



Association of European Administrative Judges/Vereinigung Europäischer Verwaltungsrichter /  
Fédération Européenne des Juges Administratifs  
Associazione dei Magistrati Amministrativi Europei /  
Based at: Europäische Rechtsakademie D-54295 Trier, Metzer Allee 4

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**Minutes of the General Assembly of Association of European Administrative Judges,  
Ljubljana, 16 May 2025**

**Initial board**

President Sylvain Mérinne  
Vice-President Eugenia Papadopoulou  
Vice-President David Rabenschlag  
Vice-President Eva Wendler  
Vice-President Indre Žvaigždinienė

**New board, elected during the General Assembly**

President Sylvain Mérinne  
Vice-President David Rabenschlag  
Vice-President Eva Wendler  
Vice-President Indre Žvaigždinienė  
Vice-President Juhana Niemi

Assisted by:

General Secretary Camille Vinet  
Treasurer Ralf Höhne  
Deputy treasurer Evaristo González González

**Representatives of member organizations and observers (voting rights indicated by underlining):**

**PRESENT**

**Albania**  
Enerjeta Shehaj

**Austria**  
Markus Thoma  
Gudrun Müller  
Claudia Pinter  
Barbara Weiss  
Renate Schohaj  
Eva Wendler (Vice-president)

**Cyprus**  
Lakis Christodoulou

**Finland**  
Patrick Stenbäck (proxy)  
Juhana Niemi  
Marija-Liisa Judström (auditor)

**France**  
Camille Vinet (General secretary – SJA proxy)  
Joseph Krulic  
Sylvain Mérenne (President)

**Germany**  
Christiane Knoop  
Jutta Schild  
Christian Von Stockhausen  
Ralf Hoehne (Treasurer)  
David Rabenschlag (Vice-president)

**Greece**  
Fani Sotiriadou  
Panagiota Charalampidou  
Epameinondas Troulinos  
Evgenia Papadopoulou (Vice-president)

**Italy**  
Germana Lo Sapiu (proxy)

**Latvia**  
Sandija Audzere

**Lithuania**  
Jūratė Bliznikaitė Povilanskienė  
Gediminas Užubalis  
Jurgita Pauzaite  
Indre Žvaigždinienė (Vice-president)

**Luxembourg**  
Michelle Stoffel

**Slovenia**  
Jasna Segan (proxy but not regarding the increase in membership fees)  
Valentina Rustja

**Slovakia**  
Michal Novotný

**Spain**  
Evaristo González González (Deputy treasurer)

**Poland**

Alexandra Wrzesińska-Nowacka

Pawel Groński

Jolanta Augustyniak-Pczkowska

**Portugal**

Jorge Gueirrero de Moraes

Antonio Mendes Oliveira

**Sweden**

Anneli Berflund Creutz

Sara Holmström

**Montenegro**

Miodrag Pesic

**Observers and other present persons**

Kosovo

Rexhep Gashi

Luxembourg

Carlo Schockweiler

OSCE

Iryna Ivankiv, ODIHR Rule of law adviser

USA

Adam Volkoff (online)

Turkey

Mehmet Tank

**PROXY:**

**To Camille Vinet**

- **Czech Republic**
- **France (SJA)**

**To Germana Lo Sapiو**

Italy (Associazione nazionale dei Magistrati Amministrativi - ANMA)

**To Patrick Stenbäck**

Finland

President Sylvain Mérenne States that the GA has been **duly convened**, which means that the statutory **quorum** is met, and that the election of the auditors has to be added to the agenda.

No one objects.

**The General Assembly (hereafter “GA”) is opened.**

President Sylvain Mérenne gives the floor to the first speakers.

**1. Introductory words by the representatives of the All-Ukrainian association of administrative judges and the US ABA-NCALJ (online)**

**Natalia Blazhivska** (Ukraine) takes the floor online.

She states that our Ukrainian colleagues have felt our unwavering support since the first day of the war.

