

Sabine Matejka, President of the EAJ

5 June 2026, Paris

Dear members and observers of the European Network of the Councils of the Judiciary,

Dear Madeleine,

Dear Colleagues!

Thank you very much for inviting me to participate in your meeting.

The ENCJ and the European Association of Judges have intensified their cooperation over the years and I want to especially thank Madeleine for being open to discuss topics both our organisations deal with or are concerned about. And there are a lot, and the number is still growing.

Defending the rule of law and judicial independence has become a major topic in Europe, unfortunately in more and more countries.

There is a wind of change, but in the wrong direction. The judiciary is among the first to feel this cold wind.

We experience attempts to undermine our independence, for example by gaining influence or changing the composition of the Councils of the Judiciary, or by influencing appointment and promotion procedures.

This is being done in many ways, sometimes loud with a “Big Bang”, but sometimes creeping in silently. So we need to be aware not to oversee the first signs.

We can no longer take it for granted that the government or the Ministers of Justice will support and defend the Judiciary. So we have to speak for ourselves, defend ourselves if necessary. And - and this is very important - explain what we are doing.

We are living in a fast world. With media reporting 24/7 and a flood of social media content that seems to be a lawless space. We have to adapt, we have to learn to communicate not only in the traditional way but also using new ways of communication.

This is indispensable because we need the contact with civil society, we need to make ourselves and our work understood. I strongly believe, that the support and the trust of civil society, are our strongest weapon when it comes to defend the rule of law.

But we also need solidarity and cooperation within the Judiciary, within the European judicial community and, in general, the legal community. This is why it is so important

to have organisations like the ENCJ and the European Association of Judges, to support our members and to enable exchange, to learn from each other, to raise awareness.

Maybe not every letter we write or statement we make will have an immediate effect. But it is important to show presence, to make others aware of problems and threats and, for those concerned, ensuring our solidarity.

Our work does matter, in many ways.

As times are rough, we must join forces. This is why our cooperation is so important. Our regular exchange, also with other organisations and other legal professions, and our joint statements, like the statement regarding sanctions imposed on members of the International Criminal Court, are important. It shows that we stand together and are willing to stand and speak up for the rule of law.

I want to thank each and every one of you, for your work and for your engagement to defend judicial independence.

Because without judicial independence, there is no rule of law.

And without rule of law, there is no democracy.

I would like to thank you, Madeline, for your cooperation and friendship.

And my best wishes to the new president: Dear Brian, I am looking forward to continuing our cooperation.

I wish you all a good meeting and a fruitful discussion.

Because your work is important and it can make a difference.

Thank you!