area is the installation of the Roma settlement of the Lokroi Municipality, in Foufla, Atalanti, again under conditions of exclusion and without

ensuring access of the children to education, or to other fundamental provisions or services. With an intervention, the Ombudsman asked the competent services to provide information, regarding the legality of the process followed, and carried out an on-site inspection of the settlement. The Public Health and Social Welfare Directorate of Regional Fthiotida of the Central Greece Region and the Regional Fire Administration of Central Greece confirmed the Ombudsman's finding regarding the serious health problem and the increased risk of fire in the shacks that are made of flammable materials. The review of the issue by the competent committee is pending, whereas to this date the municipality has not substantially complied with the recommendations of the Ombudsman and the services mentioned above (case 125601/2010).

Another case of rushed relocation without compliance with the legal requirements was in the area of Kamilovrysi of the Municipality of Lamia. Relocation to this area restores the issue of compliance with the legal requirements as well as the issue of suitability and safety of the area. It is also characteristic that due to the distance of the settlement from Lamia or the closest urban center, the access to services is particularly difficult, while no child attends school. We note that the children, and most of the Roma adults of the area, live in unheard - for Greece - conditions of poverty and misery. The Ombudsman is seeking for solutions in cooperation with the Mayor of Lamia, to immediately address the problem and relocate the population in a suitable and safe space (case 140043/2011). Similar issues are raised by other relevant reports in the areas of Chalandri, Attica (case 193004/2014), Sofades, Karditsa (case 140043/2011), Kranidi, Argolida (cases 20489/2008 and 129730/2010), Kolokyntou, Kastoria (case 171315/2013), as well as the area of Birmipita, Kalamata, where the Ombudsman has addressed a recommendation to the Municipality of Kalamata and a call to the General Secretary of Decentralised Administration of Peloponnese and the Ionian Islands to not proceed, under the current circumstances, with the relocation planned by the Municipality of Kalamata from Agia Triada to the Birmipita area, in order to avoid the same conclusion as the previous failed relocation attempt in 2006 (case 19755/2005).

We find a unique - and encouraging - positive development in a relocation issue in the settlement of Drosero, Xanthi, where the settlement was included in the urban plan, and the process for the designation of communal spaces has started. The Ombudsman is following the developments and intends to promote this case as an example of good practices, after the completion of the necessary actions (cases 131746/2010 and 158204/2012).

Access to goods and services

The conditions under which disadvantaged groups of the population live must be taken into consideration during the planning and implementation of the procedures aiming at the modernisation of the operation of the administration, and the improvement of the provided services. The Ombudsman reviewed a report (case 165828/2013) of a Roma citizen regarding his inability to submit an electronic application for an administrative case, due to illiteracy, inability to use a computer and financial inability to turn to a private accountant. The investigation of the report concluded that there is provision for the support of anyone

who is unable to submit a relevant application, since they can address the heads of each service (e.g. Tax Office, EOPYY, IKA).

The Ombudsman estimates however that it is necessary to set up a support structure, possibly in cooperation with the social services of the municipalities, capable of effectively serving a significant number of citizens who face similar inability (seniors, people with disabilities, illiterate persons, Roma).

In the framework of the review of a relatively newer report, the Ombudsman intends to address the competent services again, in order for this problem to be addressed more effectively (case 195010/2014).

Access to employment

Roma candidates in public calls of the Greek Manpower Employment Organisation (OAED) for General Duties jobs, in the context of fostering employment through community service programmes in public bodies, were included among those eligible for the Municipality of Patras and for an OAED nursery school, but they were eventually excluded because they have not completed compulsory education. While investigating their complaints, the Ombudsman addressed the Ministry of Administrative Reform and OAED, initially invoking Article 5(2) of law 2527/1997, according to which the requirement for compulsory education graduates may be removed if it concerns "manual labourers ... and cleaning staff". The Ombudsman further demanded that the principle of equal treatment in employment is taken into consideration, and in particular Article 3 of Law 3304/2005, according to which indirect discrimination exists when a neutral, at first glance, provision, criterion or practice may place individuals of a specific racial or ethnic origin in a disadvantageous position compared to others.

Since, as indisputable research has proven, an exceptionally high percentage of the Roma population are characterised by high school drop-out rates and illiteracy, their exclusion from jobs that do not require specialised qualifications could be considered as introducing an indirect discrimination.

Besides, the Framework of the National Strategy for the Integration of the Roma urges towards "the guidance of the Roma in seeking and finding desirable work in the salaried employment field, as an alternative to informal or formal entrepreneurship", because this "serves as simultaneous familiarisation with social institutions in general".

In reply to the Ombudsman, the ministry claimed that any positive discrimination in favour of the Roma "may serve as a base for similar claims also by other sensitive social groups". However, the Ombudsman insists that in future community service programmes, both the prohibition of indirect discrimination, based on Law 3304/2005, and the actual need for the integration of individuals with a low educational level, must be taken into consideration (cases 179018, 179244, 179343/2013).