Remarkably, despite the ongoing conflict, justice continues its work—especially in the field of criminal justice. The Supreme Court continues to hold 30 hearings every week without interruption.

Thanks to the AEAJ involvement —particularly the dedication of vice-president Eva Wendler and former president Edith Zeller— the Ukrainian association has been able to organize two impactful conferences featuring excellent speakers and attended by 60 to 70 participants each.

These events were highly meaningful. In addition, our Ukrainian colleagues had the opportunity to attend a week-long event outside of Ukraine— an experience that marked their first time leaving the country since the war began. Being away from bomb alerts, fighter jets, and finally being able to sleep peacefully had a profound emotional impact.

Each meeting offers them a vital breath of fresh air and renewed strength. They extend heartfelt thanks to every country and every judges' association for their continued support.

Natalia Blazhivska expresses hope for a next meeting to take place in a peaceful and free Ukraine.

President Sylvain Mérenne expresses the full solidarity of the association's members with Ukraine.

The participants applaud with emotion.

**Adam Volkov** takes the floor.

On behalf of the American Bar Association (ABA), National conference of administrative law judges (NCALJ), Adam Volkov extends his warm greetings to all and expresses sincere gratitude for the ongoing collaboration with AEAJ. He mentions the support we offered to our Polish colleagues last year in Würzburg, which deeply inspired him.

Today, administrative law judges in the United States are facing serious challenges to their independence and tenure. Some judges have already been dismissed, and there is growing concern over the erosion of judicial independence within federal agencies —where these judges play a vital role in fair and impartial decision-making.

This situation is part of a broader trend threatening the independence of both administrative and judicial institutions across the country. It faces increasing pressure, intimidation, and attacks on freedom of expression, as well as unconstitutional challenges to the rule of law.

Despite these troubling developments, courts stand firm, and judges continue to fulfill their duties with integrity and resolve.

The ABA reaffirms its unwavering support for the rule of law and emphasizes that now, more than ever, is the time to speak with one voice.

President Sylvain Mérenne invites our U.S. colleague to Lisbon, where the next General Assembly and the next meeting of the Working Group (hereafter WG) on Independence will take place.

The participants applaud.

## **2. Speech of President Sylvain Mérenne**

President Sylvain Mérenne recalls that in his intronization speech in Versailles, two years ago, he concluded with a touch of gloom, mentioning that shadows are coming and that in such times, we need to raise our lights.

Then he broached following points:

### **Life of the association**

**Board meetings:** A total of **five board meetings** took place – three were held online (in June 2024, October 2024, and January 2025), one was held in person after the “Conflict of Norms” seminar in Prague, and there will be an additional flash meeting following the General Assembly.

**Working Group co-chairs:** Catherine Joly, presiding judge at the CNDA, was appointed as the new co-chair of the WG on Asylum and Immigration, replacing Catherine Koutsopoulou, who has recently been elected president of the European Chapter of the International Association of Refugee and Migration Law Judges (IARMLJ). This is a positive development, and we plan to maintain strong ties with her through IARMLJ.

**EUAA Contact Point:** Camilla Schloss from the AC Berlin was appointed as the new contact point to the EUAA, succeeding the previous representative.

**Partnership renewal:** The Memorandum of understanding with the American Bar Association’s National Conference of the Administrative Law Judiciary (ABA-NCALJ) has been renewed for another three years.

**International representation:** General secretary Camille Vinet represented AEAJ at an event organized by Mimi Tsankov (ABA-NCALJ) for the 69<sup>th</sup> annual Commission on the status of women (March 14, 2025), focused on “Women in the Judiciary – Striving for Gender Balance.” She remains a key contact for anyone interested in this topic.

**ERA Forum Participation:** President Sylvain Mérenne personally represented AEAJ at the ERA Forum of Legal Professions on November 8, 2024, where he spoke on the topic of innovation, aiming to increase AEAJ’s visibility.

### **Relations with national associations**

- June 2024: President Sylvain Mérenne visited Vienna, Bratislava and Budapest, where he met with Austrian, Slovak and Hungarian colleagues and associations.

