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1. Introduction

Since 1999, the Catalan Ombudsman’s Office has been devoting a part of its staff and budget to international cooperation projects, in light of this institution’s wish to contribute to a safer, fairer and more supportive international community. This economic contribution has been progressively rising, until reaching its current level of over 0.7% of the annual budget. Additionally, it makes use of resources from the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD), the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID) and other international organizations that co-finance its projects.

The Catalan Ombudsman and the ACCD have been cooperating since 2005 on a project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, that concluded in 2008 with the presentation in Sarajevo of the Framework Protocol for Cases of Child Abuse. Further, since the formalization in September 2006 of a framework agreement for collaboration between the Catalan Ombudsman and the ACCD, other joint actions have been taken. In 2008, under the aegis of this framework agreement, the Free Legal Aid project was begun in the Serbian region of Vojvodina. A project to support the recently-created Serbian Ombudsman was also carried out in conjunction with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

It must be mentioned that the free legal aid project in the Vojvodina region is also co-financed by the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation.

In 2008, and along the same lines, the Catalan Ombudsman received a study delegation from the Macedonian Ombudsman, and took part in a conference on the independence and integrity of ombudsman institutions, organized by the Ombudsman of Vojvodina in the Serbian city of Novi Sad.

As the directing institution for cooperation projects, the Catalan Ombudsman has a special staff charged with conducting them, made up by the two cooperation project coordinators (Judit Salas, International Relations and Cooperation Officer and an external expert, Arantxa Díaz) and two aides in the field (Jasmina Nikolic in Serbia, and Amela Vezic, in Bosnia and Herzegovina), citizens of these respective countries. Depending on the topic, higher-ranking officials or advisors of the Catalan Ombudsman’s Office or other collaborating institutions also travel to the Balkans. The cooperation activities carried out in 2008 are listed as follows.

2. Project in Bosnia and Herzegovina for promotion of the Ombudsman: protection of abused minors

On March 14, 2005, the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation and the Catalan Ombudsman signed a collaboration agreement to carry out a cooperation project in Bosnia and Herzegovina, co-financed by the two institutions and entitled, “Promoting the Ombudsman of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a driver for improvements in the Justice Administration”.

The NGO Balkan Human Rights Network, of regional scope and with its secretariat in Sarajevo, has acted as local partner for this project, making available to the Catalan Ombudsman an assistant on the ground who carries out administrative and translation tasks, under the supervision of the project coordinators.

As described in the 2005 and 2006 annual reports to Parliament, the project establishes two specific actions with the aim to create institutionalized, permanent communication channels among the Ombudsman institutions, Prosecutor’s Office and the Judiciary of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as other institutions associated with the protection of abused minors.

Action 1 of the project, meant to facilitate discussion and implementation of the Ombudsman’s recommendations by the Judiciary and Prosecutor’s Office, culminated with the formalization in November 2005 of the collaboration agreement between the Ombudsman institutions and the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The signing ceremony was attended by a delegation of the Catalan Ombudsman, the Parliament of Catalonia,
and the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation.

Action 2 of the project is meant to coordinate the actions of all institutions involved in the prevention and investigation of child abuse, so that only the strictly necessary actions are carried out, to keep from aggravating the delicate emotional situation and victimization of the minor. The instrument to achieve this purpose is the elaboration of an action protocol in cases of child abuse. The Catalan Ombudsman has been behind the establishment of these protocols in Catalonia.

This protocol was prepared from 2006 to 2008, and presented in May, 2008 in Sarajevo. In 2006, the institutional commitment for support and involvement in the project by the competent institutions was secured. These included the competent ministries for each territorial unit of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina) and at the state level, while 2007 was devoted to discussing and developing the text of the Protocol, through a study visit to Barcelona by a Bosnian task force, and a working meeting in the Bosnian city of Vlasic.

As explained in detail in the 2007 Report to Parliament, it should be remembered that the Vlasic meeting was meant to conduct joint analysis of the Framework Protocol drafting proposals, drawn up by the drafting sub-committee designated during the study visit to Barcelona.

In Vlasic, it was decided that the drafting of the Protocol text that had been agreed at the meeting had to be completed by the drafting sub-committee on certain points, in accordance with directives that had also been set out in Vlasic. The sub-committee sent its proposal to the project coordinators at year-end 2007.

By early 2008, the project coordinators, having systemized the drafting proposals received from the aforementioned sub-committee, had sent the information to all members of the task force for them to make their comments, which were taken up in a new version of the Framework Protocol text.

