

Dear President Özkaya,

Dear Presidents and Members of the Constitutional Courts,

Your Excellencies,

Distinguished Colleagues and Guests,

It is an immense honour and a sincere pleasure for me to address all of you at the opening of the **Third Annual Meeting of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum**. To stand before you today, in the beautiful city of Antalya, and to witness the constitutional courts of our region gathering for the third consecutive year, fills me with a profound sense of pride and gratitude.

Two years have passed since we laid the foundations of the Balkan Forum in Sofia, Bulgaria. What was then a mere idea – an aspiration born of shared convictions and common ideals, is now real and tangible. We find ourselves already convening for the third time under the auspices of our Forum, which has begun to flourish as a genuine platform of cooperation and judicial dialogue among the constitutional courts and analogous institutions of the Balkans, as was the founders' hope and ambition from the very beginning. This, I believe, stands as living proof of the strength of the vision we share and of the sincerity of our commitment to our common cause.

In 2023, before we signed the Memorandum of Understanding that gave life to the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum, I expressed the firm conviction that this was not merely a ceremonial affair, but an earnest commitment to work together for upholding and safeguarding our common values. Today, I daresay that the signing

of the MoU by the six founding members of the Forum has given impetus to a long-term meaningful and fruitful collaboration.

In 2024 we met in Pristina, at the Second Annual Meeting, where our hosts, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Kosovo, welcomed us with warmth and generosity, and we were able to participate in another meaningful conference on constitutional justice.

In the beginning of this year, the Forum marked an important milestone, when at the preparatory meeting of the Circle of Presidents of the Constitutional Courts members of the *Conference of European Constitutional Courts*, which was held in Tirana, Albania, the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum was, in its own right, granted the status of observer to the next Congress of the CECC, to be held in 2027 – an important recognition of our role as a regional association of constitutional courts and a significant step in the process of affirming the Balkan Forum's rightful place among the international community of constitutional courts.

And now in Antalya, thanks to the hospitality of our gracious hosts, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Türkiye, we gather once again, for yet another Annual Meeting, as tradition dictates.

Looking back on the short yet fruitful history of the Forum, I cannot help but feel encouraged by what we have already achieved. Our meetings have given rise not only to academic discussions but have also provided us with a platform to foster **personal friendships**, which, I would go as far as to say, are just as important. Institutions communicate most effectively when the people within them trust and understand each other. The human dimension of our cooperation – built through conferences such as this one and the two preceding it – will remain the true engine of our success.

The Forum's future, I believe, should be guided by three principal goals: First, to continue promoting judicial dialogue between the participating institutions, second, to strengthen the administrative and professional capacities of our respective courts, and third, to serve as a regional voice affirming the independence and integrity of constitutional justice, particularly in times when those values are put to the test. The Balkan countries have known moments of great turmoil throughout their history, but they have also shown remarkable strength and resilience. Instead of adhering to the stereotype of the Balkans as a region of division and neighbourly rifts, we should strive to build bridges between each other and toward our common European future, and this should always be the true cause and mission of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum.

\*\*\*

Today's Conference is about to address a theme of immense significance: **“The Standardisation of Human Rights and the Role of Constitutional Justice.”** This topic goes to the very heart of what unites us as constitutional courts and as members of a shared European legal civilisation. While human rights are universal in principle, their realisation in practice is dependent on the constitutional and legal orders of individual sovereign states. And here lies the real challenge before standardisation – in the fine and often delicate balance between universal and national. Standardisation, of course, should not be misconstrued as uniformity – we have never ceased to recognize, respect, and even celebrate our diversity, including (or *especially*) with regard to our constitutional traditions. Standardisation should rather be seen as a process through which different legal systems, through dialogue and jurisprudence, converge towards common standards of protection of the universally accepted human rights.

In Europe, this process has long been shaped by the work of the European Court of Human Rights whose judgements provide guiding principles and baselines to national jurisdictions. At a national level, the role of the Constitutional Courts is crucial in this process. It is through our jurisprudence that international norms acquire tangibility and practical meaning within our societies, and it is our task and great responsibility to make sure that these norms are adapted to our respective constitutional identities. In this respect, constitutional justice becomes the instrument through which the universality of human rights is reconciled with the independence and supremacy of national constitutional traditions. Our jurisprudence is part of the broader European discourse on rights, and we should always be mindful of our role of principal contributors to that process.

In that endeavour, today we are faced with a myriad of difficulties arising from ongoing military conflicts destroying human lives; the rise of populism spreading throughout Western societies like a plague; natural calamities induced by human activity; and the elemental technological progress, posing new challenges related to privacy, data protection, bioethics, and even the established paradigms of legal personhood. In these tumultuous times, the concept of human rights is constantly expanding in scope and meaning. It is our duty to ensure that human rights are interpreted and applied consistently, in order to justify and reinforce the public's trust in constitutional justice. This is where judicial dialogue becomes crucial. By exchanging experience and jurisprudence, by learning from each other's challenges and solutions, we enrich each other, thus collectively elevating the quality of constitutional adjudication.

And this is the very *raison d'être* of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum – to serve as a platform where this dialogue can be conducted in the spirit of mutual

respect and camaraderie. This is why we created the Forum, three years ago, and why the Forum has a future and a role to play in the years to come.

It is my firm belief that through our cooperation, our courts will not only contribute to the standardisation of human rights in our region but also help fortify the very foundations of European constitutionalism.

Let us, therefore, engage in today's discussions with open minds, optimism for the future, and the conviction that our work together serves not only our institutions but our nations and the citizens whose rights we are sworn to protect.

I am certain that today's conference will be fruitful, inspiring, and memorable for us all, and I know how eager we all are to delve into the immensely important topic chosen by our hosts, so without further ado I would like to wish godspeed to the Third Annual Meeting of the Balkan Forum.

Thank you!