



Annual Conference of the
European Forum of the Legal Professions

The Need for Constant Vigilance

The Role of the Legal Professions in Maintaining Democratic Values

Brussels & Online, 14 November 2025
(9:00-17:00 CET)



ABOUT THE STAKEHOLDERS:

The **European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ)** unites the national institutions in the Member States of the European Union which are independent of the executive and legislature, and which are responsible for the support of the Judiciaries in the independent delivery of justice.

The **Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE)**, founded in 1960, is an international non-profit association which has been, since its creation, at the forefront of advancing the views of European lawyers and defending the legal principles upon which democracy and the rule of law are based.

The **European Association of Judges (EAJ)** is one of the four regional groups of the International Association of Judges. The IAJ was founded in Salzburg (Austria) in 1953. It is a professional, non-political, international organisation, bringing together national associations of judges, not individual judges, approved by the Central Council for admission to the Association.

The **Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ)** is an organisation founded in the year 2000. Its membership comprises national associations, representing administrative judges from Member States of the European Union and the Council of Europe and individual members, being administrative judges from those countries in which such associations do not exist.

ACA-Europe is a European association composed of the Court of Justice of the European Union as well as the Councils of State and the supreme administrative jurisdictions of each of the members of the European Union.

The **Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the Member States** was formed in 2004. It provides a forum through which European institutions are given an opportunity to request the opinions of Supreme Courts and to bring them closer by encouraging discussion and the exchange of ideas.

The **European Union of Judicial Officers (UEHJ)** is an international association created in 2016 in close coordination with the International Union of Judicial Officers. UEHJ aims to represent, promote and ensure the interests of the judicial officers within the (candidate) member states of the European Union. The association includes 22 member and 2 observer member countries.

The **European Union of Rechtspfleger (EUR)** is an association of 14 professional organisations from 13 states of the European Union. The objective is to improve the effectiveness and proximity of justice and to harmonise legal systems. For this purpose, the EUR has developed a model of a European profession, which is based on the professions of Rechtspfleger that were originally created in Germany and Austria.

CONTENT

The European Forum of the Legal Professions is an initiative that aims to launch a structured dialogue among the representations of legal professions in Europe, where common challenges and concerns can be addressed and analysed, and a joint position can be formulated. This is an inter-professional platform of exchange, a collaborative and evolving project among the legal professions, where ERA plays the role of a facilitator. We aim to organise an event every year, where the latest trends and most relevant issues of common interest can be discussed by the members of the Forum.

This fourth annual conference brings together distinguished figures from the judiciary, legal professions, and European institutions to discuss ways in which the rule of law and democratic values can be upheld in today's increasingly polarised societies. We will evaluate the strengths of existing legal frameworks and explore the role of key institutions, such as the European Courts, the Venice Commission, and various legal associations, in defending judicial independence and fostering public trust. Given the increasing difficulties like political pressure, loss of trust in democratic institutions, and threats to the independence of legal professions, participants will hear important talks about ethics, accountability, public involvement, and practical ways to improve the legal system. Join us in reaffirming the essential role of judges, lawyers, and judicial officers in safeguarding democracy through vigilance, integrity, and collective responsibility.

Onsite participation in Brussels is available for a fee of €150, which includes catering provided during the event. Institutional members of the European Forum for the Legal Professions (ACA-Europe, AEAJ, CCBE, EAJ, ENCJ, E.U.R., Network of the Presidents of the Supreme Judicial Courts of the EU, UIHJ) may nominate participants free of charge. Online participation is free of charge.



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Programme

Friday, 14 November 2025



08:45 Registration

09:15 **Opening**

Jean-Philippe Rageade, Director of ERA
Representative of the Belgian Council of State

09:30 **Keynote**

Ana Gallego Torres, Director-General for European Commission, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers

10:00 **Giving voice to judges: the ENCJ survey among judges on the independence of the judiciary**

Frans van Dijk, ENCJ advisor

10:30 Discussion

10:45 Coffee break

11:15 **Roundtable discussion : "Our Strength"**

- The role of European legal professions in safeguarding the rule of law and maintaining democratic values
- The existing toolkit to uphold our values
- The importance of public trust in the democratic institutions and the legal order