Proportionality and administrative treatment: The case of urban planning fines

This year the Ombudsman continued its mediation in the case of hundreds of urban planning fines imposed on illegal Roma residences in the Old Roma Settlement in Sofades, Karditsa (Annual Report 2012, pg. 114-115 and Annual Report 2013, pg. 106-107). The processing of the Roma owners' objections against the fines has not yet been completed by the competent Urban Planning and Objections Council: 95 objections have been examined and all have been rejected, with the exception of one, while the examination of 93 other objections is pending. In investigating the possibility of violation of the principle of equal treatment, the Sofades Police Station and the Municipality of Sofades have been asked to send supplementary information. The police department has responded, but the municipality has not so far. The Ombudsman brought back to the General Secretariat of Urban Planning and Urban Environment the proposal for the resolution, potentially with a legislative regulation, of the disproportionate burden with fines for the illegal shacks and huts made of cheap materials, which are used as residences. The General Secretary replied that the ministry has examined the issue and is considering the possibility of a legislative regulation (case 143770/2011).

Nuisances and disturbance of social peace

Nuisances by the Roma in settlements (noise pollution, burning of materials, etc.) have been investigated by the Ombudsman in the past, within the context of the investigation of a significant number of reports. These activities frequently cause disputes and tension and are impediments in the keeping of social cohesion and peace. An added impediment is the unwillingness of the competent authorities or their inadequate, according to the reports, interventions. A characteristic example of the investigation of such reports is the reported systematic nuisance to the neighbours caused by the excessively loud music played by individual members of the Roma community, in a settlement in Koropi. The Ombudsman made an on-site inspection and had a meeting with the municipal authority and the police department seeking the direct cooperation of the co-competent services in order to address the problem. Further to this intervention, the competent services of the Decentralised Administration and the Region took action. At this stage, a repetition of the inspection is expected, in cooperation with the municipality, in order to conduct it at a time when it will be possible to ascertain the nuisance. A similar intervention has been requested by the police, which, even though it has a range of actions available to address problems, has not managed to effectively address this problem (cases 170073/2013, 183904/2014).

Similar problems of negligent exercise of the duties of the competent services are reported also in a report submitted by residents of a region of Attica. The case pertains to a house owned by a Roma family, who are showing difficulties in their socialisation. Its members allegedly cause episodes of disturbance and nuisances under the influence of substances, and possibly have delinquent behaviour. The Ombudsman has contacted the competent police authorities, and the municipality's social service, presenting the problem and asking

for an intervention, as well the collaboration between them for addressing it (case 187274/2014). A related problem of unwillingness of the competent authorities is reported also by a resident of the Municipality of Spata, who complains about the illegal occupation of a plot close to the Athens International Airport by Roma, which the state has committed for reasons of flight safety, and regarding the failure of the services to reply to his written applications. At the same time, the illegal burning of cables and pollution of the area is reported, as well as the possible connection of the burning activities with the recent fire in the area, which burnt olive trees and cultivations (case 191397/2014).

The Roma and education

Education holds a critical role in eliminating the social exclusion of the Roma. As noted above, assuring easy access to education does not appear to be given the due importance when planning solutions for the relocation of Roma settlements, and neither does it appear to be a strategic goal.

An example is a case related to the access and school attendance conditions of the children living the Agia Sofia settlement of the Delta Municipality of Thessaloniki. During its investigation, we made visits to the settlement's kindergarten and corresponded with the competent education and self-government services. As regards the operation of the kindergarten, the Ombudsman recommended:

- improvement of the building infrastructures (addition of classroom and bathroom, since they are not sufficient for the number of children attending kindergarten)
- cleaning of the space around the school, improvement of fencing and school yard door to deter access of third parties inside the school yard and organisation of the school yard with appropriate toys
- appointment of additional teachers, since these are students with increased educational needs.

As regards the children that live in the settlement and are enrolled in primary schools outside the settlement, it appears that despite the preparation of both the students and their families for their enrolment in school and their positive response, they did not attend for a large portion of school year 2013-2014, since the problem of their transport to the schools had not been resolved. The Greek Ombudsman, after visiting the settlement in January 2014, addressed the competent services and ministries in order to find a solution for the attendance of the students for the remainder of the school year. Finally, students were transferred to other schools, where transportation had been ensured. Unfortunately, with the start of the new school year of 2014-2015, the problem recurred, since it does not concern only the students of the settlement, but also a large number of students who are entitled to transportation. The Ombudsman drew up a conclusion* which, inter alia, refers to its proposals regarding the transportation of the Roma students. In particular, the Ombudsman recommends that they are transported using a public services contract, with an

attendant, and special incentives for the transporters of children who live in settlements/camps (cases 165718, 175856/2013).

DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF DISABILITY

The reports on discriminatory treatment due to disability, which the Ombudsman was called upon to investigate in 2014, were approximately the same number as those of past years, with the more frequent objective being the definition of the right of disabled workers for measures of reasonable accommodation on the one hand and the degree of its satisfaction on the other. The objective appears to still be the familiarisation of the administration's various bodies with the provisions on the prohibition of discrimination on grounds of disability, as well as the general legislative framework that guarantees the right of persons with disabilities for equal treatment and for respect of their diversity and which has been significantly enriched with Greece's ratification, with Law 4074/2012, of the UN Convention for the rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Reasonable accommodation and disability

As regards the definition of disability, which is always a critical issue, in the context of Law 3304/2005, the view was expressed once again that it does not coincide with disease per se. Its main feature is the disadvantage that is due in particular to a physical, mental or psychological condition, which in combination with various restrictions may obstruct the full and effective participation of the specific person in the working life on an equal basis with other workers.

