

HELP in the EU NETWORK CONFERENCE

Opening speech of Mr Christophe Poirel, Director of Human Rights, Council of Europe

I warmly welcome you to the **HELP in the EU Network Conference** organised under the **EU-CoE joint project 'Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) in the EU'**.

I would like to thank all the participants for attending this event, representatives of national training institutions for judges, prosecutors and lawyers, international partners (EJTN, CCBE), as well as members of Permanent Representations of several EU member States. I would also like to thank Per Ibold, from the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe, who has kindly agreed to deliver a welcome speech, showing the active engagement the EU is taking in promoting human rights education.

The EU is indeed our natural partner in Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals in EU member States, a partnership that was enhanced when in 2015 the Directorate General for Justice entrusted the biggest, EU-wide, training project on fundamental rights for legal professionals, 'HELP in the 28', to the Council of Europe. **The current EU funded 'HELP in the EU' project illustrates the EU's renewed and firm commitment to enhance human rights education and trust in the Council of Europe's expertise.** We are most grateful for this confidence.

The Council of Europe is indeed in a unique and privileged position to develop practical human rights courses, **given its central role and unique expertise in protecting human rights and the rule of law in Europe.**

Thanks to the 'HELP in the EU' project, we are implementing more and more courses in the EU with the active involvement of experts, thus **contributing to achieving the EU goal of having at least 50 % of all legal practitioners** (corresponding to a total of 700.000) **trained in EU law by 2020**, including on fundamental rights.

The **HELP in the EU Network** is part of a larger Network composed of national training institutions and bar associations of the 47 member States of the Council of Europe, a unique platform in its nature, bringing at the same table representatives from the three main legal professions: judges, prosecutors and lawyers.

The use of HELP courses ensures that **human rights training throughout the EU** space is of **high quality** and **meets the specific needs** of each of these professions. While HELP focused at the beginning on the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), it gradually moved to cover other instruments like the European Social Charter or CoE Conventions in key areas like data protection or bioethics. Furthermore, with EU support since 2015, we include the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and relevant EU law in the courses specifically developed for EU countries, in key areas that respond to the many serious challenges that Europe is facing. Thus, **HELP courses are unique as they combine the EU and the CoE law and case law, and help judges, prosecutors and lawyers to apply both systems in a practical and effective way.**

The 'birth' of a HELP online course was a long, complex and challenging process. Now that it is in place, it is a **free and always accessible training resource** which can be **translated and adapted to the national context**, with the **potential to reach the most remote courts and legal offices** in your country. HELP courses have a **high quality content** and are **developed with CoE in-house expertise**. They ensure that any legal professional from any corner of the EU receives the same human rights training on European standards, but with the advantage that they can be translated into national languages and complemented by national adaptations. **Currently, out of the more than 30 HELP thematic courses available, there are some 220 national translations or adaptations.** This effort is particularly remarkable in light of the financial constraints currently faced by the CoE and has been possible thanks also to the generosity of our international partners, the continuous engagement of national partners and the tireless commitment of the HELP team.

Launching HELP courses across Europe relies heavily on our national partners, represented in this room, and I would like to thank them. Many of you constantly open the doors of your institutions to **host launch events for HELP courses and actively engage in selecting tutors and participants.** Some of your institutions, from which we will hear tomorrow, have gone one step further and have fully integrated HELP courses in the training curricula, **making them part of the regular trainings** offered to legal professionals.

The demand for more HELP courses is increasing, particularly as EU member States are currently struggling with such serious human rights challenges as terrorism, migration or rising xenophobia. The increasing number of EU users of the HELP online platform, almost half of the 30 000 users, confirms the relevance of EU support to develop and launch HELP courses that address **practitioners' needs in the EU context.** In order to be able to continue addressing these needs, HELP is constantly looking to identify resources available to sustain its work. In this regard, it comes naturally to **join forces with the EU** and HELP has been privileged to find

support not only through funding, but also through institutional support, be it for ensuring presence in HELP seminars and launch events or for contributing with feedback and content in the process of course development or updates. **HELP has responded to a recent call for proposals for projects on legal training, launched by the EU, and we hope to be able to continue this fruitful cooperation.** We also stand ready to join forces with the EU on thematic areas of common interest.

To sum up, I would like to highlight that the **HELP courses have a feature which is unmatched in any other training material: they are developed as close to the 'source' as one can get** (i.e. within the very institution where standards are developed and that is in charge of monitoring their implementation: the Council of Europe) **and they are delivered as close to 'home' as one can be** (i.e. reaching legal professionals in their language, in their context, in their office or on their home screens across the EU countries).

Before concluding, I want to thank you all for your active participation and renewed trust in HELP. Be it as partner or collaborating institutions, most of the institutions you represent have expressed the **determination to continue working with HELP**. We look forward to continuing our excellent cooperation to ensure that the **work of the Council of Europe, through its HELP Programme, has an increased impact regarding human rights protection on our continent**. Your presence here proves that the Council of Europe was right to assume, through the motto chosen for its 70th anniversary this year, **that we are all determined to stand for 'our rights, our freedoms, our Europe'**.

I wish you all a successful conference, with fruitful and engaging discussions. Thank you very much for your attention.

Strasbourg, 31 January 2019