Simone Cuomo, Secretary General of CCBE
Patrick Gielen, Secretary General of UIHJ
Maria Gkana, Associate Councilor, Council of State, Greece, Representative of ACA-Europe
Madeleine Mathieu, President of ENCJ

12:30 Lunch break

14:00 **Short presentations: challenges and (re)actions**

The decreasing public trust: the legal professions in a polarised (sometimes violent) society

Barbara Porta, Italian lawyer, Chair of the CCBE Human Rights Committee

How legal professions can help maintain the resilience of our institutions – the Italian example

Monica Mastrandrea, Judge, Turin Court of First Instance

Ethics and accountability: how to increase public trust

Marc Schmitz, President of UEHJ

Public awareness and education: do the legal professions have a role in this?

Eva Wendler, Vice-President of AEAJ

15:20 Coffee break

15:40 **Roundtable discussion: Independence of the Legal Professions**

- What are the threats to the independence of the legal professions?
- How can legal actors respond to external and internal pressure?
- The resources of the judicial system (incl. remuneration)
- What can you do as a judge, a lawyer, or a judicial officer to protect democratic values?

Gabriele Juodkaite-Granskiene, Judge of the Supreme Court of Lithuania

Sabine Matejka, President of EAJ

Walter Szöky, President of E.U.R.

Alex Tallon, Belgian lawyer, Vice-President of CCBE

16:55 **Closing remarks**

Viktor Vadász, Deputy Director and Director of Programmes of ERA

17:00 End of the Conference

Live Stream



Times indicated are CET
(Central European Time)

Speaker biographies



Since August 2020, **Simone Cuomo** has been the Secretary-General of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE), which is the voice of the European legal profession, representing, through its members, more than 1 million European lawyers.

He joined the CCBE in 2010 as Senior Legal Advisor, managing a range of CCBE committees in areas of data protection as well as cross-border judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters. For many years he has been closely involved in EU policy developments as regards the digitalisation of justice, with a main focus on translating lawyers' needs in electronic judicial proceedings, as well as procedural safeguards and the impact of novel technologies on the legal profession.



Ana Gallego has been the Director-General for Justice and Consumers at the European Commission since November 2021. Before joining the European Commission, she was Director-General of International Legal Cooperation and

Human Rights in the Ministry of Justice in Spain. She has a degree in law from the University of Granada, Spain, and studied translation and interpreting at the same university.



Patrick Gielen is a judicial officer in Belgium and Secretary General of the International Union of Judicial Officers (UIHJ). He is the author of several European and international publications on enforcement law and the modernisation of justice

and has taken part in numerous international conferences as a speaker and expert. He was, moreover, appointed a member of the Belgium Notarial Nomination Commission in 2025.



Maria Gkana graduated in 2000 with a master's degree in Public Law from the University of Athens. She also holds an LLM in European Law from the University of Paris II, Panthéon-Assas. Between 2000 and 2002 she was the editor-in-chief

of the law review 'Efarmoges Dimosiou Dikaiou' (Public Law Applications). She has been a lawyer registered at the Athens Bar Association since 2002, and a judge at the Hellenic Council of State since 2006. In 2019 she was promoted to Associate Counsel and between 2018 and 2024 she was a member of the International Relations Commission of the Council of State, which she has been the deputy spokesperson for since 2024. She is a member of the ENCJ, and has been a member of the European Commission Expert Group on European Judicial Training since 2022. She is also a member of the Laboratoire Méditerranéen de Droit Public, of the Association of European Competition Law Judges (AECLJ), of the Editorial Board of the European Competition Law Judgments Database (EUCOJUD), and a trainer at the Hellenic National School for the Judiciary.



Gabriele Juodkaitė-Granskienė is a criminal judge of the Supreme Court of Lithuania. She is also a professor at Vilnius University, Faculty of Law. She has a law degree from Vilnius University (1996) and a PhD in criminal law (2003). Starting

in 1996, she first worked in the Forensic Science Centre of Lithuania, rising to become its Director from 2004 to 2017. Since 2017, she has served as a Justice of the Supreme Court of Lithuania, including as the Chief Justice of the Criminal Division since 2022. During her career, she has been involved in numerous EU twinning and other projects, supporting various states in implementing or developing legal regulations and educational procedures in criminal procedure law, forensic examination, and other areas (Ukraine, Moldova, Croatia, etc.). She is a member of the Council of Judges of Lithuania and also a member of the Executive Board of the European Network of Council of Judges. She has published more than 50 scientific articles in different areas of forensic science and law.