Therefore, the reasonable accommodation measures, which aim at addressing the needs of persons with disability, are a consequence and not a component of disability.

With this reasoning, the Ombudsman found without grounds the invocation of a health problem that does not cause such a disadvantage that obstructs the complete and effective participation in the professional life on an equal basis with others, as a reason for the transfer of an employee in a public service to a position closer to her place of residence (case 177817/2013), with reference to the decision of 14.4.2013 of the Court of the European Union (Joined cases C 335/11 and C 337/11 Jette Ring & Lone Skouboe Werge, paragraphs 41, 46 and 47).

From another aspect, because the key conceptual elements of disability include long-term illness, the Ombudsman (see Annual Report 2012, pg. 105-111), addresses as an issue that falls under its competence, as the body promoting the principle of equal treatment, the possibility of granting double the normal sick leave to an employee of a Legal Entity governed by Public Law who is suffering from a refractory disease (Article 54, paragraph 3 of the Employee's Code and MD Y1/Γ.Π./οικ16884), considering that reasonable accommodation includes the facilitations provided by law to the benefit of employees with disability in the Public Sector (case 170398/2013).

The Ombudsman considers that the transfer of an employee with serious mobility disability from a branch close to her home, to a branch where she needs to use two means of public transport, puts her in a disadvantaged position compared to the other employees who otherwise share the same main characteristics.

It is therefore equivalent to indirect discrimination in the sense of Article 7(1b) of Law 3304/2005 and the corresponding violation of equal treatment, unless on the one hand it is objectively justified by a legitimate aim and is a useful and necessary way to achieve it and on the other hand the employer has taken all the appropriate and indicated reasonable accommodation measures that do not entail disproportionate cost or which are offset by measures taken in the framework of the policy for persons with disabilities, as stipulated by Article 10 of this law and Article 21(6) of the Constitution (see also Annual Report 2006, pg. 235-236). With this rationale and according to the allocation of the burden of proof of Article 14, the Ombudsman asked the involved service to specify the needs that rendered necessary this transfer, to state whether they had first investigated the possibility of transferring an employee without disability, and if the transfer was not made, would the cost be disproportionate in relation to the resources and the general economic capability of the service (see also Annual Report 2006, pg. 235-236). The Ombudsman is waiting for replies to these questions (case 189977/2014).

Correspondingly, in the framework of examining a report by an employee of Secondary Education level, a nurse aid, requesting her transfer to a hospital department with less difficult working conditions, because she needs to avoid long periods of standing and lifting weights due to her chronic condition (case 191907/2014), the Greek Ombudsman is focusing its investigation on those factors that determine the possibility for satisfaction of the request in this case, the basic one being the degree to which the positions provided for this specialisation in the relevant organisational chart are met (see par. 20 and 21 of the Preamble of Directive 2000/78).

Based on the open nature of the reasonable accommodation measures which the employer must take so that they meet the needs of each case, the Ombudsman was called to mediate for the installation of air-conditioning systems in classrooms, in order to facilitate the work of a secondary school teacher suffering from multiple sclerosis, a disease which relapses in conditions of high temperature. Accepting that such a measure is appropriate and suitable, the Ombudsman is focusing its investigation on how the cost of a potential adoption would be covered and is waiting for the administration's position (case 190405/2014).

Accessibility to public space

Ensuring accessibility to public space is an issue of major importance in assuring the rights of persons with disability. The Ombudsman has reviewed a significant number of related reports (indicative cases 181848, 185721, 192764/2014), which pertain to the absence of infrastructures or difficulty in the use of existing infrastructures, suitable for ensuring unobstructed access to persons with disabilities. There was a positive outcome in a case related to the lack of access for persons with disability to the metro station of Agia Marina,

because the sidewalk had been taken over by a canteen and other installations. Following the Ombudsman's intervention with the Municipality of Chaidari, all the necessary actions were taken to restore the area's accessibility (case 180874/2014).

Accessibility to social benefits and commodities

The Ombudsman was also asked whether the non-recognition in the case of an employee under a private law employment relationship, who retired due to disability, of the right to a lump-sum compensation that is recognised in Article 5 of Law 435/1976 for those who retire due to age when they reach the relevant age limit, constitutes discrimination. The Greek Ombudsman has already claimed that this provision constitutes indirect discrimination, because it appears to be neutral but it puts persons with disability in a disadvantageous position in the cases where the state of their health does allow them to remain at their job until they establish the right to retirement, and none of the conditions of such a discrimination apply, as provided for in Article 7 (1b)(2) of Law 3304/2005 (Annual Report 2011, pg. 109-110). This indirect discrimination however does not apply as long as retirement due to disability has a limited duration, because such a case is not comparable to retirement due to age, which is permanent (case 178069/2013).

