



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

Opening of the judicial seminar

Speech by Linos-Alexandre Sicilianos

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**Presidents,
Dear friends,**

Allow me at the outset to say how glad I am to see so many of you gathered here for this seminar, which traditionally precedes the Solemn Hearing of the Court.

This is a particularly important seminar, since it is the first event organised this year to mark the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. I shall return to this point in a moment.

Your presence here testifies to your interest in this traditional rendezvous between the European Court of Human Rights and the European supreme courts.

I am sure that the presence of distinguished academics and the Government Agents to the Court will further enrich this afternoon's discussions.

I should like to thank Judges Turkovic, Dedov, Motoc, Kucsko-Stadlmayer, Chanturia and Jelic, who organised the seminar, assisted by Rachael Kondak and Valentin Nicolescu.

Naturally, I welcome our four speakers: Rick Lawson, a well-known specialist on the European Convention on Human Rights, Professor in Leiden; Juliane Kokott, Advocate General at the Court of Justice of the European Union; Laurence Boisson de Chazournes, Professor in Geneva and recognised expert on environmental law (among other areas); and, lastly, our friend and former colleague Ineta Ziemele, President of the Constitutional Court of Latvia.

The theme chosen for today's event is highly topical, since it refers to the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights, which we are celebrating this year.

To mark this anniversary, it was decided to prepare a commemorative book, a copy of which you will all receive this evening. In addition to historical and contemporary photographs and archival material, you will find, in respect of each member State, information about an important judgment, one that was a landmark for the protection of human rights. I should like to thank all those who contributed to this book, working to extremely tight deadlines, and I thank the judges of the Court, each of whom chose the judgment which struck them as the most salient for their country.

Over seven decades, the European Convention on Human Rights has become our common language. Although our legal traditions differ, as illustrated by the range of nationalities represented here today, the Convention nurtures our dialogue and we all apply it. It is a working instrument used by every one of us – by you in the first place, in your courts, and on an increasingly frequent basis. Then by us in Strasbourg, since that is the role assigned to us by the treaty.

If, to return to the theme of our seminar, it can be stated that the Convention is nowadays a living instrument, this is really as a result of the evolutive interpretation given to it. Over the years, the text has been constantly adapted to present-day conditions, enabling the Convention to remain an incredibly modern text. In addition, it has continued to nourish all branches of law. For its part, the Court has extended the scope of the guaranteed rights to take account of technological and societal developments that were unforeseeable 70 years ago.

This is illustrated by the topics chosen for today's seminar: gender equality, the environment, and science and technology. Here indeed are three areas where we can be certain that the Convention's founding fathers did not imagine the role that their text would be required to play. These are topics which did not have the importance in 1950 that they have now assumed.

If we examine the case-law in these areas, however, it is rich and varied. For that reason, I look forward immensely to hearing our speakers and listening to your comments. It is you, members of the superior courts, who give life to the European Convention on Human Rights. Without you, and the lawyers who rely on its provisions, this treaty would be a dead letter. I am therefore convinced that this 70th anniversary seminary will be a fascinating one.

I have already spoken at some length, and so I immediately hand the floor to my colleague and friend Iulia Antonella Motoc, who has very kindly agreed to chair this seminar.

Thank you for your attention.