- He recorded speeches for Lithuania, Ukraine, Albania in the context of bilateral seminars organized with OSCE (see Eva Wendler's report).
- In collaboration with our Portuguese association, he delivered an online intervention in September 2024 at a seminar organised by the university of Coimbra on the Future of Administrative and Tax Justice.
- He took part in a joint seminar with OSSA in October 2024 „*Quis custodiet ipsos custodes*”, held in Warsaw following the seminar of the WG Asylum and Immigration.
- There were exchanges of information in support of Luxembourg
- With regard to Austria, he engaged in recent discussions concerning a possible request for a CCJE opinion on the disciplinary regime applicable to administrative judges in the city of Vienna.

President Mérenne emphasized the AEAJ's close collaboration with national associations and reaffirmed its commitment to supporting them in every possible way. He underlined the importance of empowering member associations through a shared European perspective and solidarity.

He proposed strengthening communication and connections with an online meeting with national associations and contact points in January. Such meetings should not be like another general assembly.

### **Rule of law**

**ELI.** President Mérenne indicates that AEAJ contributed to an ELI project: the ELI-Mount Scopus European Standards on Judicial Independence, which is a very valuable synthesis of the consensus of European jurists on judicial independence.

**CCJE.** As usual he represented AEAJ to the CCJE in the process of drafting the CCJE Opinion n° 27 (2024) on the disciplinary liability of judges. He deems that our comments met an average success. However, our seriousness and credibility within the CCJE are established.

**“Polish lawsuit”.** President Mérenne explains that, short after our seminar in Würzburg the EU General Court rejected the petitions of the associations as inadmissible.

Even if this lawsuit is not appropriate anymore to help solving the situation in Poland, the inadmissibility issue and the gap in judicial protection on issues related to the Rule of law in the sphere of competence of EU-institutions raised questions of principle which justified an appeal to the Court of justice.

This appeal proceeding is currently pending. We should be reasonable and expect this appeal to be rejected as well.

**ECtHR.** Our partner organisation MEDEL (*Magistrats européens pour la démocratie et les libertés*) has proposed to introduce a demand for a third party intervention to the ECtHR in favour of the Turkish colleague Murat Arslan. President Mérenne supported this proposition in coherence with everything we have done so far. This demand is unlikely to be accepted by the court as well.

**MEDEL.** On the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June, president Mérenne will attend MEDEL anniversary meeting in Strasbourg and will transmit the collective best wishes from the AEAJ General assembly. He will use this event as an opportunity to propose that the four judicial associations formalize their existing cooperation into a more lasting, albeit informal, platform for an independent judiciary in Europe.

**AI.** On the base of a draft prepared by the Advisory Group, the Board created an *ad hoc* working group on AI. This group (Germana Lo Sapi, Epameinondas Troulinos, Paweł Gronski, Jasna Segan, Carlo Schokweiler, Antonio Mendes Oliveira, Eva Wendler and Sylvain Mérenne) held two online meetings and prepare the version of the Statement submitted for adoption to the WG Independence and Efficiency and to the Board for final adoption, after the General assembly.

## **Cyber issues**

President Mérenne reminded the audience the scam attack we experienced in November. Some of our contacts received emails apparently from him asking for more data and money.

After this attack he contacted the French Cyber Intelligence Agency (regional branch for small organisations) with whom AEAJ concluded a convention for its services. His contact at the agency confirmed him that he gave the proper follow-up but that he couldn't identify perpetrators after enquiry.

We will continue to take such events very seriously as we are an organization dealing with sensitive issues. President Mérenne ask the audience to remain vigilant.

## **We are the AEAJ**

President Mérenne recalls that, in his speech in Versailles, he also concluded with a touch of optimism, saying he was not afraid because he knew he was not alone. Two years later, that was right, and he thanks the board for its work and support.

