



CONTACT WITH CITIZENS LIVING OUTSIDE ATTICA

1) The volume of cases and wide variety of issues dealt with by the Ombudsman concern the whole of the country and make it necessary to decentralise the institution with the establishment of regional offices.

The establishment of regional offices, which may be included in the institution's Rules of Operation on the basis of Article 5 of Law 2477/97, would take some of the load off the already heavily burdened central office. Setting up regional offices would also improve services provided outside the capital, as regional offices would have an immediate understanding of the situation and possibilities for solutions. In addition, this would make it possible to monitor the implementation and results of the proposed solutions. Such observations would help the Ombudsman compile useful reports to deal with similar cases in the future.

2) Until the necessary conditions for a successful decentralisation are in place (staff, technical infrastructure, etc.), it is planned to send groups of staff members from the central office on visits to the regions. This will improve the office's communications both with the citizens living there and the responsible local

services, and it will also help to dispel the impression that the Ombudsman is "Athens-centred."

3) With this in mind, two visits have been planned for the first months of 1999. The first group will visit the city of Corinth in February and the second group will visit Thessaloniki in April. During these visits, personnel from the Ombudsman will meet with individual citizens, local administrative authorities and representatives of various non-government organisations. The visits will include:

- The organisation of public meetings and press conferences, with the aim of raising awareness about the role, responsibilities, and purpose of the Ombudsman.
- Personal contacts of staff members with interested citizens and representatives of local agencies, so the Ombudsman can become better informed about local problems and can also suggest on-the-spot solutions.
- Discussions about current needs and problems of maladministration with the providers of local services in order to understand conditions on the spot. The intention is to deal with these problems effectively, improve the services provided, and generate a feeling of mutual trust and credibility between the public sector and the public.