It is worth noting that coming up with the final version of the text was a slow process, as the task force had many members, but also because the Framework Protocol had to be supported by all institutions competent in detection, prevention and action in the realm of minor abuse.

At last, at the end of February, 2008, the final version of the Framework Protocol for Cases of Child Abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina was drafted.

2.1. Official presentation in Sarajevo of the Framework Protocol for Cases of Child Abuse in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In light of the difficulty in receiving, within a reasonable timeframe, confirmation from all ministries and institutions involved in the task force on their willingness to sign the framework protocol, and considering the convulsive political panorama in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was decided to present the consensus document without this presentation depending on the eventual signing of the framework protocol.

The grounds for this decision were that the framework action protocol, as a non-regulatory instrument, is applied thanks to the will of the competent institutions, and this will had been expressed through the participation of all competent institutions in the Protocol development working group. These institutions, after months of work, had come up with a consensus document.

Thus, on May 28, 2008, in the seat of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in Sarajevo, the presentation of the Framework Protocol for Cases of Child Abuse was held.
The ceremony was to present the Framework Protocol to the media and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina and disseminate the text through distribution of the documentation published with this text.

Branko Peric, president of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, hosted and chaired the ceremony. Presentations were made by Safet Halilovic, minister of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Xavier Bonal, Deputy Ombudsman for the Defence of Children’s Rights.

The two Bosnian institutions that made presentations to those present were of the state level. The former is the highest representative of the judicial system in Bosnia and Herzegovina; the latter is responsible for designing the Action Plan for Children in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also present were the representatives of all the Bosnian institutions of the state level and territorial entities involved in minor protection and that had taken part in developing the text from 2006 to 2008, with the Catalan Ombudsman’s support: ministries of health, social services, home affairs, justice and representatives of the judiciary, prosecutor’s office and Ombudsman’s institutions.

Also on hand were representatives of the attorney community, social work centres and NGO’s that work in the realm of children’s rights.

As for media presence, the presentation was covered by a local television network (TVSA) and publicized on the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina website. Stories on the presentation ran in three Bosnian newspapers: Dnevni List, Avaz and Focus.

As stated during the presentation ceremony by Xavier Bonal, Deputy Ombudsman for the defence of children’s rights, the purpose of the Protocol was to ensure effective coordination among the various institutions involved and work to ensure, without undermining any procedural, aid or protection guarantees, that the actions carried out with the child are limited to those strictly necessary to avoid the repetition of proceedings that could affect their emotional situation. Although the Protocol can not prevent child abuse on its own, it does include all the steps that make possible a more precise identification of cases of abuse and the measures to be taken by the various institutions in coordinated fashion.

Last, the event was the ideal setting to present and distribute the publication of the Framework Protocol in Bosnian, which will definitely be a document of reference in the daily work of the Bosnian institutions with competencies in protection of child abuse victims.

In order to more broadly disseminate the content of the Framework Protocol for Bosnia and Herzegovina, it was translated into Catalan, Spanish and English and published in the same format as the original Bosnian version.

The Framework Protocol has been published in Bosnian. Copies have been published in Catalan, Spanish and English.

This has made it possible for it to reach institutions in the Spanish, Catalan and international realms. One thousand copies have been published in Bosnian, 500 in English and 200 in a combined Spanish-Catalan version. 3. Establishment of free legal aid in Serbia, especially the Vojvodina Region.

This project, entitled “Institutionalization of Free Legal Aid in Serbia, especially in the Vojvodina Region”, is conceived as a continuation of the free legal aid project in Serbia conducted by the Catalan Ombudsman from 2004 to 2007 with the co-financing of the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation (AECID), the results of which were detailed in the 2007 Report to Parliament.

The project has funding from the Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation.
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(ACCD), and establishes two lines of work: establishment of legal advice service and in-court representation throughout the territory of the autonomous province of Vojvodina, and contribution to the institutionalization of free legal aid in the territory of Serbia through support for the executive and legislative branches and other competent institutions.

As for the first area, this action makes for an advancement over the previous project in two ways: responsibility for financing the in-court representation by the autonomous provincial (and not the municipal) administration, and establishment of the services in the province to cover the entire territory.

Further, it is compatible with the regulations now in force as well as the future regulations, in consideration of the terms in which the Serbian free legal aid draft bill has been prepared by a working group of the Serbian Ministry of Justice.

