

Esteemed Mr President of the Court of Justice of the European Union,

Esteemed Madam President of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria,

Esteemed Madam Vice-President of the European Commission, dear Věra,

Esteemed Minister Slavov,

Your Excellencies,

Esteemed Judges of the Constitutional Court,

Esteemed Participants and Guests of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum,

First of all, I would like to cordially thank the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria and its President, Ms. Pavlina Panova, for the organization of the Forum. Thank you for the invitation to be part of the key messages which I believe that you will send out today for the whole of Europe. I would also like to thank the President of the Court of Justice of the European Union, Mr. Koen Lenaerts, as well as the Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms Věra Jourová, for your presence here with us is a strong message for a Europe committed to the rule of law and democracy.

I would also like to thank all representatives of the constitutional jurisdictions of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Greece, Kosovo, Romania, North Macedonia, Türkiye, Croatia and Montenegro. Thank you for your participation in the Forum today with your knowledge and expertise, which I do believe will contribute to a valuable discussion that will provide input on significant issues of constitutional jurisprudence.

The establishment of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum and its first annual meeting are a continuation of the good cooperation which has been developed between the Constitutional Courts of the Balkan Peninsula. However, the Forum does not stop to the idea of cooperation only. The Forum's vision is to become a platform for exchange of best practices, ideas and experience among the participating jurisdictions in the field of constitutional justice.

Constitutional jurisdictions are the guardians of the Constitution. They have a key role in the implementation of the principle of the rule of law in the national legal order of the state. The Constitutional Court of Bulgaria has an important role to play, from providing binding interpretations of the Constitution and pronouncing on petitions to establish unconstitutionality

of the laws to settling any competence disputes between the National Assembly, the Council of Ministers and the President, as well as between the central executive authorities and the bodies of local self-government, etc. The contribution of the Constitutional Court of Bulgaria to our country's transition to democracy is indisputable and the level of representation at today's Forum proves that the Bulgarian Constitutional Court is an authoritative and respected institution both in European and international terms.

It is accepted that one constitutional jurisdiction operates only within one national legal system. Constitutional Court judges do rule in accordance with the supreme and basic law of their country. But constitutional justice has a very clear European perspective which exists through our common shared values and principles. The rule of law, the separation of powers, the protection of civil rights, the right to a fair trial are all a common European achievement which is one of the cornerstones of the idea of a united Europe for those who are member states and those who aspire to become part of the great European family.

As the President of the Constitutional Court said, the meeting of the Balkan Constitutional Courts Forum comes at a crucial moment for our country. We are right in the middle of a constitutional debate which in a little over a month should lead to the adoption by the National Assembly of amendments to the Constitution. We all know that these changes are comprehensive, but they are part of an ongoing process that is typical of all constitutional democracies, that of the gradual refinement of the basic law, of the natural development of the institutions, of the growth of the Constitution.

It is not by accident that I say the Constitution grows. The very act of its creation implies and sets this direction. The constituent power starts, first of all, from the idea of values and morale and by reason and principles it does not create a simple system of norms but establishes a philosophy and a value consensus. The concepts of freedom, justice, equality cannot be limited to a single act. They set forward a horizon to future generations who will rediscover and develop their meaning. However, the foundations laid down in our basic law have also paved the way for our civilizational choice that our country made by joining NATO and the European Union.

Today's event has a very specific topic: *Countries' Experience with Providing Citizens Access to Constitutional Justice*. I am sure that today you will have the opportunity to hear also from the Minister of Justice more details concerning the direct access of citizens to constitutional justice in Bulgaria. But what is important for me today is that we hear of your experience, that you share with us how you turn challenges into opportunities. It is not by chance that in this

process all who are present here today send a strong message of commitment in that there are good practices, there are opinions and expertise and more than ever one fruitful discussion is the way to a good solution through exchange of views and experience. And this is precisely the purpose of today's Forum – to hear the experience and best practices that exist in your countries. The high level of representation and expertise underlying the presentations and discussion panels allows to highlight extremely valuable views and opinions.

I am convinced that everything that is to be said during this Forum will be useful and will also have a high added value to our efforts to improve our constitutional system as well as in the process of establishing a stronger and stable democracy. I would like to end here and once again express my gratitude especially to the Vice-President of the European Commission, Věra Jourová, for being with us today. Thank you for the excellent communication we have with the European Commission. Thank you for your support in our joint efforts as regards rule of law issues, transparency, the protection of our shared common European values.

I wish every success to the Forum and may this edition become a tradition. And it has all the strengths to become such due to each and every one of you, since it is based on your expertise, on your knowledge. I indeed wish that in many years' time we all say again that the rule of law and democracy are our core values for good cooperation and exchange of best practices. We stand stronger together! Thank you!