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

OPENING SESSION

14.30 p.m. to 14.50 p.m

Daniele Cangemi

Head of the Department of Human Rights and Justice Standards

DGI, Council of Europe

Dear Chair of the European Committee on Legal Co-operation,

Dear President of the Consultative Council of European Judges,

Dear Vice-President of the European Court of Human Rights,

Dear President of the European Commission on the Efficiency of Justice,

Dear Special Rapporteur,

Distinguished speakers and participants,

It is an honour for me to be invited to say a few opening words at this launch conference on the first thematic review of the Council of Europe Plan of Action on Strengthening Judicial Independence and Impartiality – the Sofia Action Plan – and to see so many of you here, both in person and online. If further proof were needed, this demonstrates how preserving judicial independence remains a highly topical issue.

Exactly ten years ago, in 2016, the Sofia Action Plan was adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. This was against a backdrop of growing concerns of whether sufficient safeguards were in place to ensure the independence and impartiality of the judiciary, as an essential requirement for the proper functioning of our democratic societies. The Council of Europe then committed to working alongside states and to supporting them in implementing concrete measures and fostering a culture of respect for judicial independence and impartiality.

Ten years on, while progress has been made in number of areas, challenges have arisen that fuel new concerns, as we face unprecedented regional and global tumult, questioning of our democratic model and destabilising it. They require us to act with determination and resolve.

This is precisely what the Council of Europe is doing. In 2023, at the Reykjavik Summit of heads of states and governments, member states adopted a strong Declaration, placing ten principles for democracy at the heart of the organisation's action. These principles are based on the fundamental pillars of the Council of Europe: democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Needless to say, protecting judicial independence features prominently among them.

Building upon the Reykjavik Declaration, the New Democratic Pact for Europe launched in 2025 seeks to create the conditions for making our democracies more resilient and responding to the changing expectations of states, institutions and civil society. In this context, it is undeniable that the independence of the judiciary is an important indicator of a society's democratic health.

Against this background, the topic of this first thematic review – the career and training of judges – is a good yardstick for measuring the independence of judges throughout their tenure.

There can be no judicial independence without a career system for judges that is fully transparent and protected from any undue influence, whether in relation to their appointment, promotion or accountability.

Nor can there be independence or impartiality without a system that ensures judges maintain a high level of expertise through their training.

The thematic review reveals positive developments, which should be welcomed, but also a number of challenges.

The aim of today's conference is to address both, with the insights of the speakers and contributions of participants.

Given that the CDCJ has produced the report being launched today and is responsible for the follow-up to the Sofia Action Plan, it is only natural that I would now to give the floor to its Chair, Signe Öhman.