In the project taking place in Vojvodina, the Catalan Ombudsman, together with the ACCD and AECID, is taking responsibility for partial financing of the in-court representation, as the Executive Council of Vojvodina is a co-sponsor. Specifically, the AECID and ACCD finance in equal measure the first 1,000 cases with in-court representation. The next 1,000 cases will be financed by the Executive Council of Vojvodina. As for the legal advice service, the Catalan Ombudsman is working to establish services that will co-exist with those already running, with a view to sufficiently cover the territory of Vojvodina. These legal advice services will be financed by the respective local councils.

The Catalan Ombudsman’s Office will be responsible for covering the project’s administrative and logistical expenses with its funding.

The overarching goal of the project is to show that the model implemented up to now in various points of the Serbian territory, and later extrapolated to Vojvodina, can work as a comprehensive system applied to a supramunicipal territory (Vojvodina) which is home to a third of Serbia’s population.

With proof that the model the Catalan Ombudsman has helped deploy is a valid comprehensive system on the supramunicipal level, it is proven (albeit on a smaller scale), that the system can work throughout Serbia.

On the second front, contribution to the institutionalization of Serbian territory, it must be borne in mind that the Ministry of Justice, along with the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), has designed a strategy that includes the ultimate approval of a law, and the prior performance of a number of activities to test the different proposed legal aid systems. Since the strategic document takes up the task carried out by the Catalan Ombudsman in this realm, and that the Ministry of Justice draft bill follows the Spanish model, especially as regards in-court representation, the Catalan Ombudsman can take responsibility for promoting the system, which has already borne fruits in Serbia, and advise the competent institutions on design of an ideal system for Serbia in the meantime.

3.1. Training seminars and launch of free legal aid services

Following formalization in Novi Sad, capital of Vojvodina, in December 2007, of the collaboration agreement among the parties to carry out the project, to wit, the Catalan Ombudsman, Executive Council of Vojvodina and Vojvodina Bar association, and an annex to the agreement listing all participating local councils, the training seminars stipulated in the agreement were prepared.

The ten planned seminars were grouped into two phases. The first five seminars took place March 26, 27 and 28 at the following sites: Sremski Karlovci, Becej, Subotica, Odzaci and Bela Crkva. The five remaining seminars were held on June 23 in Vrsac, Zenjanin and Kikinda; and June 24 in Sombor and Novi Sad.

Training seminars on free legal aid have been held in ten Serbian municipalities
The municipalities were chosen strategically, with an aim to cover as much of the territory of Vojvodina as possible, to facilitate access to seminars by the highest possible number of attendees, whether they were attorneys or municipal representatives from all Vojvodina local councils interested in establishing legal advice services.

The Vojvodina local councils interested in establishing legal advice services are those listed in Annex 2 of the Collaboration Agreement signed on December 20, 2007, totalling some 20 local councils.

All seminars analyzed the operation of the legal advice and in-court representation services in detail. The seminars held in March, however, emphasized the operation of the legal advice service with a view to the immediate opening of the services in the various local councils. On another note, the seminars held in June focused on organizing the in-court representation services, as most of the local councils had already begun with legal advice services.

The seminars were taught by Biljana Bjeletic, head of the Vojvodina Bar Association project and member of the Executive Council of the Serbian Bar Association, and Arantxa Diaz, project coordinator. Jasmina Nikolic, the Catalan Ombudsman’s assistant in the field, also took part.

The political circumstances of Serbia, and especially Vojvodina, from January to September 2008, impeded the legal advice services from beginning immediately after the training seminars.

These were the presidential elections in January and February, the local and parliamentary elections in May (which were held in advance, coinciding with the local elections, following the break-up of Serbia’s governing coalition, which led to the dissolution of Parliament) and the parliamentary elections in Vojvodina, also held in May. Kosovo’s unilateral declaration of independence on February 18 further weakened Serbian political stability.

The election campaigns, rounds of official and exceptional voting brought about by the irregularities, and post-electoral negotiations, further accentuated due to the breaking up of coalitions at the state level, all had a negative impact on municipal governments, key administrations in the free legal aid project.

The political instability suffered by local councils and Vojvodina’s government bodies (where the Parliament, and as a result the Executive Council, could not be constituted until July) caused the legal advice services to begin later than originally planned. Thus, the legal advice service was implemented in 13 local councils from April to October.

