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**EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR THE EFFICIENCY OF JUSTICE
(CEPEJ)**

Welcome package for CEPEJ National Correspondents

Dear National Correspondent,

Welcome to the CEPEJ community! We are thrilled to have you on board as a vital member of our network dedicated to the evaluation of judicial systems across Europe. As a National Correspondent, your role is pivotal in ensuring the data collection as well as their accuracy and comprehensiveness.

I. What is the CEPEJ?

The European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) of the Council of Europe, works for more than 20 years on the improvement of the efficiency and functioning of justice across Europe, by strengthening co-operation between states and between legal professionals. The role of the CEPEJ consists in developing and making available for states specific and concrete tools aimed at enhancing quality, efficiency and promptness of judicial systems. To learn more about the CEPEJ's mission, you can visit the [CEPEJ internet site](#).

Given that the CEPEJ's primary objective is to contribute to public policies in the field of justice, it is essential to know the judicial systems. To acquire this knowledge, the CEPEJ collects data at European level, based on which, it designs indicators that enable analyses to be carried out, but also identifies good practices that could inspire other judicial systems.

These data and analyses are presented in the European Judicial Systems CEPEJ Evaluation Report published since 2004 (more information available [here](#)), one of the CEPEJ flagship documents, that relies on the CEPEJ National Correspondents network.

The Evaluation Report includes also the dynamic database of European judicial systems [CEPEJ-STAT](#) which presents all the data and comments provided in the framework of the evaluation process, in an interactive way.

The CEPEJ presents an objective situation of the European judicial systems, without ranking the states, by grouping them together on the basis of common characteristics or problems and by identifying good practices that can inspire other member States, particularly in their reform processes.

II. What is your role as a National Correspondent and what does it entail?

As a National Correspondent, you serve as a crucial link between the CEPEJ and your respective country's judicial system. In this sense, the knowledge of your judicial system is essential for all CEPEJ activities.

In the first place, you are in charge of collecting data from different authorities in your judicial system and providing them to the CEPEJ. To do so, you would need to establish your own network of sources at national level, raising their awareness about the purpose of the data collection – the CEPEJ Evaluation Report - and the fact that this stage is followed by a quality control phase in which they are also involved and which will require a high level of availability and responsiveness on their part because of the very strict deadlines for these evaluation exercises.

In this context, organising meetings with all your sources to discuss data collection methods and possible improvements can be very useful.

As a National Correspondent you are responsible for the data of your state, which will be the unique source of information and analysis for the Report.

This work is a collaboration between you, a specialist in your judicial system, and the CEPEJ Secretariat, which can guide you in the interpretation of the questions and concepts. This cooperation is built on trust and transparency and will give rise to regular exchanges and communication with you. For example, no changes/modification of data will be made without consultation/discussion with you.

A meeting with all the CEPEJ National Correspondents is organized every year in Strasbourg and provides a platform to exchange experiences, share practices, and propose improvements to the data collection process.

Peer evaluation visits can also be organized to support National Correspondents in the data collection process and improve the availability and quality of data provided. This activity also makes it possible to deepen knowledge of the judicial system of the country concerned through exchanges of experience with CEPEJ experts, who are themselves working on specific subjects/problems in their countries. The CEPEJ secretariat is at your disposal for further information on this type of individualized support.

You can count on the support of the CEPEJ Secretariat throughout the entire data collection and quality control processes. We are available for any issues – technical or substantial – through video or phone contacts, e-mail, on the occasion of the National correspondents meeting, or by means of visits/peer evaluation missions in your country.

More details about the scope of your role are outlined in detail on the Network of CEPEJ National Correspondents page, accessible [here](#).

