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FINANCIAL OMBUDSMAN IN UKRAINE: ENHANCING TRUST IN THE FINANCIAL SERVICES

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ФІНАНСОВИЙ ОМБУДСМЕН В УКРАЇНІ: ПІДВИЩЕННЯ ДОВІРИ ДО ФІНАНСОВИХ ПОСЛУГ

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The relevance of the research in the field of development of enforcement mechanisms for the protection of consumer rights in the market of financial services is attributable to the dynamic market evolution and growth, accompanied by an increasing number of financial services consumers, diversity and complexity of financial products and instruments, as well as general globalization processes. Creation, development, and use of sophisticated financial instruments and banking products not always influence in a positive way consumer trust due to the difficulties in understanding the essence and contractual stipulations of financial transactions. Consumers of financial services, usually, have limited cognitive abilities due to the absence of sufficient information and knowledge. Therefore, they are unable to assess the level of risks and their future financial obligations.

One of the key pillars of the sustainable financial market development is trust and confidence of financial services consumers. Formation and strengthening of a sufficient level of trust and confidence requires the financial sector regulation that are expected to afford effective protection to the persons concerned, financial stability and solvency, achieve adequate standards of quality and behavior on the market, enshrines the right of consumers to receive full, timely compensatory payments, and to resolve disputes between consumers of financial services and financial institutions.

The financial crisis has provoked serious problems in the Ukrainian financial sector, such as an increase in the number of disputes between financial institutions, depositors, borrowers, debt burden increases. The search for alternatives to address these issues has led to the active use of such rigid tools as the attraction of collectors, the ever-increasing number of lawsuits on debt collection, which are quite expensive and long-lasting. However, the best solution to these problems could be an establishment of financial ombudsman institution. The Financial Ombudsman is the body for pre-trial disputes arising between financial institutions and consumers of financial services. According to Part 1 of Art. 22 of the Law of Ukraine «On the protection of customer rights» the protection of consumer rights is carried out by a court [1]. However, such a mechanism for resolving disputes is not effective in Ukraine, as according to a survey conducted by the sociological service, about 80% of the surveyed respondents expressed distrust to the judicial system [2]. This level of distrust is the lowest among all state institutions and shows that it is impossible to resolve the above-mentioned disputes through a court.

In world practice, the institution of financial ombudsman is used to improve the level of trust to financial institutions through regulation and pre-trial settlement of disputes and conflicts between financial institutions and clients over a long period of time. The most widespread cases of the need for financial ombudsman assistance are the following: non-return of deposits by banks and their related interest on them, the change in the rules for the provision of loans, without the consent of all interested parties, or unjustified increase in the interest rates on credits, and etc. In Europe, we can distinguish two main models of financial ombudsmen, a comparative analysis of which is given in Table 1.

Each of the alternative mechanisms for resolving disputes in the field of financial services has its advantages and disadvantages. Thus, the advantages of the German model are as follows: the founder / form of ownership and terms for consideration of cases. The founder of the institution of the financial ombudsman in Ukraine should be a non-governmental institution in order to ensure the independence

of such authority from the state, which will provide a significant advantage, in the form of more objective and fair decisions.

Table 1. **Description of European models of financial ombudsman**

№	Features	Model		
		German	British	
1	Founder	non-government institution (Deutsche Bank)	state, as the overseer of financial institutions	
2	Form of ownership	private	public	
3	Method for resolving disputes between consumers and financial institutions	conciliation	conciliation	
4	Right of complaint to the financial ombudsman	have only individuals	have both individuals and legal entities	
5	Cost of services	free-of-charge	free-of-charge	
6	Terms for the consideration of cases	2 months	6 months	
7	Obligations of implementation the decisions	only members of Deutsche Bank	all banks	
8	Organizational structure	one financial ombudsman	a network of financial ombudsmen	
9	Source of funding	contributions from banks that are members of Deutsche Bank	contributions from participants in financial services	
10	The amount of the complaint	up to €5 000	up to €114 000	

However, the right of complaint must have both individuals and legal persons. This is an advantage of the British model of the financial ombudsman and provides an increase in trust at the individual and institutional levels. From the organizational point of view, the construction of a network of financial ombudsmen will provide a quick solution to complaints and will be closer to consumers of financial services. Obligations of implementation the decisions must be binding on all banks. To this end, state regulation is needed in the area of implementation of the decisions of the financial ombudsman. This function can be taken by the National Bank of Ukraine, which, as a result of non-compliance with the decisions of the financial ombudsman, will deprive such financial institutions of licenses for the exercise of their activities.

The advantages of both models are method for resolving disputes in the form of conciliation and free-of-charge provision of services. Quite controversial questions

remain about the methods of financing the financial ombudsman and the maximum amount of complaint in Ukraine. In order to enhance trust in the decisions of the financial ombudsman and ensure the independence of his work, it is necessary to attract funding from the side of international organizations. Funding and representatives from management bodies of the EBRD, IFC, EC or World Bank will ensure transparency and independence of the newly established financial ombudsman.

In Ukraine, there are bodies that perform some functions of the financial ombudsman. Therefore, when establishing a financial ombudsman institution, it is necessary to avoid or minimize duplication of functions in the field of protection of financial services consumers in order to achieve a synergistic effect from their activities. This will lead to the liquidation of structural units of the National bank of Ukraine, the State Fiscal Service, the National Commission for Financial Services, the Fund for the Guaranteeing of Individual Deposits. An additional advantage of liquidation the duplicate powers is saving of the state budget in a difficult macroeconomic situation in Ukraine. Thus, creation of financial ombudsman will provide an opportunity to restore consumer trust and confidence to the financial services market, reduce the burden on the judiciary, and etc.

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