On June 24, the Executive Council of Vojvodina, the Vojvodina Bar Association and local councils that provide the legal advice service signed a collaboration agreement which stipulated the considerations among the signatory parties.

In November, the project coordinators returned to Vojvodina. In a follow-up meeting of the legal advice services held with representatives of the Local Councils and Bar Associations of Vojvodina from all the localities where the services had been set up, it was made clear that the services were working in a satisfactory way.

It should be noted that the geographic distribution of the legal advice services open in Vojvodina ensures that all citizens of the region have access in their surroundings, or if necessary following a brief trip from their home, to services that offer free legal advice, based on a standardized model that guarantees the quality and effectiveness of this service.

The project coordinators met again in November with representatives of the new Vojvodina government, its Parliament and
the experts responsible for organizing the in-court representation service, in order to implement this service in the first quarter of 2009.

4. Joint project with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to support the Serbian Ombudsman

On September 28, 2007, the Catalan Ombudsman and the OSCE Mission to Serbia signed a memorandum of understanding, according to which they agreed to carry out activities aimed to support the Serbian Ombudsman, a newly created institution.

The Catalan Agency for Development Cooperation (ACCD) provided the funding necessary for the Catalan Ombudsman to take part in the project, which was co-financed by the OSCE itself.

The project’s objective was to provide support in the process of establishing an Ombudsman Institution in Serbia, and once established, strengthen its independence, credibility and effectiveness through expert advising, study missions, advisors to the institution and several presentations.

In September, 2005 the Serbian Ombudsman Act came into force, following its approval in the Serbian Parliament. This marked the culmination of a long discussion and development process, to which the OSCE and the Catalan Ombudsman had made contributions.

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4.1. Study mission to the Catalan Ombudsman by the Serbian Ombudsman and his staff

From May 20 to 25, a delegation consisting of the Serbian Ombudsman and his staff visited the Catalan Ombudsman to learn first-hand about the Catalan Ombudsman structure and operation, the interaction with Parliament and collaboration with other Ombudsman’s institutions.

The group was made up of the Serbian Ombudsman, Sasa Jankovic, the three candidates for deputy posts (they were formally designated months later), two directors, two advisors, an officer from the General Secretariat and the International Cooperation Officer. The delegation was rounded out with two representatives from the Human Rights Department of the OSCE Mission to Serbia.

All of the working sessions took place at the Catalan Ombudsman’s head offices, where the delegation was received by Rafael Ribó, and simultaneous translation into Serbian was offered. Deputy Ombudsman Laura Díez discussed the legal framework and competencies of the institution. In another session, the internal circuits and relations with the Administration were outlined. Ignasi Garcia, Director of Public Security and Social Relations, gave a presentation on the areas of justice and prisons. Matias Vives, Director of Town Planning and Local Relations, spoke on the People’s Services Unit and the Ombudsman’s trips around Catalonia. Fina Brunet, the Ombudsman’s Director of Communication and Cabinet took part by explaining the Ombudsman’s communication and advertising policy. Pilar Figueras, Secretary General, spoke on the office’s internal organization.

The Catalan Ombudsman is the first Ombudsman’s office of the international realm to offer comprehensive support to its Serbian counterpart

All of this notwithstanding, the Serbian Ombudsman was not designated until mid-2007. He took office on July 31 of that year. The Serbian Ombudsman’s office, located in provisional premises, was not operational until year-end 2007. Thus, the various activities called for in the project were carried out over 2008.

It is worth noting that through this joint project with the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the Catalan Ombudsman was the first Ombudsman’s office of the international realm to offer comprehensive support to its Serbian counterpart, including a quarter-long stay by an expert in Serbia.
economic and human resources management. Xavier Bonal, Deputy Ombudsman for the Defence of Children's Rights described all the subject matters handled in the Children's Affairs Department, as well as the formulas to make the institution more accessible to children. Maria Jesús Larios, director of Social Affairs and Relations with the Parliament, discussed the subject of annual and monographic reports. Last, advisor Àngels Gayoso fielded the delegation’s questions on health care and social services.

On another note, in addition to visiting the Parliament of Catalonia and being hosted by the president, the delegation was able to attend the working session with local Ombudspersons, organized by the Catalan Ombudsman. The delegation was provided with a large amount of materials (brochures, monographic and annual reports, charters of service, etc.) in English.

