

**Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Justice  
'Independence of Justice and the Rule of Law'**

- Ladies and Gentlemen,
- Thank you for inviting me to speak at this important and timely conference. I am sorry I could not be with you today in person.
- The EU and the Council of Europe have a long and fruitful history of cooperation. The seventy years of experience of the Council of Europe grant it a crucial authority in setting standards and protecting them, including regarding the rule of law.
- Our commitment to work closely together to uphold the rule of law was recently reiterated in the EU priorities for the cooperation with the Council of Europe for 2020-2022.
- To respond effectively and rapidly to emerging challenges to the rule of law in the European Union, the Commission has over the past years developed and expanded its so-called 'rule of law toolbox'.

- A central new instrument in this toolbox is the European Rule of Law Mechanism, with the Commission's annual Rule of Law Report at its centre. We adopted our first Rule of Law Report little more than a month ago.
- The Mechanism is conceived as a yearly process. It is aimed at preventing problems from emerging or deepening, promoting good practices and creating joint awareness of the situation of the rule of law across the EU.
- The new Mechanism will keep the rule of law on the political agenda and stimulate a permanent and fruitful discussion on the rule of law, year after year. We will have discussions in the EU institutions and at national level.
- Our 2020 Rule of Law Report provides a overview of significant rule of law related developments in the European Union, including country-specific assessments for all the 27 Member States.

- Our report presents both positive and negative developments since 2019, covering four pillars:
  - Justice systems,
  - The anti-corruption framework,
  - Media pluralism and freedom,
  - And other institutional issues related to checks and balances.
- During the preparation of the report, we have worked closely with the Council of Europe, including through a designated contact point.
- This has helped to ensure that our work on the rule of law is mutually reinforcing. Council of Europe recommendations and standards are integral part of the methodology that we applied in our rule of law report. Through the contact point, you also provided very valuable country-specific input for the Report.
- I would like to thank you for this excellent cooperation.

- The Rule of Law Mechanism is more than just a report: What we want to achieve is a deeper dialogue and the promotion of a rule of law culture for all EU Member States.
- I have experienced the first discussions on the report in the EU's Council of Ministers, the European Parliament, the German Bundestag and with civil society organisations as very encouraging. And I am determined to take this debate further, both at European and at national level.
- Moreover, the rule of law is also a value guiding the external action of the European Union. The EU is determined to pursue a strong and coherent approach between its internal and external rule of law policies with the aim to enhance a rule of law culture also in the external context.
- Discussions like the one you are having today can make an important contribution to safeguarding and fostering the rule of law.

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the Rule of Law'**

- Thank you for this and for your attention.