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## **“Independence of Justice and the Rule of Law”**

The video Conference will take place on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 2020, and we shall have the opportunity to highlight how the principle of the rule of law, one of the three pillars upon which the Council of Europe was established, 70 years ago, is so relevant in our times for the quality of our democracies and for the citizens’ confidence in justice.

The Conference builds on the work done so far by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) which attempted to define the rule of the law for the first time, the work of CEPEJ, the relevant references in the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR) and other political documents and legal instruments. The recent discourse in Europe about the new challenges facing the rule of law and the need for justice systems to respond to the extraordinary times due to Covid-19 pandemic, constitutes the protection of the right of access to justice vital for the defense of individuals’ rights.

There is a long tradition in the European area and a common legal space for the Member States of the Council of Europe to have developed constitutional and other legal guarantees in order to ensure justice independence and the impartiality of the judiciary and legal professions. The judiciary must be able to exercise their responsibilities without the influence of the executive branch, or other restrictions, pressures or threats by any other authority. As a fundamental principle, an independent justice constitutes a core element of democracy and a precondition for a fair trial and an unimpeded access to justice. During this Conference, the Ministers will have the opportunity to focus on the **new challenges for the rule of law** and to discuss the legal and other guarantees that governments may adopt for safeguarding judicial independence.

In the same context any instability caused to public institutions due to external or internal crises have an impact on citizens’ trust in these institutions. The emergency measures that governments have taken in order to protect their citizens should respect fundamental rights and the rule of law and justice can contribute to this effect.

The citizens deserve an independent and efficient justice, which safeguards and promotes their rights, inter alia, the right to a fair trial and protection from power abuse. At this Conference, we shall have the pleasure to exchange views on **ways to further strengthen our citizens’ confidence in our justice systems** under emergency circumstances such as the ones imposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.