4.2. Three-month stay by an expert from the Catalan Ombudsman’s Office

From April 8 to July 4, Laura Díez, Deputy Ombudsman, studied and advised the Serbian Ombudsman’s institution in situ, as the Catalan Ombudsman assigned her the tasks of the international expert who, within the framework of this project, was to advise the new Serbian institution over a mid-term stay in Serbia.

The Deputy Ombudsman’s main mission was to write a detailed report on the different aspects related with the operation of the Ombudsman institution, in the aim to develop proposals that would orient the activity of this recently-created institution and improve its effectiveness. This would be the result of an in-depth analysis of the regulations governing the institution and the country’s constitutional bodies, in addition to the work performed by the Serbian Ombudsman’s Office since its creation.

The study of the work carried out by the Ombudsman was done by analyzing the 2007 annual report and the interviews conducted with the Ombudsman and much of his staff, in addition to attendance at events in which the Ombudsman took part.

Using this methodology, the report reflects the strong and weak points of the Serbian institution, and makes a number of recommendations to improve the institution’s work and make it more effective.

The areas addressed in the report were: creation of the institution and regulating legislation; main roles (defence of rights and supervision of the Administration); additional tasks (supporting regulation and information), organizational structure, resources and internal circuits; realm of competencies and relations with other Serbian ombudspersons and institutions for defence of rights; relations with the Administration and Parliament; complaints and ex-officio actions handled; publicity and public and international projection.

Some of the suggestions included in this study have already been implemented.

On another note, it is worth noting that Laura Díez took part as a speaker in three of the conferences organized in the framework of this project, described in upcoming sections.

4.3. Conferences in Serbia to disseminate the Ombudsman’s role

A total of four conferences were held. The subjects of the conferences were chosen by the Serbian Ombudsman with the guidance of the Catalan Ombudsman and OSCE.
The first conference was held in Belgrade on February 22. It was devoted to the defence of citizen's rights by the Ombudsman, Constitutional Court and Supreme Court.

Deputy Ombudsman Laura Díez and Arantxa Díaz, co-coordinator of the project, took part in representation of the Catalan Ombudsman. Laura Díez gave a presentation on the defence of rights.

Representatives of Serbia’s highest institutional and judiciary levels were among the 80-plus participants.

The paper read by Laura Díez was structured along two lines: the content of the Ombudsman’s defence tasks according to the existing models (Scandinavian and Iberian) and the conditions necessary to develop the defence tasks in an appropriate way.

The second conference was also held in the Serbian capital on May 30. On that occasion, the conference dealt with the mechanisms to achieve and guarantee the protection of children’s rights in the Republic of Serbia. Xavier Bonal, Deputy Ombudsman for the defence of children’s rights, participated.

Three subjects were outlined and discussed: the challenges of national institutions in the defence of children’s rights and Serbia’s experience in this realm; the experience of European countries in facing the aforementioned challenges; and different problems associated with the protection of children’s rights in Serbia.

Conference participants and delegates were mainly representatives from Ombudsman institutions, NGO’s devoted to the defence of children’s rights and representatives from the social services and children’s affairs areas of the Administration.

Xavier Bonal, as Deputy Ombudsman for the defence of children’s rights, explained the model of the Catalan Ombudsman as an independent institution for the defence of children’s rights. He also gave information on the institutions that belong to the European Network of Ombudspersons for Children (ENOC), of which he was chairman at that time.

The third conference, held as a round table discussion, took place on June 26 and 27 in Kanjiza. The objective of the round table was for Serbia’s Ombudsman institutions to exchange points of view and strengthen protection of human rights in the territory of the local self-government bodies, and reinforce the process of local Ombudsman establishment in Serbia to create a proper level of protection for all citizens.

At the present time, in addition to the Ombudsman of Serbia and the Ombudsman of the autonomous province of Vojvodina, there are Ombudsman institutions in 10 municipalities. As the law on territorial organization in Serbia has brought about a new unitary division, featuring 150 municipalities, 23 cities and Belgrade as a capital, the number of Ombudsman’s Offices on the local level is still low. It is probable that more will be established. In such a context, cooperation mechanisms among the various Ombudsman institutions must be established.

The round table, participated in by representatives of all Serbian Ombudsman institutions, was divided into two parts. The first part focused on the position of local Ombudsman’s Offices in the human rights protection system in Catalonia and Vojvodina, and the discussion of comparative cooperation law models between the central and local Ombudsman’s Offices. In the second part, through the exchange of experiences and ideas, the Ombudspersons came up with suggested amendments to the Law on Local Self-government, approved in 2007.

