



**Welcoming address by Ambassador Emil Ruffer,
Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe**

Strasbourg, 19 June

Dear members of the HELP Network, ladies and gentlemen,

Please allow me to greet you all and welcome you at this event. It is an honor for me, as Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, to open the 2017 Conference of the HELP Network, which is devoted to friendly judiciary.

Let me first say that serious steps are being taken by the Council of Europe towards the development of a European legal area and enhancement of democratic institutions in the Council of Europe member States. Considering the paramount importance of justice in ensuring the rule of law, the Council of Europe naturally places special significance on training of judges, prosecutors and lawyers.

This is the role of the HELP Programme. HELP has become the umbrella for the main human rights capacity development actions undertaken by the Council of Europe involving legal training. The main aim of the HELP Programme is to ensure the implementation of the standards of the European Convention on Human Rights ('the Convention') at national level, supplemented with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights ('the Court'). Training of legal professionals is key to achieve the application of the European standards in their daily work. For this, the HELP Programme provides high-quality courses on human rights, most of them available on line. Indeed, HELP relies on the principle of "open education" as it considers the heavy work load and time constraints of legal professionals.

I would like to make a link between the priorities of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and today's Conference. Two of our priorities are relevant and are interlinked: 1) strengthening the rule of law and 2) promoting human rights education and linguistic skills. To achieve both of them, education on the Convention system plays a crucial role. Indeed, the HELP motto states: **Good training for good judgments!** But it is also more and more obvious that good human rights training is necessary for the good execution of judgments as well. Actually, the extent to which the judgments are treated as binding and executed is one of the criteria against which the rule of law is measured. To address this matter, a Conference of Supreme Court Presidents on the binding force of the judicial decisions takes place in Brno today and in the next two days.

But human rights education cannot be limited to legal professionals only. It is truly a path that has to be taken in the earliest stages of life and never be abandoned; it has to be rather continued as lifelong learning. This is why this year the HELP Conference coincides and shares tomorrow's session with the Conference on the State of Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Europe. This will allow for synergies to be generated from the various approaches in the different stages of human rights education.

Coming back to the HELP Programme, it is a pleasure for me to say that the Czech Republic, and in particular Czech lawyers, have also benefitted from it. Namely, the HELP course on Admissibility criteria in applications submitted to the European Court of Human Rights that was implemented in 2013 in cooperation with the Czech Bar association. And in January this year, a course on Data Protection and Privacy Rights was jointly launched in Brno for lawyers from the Czech Republic and Slovakia, thanks to the excellent cooperation between both countries' Bar associations and under the auspices of the EU-funded "HELP in the 28" project.

This successful example brings me to one of the topics which are to be discussed during the Conference: **Cross-border cooperation in human rights training**. Indeed, a transnational approach in human-right training is one of the tools to develop a common European legal culture and to overcome existing differences. The Czech – Slovak course was **THE** first multi country HELP course on Data protection and it was successfully completed in March this year. It is a pleasure also to see that the tutor of that course¹ will share his experience on the cross-border implementation of this course during the Working Group for Bar associations and Universities.

Finally, I would like to refer to another one of the priorities of the Czech chairmanship with the Committee of Ministers: **Co-operation and co-ordination with other international organisations**. The HELP Programme successfully joins forces with the other international organizations active in the field of human-rights education. One example would be the European Judicial Training Network, for some of the courses developed targeting EU countries. Another one would be the cooperation with United Nations Agencies such as the UNHCR for the development and implementation of the UNHCR/HELP course on Asylum and the ECHR. Another one is the cooperation with OSCE/ODHIR, through the jointly developed courses on Hate Crime and Hate Speech. There is also the cooperation with a number of international and regional NGOs.

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I would now take the opportunity to express my gratitude to the HELP Programme's Secretariat, the members of the HELP Network and the partners of the HELP Programme for their work and cooperation.

¹ Note for the Ambassador: Mr Jiri Novak

In the next day and a half, I am confident that we will benefit from enlightening presentations on particularly relevant topics and that we will actively take part in the discussions during the working groups. These exchanges will be crucial for the development of HELP's road map in the near future.

Once again I wish all the best for the work of the Conference.

Thank you very much for your attention!