There are also serious problems in the use of the possibility of the granting of a social household tariff to persons with disabilities. Subjection to the social household tariff is late due to the verification procedure of their capacity to such a degree, that it results in the right being compromised. Specifically, when persons with disabilities submit applications for inclusion in the social household tariff, the General Secretariat of IT Systems confirms whether the required income/asset criterion is met, and if, in parallel, the disability capacity still applies. The service refers exclusively to the cleared tax statement of the previous fiscal year and searches for the indication of Person with Disabilities. Therefore, vulnerable customers, who meet the income criteria, cannot use the related benefit immediately once they are recognised by the Disability Certification Centers as disabled, and they are therefore forced to wait for next year's tax statement in order to declare the certified disability. That is, the certification of the disability capacity is joined to the certification procedure of the income criterion through the cleared tax statement.

Similar problems are seen when investigating complaints regarding children with disability, which are related to social welfare benefits, refund of treatment costs by the insurance organisation, participation in sport activities or camps, administration of medication, etc. (cases 174194, 177874, 179092/2013, 181523, 184378/2014).

Discrimination on grounds of disability in tertiary education and training

The Ombudsman mediated for the transfer to a University of a person suffering from a serious condition (case 186218/2014). The interested student was accepted for academic

year 2013-2014 in the Biology Department of the University of Patras, under the special category of persons suffering from serious conditions (Article 35 of Law 3794/2009). She then requested her transfer to the corresponding department of the University of Athens. The department however refused to satisfy the request, with the justification that according to Ministerial Decision Φ151/123835/B6/2013, the acceptance of individuals falling under this condition category in the Biology Department is excluded. Moreover, there was concern regarding the fact that the department does not have the necessary infrastructure to support students with this condition. However, especially in the case of transfer, there is no limitation regarding excluded conditions (Article 34 (7), Law 4186/2013 and Ministerial Decision Φ1/21140/B3/2014), while departments are given the discretion to accept students even when suffering from an excluded condition (Article 3 (4) of Ministerial Decision Φ151/105965/B6/2011). It was further noted that the lack of a single position by similar departments towards the same condition is problematic. The Greek Ombudsman claimed that the refusal to satisfy the interested party's request is contrary to the institutional framework for the protection of people with disabilities (International Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Law 3699/2008, etc.). It therefore called the University of Athens to take special measures for reasonable accommodation in order to facilitate the interested party's attendance, by assisting her in her effort with any suitable means. Finally, the department accepted the request and enrolled the interested student*. We note that as of academic year 2014-2015, any limitations to admittance in tertiary education of persons suffering of specific conditions are repealed (Article 7, Law 4283/2014).

A striking example of the lack of any familiarisation with the legislative framework that guarantees the equal treatment of persons with disabilities, with respect to their diversity, was the posting on the OAED website, of an invitation for the expression of interest for the admittance of trainees to the Vocational Training School of persons with disability for academic year 2014-2015, which expressly excluded persons with a disability caused by mental illness. Following a report by the Greek Confederation of People with Disabilities (case 193395/2014) the Ombudsman intervened directly, noting that the call, beyond the discriminatory treatment due to disability prohibited by law 3304/2005, also constituted a violation of provisions of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, in particular Articles 12 (equal recognition before the law) and 27, based on which Greece, as a contracting party, must ensure and promote the right to employment and take suitable measures in order for Persons with Disabilities to have effective access to job search services, vocational and continuing education.

Special educational needs of children with disability

The facilitation of the rights of children with disability is imposed in particular by the International Convention on the Rights of the Child and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The obligation emerging from the above conventions consists on the one hand in ensuring through legislation the established rights for all children, and on the other, their true implementation for all children, without any discrimination. In this context, the state must establish and implement special measures for addressing the special

circumstances, in this case of disability, in order to realise the rights of children with disability on an equal basis as their peers and to eliminate or minimise the circumstances that create the discrimination. The state's omission to do so, may constitute discrimination that is subject to the Ombudsman's control.

The Ombudsman's findings, regarding the chronic problems in the education of children with disability and the discrimination they suffer with regard to the implementation of their rights, remain current. The special measures in education, established by law, such as personalised parallel support and the inclusion class, for equal access and the special educational support of children in the general school are not implemented for all children, especially in secondary education, or in all regions, and in particular the islands*. In one case in fact, in a region of Greece, the parallel support was taken away from a student in the middle of the school year in order to provide it to a different school, without stating a legal reason.

The shortage of permanent and specialised staff, the standard delay in the start of the school year in special schools and the coverage of permanent needs in special education with substitute teachers, who are recruited late, in the midst of the school year, continue to be main features of the education provided to students with disabilities, compared to their peers without disability in general schools.

As emerges from documents, the Ministry of Education made no appropriations to special education during 2013-2014 from the part of its budget related to education. The recruitment of 4008 substitute teachers for special education was covered in its entirety and exclusively by NSRF programmes, and the provisions of the law were amended to this end (Law 3699/2008). This choice reveals the intention of those responsible for covering the needs in special education, however, on the one hand it does not ensure the future programming for the education of children with disabilities and/or special education needs, and on the other hand, it is indicative of a perception on special education, as something distinct from general education, which has been set outside the regular public budget.

DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF AGE

The establishment of a maximum age limit in calls of public sector bodies is a systematic problem, to the extent that the age limits are set in an arbitrary and abusive manner, without the special justification stipulated by the provisions of Law 3304/2005. In the majority of these cases, the specified age limits are linked to specific characteristics, such as health, physical condition and endurance, availability or adaptability, and end up determining in an absolute manner the ability or not of the candidates to fulfil the duties of the jobs they wish to fill, ignoring personal characteristics and skills. In 2014, for the first time, reports were submitted to the Ombudsman, on the subject of determining a maximum age limit, in public servant mobility procedures.

The Ministry of Employment brought to the Ombudsman's attention an announcement - call of the Hellenic Chamber of Shipping for the transfer of administrative employees, which set

40 as a maximum age limit, as a required additional qualification for the candidates to participate in the selection process. The Ombudsman addressed the Chamber, noting the prohibition of discriminatory treatment against individuals on grounds of age in employment and work, including the terms for official and professional advancement. The Ombudsman stressed that any discriminatory treatment is justified only when specific and strict conditions are met, and only if the establishment of a maximum age limit is accompanied by special justification. Moreover, it is noted that the establishment of an age limit for the transfer of employees cannot be legally justified only by invoking the needs of a service or the vaguely estimated benefit on the performance and adaptability of the employees to be transferred. In fact, taking into consideration the general extension of the retirement age of employees in the public and broader public sector, as well as the fact that the employees being transferred have the capacity of public servant and add the time of their service to the time for their retirement, invoking a requirement of a lapse of fifteen years for their retirement cannot be considered an adequate reason for justifying a different treatment due to age. In response, the Chamber recalled the announcement at issue for the transfer of employees and stopped the relevant procedure*.

Similar was the case of the rejection of an application for the transfer of an employee of the Civil Aviation Authority to a higher category sector. The competent council rejected the transfer request with the reasoning that a transfer constitutes a quasi appointment, and there must be no impediment for appointment with respect to the person being transferred, including that of age. In this case, especially for access to the sector where the employee asked to be transferred, there was a maximum age limit (35 years), according to a ministerial decision. The Ombudsman noted that the ministerial decision did not contain the special justification required by law, substantiating that this measure serves a legitimate aim, is reasonable and necessary, and is an essential and definitive professional condition for the performance of the work. In addition, the Ombudsman stressed that an age limit, when required for the above reasons, by definition pertains to the entry of a newly appointed employee at the introductory level, and not to the case of change of the category to which the employee belongs, provided that this change is made without interrupting the employment relationship with all its consequences (prior service, seniority, benefits). In fact, the Ombudsman underlined that, taking into consideration the range of the provisions that aim at life-long learning and continuous training and education of employees in the public sector, encouraging employees to upgrade their formal qualifications through their career would be inconsistent, when the relevant service sets practical impediments as regards the age limit to the request of an employee for recognition of these qualifications (case 193535/2014).

In the event of exclusion from the selection procedure for the appointment of temporary teaching staff under a private law fixed term employment relationship and hourly wages to an academy of the mercantile marine, with the justification that the age limit of the call was exceeded (64 years), the Ombudsman noted that this limitation is not based on law, and it requested of the service - if it estimates that there is need to establish age limits in the appointment of hourly-paid teaching staff - that it include a special and specific justification on the reasons that render necessary this age limit. In a next call, the body extended the age limit to 67 years (case 179078/2013).

Reports were filed with the Ombudsman for the determination of a maximum age limit (30 years), in a call of the National Bank of Greece, for the recruitment of University and Technological Education graduates (cases 189569, 189835, 192282/2014). According to Article 3 (1) of Law 3094/2003, banks do not fall under the Ombudsman's competence, which means that it could not directly intervene in this case. However, due to its special mandate as the body promoting the principle of equal treatment, the Ombudsman asked the Hellenic Labour Inspectorate (SEPE) to carry out the relevant inspection, but the Inspectorate did not respond. On the contrary, the competent Directorate of the Ministry of Employment sent a letter to SEPE commenting on the reply of the National Bank, and assessing as non-satisfactory the claims made on the legal establishment of the age limit at issue. In a similar case, where the Ombudsman did not have the competence for a direct intervention, since the report raised the issue of a maximum age limit (35 years) in a notice by a private Life-long Learning Centre for the recruitment of an employee in a secretarial job, the Ombudsman contacted the General Secretariat of Life-long Learning, which has the general supervision of public and private bodies of non-formal education. It noted that these bodies must operate with respect towards the national and community provisions, including those prohibiting discrimination on grounds of age in access to employment, and, provided that their regulations, according to law, are drawn up by the General Secretariat for Life-long Learning, the provisions on the prohibition of discrimination during recruitment should definitely be taken into consideration. The General Secretariat of Life-long Learning informed the Ombudsman that no regulation has yet been issued for private Life-long Learning Centres, without expressing an opinion on the subject (case 181739/2014).