Since 2012, **Monica Mastrandrea** has served as a judge, specialising in civil law. Following her law degree, she earned a PhD in environmental law and economics. Since 2020, she has also been engaged in the training of judges within the district of the

Turin Court of Appeal, where she serves. She has been a speaker at numerous training events, has published several legal articles and has contributed to the drafting of collective works.



Sabine Matejka is an Austrian judge and President of the European Association of Judges. She completed a degree in law, then worked at the Centre of Legal Competence (CLC) from 2000 to 2004, which supported the further development of rule-of-law structures in Central and Eastern Europe. In 2004, she became a judicial trainee at

the court, and went on to become a judge in 2008. She has been involved in civil, housing, and tenancy cases at District Courts in Vienna, as addition to being a family judge. Since June 2019, she has been the President of the Floridsdorf District Court. Since 2012, she has been active in the Austrian Association of Judges, of which she became Vice President in November 2013 and President in 2017 (until 2023). Since 2013, she has also been an Austrian delegate to the European Association of Judges and was elected Vice President thereof in 2021. She was elected President of the European Association of Judges in October 2025.



Madeleine Mathieu is the President of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary and a member of the Conseil Supérieur de la Magistrature France. She is also an Honorary Advocate General at the French Court of Cassation. Previously, Ms Mathieu was a member of the

ENCJ Executive Board. She has served as a judge in various courts in France since 1980, including the Paris Court of Appeal, and she was Chamber President at the Versailles Court of Appeal. Ms Madeleine Mathieu also has experience in the executive branch of government, including as a Director of Judicial Protection for Young People at the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of France.



Since 1999, **Barbara Porta** has been a member of the Turin Bar Association, holding a qualification in the Superior Jurisdiction. From May 1994 to 1997, she was a collaborator at Studio Legale Feola e Schiavone in Turin in the field of civil law. From

1998 to 2012 she was a collaborator and then a qualified senior lawyer at Studio Legale Associato Ambrosio & Commodo in Turin, where she followed many important cases such as compensation for personal injuries for the victims of the Thyssen Krupp fire and the collapse of the Liceo Darwin ceiling. She was the co-owner and founding partner of Studio Legale Associato Vittorio 12, together with two colleagues, Avv. Roberta Cucinotta and Avv. Stefania Gerbino, from 2012 to 2022. In 2023 she founded the Studio Legale Porta.



Jean-Philippe Rageade has been the Director of ERA since January 2021. He studied French and German law at the University Paris-X Nanterre, completing his LLM at the Westfälische Wilhelms Universität in Münster and a D.E.A. in business

law at the University Paris-I Panthéon-Sorbonne. Following various traineeships in law firms and large companies, he was a lecturer in economic criminal law at the University of Paris IX Dauphine and in French law at the University of Bielefeld. He was an academic assistant at the Institute for International and Comparative Law of the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich, following which he was a lawyer at the law firm Arendt & Medernach in Luxembourg. He was Deputy Director and Director of Programmes of ERA from October 2005 to December 2020.



Marc Schmitz was born in Belgium. He graduated from Université Catholique de Louvain (UCL) in 1991 and passed his professional exam as a judicial officer in 1995, with distinction. He was appointed as a judicial officer by royal decree in

1996 in his hometown, Sankt-Vith, located in the German-speaking part of Belgium. Since then, he has been the owner and manager of the judicial officer firm RECOLEX. Since 1997, he has been elected continuously as the official representative of the Belgian National Chamber of Judicial Officers at the Union Internationale des Huissiers de Justice (UIHJ), with its headquarters in Paris. He has worked as a speaker at numerous conferences on civil enforcement for more than 25 years and participated as an expert in different international projects funded by the EU and the Council of Europe. In 2012 he became a member of the UIHJ board. In 2015 he was elected First Vice President of the UIHJ, and in 2018 he acceded to the position of President, to which he was re-elected in 2021 and 2024. He is also the co-founder and President of the Union Européenne des Huissiers de Justice (UEHJ), which is headquartered in Brussels.



