

Dear President of Iustitia
Dear Polish Colleagues
Esteemed Friends

Gratitude!

It is often quoted that Gratitude is the only sentiment one cannot exaggerate.

The ancient Greeks call it the “memory of the heart”.

The European judges, the judges worldwide, are wholeheartedly grateful to you, dear Polish Colleagues.

Grateful for being always in the frontline to protect judicial independence and Rule of Law.

Grateful for the continuous energy and enthusiasm, regardless of the powerful forces moving to tame you, often in the shadows.

Grateful for your patience and rationality, for keeping the composure, acting in a responsible manner.

Grateful for your closeness with civil society, working with democratic institutions, exposing, since day one, that judicial independence is not a privilege of judges but a crucial demand for citizens.

Therefore, on this special and joyful day of commemoration for the 31st Jubilee of Iustitia, allow me to publicly express - with no risk of exaggeration - how thankful we are.

In times of populism and autocratic regimes, in times of crisis of democracy, your struggle has been decisive for the European judiciary, for the future of Rule of Law within the European Union. Without your resilience and determination, I have no doubt that the attacks against our basic values would have been potentially destructive in several countries, in several regions, affecting the heart of Europe.

Personally, when I started, at an international level, several years ago, to warn about the dangerous deterioration of the Polish judiciary, many commented, in a blasé mood, how “exotic” was the topic: “a problem related to judges and prosecutors only; nothing that should concern European institutions”.

Only the continuous alerts, the persistent work conducted by international and national associations of judges, but also by lawyers organizations, academia, European Law professors, succeeded in gradually shifting the top priorities of European policies.

The turning point, dear friends, was the historical moment of the 1000 Robes March.

January 11, 2020 will remain for many decades as the day when the European judges, normally silent by professional duty, raise their voice and take an unmistakable stand.

Since that day it was impossible to continue to ignore or neglect such a crucial concern.

If we are not independent, we simply cannot be called judges and courts will lose the right to be considered as such.

As you know well, our intervention is always strictly apolitical.

I remember the different battles of our association in recent years: protecting Judge Afuni and persecuted judges in Venezuela or in Bolivia, denouncing the terrible annihilation of Rule of Law in Turkey; in those circumstances we were often qualified, depending on the case, of being of extreme right or radical left.

When working with the European political authorities, similar attacks were made regarding our denunciations related with Poland.

Nothing could be more detached of reality.

Our only commitment is towards Rule of Law and Judicial Independence. Nothing more but certainly nothing less.

Allow me to emphasize today the importance for EU authorities to effectively enforce our Treaties.

A few days ago EAJ assembled in General Assembly urged the European Commission to use all means to bring the Polish authorities to abide by their obligations and, in particular, to ensure that the decisions of the Court of Justice are respected and that implementation of the measures necessary to give effect to their decisions is not further delayed. Such measures include declaring the decisions issued by the unlawful Disciplinary Chamber null and void.

This appeal remains vital and urgent.

Time continues to be of absolute essence.

It is time to conclude.

I dedicated my recent election as President of IAJ - just one week ago - to the Afghan women judges. Human lives are there in serious danger; it is our obligation to raise awareness to the ordeal of these women. Iustitia, the Polish judiciary, has reacted promptly and graciously.

But we all need to do more.

IAJ calls on all States to help organize safe travel options, visas for transit and for ultimate destinations, support for the judges and their families to rebuild their lives.

We urge that States ensure humanitarian visa quotas for Afghan judges at-risk, especially women judges.

We must act immediately. This is an absolute prerequisite to save lives.

United we stand.

In solidarity - a unique word to use in this country, in this city, in this particular time and place.

Solidarity!