In another case, an age limit (24 years) was set in the enrolment of students in a Vocational School of the Sivitanidios School, the only exception being enrolment in the Maritime Professions Orientation Team, Captains and Engineers Sector. The maximum age limit was set with a ministerial decision of the Deputy Minister of Education and Religion, which however, due to the reactions of candidate students and the Greek Federation of Secondary Education State School Teachers (OLME), was never sent to be published in the Government Gazette. The ministry, as a justification for the establishment of the age limit, claimed that its intention was to avoid the interaction between minor and adult students. Finally, at the initiative of the Ministry of Education, this ministerial decision was revoked (case 192834/2014).

Having received a report on the subject of the establishment of a maximum age limit for recruiting candidates of University Education level Electrical Engineers (40 years) and Secondary Education level Electrical Network Technicians (35 years), in notice No. 3K/2014 of the Supreme Council for Civil Personnel Selection, for positions in the Hellenic Electricity Distribution Network Operator S.A. (DEDDIE), the Ombudsman brought to the attention of the Minister of Administrative Reform the systematic practice of public sector bodies to set age limits in personnel recruitment or mobility procedures, without the required special justification. Finally, it noted that any continuation of this practice could expose the country as violating European law, in the event that the competent European bodies were informed and activated their control function. The Greek Ombudsman noted that it is necessary to coordinate the actions of all involved public bodies, in order to give specific directions and

harmonise the practice followed with the requirements of the Community Directive and Law 3304/2005 (case 192355/2014).

DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF RELIGIOUS OR OTHER BELIEFS

As noted in the past (Annual Report 2013, pg. 110), indirect discrimination between religious communities or between persons based on their religion, within or outside the regulatory scope of Law 3304/2005, are frequently intertwined with the issue of the legal form of religious communities. The passing of Law 4301/2014, therefore, was decisive for the progress of these issues, since it greatly modernised the legal form of religious communities, organised the administrative procedure for their recognition and resolved a series of problems that had been pending for decades.

We note however that this reform shows signs of lack of courage, especially in relation to the different treatment of religious communities, since certain were recognised directly by the law (beyond those that had always been Legal Entities governed by Public Law), while others must wait for the completion of the relevant administrative procedure. It also shows signs of an outdated statism, since it encumbers the recognition procedure with requirements for a disproportionately high number of followers, per geographical area in fact, with checks of persons presented as clergy, with intervention in the internal organisation of the new legal entities, and with conditions for the permit to build temples "of other faiths", which exceed by far what applies for other, non religious, activities. A first sample of the legislator's view was circular No. 69230/A3/6.5.2014 by the Ministry of Education, which raises unjustified bureaucratic obstacles in the licensing of temples (cases 186590, 189581/2014).

From the reports that raise an issue of discriminatory treatment, it is worth mentioning the case of the Free Evangelical Church of Thessaloniki, which was encumbered with a property tax for part of its worship premises, in violation of Article 29, of Law 3842/2010. Following an intervention by the Ombudsman, the relevant Tax Office recognised that it was a single property, and proceeded with the legal tax exemption (case 181961/2014). There are sporadic reports of arrests of Jehovah's Witnesses by regional officers of the Hellenic Police, who persist in treating any public declaration of religious beliefs as proselytism (cases 182260, 194533/2014). There are also cases of misinterpretation of the legal status of municipal cemeteries, whose administrations frequently believe, contrary to the law, that they are bound by circulars or decisions of church authorities (See Annual Report 2006, pg. 88-89), such as in the case of a village in Florina, where the non-orthodox are buried in a separate isolated space (case 191382/2014).

The Ombudsman mediated in promoting the spatial planning and approval of Cremation Centers, in municipalities that have expressed such interest, in order to implement the relevant applicable laws and protect the right of self-determination of those individuals who prefer cremation instead of burial. The Ministry of Environment informed the Ombudsman that for the approval of the spacial planning of the Cremation Centers at the cemeteries of Schisto, Attica, and Pylaia-Chortiatis, Thessaloniki, the completion of the files by the relevant

inter-municipal associations with the necessary supporting documents, and in particular the environmental licensing, was pending. After that however, with Law 4277/2014, the relevant legal framework was reformed once again, allowing the spatial planning and operation of Cremation Centres by 1st degree Local Government Organisations or municipal Legal Entities governed by Public Law, on land they own, even outside of cemeteries, inside or outside the city plan, following a relevant license, while a similar procedure was established for the installation and operation of bone cremation units inside municipal cemeteries. A pioneer in this issue, the Municipality of Thessaloniki informed the Greek Ombudsman that they have already approved an open tender procedure for the supporting studies, whereas pursuant to Law 4277/2014 they are examining alternative spatial planning solutions (case 163820/2013).

It is finally noted that there are frequent complaints that are characterised by religious intolerance since they turn against, sometimes with incredibly degrading characterisations, the existence and legal operation of "heterodox" religious communities, on the basis of alleged security or sound pollution risks (indicative cases 164132/2013, 182728/2014).

DISCRIMINATION ON GROUNDS OF SEXUAL ORIENTATION

The creation of a cooperation network with LGBT organisations (see Annual Report 2013, pg. 111), contributed to the improvement of the contact between the Ombudsman and anyone experiencing discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity, the mutual exchange of information regarding related developments on national and European level and providing updates regarding the suitable access of involved bodies and persons to the competent authorities.

