Foreword

I am delighted to write the Foreword to this collection of chapters written to mark the twentieth anniversary of the Office of European Ombudsman. The fact that such a wide variety of insights into the work of the European Ombudsman’s office can be brought together in one publication is itself a tribute to the breadth and depth of activity of the office in its first 20 years. The different perspectives of academics from different disciplines, the former Ombudsman, and the former Secretary-General not only demonstrate the impact that the office has had on transparency, accountability and good administration in the EU, but also provide a glimpse of how that has been achieved by those responsible for leading the development of the office and its practices from its inception until recent times.

It is right that a work that marks an anniversary is primarily retrospective in its focus. The achievements of the office and its emergence as a key player in the EU administrative landscape of dispute resolution are significant. However, as I write this, I am conscious of the fact that the landscape of the EU itself is changing in a way which was not envisaged 12 months ago, let alone 20 years ago. The office cannot and does not rest on its past achievements. My strategy of ensuring the European Ombudsman’s continuing relevance, visibility and impact requires flexibility and resilience to meet the new challenges which face us on a daily basis.

Since taking office, I have moved to insert the office even more strategically and dynamically into the life of the institutions and to see how I can use all the powers and tools available to me to deal with matters of significant citizen interest. The Maastricht Treaty, which created this office, encourages me to take the widest possible view of the role and that includes not just passively waiting for citizens to approach it but also proactively reaching out to them, or on their behalf, through strategic investigations and other appropriate interventions.

Having said that, each Ombudsman can build only on the foundations laid by her or his predecessor. In that regard, Jacob Söderman, as the first European Ombudsman, arguably had the most difficult task of establishing the office from scratch. I have the privilege of building not only on his initial achievements, but also on the great contribution of Professor Nikiforos Diamandouros, in whose time a
comparable volume to this was published to mark the institution’s tenth anniversary.

I am grateful to him, as I am to all the authors of the chapters in this work, for their continuing interest in the work of the European Ombudsman and for their thoughtful and thought-provoking contributions to this collection. I should also like to thank in particular Professors Jacques Ziller and Herwig Hofmann, for their editorial oversight.

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