

**Address at the Parliament of the Republic of Austria on the occasion of the
45th Anniversary of the Austrian Ombudsman Board**

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Introduction

Guten morgen

It is a great honour to join you in the Parliament at the Hofburg to commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the Austrian Ombudsman Board and for your Presidents to allow me to address you in this wonderful Parliament. Today is, in my view, a celebration of the democratic state, of this great Republic of Austria and of a treasured and trusted institution.

His Excellency, Federal President of the Republic of Austria, Sobotka, President of the National Council, President of the Federal Council, members of Parliament, members of the Austrian Ombudsman Board, fellow speakers and distinguished guests.

AOB work and value

And indeed, there is much to celebrate. Since 1977, the Austrian Ombudsman Board has provided access to justice for Austrian citizens; ensuring that their dealings with the State are unwaveringly fair. In 2020 alone, nearly 18,000 people brought their complaints to be heard by the Austrian Ombudsman Board.

But the Austrian Ombudsman Board has since 1977 also continued to have the confidence of this Parliament and the people of Austria such that its mandate has expanded. This includes, for the last decade, a constitutional mandate to protect the human rights of some of the most vulnerable citizens.

More recently, in April this year the Austrian Ombudsman Board was officially recognized as an 'A status' institution by the Global Alliance of National Human Rights Institutions or GANHRI. The AOB is now recognized as fully compliant with the 'Principles Relating to the Status of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs)' or Paris Principles. It is these principles that informed the Venice Principles for Ombudsman Institutions and was also the progenitor of the United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/186, *The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*.

There can be no question that the Austrian Ombudsman Board embodies the very essence of the Paris Principles, Venice Principles and the United Nations Resolution.

The Austrian Ombudsman Board is both an Ombudsman with all the gravitas that its history bestows upon it, but absolutely a modern Ombudsman institution committed to human rights, good governance and the rule of law.

AOB and IOI

As mentioned by the President of the Federal Council, no proper recognition of the many accomplishments of the Austrian Ombudsman Board could be complete without acknowledging the contribution that it makes to the international Ombudsman community and the citizens they serve. Since 2009, the Secretariat of the International Ombudsman Institute, or IOI, has been based in the Austrian Ombudsman Board. The IOI represents over two hundred Ombudsman institutions from more than 100 countries worldwide across six global regions - Africa, Asia, the Australasian and Pacific, Europe, the Caribbean and Latin America and North America.

The Austrian Ombudsman Board and a staff team led by Mr Meinhard Friedl, on a daily basis, support these more than two hundred Ombudsman institutions. In my capacity as President of the IOI, I have the privilege of working very closely with mein freund Mr Werner Amon, Secretary General and Secretariat staff. It is of note that I consider the Austrian Ombudsman Board, the Secretary General and the IOI Secretariat first and foremost as friends. They are, of course, also enormously valued colleagues and I take the opportunity today to thank them for their exceptional work in service of the international Ombudsman community – it is inconceivable to me that anyone could do more, or better, than the IOI Secretariat. I thank all three members of the Austrian Ombudsman Board for their unfailing support.

This is also a propitious time for one other remark. I take great pleasure, both publicly and privately, and all around the world, to acknowledge the support that makes the IOI Secretariat possible.

But I have never had this opportunity in the one place that it is most meaningful to do so – this Parliament. On this auspicious occasion, I wish to acknowledge, and formally thank, the Parliament of the Republic of Austria and successive Austrian governments for their generous support of the IOI Secretariat.

Austria is, of course, a domicile of a number of supranational bodies. It is the contribution of a true international citizen that you provide this support. I, for one, am certain that the IOI would not exist in any meaningful way without your commitment.

Austria and Australia

Before concluding it would, I think, be remiss of me not to mention one other matter. In 2021, I was the first Australian to have the privilege of being elected President of the IOI. As such, I want to recognise the Republic of Austria is a longstanding and very valued friend of my country. Apart from nearly sharing the same name, we enjoy annual bilateral trade of two billion dollars and, as like-minded countries, we cooperate on a range of issues of mutual interest, particularly in multilateral institutions. In September 2021, Australia and Austria signed a Strategic Cooperation Arrangement to deepen our collaboration. On the occasion of my visit to this magnificent city, and

the wonderful province Styria, I thank you personally for the warmth and hospitality you have shown me and my Chief of Staff Rebecca Poole.

Conclusion

To conclude, it is a testament to the wisdom of the Parliament of the Republic of Austria forty-five years ago, that we are here today to celebrate this anniversary. The institution of the Ombudsman upholds the great principles of democracy, human rights, good governance and the rule of law. I thank the Austrian Ombudsman Board for being a champion of these principles for four and a half decades.

The Austrian Ombudsman Board is an institution woven into the very fabric of the democratic state with a constitutional mandate to protect human rights.

Your work in service of this Parliament, the citizens of this great country and, of course, in supporting the global institution of the Ombudsman, is an achievement of which you ought to be extraordinarily proud and, for which, I am profoundly grateful.

I congratulate the Austrian Ombudsman Board on this significant milestone and wish it every success in the future.

Danke schoen