European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ)

Strengthening Judicial Independence: Career and training of judges

Launch conference of the report on the first thematic review
under the Sofia Action Plan

*Strasbourg, 17 November 2026*

CLOSING SESSION

17.00 p.m. to 17.30 p.m

Francesco Depasquale (Malta)

President of the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice
(CEPEJ) of the Council of Europe

Thank you very much to the European Committee on the Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) for the invitation made to the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) to intervene during this closing session.

The CDCJ, when it works on justice matters, and the CEPEJ, are two committees of the Council of Europe that may find themselves working on the same issues. However, their mandates are not the same and are complementary. The CDCJ is a committee responsible for setting norms and standards, whilst the CEPEJ provides technical assistance on the ground, in the courts, alongside legal professionals. Our joint work benefits from this diversity of roles, in the interests of justice and of those who come into contact with the justice system, whether they are legal professionals or members of the public. Let us hope that this cooperation continues, and indeed intensifies in the future, particularly on the subject that concerns us today, namely the careers and training of judges. The same applies to the CCJE and the CCPE, whose direct input from judges and prosecutors is invaluable in enriching our own work

Indeed, the aim of the CEPEJ is the improvement of the efficiency and functioning of justice in the member States, and the support for a better implementation of the instruments adopted by the Council of Europe, in particular those adopted by the CDCJ.

To that end, the CEPEJ evaluates judicial systems, identifies challenges and ways to improve their performance, supports member States on request, and advises the Council of Europe on possible new legal instruments. It does so by analysing data, developing evaluation tools and guidance, and engaging with legal professionals, experts and organisations.

Since 2004, the CEPEJ has undertaken a regular process of evaluating the judicial systems of the Council of Europe's member states. A real photography of the justice in Europe, structured by

thematics (budget, efficiency, professionals, access, etc), which includes now, after almost 25 years, millions of comparable data. The next Report will be published next month, containing 2025 data.

Your report mentions numerous CEPEJ concerning the carrier or training of judges. It should be noted that the training of judges is an area in which data can be collected; however, from a methodological perspective, the results are not always considered reliable. There are, in fact, numerous training courses provided to judges which do not necessarily fall under the remit of the National School for the Judiciary, if any. These courses are either not recorded at all by the States or are recorded only incompletely. This prevents satisfactory comparability of data on this subject between States.

However, on the issues that bring us together today, the CEPEJ does not restrict itself to collecting statistics. It has also produced a number of tools which it makes available to legal professionals:

- Guidelines on gender equality in the recruitment and promotion of judges (12/2022)
- Guidelines on the evaluation of the quality of work of judges (12/2024)
- Model Technology Curriculum for Judges (06/2026)
- In December, we should adopt guidelines on work-life balance for judges

Similarly, within the numerous bilateral cooperation programmes implemented directly by the CEPEJ, some of the activities focus on capacity-building; as part of this, it organises, at the request of the beneficiaries, highly specialised training courses for judges. Allow me to mention a few of the topics taught by the CEPEJ's experts: judicial time management within courts, reduction of backlogs, ethical aspects of AI, automation of proceedings with or without AI, communication by courts, etc.

Current work of the CEPEJ are numerous, in line with its 2026 – 2029 CEPEJ Action plan (VALLETTA ACTION PLAN):"*Strengthening the Rule of Law by improving trust in justice systems*". This framework nevertheless leaves the door open to further work, which could prove useful, depending on developments in the justice system and the needs expressed by States. When I read your excellent report, which is a compilation of all the key current standards relating to the careers and training of judges, I find myself thinking that we could launch further joint initiatives together on this basis. For example, on the role of the human element in the digitalisation of the justice system. Or on young people's access to justice, to ensure that it is genuine and inclusive, so that these young people are confident that their interests are genuinely taken into account by a justice system whose understanding is not limited to what is shared on social media – in short, a responsive, modern and intelligent justice system, on both sides. We could discuss this at a later stage.

Thank you very much.