III. What are the main challenges for the National Correspondent and how to address them?

- ✓ *The timeframes* – the evaluation process consists of different stages framed by specific deadlines; in their common work, the CEPEJ and the National Correspondent have to comply with these deadlines which implies reactivity and availability from both sides. As most of the data are systematically collected every year, such as data relating to the case flow, it is recommended that these data be collected at national level even before the start of the evaluation cycle, if they are available.
- ✓ *Data collection from different sources* – the National Correspondent obtains the information required from different national authorities, depending on the specific thematic. S/he has to constantly be in touch with various bodies, guiding them on the CEPEJ definitions, methodology and deadlines. S/he has to ensure a kind of “internal” quality control of data anticipating possible questions from the CEPEJ Secretariat on discrepancies. Establishing a practice of exchange and communication at national level is a good way to ensure consistency of data. The National Correspondent can identify key persons in the different justice institutions and discuss in detail the data requirements that relate to the evaluation. Maintaining contact with these resource persons, not only when there are questions related to the data, but also when the evaluation results are published, will ensure a deeper understanding of the needs of the evaluation exercise, and more ownership on behalf of the institutions involved in providing the data.
- ✓ *The comparability of data* – the National Correspondent has to bear in mind that the CEPEJ has its European approach built on autonomous definitions and concepts. Sometimes, it is necessary to move away from national definitions and present the data in accordance with the CEPEJ Explanatory note. In this respect, it is paramount to provide comments which can explain and shed light on the peculiarities of the judicial system and for that, your expertise is essential. The functioning of *CEPEJ-COLLECT* (the online data collection platform) facilitates this exercise. General comments inserted in relation to each question are saved automatically, and national correspondents can see the previous feedback and clarifications they had submitted. They can then either update them or confirm them.

IV. What data should be collected?

You need to collect the replies to the Evaluation questionnaire. The latter is organized per different thematic covering numerous aspects of the judicial systems such as budget, justice professionals, access to justice, quality and efficiency, ICT, court users etc. Accordingly, you are required to contact different authorities having the relevant data for each respective field.

The Explanatory note explains in more details what kind of data should be provided under different questions. The quality and the comparability of data being of utmost importance, the CEPEJ ensures through this document that all countries have the same understanding of the concepts, sometimes implying to deviate from the national definitions. It could be useful to translate the Questionnaire and the Explanatory note to facilitate the understanding by the relevant national authorities. During this translation phase, the CEPEJ Secretariat is entirely at your disposal in case of doubts about the meaning of a term, the sense of a concept or the way of interpretation of a question.

To have a better picture, please consult the most recent replies from your state, available on the CEPEJ webpage as well as within the *CEPEJ-COLLECT* platform (every section of the current campaign contains a heading “*previous data*”). Furthermore, at the beginning of each evaluation cycle, the Secretariat of the CEPEJ provides the National Correspondents with an Excel document containing the data provided by the state concerned during the last evaluation campaigns. This document can be useful for both the National Correspondent and the source authorities to anticipate any questions from the Secretariat and to explain from the outset any possible variations/modifications/evolutions in the responses for the reference year.

V. What are the phases and the timeframes that apply?

Starting from 2025, the CEPEJ Evaluation cycle takes place every year. The Council of Europe member States as well as few observer States participate in it.

The evaluation cycle is divided into specific timeframes implying different tasks and responsibilities of the National Correspondents:

1. October (N-1) to March (N): *Data Collection Process*

- ✓ Identify the relevant institutions competent for answering the different questions and divide the Questionnaire and the Explanatory note accordingly. Check if the previous National Correspondent has established the list of these authorities; any feedback from the former Correspondent on this starting point is useful.
- ✓ Contact all relevant authorities that can provide you replies on the CEPEJ questionnaire (data sources), send them the respective questions, the relevant part of the Explanatory note, insisting on the importance of complying with the CEPEJ definitions when providing the data; send them also the previous replies, inviting them to provide straight away a comment/explanation/clarification in case there are discrepancies/variations/different replies compared to previous years.
- ✓ Recall to the competent authorities the significance of the comments accompanying the data; beyond the explanations of variations between the cycles, general information on the respective judicial system and its various aspects covered by the different questions, is very important when analysing data and will be published on the CEPEJ-STAT database. It may be useful at this initial stage to recall that some additional questions regarding replies can be sent by the CEPEJ, requiring extra attention from their side.

