

Strasbourg, 12 January 2017

## CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL OF EUROPEAN JUDGES (CCJE)

### Questionnaire for the preparation of the CCJE Opinion No. 20 (2017):

#### “The role of courts with respect to uniform application of the law”

*Please in your answers do not send extracts of your legislation but describe the situation in brief and concise manner.*

*Comments on what is also happening in practice, and not only on point of law, will be much appreciated.*

### Introduction

The first section deals with the concept of the uniform application of the law in the way, in which it possibly exists, is understood and is operated in different member states of the Council of Europe.

The second section proceeds to discuss the role of the legislative and executive powers in ensuring the uniform application of the law through adoption of consistent legislation and executive acts.

The third section highlights the role of courts in ensuring the uniform application of the law through consistent court case law. **This section, due to the mandate of the CCJE, is the key section of the Opinion.**

The Bureau and the Secretariat of the CCJE would like to strongly thank you for your cooperation and contributions.

### 1. Concept of the uniform application of the law

**1.1** Is there in your country a concept of the uniform application of the law? Is it formal, established at the level of the Constitution and/or legislation, or rather informal,

discussed and set at various level and applied in practice through common understanding? Is it a combination of both approaches, to various extents? ***It is informal and set in various level and applied in practice through common understanding.***

1.2 What is understood in your country under the concept of the uniform application of the law? Is it understood in the form of:

- consistent legislation to be adopted at legislative level;
- uniform practices by the executive institutions and law enforcement bodies;
- uniform case law developed by courts.

Please explain each point and indicate the relative importance of each point. ***It is understood in the form of consistent legislation to be adopted at legislative level as well as uniform practices by the executive institutions and law enforcement bodies and uniform case law developed by courts. It is therefore a mixture of all these factors.***

1.3 What is the rationale of the uniform application of the law in your country and which kind of outcome for the population it is supposed to produce? ***The rationale of the uniform application of the law is that there should be consistency in the legislation and its implementation to ensure transparency and equal rights of all citizens of the country.***

## **2. Role of the legislative and executive powers in ensuring the uniform application of the law**

2.1 Are there in your country formal or informal requirements for ensuring the uniformity in the legislative process? ***There are informal requirements for ensuring the uniformity in the legislative process according to what is generally recognized by those concerned.***

2.2 Is there a hierarchy of laws? ***Yes it is so. The constitution is in the first place, followed by the general law and the regulations and rules set by law.***

2.3 How the conformity of national laws to treaties and other international instruments is ensured? How the latter are applied in your country: directly or through national implementing legislation? ***The conformity of national laws to treaties and other international instruments is ensured by international treaties and EU regulations are implemented in national legislation and by the interpretation of national legislation in accordance with international treaties and EU regulations.***

2.4 What are the arrangements in cases of contradictions between national laws, or between national law and treaty? ***If the general legislation is not in accordance with the constitution the general law depart. As depart senior general law for new legislation on the same subject if there is an inconsistency between older and younger law (lex posterior derogat legi priori) as well as specific law prevail over the general law (lex specialis derogat legi generali). If there are contradictions between national law and treaty the national law is to be interpreted in accordance with the international treaty to which Iceland has recognized and committed to implement.***

2.5 How usually law making process is carried out in your country? Which of the powers of the state has in practice dominant role in this process? ***The government and its individual ministries has in practice dominant role in law making process.***

- 2.6 Are acts of the executive power source of law in your country and in that respect are they legally binding for the courts? **No.**
- 2.7 In your opinion, are laws too often amended in your country and does it affect the legal certainty in the country? **No.**

### **3. Role of courts in ensuring the uniform application of the law**

- 3.1 Has the court case law in your country binding legal effect and is it a source of law? If yes, to what extent? To the same extent as the national legislation? **Yes, court case law can have binding legal effect as the national legislation.**
- 3.2 If the court case law in your country does not have binding legal effect, to which extent it is recognised as important for judges, at formal or informal level? **Refer to answer to question 3.1.**
- 3.3 In either case, have the courts a role to unify in any way the case law, and if yes, which courts and in which way? Are there special arrangements within each court – or between different courts at horizontal or vertical level within the hierarchy of courts – to ensure uniformity? **No.**
- 3.4 Are there specialised courts in your country? Is there a hierarchy of specialised courts if such system exists? Is it possible to challenge final judgments of specialised courts before superior judicial body (Supreme Court or court with a similar role). If yes, please explain in short. **There is only one specialised court in Iceland, The Labour Court. There it is not possible to challenge its final judgment.**
- 3.5 Is the unification of case law (mentioned in the question 3.3) determined by the Constitution, laws, by-laws or by long lasting practice? **It is determined by long lasting practice.**
- 3.6 Are judgments of such courts (mentioned in the question 3.3) obligatory to follow for:
- judges/panels of that court;
  - all judges in the country;
  - are there any consequences for judges if they do not follow case law of higher court?
- Refer to the answer to question 3.3.**
- 3.7 If judgments of such courts are not obligatory, what kind of practical effect they may have? **If the judgment shows that there is inconsistency in the legislation it is dealt with by changing legislation.**
- 3.8 What are the procedures, if any, applied when there are contradictions or deviations in the case law between different courts or different levels within the same court including superior courts (appealing, rendering legal opinions of court departments, preliminary rulings *in abstracto* etc.)? **In Iceland there are only two judicial levels. In case of contradictions or deviations in case law the Supreme Court has the role to correct it.**
- 3.9 Either in the case when the case law has binding legal effect, or in the case when it is not binding but otherwise has some impact, in which, if any, situations would it be

regarded as permissible or maybe even necessary to depart from the case law? **Only if there are contradictions or deviations in case law.**

- 3.10 What is the role of the Supreme Court or any other highest court in your country in establishing uniformity of application of law? Please explain how it is possible to access the Supreme Court and are there any discretionary powers in granting right to hear the case, and what would be the criteria for such possibility (filtering criteria)? **The Supreme Court has no such role and can only decide if that is the case if it is claimed by the parties.**
- 3.11 How is the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and other supranational courts or quasi-judicial bodies ensured and applied at national level, and how such case law affects the unification of national case law in your country? **The national courts are obliged to follow the judgments of the European Court of human rights and advisory opinions of the EFTA Court.**
- 3.12 In which way the court case law, including above-mentioned international case law, is assembled, published and made otherwise accessible for:
- judges;
  - other legal professionals;
  - general public.
- Judgments are published on the websites of Icelandic courts. Judgments of the European Court of human rights and the EFTA Court are also published.**
- 3.13 Is the access to such database free of charge? **Yes.**
- 3.14 Are courts the only source of information or there are more providers (on a commercial basis or through free access)? If the latter is the case, are such providers independent entities, and are they operating on commercial or not commercial basis? **As said before judgments of Icelandic courts are published on their website. Judgments of the EFTA Court are published by the court and judgments of The European Court of human rights are since 2005 published by the Institution on human rights of the University of Iceland. So there are only independent entities which are source for such information.**
- 3.15 What are the challenges for the unification of the case law in your country? Does the quality of national legislation pose a challenge – for example the need in modern society to use relatively broad definitions and legal concepts? **It cannot be seen that there are any special challenges.**
- 3.16 Any other point you wish to raise.