

**Secretary General, Mr Oberto**

**EAJ meeting, 29 May 2020**

Dear Colleagues,

it is a great pleasure and an honour to address you in this informal meeting, although in a way which is not the usual way we use to meet.

The idea of this informal meeting of the EAJ comes from its President, José Igreja Matos, who will address you in a few moments. My task is that of welcoming you all and explaining what are our activities at world level, despite the difficult times we are going through.

First of all, I would like to express my personal gratitude, also on behalf of all the members of the SG, for the solidarity and friendship you expressed during the worst moment of the pandemic, when Italy was hit by the Covid-19 in a massive and frightening way. We all managed to pass through all these problems in good health and we have been able to pursue the activities of the Secretariat, which, as you know, are mainly done using IT technology. Therefore, we first of all continued to use our email exchanges and continued to update our web site, especially in the part referring to the news.

The activity of the Presidency Committee has gone on and is still going on, despite the severe lockdown which was inacted first of all here in Italy, but also in practically all other parts of the world; our PC has been accustomed to work online already for a very long time. Practically, since ten years at least, it sits continuously, almost without interruption and has been able to take decisions through the exchange of e-mails. Now, the next meeting of the PC, due to take place in Verona on 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> June, will be held by video link and the same will be for the autumn meeting.

As you know all the physical (in person) meetings of this year had to be cancelled. I had only the possibility to participate, with EAJ President José Igreja Matos, Vice President Duro Sessa and IAJ Hon. Pres. Geri Reissner in the UNODC meeting in Doha in February, on behalf of the IAJ, just before the lockdown.

Then we tried to keep you informed with emails and news published on our web site.

Just for your information, I repeat that, as far as we know in this moment, the world meeting in Costa Rica will take place in 2021 (September), whereas the 2022 meeting should take place in Israel and the 2023 meeting in Taiwan.

As for the European Meetings, President Igreja Matos will keep you informed about the availability of Portugal for February 2021 and of Greece.

As you know, on April, 20<sup>th</sup> we sent as SG a communiqué to all IAJ national associations, trying to recap the situation.

We explained that the Presidency Committee had decided, having regard to the exceptional situation, to have an automatic Prolongation of IAJ PC and SG until the 2021 meeting in Costa Rica. The Presidency Committee envisages that it may require Central Council at its next meeting to ratify the prolongation of the membership of the Presidency Committee and of the Secretariat-General between that period from when the elections ought to have taken place (2020) to the time at which the new elections do take place (2021).

As to the Study Commissions, their Presidents have agreed not to have a virtual meeting, but to hold meetings in person on the occasion of the next annual meeting of the Central Council (which we we presume will be in autumn 2021 in Costa Rica). Therefore, the new deadline for the answers to the questionnaires (distributed a couple of months ago) need to be scheduled and Associations will be informed hereafter (those who already sent their contributions will be allowed to update them, if need be).

## Working Groups

Working Group on the assistance to judges. This WG has already been created and started working via e-mail: therefore, there is no reason to suspend its activities (all the more in these times) and this Secretariat-General is fully available to provide support to its President and members.

Working Group (Commission) on Regular Monitoring. The Presidency Committee decided to postpone the appointment of members of this WG and its works to 2021, as these activities are strictly confined to the annual meetings of the Regional Groups and of the Central Council. This means that the first group of 31 associations are now informed of the deferral of the deadline for submission of their report (of course those reports which have been already sent will be considered as having been submitted on time and will be evaluated together with the ones that will be sent within the new deadline in 2021).

Working Group on the Reform of the IAJ statutory provisions on voting procedures. Also, for this WG the Presidency Committee has decided to postpone the appointment of its members and its works to 2021, as these activities are also confined to the conduct in person of the annual meetings of the Regional Groups and of the Central Council.

## 2020 Annual Membership Fees

The Presidency Committee has decided to approve the proposal of the Secretariat-General to reduce by half all membership fees related to the current year 2020, taking into account the fact that the postponement of all the meetings "in person" of this year has the effect of lowering a certain number of expenses. However, it is clear that the Presidency Committee and the Secretariat-General continue working and some activities at the level of Regional Groups are still anticipated. We inform therefore all Associations that those members who still have to settle their dues for this year will pay half the amount due for 2020, namely:

- a) for the first group: € 883,50 (instead of € 1767),
- b) for the second group: € 589 (instead of € 1178),
- c) for the third group: € 353 (instead of € 706),
- d) for the fourth group: € 176 (instead of € 352).

We inform those Associations which already paid the entire amount for 2020 (following the letter we sent in January this year) that they will only be required to pay half the amount that will be due in 2021 (this situation will be reflected in the request for payment letter that we will send for the payment of the 2021 fees, which will specify the exact amount due by each and any Association).

## Survey and Study upon the Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic on Judicial Activity

Finally, the Presidency Committee agreed on a proposal submitted by the French Association and by the Secretariat-General for the Study Commissions to undertake a wide ranging survey and study upon the effects of COVID-19 pandemic on judicial activity and more generally on the impact and reactions to the pandemic on the Rule of Law and on the Independence of the Judiciary. President Pagone has already contacted the Presidents of the four Study Commissions in order to ask them to confer together with a view to seeing how best we might learn from this experience in a way that is meaningful and positive.

In this framework the Presidency Committee also asked the Secretariat-General to send a general message asking the associations to provide information about possible problems in their countries due to corona virus to obtain short answers of general character on the main issues at stake. We sent some weeks ago a short questionnaire with a deadline which was prolonged until the end of May.

So far we received only very few replies therefore we are asking you to be so kind to reply as soon as possible. Your replies will be published in our web site, where we dedicated a special page: \*\*\*

Let me add now that, even in these last months characterised by the lockdown, the IAJ and in particular its European Regional Group, the EAJ, have been really very active. President Igreja Matos will explain the many fields and occasions in which he took the floor and the interesting contacts he was able to create with European Authorities (the European Parliament, for instance, and its President David Sassoli), whose help is essential in this period.

As we have already experienced the pandemic has given us a hard lesson on how fragile our democracies can be and how delicate is the balance between the powers of the State, up to a point to push our EAJ President to advocate for a Marshall Plan for the protection of judicial independence.

Dear Colleagues and friends, I hope that with these few words I managed to convince you that, thanks to you constant help and comprehension, IAJ and EAJ are well alive: alive and kicking!

A famous and controversial French writer, Michel Houellebecq, said recently that, after the coronavirus, the world will be just the same - only worse. I fear he is right, but you can be sure that our organisation will fight until the end to make at least the world of justice a better one.

Thank you.

And now I am glad to give the floor to the President of the EAJ, José Igreja Matos.