

Distinguished Presidents, Dear Colleagues!

On behalf of the National Judicial Council of Hungary, I would like to thank you for this wonderful award, it is an honour for all of us. I would like to highlight that what our Council has achieved over the years, is the result of teamwork. We can rely on each other: we are not alone in the Council and we are not alone in the world. I also ask you not to reduce the attention and support for the Hungarian judiciary and to keep your eyes open.

Dear Colleagues! There are so many ways in which a judge can experience vulnerability. We can be vulnerable in the courtroom, while being unjustly attacked by our clients or by the press. Judges may feel vulnerable while sitting in an arbitrary disciplinary hearing in Poland. Another level of vulnerability might be when fleeing Guatemala or Afghanistan or sitting in a Turkish prison cell or walking among the ruins of bombed-out Ukrainian courthouses. These latter are the saddest examples, but the ones I have not mentioned are not less important.

Hungary was one of the few countries where independence of the judiciary has been challenged in a new way, which then might have become a model for other countries. Us, Hungarian judges, have faced various forms of violation of judicial independence in recent years: unlawfully forced retirement, irregular appointment of judges and senior judges, restrictions on freedom of expression, unjust disciplinary initiatives, smear campaigns, discrimination at the workplace, and currently we have the lowest judicial salaries in the European Union.

Judges in more fortunate countries might think that undermining judicial independence cannot happen to them, because their old democratic tradition is a shield against populist attempts. I disagree. The sad news is that tricky maneuvers against the rule of law can show up anywhere, even in the old democracies.

The most important lesson of the National Judicial Council's story is that we can count on solidarity. From our fellow judges, from representatives of other legal professions and of course, most importantly, from the international community, you, represented by the IAJ and the EAJ. Your solidarity letter in the middle of the smear campaign will never be forgotten. Along with the ENCJ, the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary, you have always been with us by our side. The fact that the National Judicial Council has been able to succeed is largely due to the attention of the international judicial community and the universal values we all share.

This award is special because it is given by judges to judges. It reminds us that solidarity is the key that can help us defend our common values: the rule of law and judicial independence. It gives hope: as long as we stand up for those principles and for each other, the everyday struggle as judges in any conditions will make sense.

Solidarity is our strength. Keep the flame alive! Thank you once again.