With the contribution of the organisations participating in the network, the Greek Ombudsman included in the "Diversity Guide for Public Servants"*, among other things, the following key problems which the LGBT community faces in its transactions with the administration, in employment and work, education and the recognition and exercise of rights:

- lack of respect of personality and the right of self-determination. Ironic, malicious or even defamatory, abusive comments, which may result in personal humiliation
- degrading treatment by superiors or colleagues (harassment). For this reason these persons usually avoid revealing their sexual orientation in the workplace. Moreover, sexual orientation may constitute a reason of exclusion from access to employment or professional advancement
- insufficient information and lack of awareness of teachers and students on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, as well the addressing of homophobic and transphobic bullying in schools
- inadequate protection of the family life of same-sex couples, since they do not have the same rights recognised as opposite-sex couples (civil partnership agreement, property or

hereditary rights, tax treatment, insurance benefits, retirement, adoption, etc.). Also, same-sex parent families (a same-sex parent family is a family consisting of two parents of the same sex) face major problems, mainly regarding the recognition of parental rights for the parent who does not have a legal (biological or adoptive) relationship with the child (registry entries, participation in school activities, access to healthcare, etc.).

Also, the Greek Ombudsman has requested* that Greece immediately comply with the decision of the European Court of Human Rights "Vallianatos and Others v. Greece", according to which the exclusion of same-sex couples from the scope of Law 3719/2008 and the possibility of concluding a civil partnership agreement constitutes violation of Article 8 (right to respect for private and family life) in combination with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights.

The reports on issues of discrimination due to sexual orientation investigated during the current year pertain to the offensive or abusive behaviour of police officers and the investigation of a complaint for dismissal due to sexual orientation. The offensive and violent behaviour of police officers was reported by a same-sex couple, who, according to the complaint, were the recipients of unprovoked verbal and physical abuse by a group of police officers, as they were walking in a central location of Athens. The Ombudsman asked the General Police Directorate of Attica and the Hellenic Police Headquarters to thoroughly investigate the reported incident.

The Greek Ombudsman further asked the Hellenic Police to take initiatives to inform and raise the awareness of police officers regarding issues of protection of the rights of the LGBT community, in order to gradually eliminate negative stereotypes and prejudices against these individuals and to ensure the protection of their personality, regardless of their sexual orientation or social gender identity.

The Police Personnel and Internal Operations Division of the Hellenic Police Headquarters informed the Ombudsman that a preliminary investigation has been ordered, with possibility of converting it into a Sworn Administrative Inquiry. Moreover, the Ombudsman's recommendation for training police officers on the rights of LGBT individuals has been forwarded to the Hellenic Police Headquarters Training Division, so that it can take further action (case 190702/2014).

A similar case of abusive exercise of power by the police was reported to the Ombudsman by the owner of a bar, who claimed that due to the homosexual-friendly character of her establishment, the police conducts more frequent checks of her business compared to neighbouring establishments. The police department in question, in its reply to the Greek Ombudsman, claimed that the checks of this establishment are no different than those of other businesses of the area. The Ombudsman returned asking for additional information, as well as clarifications regarding the imposed fine for violation of noise limits, since no measurements in decibels were reported (case 185823/2014).

The Greek Ombudsman also received a complaint for a dismissal due to sexual orientation from an employee who appealed to SEPE for violations of the labour legislation by her employer (non-payment of accrued remuneration, etc.), as well as her dismissal which she attributed to "lesbophobic behaviour" of the employer, after it became known that she was in a romantic relationship with another employee of the business. SEPE asked for the Ombudsman's assistance, in particular as regards the provision on reversal of the burden of proof, in cases where there are relevant indications, and noted the need for further information, so that the actual facts can be established, whereby direct or indirect discrimination can be concluded. The labour inspector gave the employer and the complainants a one-month deadline for submittal of the relevant memos. However, the side of the complainants did not respond to the above obligation and there was no information in order to continue the examination of their complaint (case 185460/2014).

ACTIONS TO PROMOTE THE PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL TREATMENT

Progress Programme

During 2014 the Greek Ombudsman implemented a range of actions included in the EU Progress Programme which funds actions of communication for tackling discrimination. In more detail, some of the programme's actions are:

- Working meeting on the subject of: «Framework and practices for the inclusion of the Roma»* (28.3.2014). Members of the European Commission, the coordination bodies of the National Strategy for the Roma, the European Roma Rights Centre and other European and Greek bodies, representatives of local government, members of academia, social workers and representatives of Roma communities discussed the European and Greek institutional framework, the factors and conditions for the successful inclusion of the Roma and exchanged experience from the different practices that are followed.
- Issue of a diversity guide for public servants*, aimed at filling any gaps in the information of officers of the public sector as regards the special elements of the identity of the various categories of citizens they are called upon to serve. The contribution of organisations of the newly-established cooperation network of the Ombudsman with civil society organisations working on issues of discrimination was crucial*.
- On-site inspections in various regions (Kalamata, Thessaloniki, Karditsa, Lefkada) where significant problems have been identified due to the existence of socially excluded Roma populations. The actions included meetings with competent members of local administration and other services, collection of material for handling reports, recording data regarding their number, their housing situation, employment and other factors - causes of their social exclusion. Part of the material was posted on the Ombudsman's interactive webpage for the Roma*, whereas a big part is being processed for future posting.
- Workshop in Patras, where with the cooperation of the municipality and local bodies, a one-day event was organised, as a pilot, titled "Day of rights", which was widely publicized by the local and country-wide press.

