

**Greeting Address by Ms. Holta Zaçaj, President of the Constitutional Court
Conference on the occasion of the 25th Anniversary
of the People's Advocate of Albania**

Topic: “National and International Structures for the Protection of Human Rights: Best Practices and Lessons Learned”

25 June 2025, Tirana

Honorable People's Advocate,
Honorable Minister of Justice,
Your Excellencies, Ambassadors,
Distinguished guests and participants,

It is a privilege and an honor for me to extend my greetings on the occasion of this jubilar event, which marks a significant moment in the institutional life of our country – **the 25th anniversary of the establishment of the People's Advocate**. Over the course of these 25 years, this institution has demonstrated institutional maturity, independence, and professionalism, becoming a key factor in strengthening democracy and fostering a culture of human rights in Albania.

Today, I address you not only in my capacity as the President of the Constitutional Court, but also as a citizen and as a witness to the complex interaction and often delicate balance between power and principles, between the voice of the State and the silence of the citizens.

Within this fragile balance, the People's Advocate has stood with quiet dignity and unwavering commitment. Its name is neither symbolic nor ornamental. It is a constitutional promise.

Let us speak in clear words: the People's Advocate has neither a budget that rivals that of the executive bodies, nor legislative power. And yet, it remains one of the most powerful institutions in a democracy, because it speaks from a place that no other state authority can reach: **the human conscience.**

In a democracy silence can be threatening. It allows injustice to take root. And the People's Advocate speaks where others fall silent. It is not merely a defender of rights, it is a mirror held up to the state, reflecting not what it wishes to see, but what it must be faced with.

Let us not forget: we did not inherit democracy – we built it. Stone by stone, right by right. We emerged from decades in which the state listened only to itself, and dissent was punished and not protected. In that not-so-distant chapter of our history, one that many of us still remember and lived through, the very notion of an independent institution standing up to power in the name of citizens was not merely forbidden; **it was unimaginable. Today, it is a constitutional reality.**

The People's Advocate is not a decorative feature of our democracy; it is a vital safeguard for its fulfilment. Even now, at a time when institutional trust remains fragile, and when the distance between the citizen and the state can feel, at once, both vast and imperceptible, it is the People's Advocate who walks that distance, with the mission of narrowing the gap and bringing the two closer together.

Distinguished colleagues,

Our Constitution guarantees rights, but it is the People's Advocate who ensures that those rights are not forgotten, lost between the ink and paper of laws or buried in the corridors of bureaucracy.

Due to the constitutional and legal authority vested in the People's Advocate in the form of non-binding yet impactful recommendations, the institution is today recognized as an effective mechanism for overseeing the activity of public administration and a vital instrument for the interpretation and implementation of constitutional rights, as well as for the restoration of rights violated by public institutions.

The People's Advocate was conceived by the Constitution makers as a constitutional body dedicated to the protection of fundamental human rights and freedoms. To this end, it was entrusted with broad investigative powers, as well as the right to address the Constitutional Court, as the ultimate safeguard for the protection of individual rights and freedoms.

Although initially counted among the entities required to demonstrate a legitimate interest, it was through the evolving jurisprudence of the Constitutional Court that the People's Advocate gradually gained broader access to constitutional adjudication, reflecting the growing recognition of the significance of its mission and role.

The Constitutional Court and the People's Advocate, though vested with distinct functions and competencies, share a common mission: **to protect the rights and freedoms of individuals from unjust actions by state authorities, with the aim of preventing arbitrariness and abuse in the exercise of public power.** This is precisely why the Court increasingly seeks the advisory opinions of the People's

Advocate in cases concerning the protection of citizens' constitutional rights, acknowledging the institution as a **“friend of the Court.”**

The Constitutional Court safeguards the Constitution – the contract between the people and the state. While it is our duty to review the constitutionality of laws and to adjudicate the individual constitutional complaints concerning violations of fundamental rights, it is the People's Advocate who consistently reminds us of what law and justice **must never lose sight of: the human being behind every principle.**

In a society striving to overcome the shadows of authoritarianism, the People's Advocate represents more than oversight, it is the institutional conscience, the bell that tolls for public authorities, reminding them that their duty is to serve the people, not power.

The health of our democracy is not measured by the grandeur of institutions or the complexity of laws, but by how we treat the most vulnerable among us. And if the People's Advocate is at times undesirable by those in power, it is a sign that the institution is fulfilling its mission.

For this reason, our institutions must cooperate and not compete. **A mature democracy is not built on self-preserving institutions, but on those that defend the law, justice, and the Constitution – so that, together, they can protect the citizen.**

Therefore, I address all those who hold public office – all of us who have sworn an oath to serve:

Do not fear the voice of the People's Advocate!

Fear the silence that would exist without it!

Do not see the People's Advocate as a critic, but as a COMPASS!

In conclusion, on this significant anniversary, I invite all of us to support the institution of the People's Advocate – not with formality, but with genuine respect. Let us strengthen its independence – not only through financial resources, but through institutional responsibility. Let us respond to its reports – not with indifference, but through open and constructive dialogue.

Above all, let us not consider the People's Advocate as an outsider to power, but as **a guardian of its legitimacy**. In a country still healing from the wounds of mistrust, we cannot allow one of the few voices that speaks for the voiceless to be silenced or ignored.

Let us safeguard it. Let us strengthen the People's Advocate – not only for the needs of today, but for the future of a just, social, and truly European Albanian state.

Thank you!