## **Final story**

President Mérenne ends his speech an anecdote:

'The 9<sup>th</sup> October 1934, on board of the ship Dubrovnik, the king Alexander the 1<sup>st</sup> of Yugoslavia arrived in Marseille for a State visit in France. The King was a very important personality for France due to the alliance during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and therefore the French minister for foreign affairs, named Louis Barthou, went from Paris to Marseille to greet the king at its arrival.

These were troubled times as well, and as the car drove up the main boulevard of Marseille, the King was victim of an assassination attempt – a confusing exchange of fire followed and the French minister was shot as well. The two dying men were taken away to the prefecture (the prefect hall).

On the place where they died, a monument has been erected: two very large statues, symbolizing France and Yugoslavia; and four smaller statues: *la Justice et le Droit, la Liberté et le Travail*, Justice and Law, Freedom and Labour, working together to protect peace.

The monument is very central in the city and the people of Marseille go along with their business without paying specific attention. But Sylvain passes in front of this monument each time he goes to court ... and can't stop thinking that the four statues - *la Justice et le Droit, la Liberté et le Travail* - are staring at him personally.

### **3. Report of the Vice-Presidents**

#### **▪ Report of Vice-President Eugenia Papadopoulou**, co-chair of the WG Taxation

##### Year 2024

In the year 2024, the Taxation WG meeting was held in Vienna – Austria on 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of June 2024 in the premises of the Federal Tax Court of Austria.

The 2024 seminar was dedicated on the topic of Digital Market and its challenges.

The WG had a record number of 9 speakers, including speakers from the Federal Ministry of Finance, from the Evidence Center and Communication, from the Anti-Fraud office but also Tax Judges.

22 participants attended from 8 countries.

Presented topics:

- Aspects of “digital markets”
- The BEPS project: achievements and remaining challenges
- VAT directive and jurisdiction of the ECJ
- The digital file at the federal tax court
- Fiscal Documentation in Austria
- The digital Supreme Court – introduction and analog visit
- Pillar I and other (potential) solutions
- Digitalization: tackling challenges & seizing opportunities in the area of VAT
- Digital markets: challenges from the tax administrations perspective

It was a very successful and fruitful event concentrated on new topics. Vice-president Evgenia Papadopoulou expressed AEAJ's gratitude to our Austrian colleagues for the professional organization and the excellent and warm hospitality.

#### Upcoming Event – year 2025

For the year 2025, the next Taxation WG meeting will be held in Vilnius-Lithuania on 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> of May 2025, in the premises of the Hotel “Neringa” in Vilnius.

The official topic of the seminar is: “The never ending story of tax-fraud”.

#### ▪ **Report of Vice-President David Rabenschlag**, co-chair of the WG Asylum and Immigration

##### Year 2024

The WG Asylum-Immigration met in Warsaw on 10 and 11 October 2024 at the Voivodship Administrative Court. Its vice-president Paweł Groński had excellently organized everything at the court.

37 participants attended from 11 countries.

The topics were mainly related to international protection law:

- the Pact on Migration and Asylum entering into force next year,
- gender-based violence and international protection,
- the protection of the rule of law and human rights at the external borders of the EU,
- the European Commission's guidance on the right to free movement of EU citizens and their families.

The WG has once again succeeded in attracting experts with diverse backgrounds and countries: Judges from Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Poland; in addition, representatives of the EUAA, the European Commission, OSCE/ODHIR and Frontex, as well as from academia, University of Bologna/European University Institute.

A highlight was a visit to the headquarters of Frontex. The criticism Frontex is exposed on human rights was also openly discussed. The visit to the command room for monitoring EU external borders, was impressive.

Vice-President David Rabenschlag explains that AEAJ tries to intensify its relations with the EUAA and now uses the possibility to nominate participants for EUAA events. Camilla Schloss will represent AEAJ at the Annual Network Meeting of EUAA's courts and Tribunals Network in Malta in June.

#### Upcoming Event –2025

The next WG will meet on 18-19 September 2025 in Brussels. Agenda will be out in Summer. For September 2026, the WG has been invited to Stockholm with a promise of EUAA funding.

