

Strasbourg, June 3rd 2025

Dear friends,

It's an honour and a huge pleasure to be here with you today. In my court the judges are allowed to miss just one of the weekly chamber deliberations a year, the criminal chamber deliberates every Tuesday, so when I received the invitation for this conference I knew I had to use my joker, and I am happy I did, because I wouldn't have missed this for anything.

Since I visited in Berlin the Mendelssohn Family exhibition at the former "Remise" (carriage house) of the Mendelssohn-Bank headquarters I am intrigued by the story behind the seal used by the Mendelssohns in their coat of arms.

What are we looking at?

A crane with a stone in its claw in combination with the family motto "Ich wach" (I am keeping watch). This symbol refers to a story of the Roman writer Pliny the Elder in his book *The Natural History*. At night cranes take turns keeping watch for enemies. The one who is on duty holds a stone up with one claw; if the watcher falls asleep the stone will fall and wake him.

A beautiful image that kept coming to mind as I was preparing this talk. For me, the Crane in Its Vigilance it represents judicial solidarity. We are like a flock of cranes. It is our duty and responsibility to uphold the rule of law and the independence of the judiciary; that is "our stone".

Like the sign in Gare de L'Est I saw yesterday while travelling to Strasbourg: we are on our guard together. In the words of the Athens declaration of the ENCJ:

Judicial solidarity is an important value in Europe. European judiciaries share common values. Judicial solidarity contributes to the stability of democratic institutions and the Rule of Law in Europe.

Since 2009 I have been part of the board of Judges for Judges, a Dutch independent and non-political foundation set up by judges to support fellow judges abroad who have run into problems or risk problems mostly related to (presumed) violation of their professional independence.

As we are not the Dutch Association for the Judiciary (the NVVR) we cannot be a member of MEDEL. I am not sure why the NVVR never became a member of MEDEL, but I have a strong suspicion that it has something to do with its slightly outspoken signature, in the words of Medels first president Christian Wettinck: being a group of "petits juges rouges".

Well whatever the case may be, that did not deter us as J4J and over the years we have worked together a lot, with 5 different presidents (Vito Monetti, António Cluny,

Gualtiero Michelini, Filipe Marques and Mariarosaria Guglielmi) and it's fair to say that our relationship developed into a preferred partnership, Medel and J4J are besties!

Let me pick 3 highlights from our shared history:

[Dragana (after disciplinary trial) and her enjoying an al fresco dinner with Omer Hadziomerovic, Antonio Cluny, Gerhard REISSNER]

Just to refresh your memory: In 2009 the High Judicial Council decided that all judges with permanent tenure of office had to apply for re-election, otherwise they would not be elected pursuant to the new law and their tenure of a judge would cease to exist. As a consequence of this re-application/election procedure, in December 840 judges (more than 1/3 of all judges in Serbia) were dismissed from the 1 of January 2010. The decision contained no more than a long list of names of all not reelected judges and the sentence that they were no longer considered suitable to serve as a judge.

In reaction to my email I sent to Judges Association of Serbia (JAS) in January 2010, I very soon received an email by Dragana Boljevic, president of JAS and one of the non-reelected judges.

Dear Miss Trotman,

I am glad that the MEDEL initiative intrigued the Dutch foundation "Judges for Judges" regarding the events in Serbian judiciary.

When I read that the aim of your foundation is to stress the importance of an independent and impartial judiciary by providing support to judges throughout the world who are not able to work in true independence, free from external political or other pressure, threats and harassment (...) I realized that the Serbian case is the meaning of your existence :-)

And that was the start of a long and effective meaningful collaboration.

I will only say a few words about Turkey here, as it will be discussed later today. But the unprecedented measures taken after the failed coup in July 2016, when around 2,800 judges were dismissed in the first 12 hours after the putsch and arrest warrants were issued for all of them, were the reason for forming a coalition with our RoL allies: the Platform for an Independent Judiciary in Turkey was born. A significant step if only to let our Turkish colleagues know that we have not forgotten them and to ensure that the dismantling of the Turkish rule of law does not disappear from the radar of the relevant authorities in the rest of the world.

And the third and final example: Poland. Without a doubt one of the most impressive days of my professional life. And I know that this applies to many who were in Warsaw at the time.

The symbolic power of the March of the 1,000 robes cannot be underestimated. It was unique that judges from all over Europe came together there to mark that the Muzzle law as the next step in the Polish breakdown of the RoL truly violated all common values shared by European judges and to underline the importance of **Free Courts** for every citizen.

And again we decided to team up with our platform friends and we have taken this rather groundbreaking step by initiating proceedings against the EU Council regarding their approval of the Polish Recovery and Resilience Plan

I'm wrapping up. I recently placed this lovely Japanese natsume on my desk for inspiration. Yes indeed showing a flock of cranes as a reminder that we as judges must remain vigilant in these challenging times of serious RoL backsliding.

In Japan, the crane, is considered the bird of happiness and is seen as a symbol of good luck and longevity because it is said to live 1,000 years. So very appropriate, therefore, for this 40th Anniversary Conference.

In the great movie The Matrix Morpheus said: "There's a difference between knowing the path and walking the path" And that's the good thing about Medel, never just words but always matching actions. So congratulations, many happy returns and':

Let's keep walking the path together!



Tamara Trotman

Chair Judges for Judges