Walter Szöky has been a Rechtspfleger at the Vienna Commercial Court since 1992. He has been President of the European Union of Rechtspfleger (EUR) since 2022 and is also President of the Association of Rechtspfleger of Austria (VDRÖ).

Since 1995, he has been a lecturer at the Schwechat Judicial Training Centre and a member of the IT Commission at the Federal Ministry of Justice. He has authored several publications on commercial register and company law. Since 2021, he has been an expert for the European Commission, Directorate-General for Justice, in the field of European legal education, and since 2024, he has been a member of the Board of Trustees of the European Law Academy (ERA).



Alex Tallon has been a distinguished member of the Brussels Bar since 1981 and is a founding partner at the law firms Praetica and Miles Legal. His practice focuses primarily on commercial law, particularly regarding the protection of

intellectual property rights and market practices, to which he has contributed significantly through a series of publications. Moreover, in addition to his commitment to ethical business practices, Alex Tallon has had a pioneering role in civil and commercial mediation, having been among the first lawyers in Belgium to undergo the training in 1998. His dedication to improving the standards of the legal profession is further showcased by his three-year directorship in charge of deontology at OVB (Association of the Dutch-speaking Belgian Bars), during which he strove to adapt the regulations to bring the legal profession in line with the needs of modern society and the possibilities offered by new technologies. Moreover, Alex Tallon has assumed several key leadership roles, serving as the President of the Brussels Bar (NOAB) and subsequently as the Head of the Belgian delegation to the CCBE for two years. Within the CCBE, he has also previously been an invaluable active member for six years, especially in the Future Committee and in various additional CCBE working groups.



Frans van Dijk is emeritus professor of empirical analysis of legal systems at Utrecht University. He has a specific research interest in the characteristics and performance of legal systems from the perspective of the intrinsic value of

the rule of law but also from the perspective of promoting a peaceful and affluent society. He participates in the work of the ENCJ on judicial reform and on independence and accountability, and he co-authored the recent reports about these issues. He is also involved in the trilateral cooperation of the High Judicial and Prosecutorial Council of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Norwegian Court Administration, and the Netherlands Council for the Judiciary. Prior to this, he was among others, Director of the Netherlands Council for the Judiciary.



Since 2022, **Viktor Vadász** has been Deputy Director and Director of Programmes at ERA. Before joining ERA, he served as a judge in Hungary at the Budapest Regional Court, dealing with high-profile criminal cases. Between 2018

and 2022 he was the spokesperson of the National Judicial Council of Hungary and represented the Council in its international relations, including representing it at the Executive Board of ENCJ. Between 2012 and 2015 he was the Director of the Hungarian Academy of Justice. He holds an LLM in economic criminal law and in European human rights.



Eva Wendler commenced her professional career as a legal officer in the Austrian Ministry of Health and in the Federal Chancellery. From 2002 until 2013, she served as a member of the Independent Administrative Tribunal of Vienna. Since 2014,

she has held the position of judge at the Austrian Federal Administrative Court and has been a member of the Board of the Association of Judges of the Federal Administrative Court. Between 2021 and 2023, she exercised the function of Rule of Law Officer in the Association of European Administrative Judges (AEAJ). Since 2023, she has been serving as Vice President of the AEAJ.

PARTNERS



AEAJ



**European Network of Councils
for the Judiciary (ENCJ)**
Réseau européen des Conseils
de la Justice (RECJ)



**NETWORK OF THE PRESIDENTS
OF THE SUPREME JUDICIAL COURTS
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**
Réseau des Présidents
des Cours Supérieures de Justice
de l'Union Européenne



UEHJ

Who should attend

Judges, prosecutors, court staff, judicial officers, private lawyers, EU officials, journalists

Fee

Participation onsite: 150 EUR (incl. Catering)
Participation online: 0 EUR

Venue

Belgian Council of State, 88 Aarlenstraat, Brussels

Language

English

Event Number

025D51

Hybrid format

Online participants can take the floor or address written questions to the panel through a live chat in Zoom. The link will be provided after registration.

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Registration



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