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

Superior Courts Network (SCN)

Message from President Mattias Guyomar

Ten years of judicial dialogue in the service of shared responsibility

The exchange of views between judges is an expression of legal pluralism and broadmindedness. It leads to the gradual establishment of a common system of law, to be achieved while respecting differences, through model-sharing and mutual enrichment of case-law. But at the level of the Council of Europe and the Convention system, dialogue also, and even primarily, satisfies the need to implement, under optimal conditions, the "shared responsibility" on which effective respect for the rights and freedoms protected by the European Convention on Human Rights is based. As a reflection of the guiding principle of subsidiarity, this "shared responsibility" between the Strasbourg Court and the national authorities, first and foremost the domestic courts, makes dialogue highly desirable, if not imperative.

In March 2015 the Brussels Conference Declaration welcomed the idea of setting up a "network facilitating information exchange on [the Court's] judgments and decisions with national courts". Upon its inauguration by the European Court of Human Rights in 2015, the Superior Courts Network was a one-of-a-kind model of judicial dialogue, dedicated to the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights through mutual exchange of information on that instrument at an operational level. Its rules of operation privileged a practical and pragmatic approach that would enable new forms of dialogue and exchange to develop. After an initial test phase, the Network grew rapidly, its success resting on its composition, remit and capacity to evolve. It now covers all 46 member States of the Council of Europe, bringing together 112 member courts and a number of observer courts, including some on other continents.

Over the past ten years, the Network has grown into a dynamic, interactive community for the effective protection not only of human rights but of the rule of law and justice more generally. It has become a structure dedicated to sharing knowledge and know-how, offering numerous tools for accessing, understanding and applying the Convention.

Designed as a mutually beneficial space for all parties concerned, the Network gives national judicial authorities – as the primary guarantors of compliance with the Convention – privileged access to the European Court's case-law in multiple fields, while enabling the Court to keep its knowledge of domestic legislation and practice up to date and to monitor new issues arising in the light of the Convention.

The Network thus helps bring the European Court and the domestic courts closer together and creates a framework enriched by the human dimension of the work of justice. The community so formed meets both virtually – thanks to the exchanges that take place on the dedicated website – and in person at the Annual Forum of Focal Points in Strasbourg. The sense of belonging to this community is rooted in the organic bonds that are formed through activities and events that are organised within the Network and in which the national Focal Points take part. The numerous contributions to the anniversary volume *The Superior Courts Network – A community of practice in the service of justice*, which cover the Network's origins, influence and future prospects from different angles, are a testament to this spirit, giving an accurate picture of the Network's day-to-day functioning. The eighth Forum of Focal Points, which was held on the Network's tenth anniversary in 2025, was an initial opportunity for its members to reflect on the direction the Network might take going forward.

A valuable tool in the hands of those who share the Convention, the Network contributes to the dissemination and consolidation of the values it protects, the rule of law and democracy.