



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality

Keynote speech: Building a stronger European Judicial Network

**15th Annual Meeting of the European Judicial Network in Civil and Commercial
Matters**

CCAB Room 0A (Rue Froissart 36)

Brussels, 01/02/2017 at 17:10

Dear Contact Points,

Dear Members of the Network,

Dear Representatives of Serbia and Montenegro and other observers,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you at your 15th annual meeting. The Network has developed a lot over these years.

This anniversary is a perfect occasion to look back at its achievements. But **also at its future, at the role which the network needs to continue to play.**

In this spirit, I convey my warm welcome to the representatives of Serbia and Montenegro as observers to the Network from now on. I trust that you will use this forum to build contacts to help with the accession process.

The Commission **attaches high importance to the work of the EJN.**

We have outlined this in the **2016 report on its activities**, to which

you have actively contributed, and in our recent communication "**EU Law: Better Results through Better Application**".

And most importantly I welcome that, for the first time, under the Slovak Presidency, the Council adopted conclusions on the EJN.

Political visibility for the Network is important. We need support to **further develop its activity** in order to meet our needs.

These needs and the challenges we face are manifold.

First and foremost, we have a **shared responsibility** to ensure that **all Union citizens and companies can benefit from their rights under Union law** in all Member States, without discrimination and with the same level of legal certainty.

All courts and legal practitioners **must apply the common European rules efficiently.** **Civil judicial cooperation is at the core of a Europe that delivers for its citizens,** whether they do business abroad that ends in litigation, they have a car accident during their holidays, they need to enforce maintenance claims that are crucial for their children, or they inherit across borders.

The **EJN is a key instrument** to make this happen.

Each day, you build bridges in the legal sphere between the Member States courts and judicial authorities and citizens.

Mutual trust between Member States is crucial to that process. But this is not something that we can take for granted.

Real trust is earned over time through successful cooperation.

Through the long-lasting contacts you and all actors involved in the proper application of EU civil justice instruments, namely judges, lawyers, notaries and bailiffs contribute to developing **a common European legal culture. This is exactly what you have achieved.**

But the Network has also had its say on the preparation of Union law.

The Commission took into account your input and feedback when we prepared rules on family matters, such as the review of the Brussels IIa Regulation, insolvency matters and procedural instruments.

We must build on these successes and **take the next steps to deliver for all Union citizens.**

Among these steps, I wish to mention a few **priority areas** which I consider essential for our common action.

Firstly, improving data collection is crucial to better understand how often and how successfully the Union instruments are used. I know that this is a challenge, but I think we all agree that in order to carry out evidence-based policies we need sufficient data on what works and what does not.

The **EJN has an important part to play** here. You have the precious viewpoint from daily practice. So you know best which information needs to be collected and how it can be collected in the most efficient and least burdensome way.

I trust that you will be our strong allies in **making available the data indispensable for underpinning EU legislative action.**

Secondly, the visibility of the Network is another key point. Practitioners should know that it exists and what tools it offers to them. For example, **the factsheets on national law and the**

numerous guides for practitioners and citizens, which are highly appreciated by those who apply our instruments.

The EJM factsheet pages have received more than 3 million visits in 2016. This impressive figure shows how much your work is directly responding to citizens' needs.

Each and every member of the Network and everybody participating at today's meeting is our ambassador in that sense. I urge you to speak about the Network at home, in the courts and in the office.

Your involvement in the organisation of the **European Day of Justice** is very useful in that context as it allows the Network to make itself better known.

As regards the internal functioning of the Network I welcome the steps to improve the **digitalisation of workflows**. The decision to test, in a pilot project, the digital-structured case-handling workflow, by using the **Internal Market Information System** is such a **concrete step**. **Digitalisation is a must today in all areas** and it can **help in cross-border cooperation in particular**.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our partnership in the Network will be crucial for **further legislative and non-legislative projects. We'll need your support in seeing a good outcome of the legislative proposals currently under negotiations, such as the Brussels IIa recast and the insolvency directive. And we'll need your contribution in developing new projects,** in particular on modernising procedural instruments, such as service of documents and taking of evidence. **The digitalisation of these matters is a key challenge.** Your expertise will be required for making these instruments fit for the changed technological and legal environment.

These are the many reasons why **the Commission is determined to continue to invest in the EJN.**

We need and expect the same level of commitment and investment from all Member States.

Making available sufficient resources, even in times of budgetary constraints, is crucial to provide assistance which is easy to access

and quickly available. But every Euro invested here will pay off with high returns in terms of **better cooperation between legal systems, savings in litigation and administration costs and ultimately making life easier for citizens and business.**

Fifteen years ago, the EU took a big step when it put the Network in place. I call on you all to continue this journey for many years to come and many successes to celebrate.

Thank you for your support and I wish you a fruitful meeting!