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Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe
The voice of European Lawyers

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CCBE statement on rule of law developments: justice - the compass for an evolving world

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The Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) stands as a voice for the legal profession across Europe, representing over one million lawyers through its member Bars and Law Societies. The CCBE is committed to upholding the fundamental principles that define a just and democratic society - the rule of law, the independence of the judiciary, and the essential role of an independent legal profession. The challenges facing the legal profession and the judiciary are not confined to any single country or region. These principles transcend time and context - they are immutable values that must not be compromised, regardless of political, economic, technological, or societal changes. As representatives of the legal profession, it is our solemn duty to ensure their preservation and advancement for the benefit of all.

The CCBE stands alongside its international partners in opposing threats and ensuring that lawyers remain independent, and able to fulfil their essential role in upholding the rule of law.

European values

During these challenging and uncertain times, the European Union must remain steadfast in upholding its fundamental values. Democracy, human rights, the rule of law, freedom, and solidarity are the cornerstones of our Union, and they must guide our actions now more than ever. The rule of law is a founding principle of the EU and has been a key element in the development and integration of the Union since its foundation. As we navigate crises that test our resilience, we must not let the principles that define us erode. The strength of the EU lies in its unwavering commitment to these values, which unite our diverse nations and peoples in a shared vision for a just and prosperous future. European values are non-negotiable, and they contain equality, non-discrimination and fundamental rights, including those of minorities.

EU institutions have a critical role to play in ensuring that our values are not only protected but actively promoted. EU institutions must demonstrate leadership by upholding the rule of law, defending democracy, and safeguarding human rights within and beyond our borders. This means standing firm against any threats to fundamental freedoms, addressing inequalities, and ensuring that policies reflect the core principles of the Union. The credibility and legitimacy of the EU depends on its ability to lead by example and to act decisively in defence of its foundational ideals.

At a time when global challenges such as conflict, economic uncertainty, and democratic backsliding are on the rise, we must not waver in our commitment to building and strengthening European values. It is not enough to speak of democracy, freedom, and solidarity - we must embody them in our policies, institutions, and daily lives. We must resist any forces that could undermine our unity and shared vision. By standing firm in our commitment to European values, we not only safeguard the future of the EU, but also reaffirm our dedication to a world built on peace, justice, and human dignity.

Trust and confidence in the legal system

Public confidence in justice is fundamental to maintaining the rule of law. A strong justice, independent lawyers and judges are non-negotiable pillars of the rule of law. Attacks on lawyers or courts undermine this trust and can create a justice shaped by political power rather than abiding by these principles. The CCBE calls on all stakeholders to abstain from any action that could erode trust in legal institutions.

No tolerance for attacks on lawyers or courts

The CCBE strongly opposes any attacks - verbal, legislative, or otherwise - on lawyers or national or international courts. Any efforts to delegitimise courts, intimidate judges, obstruct the administration of justice, or target lawyers for carrying out their professional duties threaten the stability of legal systems and democratic governance itself. Lawyers play a crucial role in safeguarding the rights of individuals and ensuring access to justice, and they must be able to carry out their work free from harassment, threats, or political pressure.

The CCBE invites all governments and political actors to respect the judiciary's role in upholding justice and to protect legal professionals from any form of retaliation or coercion. Disagreements with judicial decisions should only be addressed through proper legal channels, not through intimidation, threats, or attempts to undermine judicial and professional independence.

A committed CCBE

The CCBE stands resolute in its commitment to defending the rule of law, the independence of the legal profession, and the judiciary. No political shift, economic crisis, technological advance, or societal transformation can ever justify undermining the principles of the rule of law and the independence of courts and lawyers. These are not transient values as they are the bedrock of justice, democracy, and human rights. Without them, freedom is threatened and trust in institutions vanishes. It is the responsibility of every generation to safeguard these principles, ensuring that they endure. The CCBE will continue to defend these principles and work with all Bars and Law Societies and lawyer organisations to ensure that justice, integrity, and legal independence remain at the heart of our societies.

The erosion of these principles anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. The rule of law is not self-sustaining - it requires unwavering commitment, collective effort, and the courage to stand firm in its defence.

We call upon Bars, Law Societies, lawyers, judges, policymakers, governments, and citizens to stand together in this cause.

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