#### Other activities:

Vice-President David Rabenschlag informed the audience that the day before and the morning of the General Assembly, he participated to the “EUAA High-Level Roundtable on judicial dialogue through the case-law of the CJEU, the ECtHR and national courts in the field of international protection” at the ECtHR. AEAJ was into the organizing committee with EUAA, IARMJ and the two European Courts. He gave an introductory address, both Catherine Joly and Camilla Schloss participated to panels.

Beyond asylum and migration law, he participated on the invitation by our polish member association (OSSSA) at a conference on 12 October 2024 on the rule of law. He gave an overview of the amendments to the German Constitution and to German law, which are intended to strengthen the resilience of the Federal Constitutional Court of Germany against enemies of the constitutional order.

In addition, AEAJ continued its successful cooperation with EJTN with their joint seminar on “Conflict of norms”, this time held in Prague, where he gave two presentations.

Finally, on IT issues. The website is finally online but an ongoing project, of course. Recently AEAJ decided to migrate to a new server in order to have better protection against cyber-attacks. Co-operation with its IT specialist Bob Schockweiler has continued to be excellent. An open issue is the plan for a new contact management/newsletter. Vice-president David Rabenschlag found a new platform in conformity with the GDPR on which the board will have to decide if it meets our needs.

#### ▪ **Report of Vice-President Eva Wendler** co-chair of the WG “Independence and Efficiency”

#### Seminars on Conflict of Norms

In May 2024, former president of AEAJ, Edith Zeller, and vice-president Eva Wendler, held an adjusted version of the seminar on Conflict of Norms in the Context of Fundamental Rights, at the University of Lviv in Ukraine.

They were warmly welcomed by our Ukrainian colleagues and gained a direct impression of the difficult working conditions they face during wartime.

A follow-up seminar was organized in Ivano-Frankivsk in September 2024, and most recently a new edition with Albanian colleagues in March 2025 in Tirana, Albania. Former AEAJ president Edith Zeller participated in person, while vice-president Eva Wendler joined remotely.

#### Institutional Visits in 2024

In June 2024, she visited the Supreme Administrative Court in Bratislava and the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) in Vienna, strengthening institutional dialogue and cooperation.

## Judicial visit Budapest

Together with president Sylvain Mérinne and our Austrian colleague Markus Thoma, vice-president Eva Wendler visited both the Regional and the Supreme Court in Budapest, gaining insights into recent developments within the Hungarian judiciary.

Regarding the situation in Hungary, vice-president Eva Wendler refers to an article on Verfassungsblog by Dániel G. Szabó ("Paying Judges Properly," 7 March 2025). The article discusses a controversial 2024 agreement between the Hungarian Ministry of Justice and the presidents of the Supreme Court (Kúria), the National Office for the Judiciary (NOJ), and the National Judicial Council (NJC). This legally dubious agreement offered 48% salary increase over three years in exchange for support of vaguely defined judicial reforms. They raised concerns over judicial independence, particularly due to proposed shifts of judicial tasks to administrative bodies and raising the minimum age for judicial appointment. The agreement sparked widespread criticism, including public condemnation by several hundred judges (out of a total of 3 000) and the resignation of the president of the National Judicial Council, revealing the lack of genuine consultation and growing tensions within the judiciary.

The unrest culminated in a major demonstration on 22 February 2025, organized by the Association of Hungarian Judges (MABIE), where several thousand people marched through Budapest demanding proper judicial pay and defending judicial independence.

AEAJ was represented by two Austrian colleagues at this demonstration, namely Astrid Brecka and Siegfried Königshofer from the Viennese Administrative Court, who vice-president Eva Wendler thanks for their commitment.

## Participation at OSSA conference in Warsaw on 12 October 2024

### Visit in Albania

In September 2024 Vice-president Eva Wendler visited Albania with an Austrian delegation. They were hosted by the School of the Judiciary and the OSCE mission in Albania, which finally led with the help of our Albanian individual member Enerjeta Shehaj to the above-mentioned seminar in Tirana.

