

# General Assembly of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary looks back at achievements and elects a new president

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From 1 to 3 June, the General Assembly of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) took place in Athens, summarizing the performance results of the ENCJ 2021/2022. Dalia Vasarienė, a member of the Judicial Council of Lithuania and a judge of the Supreme Court of Lithuania, has been elected the new President of the ENCJ.

The work of the ENCJ has been summarized in a number of working groups, both on the evaluation of the performance of judges in European Member States and on a number of models for surveying court clients. Member States were presented with the results of the survey of the independence of the European judiciary held earlier this year. A total of 15,821 judges from 27 Member States (including 200 Latvian judges) took part in the survey. It was found that on a 10-point scale, European judges rate the independence of judges in their country on average between 7.0 and 9.8. Nevertheless, in some cases, undue pressure in order to influence court decisions is pointed out. For the first time, judges were asked to assess the independence of their national Judicial Council (results ranged from 2.7 to 9.6). The results show that the establishment of the Judicial Council alone is not enough to guarantee the independence of the judiciary as a whole.

Special guests from countries where justice is facing unprecedented challenges in today's Europe also addressed the General Assembly. Oksana Blazhivska, a member of the High Judicial Council of Ukraine, and Dorota Zabłudowska, a member of the board of the Polish Association of Judges IUSTITIA, spoke about the situation in their countries.

In the next term, the ENCJ will continue to work in the Digital Justice Forum, as well as will continue to develop guidelines for codes of ethics for judicial councils.

This year, for the first time in the history of the ENCJ a representative of the Baltic States has been elected as the President of the ENCJ – Dalia Vasarienė, a member of the Lithuanian Judicial Council and a judge of the Supreme Court. The Lithuanian representative will take over the presidency of the ENCJ from the current president Filippo Donati (Italy) in December this year.

The ENCJ Award for Positive Change was also presented during the General Assembly. Several Member States took part in the competition. In 2022, the Dutch innovative solution received the Award for Positive Change by setting up five so-called 'fire brigades' of judges and judge assistants to provide prompt assistance in dealing with protracted cases.

In Athens, the Latvian Judicial Council was represented by Aigars Strupiņš, Chair of the Judicial Council, Solvita Harbaceviča, Adviser to the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court on the issues of the Judicial Council, and Dace Šulmane, Adviser to the Secretariat of the Judicial Council.

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