- ✓ Collect replies (data and comments) from data sources, double-check for omissions and ask for explanation of discrepancies with previous replies if not provided.
- ✓ To help your data collection process, we recommend consulting the "Workshop Data Collection" outlined in the document "[Good Practices for National Correspondents](#)."
- ✓ Start entering data on [CEPEJ-COLLECT](#) once the platform is open. Familiarise yourself with the [CEPEJ-COLLECT User Manual](#) for efficient data entry.
- ✓ Submission of data can be gradual. Obtaining the entire data set from the different sources before starting is not required. Once you submit the data, you can "Save" it without publishing it. This allows you to revisit the data and change it until you are confident enough to publish it.
- ✓ The *CEPEJ-COLLECT* system automatically highlights discrepancies with previous replies. National correspondents should come back to the data sources to provide explanations (in case they did not anticipate this by providing an explanation straight away) of the identified discrepancies before the final data entry.
- ✓ Inform the CEPEJ Secretariat promptly about any difficulties or delays in data submission.
- ✓ Do not hesitate to request any assistance from the Secretariat if you face technical difficulties in filling the data and/or posting the sections, or if you have doubts about the meaning of a question.

2. April to September (N): Quality Control Process

- ✓ From April onwards, the CEPEJ Secretariat reviews the provided data for compliance with the Explanatory note, consistency with previous replies, and coherence of replies across the questionnaire.
- ✓ A question-and-answer process begins between the CEPEJ Secretariat and the National Correspondent. During this process the CEPEJ Secretariat could ask you to provide additional comments and information.

3. October to December (N): Preparation of the Report

- ✓ During this period, the CEPEJ Secretariat prepares the [Evaluation Report](#) and the National Correspondent's role is generally minimal.
- ✓ If necessary, the Secretariat will reach out to the respective National Correspondent for additional information or clarification.

4. December: Beyond the official publication of the Evaluation Report

- ✓ After the Report's publication, National Correspondents can significantly contribute to its dissemination within their professional networks.
- ✓ At this stage, it is also recommended – if necessary - to have the Report (or at least the *Country profile* of the state concerned) translated into the national language to make it better understood.
- ✓ They are encouraged to promote the Report at the national level, through conferences, media, social networks, meeting of justice professionals and similar events.
- ✓ It is highly recommended to inform all sources involved in the data collection and present them

the final result of our joint endeavors.

- ✓ At the end of the process, it is a good practice to make/update a list of all institutions involved in the data collection, indicating the name of the body, its contact details and all questions for which it is responsible for.

VI. Are there any other data collection activities?

EU member states: every year a similar data collection process for the [CEPEJ Study for the EU Justice Scoreboard](#) is carried out. It is based on an extract of the [main questionnaire](#). The outputs are different from the CEPEJ Evaluation Report. Once the data quality control phase is completed, the CEPEJ Secretariat sends the study to the National Correspondents concerned for information and possible comments.

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Serbia, and Kosovo^{*1}: every year there is a similar data collection process for the “[Dashboard Western Balkans](#)”. It is based on an extended and dedicated [Questionnaire](#) having somewhat specific deadlines that will be communicated to you by the CEPEJ Secretariat. The outputs are different from the CEPEJ Evaluation Report. Once the data quality control phase is completed, the CEPEJ Secretariat sends the report to the National Correspondents concerned for information and possible comments.

Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine: every year there is a similar data collection process for the “[Justice Dashboard EaP](#)”. It is based on an extended and dedicated [Questionnaire](#) having somewhat specific deadlines that will be communicated to you by the CEPEJ Secretariat. The outputs are different from the CEPEJ Evaluation Report. Once the data quality control phase is completed, the CEPEJ Secretariat sends the report to the National Correspondents concerned for information and possible comments.

The CEPEJ Secretariat remains entirely at your disposal at any stage of the evaluation process.

We look forward to your contributions. Thank you for your participation in improving the efficiency of judicial systems in Europe.

Warm regards,

The CEPEJ Secretariat

¹ *This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence.