

Enhancing the selection process of European Court
of Human Rights judges through multi-institutional dialogue

SEMINAR MARKING THE 15 YEARS OF THE ADVISORY PANEL'S WORK

27 November 2025, Strasbourg

OPENING SESSION

**Ms Krista OINONEN, Chairperson of the Steering Committee for Human Rights
(CDDH)**

1. Opening

Your excellencies, participants,

It is a pleasure to contribute to this opening session marking 15 years of the Advisory Panel's work.

Participants from governments, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Court, national judiciaries, academia and civil society bring valuable perspectives to this cross-institutional discussion, which remains essential for the credibility and resilience of the Convention system.

2. CDDH's long-standing engagement

The Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) has been closely engaged with judicial selection issues for more than a decade.

In 2012, the CDDH drafted the Committee of Ministers' Guidelines on the selection of candidates for the post of judge at the European Court of Human Rights, accompanied by an explanatory report with numerous examples of good practice.

Already in 2013, the CDDH concluded that the Advisory Panel functioned as a "useful additional safeguard to guarantee that proposed candidates ... are of the highest standards".

This support has continued. In its report adopted in 2023, the CDDH again examined national selection procedures, including the role and activities of the Panel. The CDDH welcomed the Panel's contribution, noting in particular that the CM Guidelines have become a reference text for the Panel, and appreciating the Panel's comprehensive and qualitative information on both candidates and national selection procedures.

3. Why this work matters — the Court is only as strong as its judges

The authority and credibility of the Strasbourg Court depend directly on the quality, independence and professional maturity of its judges.

This principle has been underlined repeatedly in the political declarations adopted at the high-level conferences held in Interlaken, Izmir, Brighton, Brussels and Copenhagen between 2010 and 2018.

The Brighton Declaration is particularly clear: “The authority and credibility of the Court depend in large part on the quality of its judges and the judgments they deliver”... and “the high calibre of judges elected to the Court depends on the quality of the candidates proposed to the Parliamentary Assembly for election.”

As a Government Agent pleading before the Court and responsible for introducing the Court’s judgments into the domestic legal system, I can say from experience that the judges’ calibre and the quality of their reasoning are consistently impressive. Their professionalism and independence truly form the backbone of the Convention system.

4. The continuing importance of national selection procedures

Today’s first thematic discussion reminds us that the process begins — and often succeeds or fails — at national level.

Fair, transparent, pluralistic and merit-based national procedures are indispensable.

The Advisory Panel’s recent reports show a significant improvement, yet also note recurring issues:

- candidates with insufficiently mature experience,
- limited linguistic proficiency testing, and
- concerns regarding undue political influence in national selection bodies.

These observations echo the importance of applying the CM Guidelines fully and consistently.

5. The added value of the Advisory Panel – but also its limits

Over these 15 years, the Panel has become a credible and stabilising part of the system, even if it has only an advisory mandate.

The Panel’s own assessment is striking: the overall quality of judges has improved compared to the years before its creation, at least partly because the existence of the Panel has pushed governments to focus more seriously on quality.

Its practice on Article 21(1) — even anonymised — is becoming an important interpretative resource.

At the same time, the Panel itself recognises its blind spots, particularly that it cannot know why highly qualified individuals may never appear on a candidate list, or whether political considerations have discouraged their inclusion.

Strengthening transparency and ensuring genuinely open national competitions are therefore essential parts of the solution.

6. A shared responsibility across institutions

The Advisory Panel is one link in a larger chain: national authorities, the Panel, and the Parliamentary Assembly each play a crucial role in ensuring that only candidates who truly meet the Convention's requirements are elected.

Each stage should reinforce — not dilute — the principles of independence, impartiality and competence under Article 21(1).

The CDDH remains committed to supporting this multi-institutional effort, including through identifying challenges, and sharing examples of good practice.

7. Looking to the future — maintaining ambition

If our ambition is to ensure three excellent candidates every time — individuals with mature, high-level experience, integrity, sound judgment and linguistic capacity — then there is still room for improvement.

But this is precisely why this dialogue matters: to clarify the standards, learn from experience, and enhance coordination among all actors.

8. Closing

I want to reaffirm the CDDH's full support for the Advisory Panel and for all institutions responsible for ensuring a fair, transparent and high-quality process for selecting judges to the Court.

Ultimately, we all work toward the same goal: a strong Court composed of strong judges, worthy of the trust placed in it by 700 million Europeans.

I look forward to today's discussions and to our continued cooperation.

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