As she is in charge of the ERA matters of AEAJ, she attended the preparatory meetings in terms of the conference of the Legal Professions, in which president Sylvain Mérinne was a panelist.

Finally, vice-president Eva Wendler participated at the 2- day EUI conference „The Role of Lawyers in the Promotion of Judicial Independence“ in Gdansk, in the framework of the annual event “Role of Legal Professions in Safeguarding European Institutions and values”.

### ▪ **Report of Vice-President Indre Žvaigždiniénė, co-chair of the working group “Environmental law”**

#### **WG Meeting 26 & 27 September 2024 – Tallinn (Estonia)**

Topic of the seminar: new rules on renewables: a challenge for administrative courts

9 countries

- A presentation of the latest developments of EU environmental law – recent CJEU case law – Discussion
- Estonia: New rules on climate protection
- Windfarms: on- and offshore
- “Giudizio universale”: Italian climate litigation

- The „French Administrative Loop“: a way to the „Regularisation“ of irregular administrative acts
- The scope and the limits of energy solidarity in the EU
- Estonian court cases on environmental law

Discussion on the Renewable Energy Directive on the basis of the questionnaire

### **WG meeting 18 & 19 September 2025 – Würzburg (Germany)**

Topic of the seminar: No plan is perfect: Urban and environmental planning under judicial review

#### **4. Report of the Advisory Group**

Carlo Schockweiler reported on the Advisory group (here after AG).

##### The bureau of the advisory group

The bureau of the AG includes the two co-chairs, former AEAJ president AEAJ Edith Zeller, and Karin Winter as secretary of the bureau. As already explained at our last General Assembly, the bureau is competent to prepare the meetings of the AG, deal with day-to-day business and to coordinate the work within the AG.

##### Adequate remuneration of judges

The rapporteur Holger Böhmann reported and referred to his paper on “Adequate Remuneration of Judges” which was sent to all members of the AG. The AG decided that the draft still needs to be completed by the information which will result from the ECJ judgments to be delivered in the cases concerning Poland and Lithuania.

Once the final document will be available, the AG decided that it will be submitted to the board in order to decide about further steps to be taken. This has been done in the meanwhile, in addition the advisory group suggested to the board to have a short statement prepared by the AG which should be published on the website of AEAJ and used by the board in the context of the communications to be addressed to national courts or authorities in case the national rules no longer respect the general principles applying in this respect. The publication on the website should also include the very detailed study prepared by Holger Böhmann as back-ground information.

##### The use of artificial intelligence (AI) in administrative justice: the role of the judge, the advantages and the risks of AI

Jasna Segan reported on the answers to her questionnaire on AI which was sent to the AG in July 2024.

The AG asked Jasna Segan to prepare a one-page document as a summary/strategy containing the main ideas on this topic. After the approval of this document by all members of the AG, it was suggested to the board the document to be published on the AEAJ-website, together with the ECJ document “Artificial Intelligence Strategy”. (NB: *this document was turned into the draft of the AEAJ Statement on AI*)

Meanwhile, this document has been sent to the board which decided to install an ad-hoc working group on this topic in order to prepare a statement to be submitted to this General Assembly for information and to be approved later by the board in the name of AEAJ.

##### The financial situation of AEAJ

The rapporteur Edith Zeller reported on this topic and referred to her paper on the “Role of judicial associations”, which was sent to the group earlier.

The AG decided to suggest to the board to raise awareness among European Institutions on the important role of judicial associations in different ways including to safeguard the rule of law: European Associations should be more included in the work of European institutions and be heard by European players; in addition, attention should be drawn to the financial needs of these European associations in order to fulfil these important tasks.

Edith Zeller was asked to prepare such a draft letter and adapt her working document as discussed. One of these actions could be sending a collective letter to European institutions that is signed also by other European associations of judges to mark the specific important roles of such associations and their financial needs.

