



European Network of Councils
for the Judiciary (ENCJ)

Réseau européen des Conseils
de la Justice (RECJ)



5 June 2025, Riga

**Address by the ENCJ President,
Mme. Madeleine Mathieu**

President of the Judicial Council of Latvia, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Latvia, Dear Aigars Strupišs

Dear members and Observers of the ENCJ,

Dear representatives of the Judicial Networks,

Dear distinguished Speakers and Guests,

It is a pleasure and an honour to open the 21st General Assembly of the ENCJ in the beautiful city of Riga. It goes without saying, that first and foremost, I would like to thank our hosts, the Judicial Council of the Republic of Latvia, and in particular its president Mr. Aigar Strupišs, for their generous hospitality and for giving us a possibility to meet and to reflect during these two days in both formal and informal formats.

Indeed, as a Network, uniting Councils for the Judiciary, the ENCJ provides us with a privileged and cherished space for exchange among the judiciaries on variety of actual topics.

Last year at the 20th General Assembly in Rome, we had an opportunity look back into the rich past of our network and the progress that was made since the creation of the ENCJ in 2004. On this occasion Ms. Nuria DIAZ ABAD rightly pointed out that the area of freedom, security and justice drawn up by the Council of Europe in 1999 in the Tampere action plan was a strong inspiration for the creators of the ENCJ. The objectives of mutual trust between European judges, convergence in civil and commercial matters, cooperation in the fight against crime and the search for a better quality and accessibility of justice for all are still at the core of the ENCJ.

A testimony to this is ENCJ's constant and continuous commitment to improve reciprocal knowledge across diverse judicial systems and to share good practices while respecting the traditions of each country. This work is carried out within the ENCJ Project groups, be it: the independence, accountability and quality of the judiciary, reflections on digital justice or on the relationship between the media and the judiciary.

However, I do not think that the choice of the topic for this General Assembly comes as a surprise to many of you. We have to admit that for quite some time now the growing trend of the ENCJ's work is the advocacy actions for the Rule of Law and for the independence of the judiciaries. It has particularly increased during my term as the ENCJ President. I believe, this reflects the current situation of the

European judiciaries and judicial institutions, which are confronted with many challenges that can jeopardise their independence.

Some may argue that there is a division, or even an opposition, between the Rule of Law and democracy, between the popularly understood sovereignty and the rights, or between the international treaties and the freedom of each state to decide on its own. Yet, let us be clear: the Rule of Law is not to be confused with the mere respect of the hierarchy of norms. It is the fundamental principle and a guarantee of democracy, which encompasses many elements, including the respect for fundamental human rights.

The judiciary has always been a marker of democracy. The principle of the separation of powers provides it with possibility to control over the other state powers to avoid arbitrariness. This control must be exercised by independent, impartial and accountable judges. Without the judiciary, the main democratic principle, the axiom of democracy would be incomplete.

As a German philosopher Jürgen Habermas wrote, law is "the medium that still provides some means for keeping together complex and centrifugal societies that otherwise would fall into pieces". In the current context of increasing challenges to our democratic institutions, this sentence makes perfect sense to me.

Let this General Assembly, therefore be an opportunity to reflect together on the nature of these threats and on the way in which the Councils for the Judiciary or other alternative judicial governing bodies can properly remedy them. These bodies play a central role in supporting the judiciary as a whole and individual judges, when confronted with such threats.

It must also be underlined, that on the occasion of this General Assembly, the ENCJ strategy for 2026-2029 was adopted. The ENCJ must also be resolute in supporting its Members and Observers in the coming years. I hope that affirmation of values of solidarity and collaboration in mutual respect for our diversity, will contribute to the construction of the future of our network, in a context that is certainly complex but also exhilarating.

I hope that, thanks to everyone's commitment, the ENCJ will continue to contribute to defending the Rule of Law and strengthening the independence of the judiciary.

I wish us fruitful discussions and announce the 21st ENCJ General Assembly in Riga open!