



EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

Judicial Seminar 2018
Strasbourg, 26 January 2018

Opening speech by the President Guido Raimondi

**Secretary General,
Dear Guests,
Dear colleagues,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

It is my great pleasure to once again welcome you all to Strasbourg today for the activities that mark the opening of the judicial year of the European Court of Human Rights.

I thank you all for making the journey – especially those who have come very far – to accompany the Court as it enters into another year of its work.

Let me point out that this is the 20th year of the new Court. The institution that we know today came into being on 1 November 1998, and we will be marking that important anniversary later on in the year.

I know that many of you are return visitors to the Court, and are familiar with the format and the purpose of the seminar. To our new guests, I would like to explain that this is a very important event for our Court. It is one of the ways that we practice what we preach in relation to judicial dialogue. Those of you who have had the experience of visiting the Court bi-laterally, and of receiving in your own courts visitors from Strasbourg, know that a regular and direct exchange of views among judges is of very great benefit to the task of upholding human rights. Under the Convention, we share that task, we share that responsibility. It is therefore natural that we should be in dialogue among ourselves – indeed, it is even a necessity. And in that context, the annual seminar is the crowning event.

This year's edition takes as its theme a subject-matter that concerns – and is of concern – to all of us who represent the judicial branch. The “least dangerous branch” (in Professor Alexander Bickel's famous phrase) is faced today, in a number of our countries, with dangers to its authority, its legitimacy, and its effective action as the guardian of the rule of law.

Whence the wish on our part to offer a European forum for discussion to our counterparts from all corners of the continent. I will make some remarks on this subject during my speech at this evening's ceremony.



Mr Secretary General, you have put this issue of the authority of the judiciary at the forefront of the agenda of the Council of Europe.

In 2016 you presented to the Committee of Ministers, and they accepted, a plan of action for strengthening judicial independence and impartiality, for implementation over a 5-year period. And in your annual report on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe, you hold up the issues and point to the failings that have to be addressed for the sake of a well-functioning, respected and trusted judicial branch. We will hear your keynote speech with the greatest interest.

Ladies and gentlemen, before I conclude my remarks, I wish to express my thanks to the five judges (from Italy, from France, from Switzerland, from Serbia and from Latvia) who accepted my invitation to be speakers at the 2018 seminar.

I also wish to thank my colleagues in the organising committee who have brought us this year's edition: Judges Faris Vehabović; Ksenija Turković; Branko Lubarda; Yonko Grozev; Iulia Motoc, and, of course, the chair of the committee who is seated beside me, Paul Lemmens.

I am sure that a discussion that is both rich and enriching will be had here this afternoon.

I now pass the floor to Judge Lemmens, to take us into the substance of this year's seminar theme.

Thank you.