In the meanwhile, the afore-said draft letter together with the more detailed background working document adopted by the AG were sent to the board together with the suggestions of the AG.

#### The mission to collect historical archives of the AEAJ

The AG decided to appoint Carlo Schockweiler with the mission to contact former board members and presidents of AEAJ in order to collect documents they still might have concerning AEAJ, based on a list prepared by Carlo Schockweiler on March 5, 2024. This mission is still ongoing.

The AG also asked Werner Heermann to collect the photos he took over many years during events organized by AEAJ, in order to put them on a stick or save them by any other electronic means so that these photos could be sent to Carlo Schockweiler.

#### New members

The AG was informed by the co-chairs that Janis Neimanis and Alen Rajko have been appointed as new members of the AG with mandates starting in 2025. In the meanwhile the co-chairs also decided to appoint Dora Virag Dudas and Michal Novotny as replacement of Werner Heermann and Annika Sandstrom with mandates starting also in 2025.

#### Attacks against judges

After the Rhodes meeting, the AG had an exchange of views on recent attacks addressed against national and international courts and judges, and it was decided that it was important to react. The AG asked the bureau to submit to the board a draft letter in the form of a joint statement to be signed by AEAJ, EAJ, MEDEL, J4J, in order to be sent to specific European and other authorities, and the media. The AG is indeed of the opinion that these populist and unjustified attacks addressed against the judges undermine the public trust people should have in the respective judicial systems.

This draft letter / statement was sent to the board on December 23, 2024.

The AG is strongly in favor of a strong reaction which should come from all major international judges' associations, as these populist critics are very dangerous and will undermine the independence of our judicial systems, which is the guarantee of the rule of law and the democracy. Of course, freedom of expression is an essential value, but criticism must be within the frames of clearly stated European standards, which means that they should be proportional and expressed with the respect due to our judicial institutions. The AG is of the opinion that not reacting would show the weakness of the judicial power to be present in the debate concerning its role in society.

## 5. Treasurer and deputy-treasurer's Report

Treasurer Ralf Höhne reports that in 2024, our available income amounts to approximately 17,500.-, consisting of 4,500.- carried over from previous funds and an expected 13,000.- from membership fees.

This amount is fully allocated across our planned expenses:

- Working Group Meetings: 10,000.- (2,500.- per group, max. 400.- per person)
- General Assembly (GA): 2,700.- (9 participants: board + 2 auditors, 300.- each for travel and accommodation)
- WG Co-chairs' Meetings: 1,500.- (6 persons, 250.- each; Independence WG excluded)
- Council of Europe (CoE) Participation: 1,200.- (Sylvain Mérenne, Germana Lo Sazio, Epameinondas Troulinos – lump sum)
- Board Travel: 200.-
- Administrative Fees (bank, registration, etc.): 500.-
- Communication Tools (website, cloud, newsletter): 800.-
- Miscellaneous: 600.-

Total Expenses: 17,500.-

This budget shows that all available funds are fully committed, leaving no margin for unforeseen costs or increased activity. Hence, an increase in membership fees is necessary to ensure the sustainability of our work.

## 6. Auditor's Report

Marja-Liisa Judström reports that as AEAJ auditor, she and the other auditor Hannele Klemettinen examined the accounts of AEAJ. They have been given access to account information, payment transactions and receipts.

There is no reason for complaint. Almost all the associations have paid the membership fees for the year 2024. Not yet all but still many individual members have paid the membership fees for the year 2025.

In the account of the association at the end of the year 2024 there were less funds than previous year because the association worked more actively.

## 7. Approval of action of the board, treasurer and auditors

Sylvain gives the floor to Markus Thoma. Markus Thoma proposes to adopt the actions of the board, treasurer and auditors.

The **GA** unanimously (**yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0**) decides to **approve** the actions of the board and the treasurer as well as the auditors.

