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

CCBE Roundtable with the European Court of Human Rights

Opening remarks by Mattias Guyomar

19 November 2026

President, Secretary-General, and Members of the CCBE

Chair of the CCBE Permanent Delegation to the Court,

Dear Judges, Registrars and members of the Court Registry,

Dear all,

It is a great pleasure for me to welcome you, on behalf of all the Judges of the European Court of Human Rights, at our Human Rights Building.

I am glad to see so many of us in the room, with so many Judges, Registrars and members of the Registry present, which clearly shows a high level of interest.

I wish to thank in particular Judges Adamska-Gallant, our Court's judicial 'focal point' for members of the legal professions, *dear Anna*, and Judge Mercer, *dear Hugh*, for being speakers at today's roundtable.

There is a deep mutual collaboration between the Convention system and the members of the legal profession.

It begins at the domestic level, long before the case reaches our Court – if it does reach it at all – and it continues until long after a judgment of our Court has been delivered and during its execution.

Throughout this entire process, the role of lawyers is fundamental:

In advising clients and applying the Convention within the national legal system.

Helping to resolve disputes 'close to home'

Ensuring that the Court's practice and case-law are known and accessible.

And finally, by litigating cases before our Court and helping us to live up to our ambition of being a Court for all.

In this regard, I wish to thank the CCBE for the latest, 6th edition of the "Questions and Answers" practical handbook for lawyers on the case-law of the European Court.

This guide reminds us that the effective protection of human rights depends not only upon sound legal principles, but also upon the practical ability of lawyers to invoke, apply and defend those principles. Our mutual dependence is even more important in 'times of change', like today, when the rule of law finds itself on the back foot.

In such times, it is crucial for the members of the legal profession to support international law and its institutions.

And it is equally crucial for these institutions to be there and able to support you.

I want to express here my appreciation to the CCBE for your very recent *Joint Statement on the Protection of International Justice*, which defends international jurisdictions and expresses concern about the targeting of judges and members of legal professions.

As the voice of over one million European lawyers, the CCBE's solidarity carries extraordinary weight and reach.

International courts can only fulfil their role in protecting human rights, the rule of law, and the international legal order, if our independence is safeguarded.

Last month, I was in the Hague to express our Court's message of judicial solidarity with the President and some Judges of the International Criminal Court, targeted by international sanctions.

These messages of judicial solidarity matter.

Attacks and threats directed at judges and lawyers all have the shared aim of undermining the legitimacy of the justice system itself.

We are all concerned by rule of law backsliding.

And we are all instrumental in fighting against its progression.

The CCBE statement recognises our common role when it says, "[t]he protection of international justice is a shared responsibility" of States, international institutions and the legal profession.

Of both judicial and non-judicial actors.

Lawyers, in particular, as non-judicial "counterpowers", are instrumental to safeguarding international rule of law and human rights when these are being threatened.

Today, alongside international courts, many counterpowers themselves come under pressure.

In response to a 2024 CCBE survey, more than a half of lawyers reported having experienced threats or aggression in the preceding couple of years.

I see this as a deeply worrying sign of the degree of fragility of the rule of law in Europe.

The Council of Europe Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, adopted last year, is one promising element of response.

However, signed by 26 States already, it remains ratified so far only by one State.

The Court has played its part in protecting lawyers through its case-law.

For the sake of defending the individuals themselves, but also, more broadly, everyone's access to a court – one of the most fundamental elements of a fair trial.[1]

By protecting, for example, the client-lawyer privilege[2] and lawyers' freedom of expression[3], in recognition of the fundamental role of lawyers as the "protagonists in the justice system"[4], to quote the Grand Chamber case *Morice v. France* [GC].

Just this year, in the case *Ramishvili v. Georgia*[5], the Court found that "damaging the reputation and credibility of lawyers can have serious consequences for the rights of the accused and the right of access to a court".

[1] *Salduz v. Turkey*, 2008
[2] *Campbell v. the United Kingdom*, 1992; *Michaud v. France*, 2012.
[3] *Lutgen v. Luxembourg*, 2024.
[4] *Morice v. France* [GC], 2015, §148 and §132
[5] *Ramishvili v. Georgia*, application No. 4100/24, 3 February 2026, §40

Indeed, the right to a fair trial would remain a dead letter without the commitment of the members of the legal profession.

And just last month, the Court delivered an advisory opinion in response to a request made by the Constitutional Court of Luxembourg under Protocol No. 16, on the compatibility with the right to a fair hearing of the obligation for a lawyer facing disciplinary proceedings to appear in-person at the hearing before the disciplinary body.

By protecting individual rights of lawyers, the Court has contributed to the strengthening of the collective legal ecosystem of the Convention and the rule of law.

Because, just as there can be no rule of law without independent judges, there will also be none without independent lawyers.

However, let me also emphasise the important role of the bar associations in upholding professional ethics and regulations relating to the conduct of lawyers.

This year, the Court has barred two lawyers from representing applicants before it, based on Rule 44D of the Rules of Court – a Ukrainian lawyer, and one Romanian lawyer who notably misused AI-generated material in her submissions.

I want to stress that this was done in adversarial proceedings, with all concerned given the opportunity to comment – including, in the case of the Romanian bar member, the relevant bar association. This, by the way reflects a recommendation made in 2020 by the CCBE.

Just as lawyers rely on the protection of the Court, so does the Court rely on lawyers and bars to protect it from situations of contempt of court and abuse. We count on this mutual assistance.

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Today's event builds on our Court's regular meetings with national bar associations, organised with the support of the CCBE, and numerous other meetings with bar and law societies.

As a side note – later today we will also host at the Court Margaret Satterthwaite, UN Special Rapporteur for independence of judges and lawyers. The coincidence of today's events is both symbolic and meaningful.

It is important for all of us to use these opportunities to come together and, through dialogue, discuss and work out how we can better help each other.

In the European context, indeed in all contexts, the resolution of disputes through law is of fundamental importance; law can accompany those in dispute, taking them from conflict to peace through justice.

I very much look forward to our discussions today and tomorrow.

Thank you.