Training and cooperation with Greek and international bodies

In 2014, building on its knowledge and experience, the Greek Ombudsman participated in a series of training seminars, aimed at informing and raising awareness on anti-discrimination issues. At the same time, the intensive cooperation and exchange of know-how between the Ombudsman and other bodies that are active within Greece and abroad continued on issues of implementation and promotion of the principle of equal treatment. Representatives from the Ombudsman participated as trainers in numerous training seminars. For example, we note the ongoing cooperation of the Ombudsman with the Hellenic Police Continuing Education School, as well as the National School of Public Administration, where the Ombudsman provides training on the subjects of rights and equal treatment.

The Greek Ombudsman also participated with members and informational material in the Anti-racist Festival of Athens, organised on 4-6.7.2014 at the University Campus of Ilisia, spreading the message of a shared effort with citizens and their organisations for tackling any type of discrimination.

At the level of cooperation and exchange of know-how, some of the conferences, workshops and events of European and international institutions, agencies and networks we participated in are:

- The Ombudsman participated in the seminar organised by the European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet), with a speech on the experience of the Greek Ombudsman in tackling discrimination on grounds of nationality, in the framework of the freedom of movement of workers in the European Union (Brussels 19.2.2014).
- The Deputy Ombudsman Vasilis Karydis presented the special report on racist violence at a conference of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), titled "The role of national Specialised Bodies in supporting local authorities in the fight against racism and intolerance" (Strasbourg, 22-23.5.2014).
- The Deputy Ombudsman Vasilis Karydis and scientific experts participated in the conference of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) for addressing racist speech "How can EU Member States combat hate crime effectively? Encouraging reporting & improving recording" (Thessaloniki, 28-29.4.2014).
- Scientific experts participated in the fourth meeting of national points of contact for the Roma that was organised by the European Commission (Brussels, 13-14.2.2014), in the "ROMACT" conference organised jointly by the European Commission and the Council of Europe (Brussels, 2-3.3.2014), in a meeting of the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) for the preparation of the report "Minorities & Discrimination" (Vienna 12.3.2014), in a UN symposium on "The Human Rights of Persons with Psychosocial Disabilities" (Brussels, 16-17.10.2014).

The Ombudsman also organised working meetings with representatives of international and European agencies and organisations. Some of the meetings of the Ombudsman were:

- with the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI). The discussion focused on how to improve the institutional framework for the better protection of victims of discrimination and the more effective tackling of racist practices in Greece (11.3.2014)
- with the special representative of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr. Nikolaj Villumsen, in the context of a visit to Greece, to record the effects of the crisis and the austerity measures in respect of issues of equal opportunities for vulnerable social groups, following a related initiative of MEPs. Deputy Ombudsmen Christos Ioannou, Vasilis Karydis and Georgios Moschos also participated in the meeting, as well as the Secretary of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the Council of Europe, Ms. Elodie Fischer (15.9.2014)
- with representatives of Disability Rights International (DRI), where they were informed about disability and the problems of people with disability in Greece, as well as the related conclusions and interventions of the Ombudsman on this subject (30.1.2014).

The Ombudsman was also represented in a meeting with members of the Racist Violence Reporting Network (16.1.2014), in a meeting with a team from Amnesty International on Roma issues (23.1.2014), in a conference organised by the Embassy of the USA in Greece "Conference on Combating Discrimination, Violence and Intolerance Based on Religion and National Origin" (28-30.1.2014), in a training seminar of NGO "Antigone" held in the framework of the "DARE-NET – Desegregation and Action for Roma Integration" programme (Thessaloniki, 7.3.2014), in an event of NGO "Antigone" and the Homosexual - Lesbian Community of Greece (OLKE) on the subject: "The effects of hate speech on the image and rights of vulnerable groups", in the framework of the European campaign "No hate during the election campaign" (23.5.2014).

Finally, the Ombudsman remains an active member of the European Network of Equality Bodies (Equinet), a network for the horizontal connection and coordination of the official bodies for the implementation of community Directives against discrimination in EU countries and accession countries. The Ombudsman participates in all the working groups of the network and is systematically represented in the meetings held annually to organise the work of the groups and exchange information on issues of discrimination, in the context of the group's actions in each case. In the framework of Equinet, scientific experts from the Ombudsman participated in training seminars on the legislative developments and case law of European legislation on equal treatment (Brussels, 19.2 & 9.5.2014), in a meeting of the working group "Communication Strategies and Practices" on issues of communication (Brussels, 3-4.6. & 24.11.2014), in a training seminar on issues of discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity (Stockholm, 17-18.6.2014), in a training seminar on "The establishment of positive measures to tackle discrimination" (Belgrade, 16-17.10.2014), in meetings of the working group "Strategy Development" on the subject of developing a strategy against discrimination (Brussels, 27.2.2014 and Vienna, 4-5.9.2014).