Deputy Ombudsman Laura Díez gave a presentation during the first part of the round table on the Catalan Ombudsman’s experience in collaboration with other local Ombudsman’s Offices around Catalonia.

The last conference was held on September 26-27 in the Serbian city of Kosmaj under the title “Protection of Individual and Collective Rights of National Minorities and Supervision of their Implementation”.

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There were 65 participants, among them representatives of the national minority councils, Ombudspersons and their assistants from Hungary, Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro, judges from constitutional courts, representatives of Serbia's and other regional NGO's and representatives from the involved ministries and international organizations.

Deputy Ombudsman Laura Díez took part in the opening of the conference, along with the heads of the OSCE and European Commission Missions to Serbia, the Serbian ministers of Public Administration and Education, the provincial secretary of national minorities of Vojvodina and the Serbian Ombudsman.

The conference was structured in three parts: implementation of the rights of national minorities and supervision mechanisms; the role of the Ombudsman in the system of protection and improvement of minority rights; judicial protection of the collective rights of national minorities.

Participation of representatives from other countries of the region, who share similar problems, made it possible to take a regional approach to the subject matter.

Additionally, the problems that arise in Serbia in the implementation of the rights of national minorities were identified and discussed. It was shown that a regulatory recognition of these rights is not enough to guarantee their application.

5. Study visit to Barcelona by a delegation of the Macedonian Ombudsman

The Catalan Ombudsman’s collaboration with the Macedonian Ombudsman, in addition to judges and prosecutors of that country, began in 2002.

Later, in 2006, the Catalan Ombudsman, with the support of the Catalan Agency for Development, co-organized with the Macedonian and Greek Ombudspersons, a seminar in Ohrid (Macedonia) on the role of the Ombudsman as mediator in administrative procedures.

On January 8, 2008, the Macedonian Ombudsman, Ixhet Memeti and advisor Uranija Pirovska, had a working day at the Catalan Ombudsman headquarters. The visit to Barcelona was a result of the initiative taken by the Catalan Ombudsman’s opposite number in Aragon (Justicia de Aragón), who had invited the Macedonian Ombudsman to visit his office and, aware of the links of the Catalan Ombudsman with institutions of the former Yugoslavia, contacted the Catalan Ombudsman to suggest the possibility of their Macedonian peer visiting him as well.

Various topics of common interest were discussed during the Macedonian delegation’s visit.

First, the Catalan Ombudsman and his Deputy Laura Díez spoke on the nature and competencies of the institution. Ixhet Memeti did the same as regards the institution he directs.

Afterwards, the Catalan Ombudsman and the director for Social Affairs and Relations with the Parliament, Maria Jesús Larios, discussed the subjects of collaboration with administrations, how to hand down effective decisions and influence in the change of the Administration’s criteria.

Concluding the round of presentations, the Director of Public Security and Social Relations, Ignasi Garcia, and advisors Mar Aldeano and Maria Trias discussed actions related to cases of discrimination on linguistic, gender and religious grounds.

The work sessions also provided a framework in which to exchange impressions on the problems arising in the aforementioned areas and the proposals related to the Optional Protocol to the United Nations Convention Against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment, as regards the supervision mechanisms established therein.

6. International conference in Novi Sad (Serbia) on the independence and integrity of Ombudsman institutions

On November 6-7, the Ombudsman of Vojvodina, with the support of the Council
of Europe and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Mission to Serbia, held an international conference on the independence and integrity of Ombudsman’s institutions in the capital of the autonomous province of Vojvodina, Novi Sad.

The Catalan Ombudsman regularly collaborates with the Parliament and Ombudsman of Vojvodina. In fact, delegations from the two institutions have visited Catalonia, as mentioned in previous annual reports to Parliament.

The objective of the conference was to discuss the structure and regulatory configuration of Ombudsman’s institutions through the analysis of aspects such as the creation of the institution, the process of electing the Ombudsman, institutional independence, budget development and approval, responsibility, accountability and transparency of these institutions.

The Ombudsman of Vojvodina, Petar Teofilovic, invited a representative of the Catalan Ombudsman to take part as a speaker in this international conference to give a presentation on budget planning and implementation in an Ombudsman institution.

Laura Díez, Deputy Ombudsman, was responsible for discussing the Catalan Ombudsman’s experience in this field, and the conditions that guarantee the independence of Ombudsman institutions’ budgetary autonomy.