

## **Ambassador Vesna BATISTIĆ KOS - welcoming address speaking points**

### **HELP Network 2023 Annual Conference, 6 July**

Dear colleagues, dear participants,

- Thank you very much for being with us today. It is a pleasure for me to open this year's HELP Network conference together with the Latvian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, Ambassador Janis Karklins, and the Director of Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Mr Christophe Poirel.
- I would like to start by reaffirming the major role the HELP programme plays as the only pan-European Network of peer-to-peer human rights training for judges, prosecutors and lawyers in the 46 Council of Europe member States.
- I wish to thank the Council of Europe for the long-lasting cooperation with the European Commission on judicial training. Rule of law, human and fundamental rights are strategic judicial training objectives for both organisations.
- The Council of Europe, through its HELP programme is a major stakeholder that we rely on for the implementation of the European Judicial Training Strategy for 2021-2024 in these fields.
- Therefore, the Commission's financial support provided to HELP under the EU Justice Programme will continue.
- I wish to congratulate you on the most recent results presented in the 2023 HELP report. Exceeding the symbolic number of 100.000 users of HELP e-learning platform is a great success. I also welcome the well-advanced work on the new HELP course on the ECHR - EU Charter Interplays.
- The Council of Europe is a very important partner to provide expertise within the EC Expert Group. This group will soon start working on the next European judicial training strategy. We count here on the profound input of the CoE representatives to this process.
- The developments and challenges we face today further increase the need for a modern judicial training.
- Digitalisation of justice is a Commission priority. As legal complexity rises and more people rightfully demand swifter access to justice,

digitalisation is the practical way justice professionals can keep pace. It makes case management faster and more efficient. It improves working conditions of justice professionals. Ultimately, it can improve access to justice, key for the rule of law.

- This is why it is also crucial to strengthen the digital competence of all professionals involved in the digitalisation process. Judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff must be well trained and digitally literate.
- The role of training has already been identified here, and relevant objectives have been set in the current European judicial training strategy. It will equally be the key priority for the next strategy.
- I do hope that the HELP programme will also contribute with its activities to assist professionals facing the challenges of digitalization.
- I would also like to stress the key role our programmes play in ensuring the resilience of our system of values in the current geopolitical circumstances.
- Russia's unprovoked and unjustified aggression against Ukraine has caused significant human casualties, forced millions of people to flee their homes and had a devastating impact on human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe.
- As the key expression of our strategic partnership with the CoE, our joint programmes (HELP being one of them) have also been able to adapt to the changing geopolitical realities so as to provide tailor-made assistance to Ukraine and support the EU membership perspective of our partners in the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership region.
- I would like to stress a few tangible examples of this.
- The Council of Europe keeps running the Asylum/Migration e-Desks that provides training support to lawyers assisting refugees from Ukraine in more and more EU countries.
- In that regard, together with the Council of Europe and the UNHCR, we delivered jointly two seminars on European legal practices to assist Ukrainian refugees in September last year and very recently in June.
- Under the PGG II component on Combating violence against women and domestic violence, national training institutions integrated the HELP programmes on Women's Access to Justice and combating violence in their own training curricula. In Georgia, the High School of Judges included the HELP course as a compulsory element in their Mentoring

Programme since 2020. Approximately two-thirds of Georgia's judges have now been trained on the topic.

- In the Western Balkans, under phase II of the Horizontal Facility, a regional action to support HELP deployment in the region has amounted to 112 courses available in the local languages and 42 in English. It has led to the mainstreaming of multiple HELP courses in academies for judges and prosecutors, universities or other judicial training centres in North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo.
- Phase III will support the beneficiaries in further enhancing professionalism, accountability and the overall quality of service of the judicial system, building upon the results achieved under the previous phases. Further support will be provided using the Council of Europe HELP tool to enhance the capacity of judges, lawyers and prosecutors in the Western Balkans and Türkiye to apply the European human rights standards in their daily work.
- Achievements like these and many others give the very concrete measure of our strong cooperation with the Council of Europe.
- Our joint efforts contribute to raising human rights and justice standards, reforming the functioning of national systems and reinforcing adherence to a rule of law culture. These benefits are meant to be structural, enduring, an investment in the future. And they trickle down to all levels of society.
- We are resolute in strengthening our values-based partnership with the Council of Europe and continuing to make fundamental rights, democracy and justice a reality for our citizens.
- Thank you for your attention!