## 8. Decision concerning the number of Board members and election of the new Board and auditors

Markus Thoma chairs the election process and handle it together with the composition of the board:

### Number of Board members

The **GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) approves**, acc. to Art. 5 of the statutes, **that the board should be composed of 5 members**, i.e. a President and 4 Vice-Presidents.

#### **Election of the new Board.**

Vice-president Evgenia Papadopoulou is not candidate again.

Candidates for the next board are Sylvain Mérenne (FRA-2021) – David Rabenschlag (GER-2023) – Eva Wendler (AUT-2023) – Indré Žvaigždinienė (LIT-2023) – Juhana Niemi (FIN)

Patrick Steinbäck takes the floor to introduce Juhana Niemi in the name of the Finnish association of judges. Marija Liisa Judström adds some words to his presentation.

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) elects** Juhana Niemi, Sylvain Mérenne, David Rabenschlag, Eva Wendler and Indre Žvaigždinienė as members of the board.

During the break, the newly elected Board gathers and elects Sylvain Mérenne as president of AEAJ. Camille Vinet stays as General Secretary, Ralf Höhne as treasurer, and Evaristo Gonzalez Gonzalez as deputy-treasurer.

#### **The new Board consists of:**

1. President Sylvain Mérenne, Administrative Court of Appeal of Marseille, 45 Boulevard Paul Peytral, 13006 Marseille, France, born 4 January 1984
2. Vice-President David Rabenschlag, Administrative Court of Berlin, Kirchstraße 7, 10557 Germany, born 14 October 1978
3. Vice-President Eva Wendler, Federal Administrative Court, 1140 Vienna, Spallartgasse, 3/39, Austria, born 21 June 1969
4. Vice-President Indre Žvaigždinienė, Regional Administrative Court, Vilnius, Zygimantu, street 2, Lithuania, born 6 October 1980
5. Juhana Niemi, Chief judge of the Northern Finland administrative Court, 90100 Oulu, Torikatu 34-40, Finland, born 2<sup>nd</sup> October 1977.

The board is assisted by General Secretary Camille Vinet and Treasurer Ralf Höhne, and deputy-treasurer Evaristo Gonzalez Gonzalez.

#### **Election of auditors**

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) elects** Hannele Klemettinen and Marja-Liisa Judström as auditors.

The General Assembly continues under the presidency of Sylvain Mérenne.

#### **9. Decisions on members and observers**

##### **Azerbaijan:**

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) approves** the cessation of membership of the association of Judges of specialized Courts of the Republic of Azerbaijan on the ground of article 2, paragraph (8) of the Statutes.

**Individual members:**

Alfonso Perez (Spain)

Irina Cioponea (Romania)

Miroslav Makajev (Czech Republic)

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) approves** their candidacies as individual members.

Adriana Gherasim ceases her participation

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) approves**

**Observers:**

Arjeta Sadiku (Kosovo)

Mehmet Tank (Turkey)

Both as international academic lawyers

**The GA unanimously (yes: 19; no: 0; abstention: 0) approves** them as observers.

**10. Discussion and vote on membership fees**

President Sylvain Mérenne explains that, given the current financial situation of the AEAJ, the Board decided last January to propose raising membership fees to the next General assembly.

Our financial resources are currently almost entirely based on membership fees:

1300 euros for “normal” fees (8 countries)

300 euros for “reduced” fees (11 countries + 0 euro for Ukraine)

30 euros for individual members

The membership fees have stayed at the same level since 2010.

Currently our structural resources approximate 13 000 euros, whereas the structural expenses approximate 16-18 000 euros. Although we are not aiming to spend more, our income is no longer sufficient to properly fund our existing activities.

For the past budgetary exercises, we dealt with this gap with the money spared from 2020-2021 (Covid-19 crisis).

President Sylvain Mérenne mentions the possibility of external sources of funding but points out that here are no low-hanging fruits and that it would require a substantial involvement in public relations for uncertain results. Moreover, we value highly our independence as a judicial association and this requires a proper level of financial self-sustainability.

Many solutions and schemes may be imagined for the evolution of membership fees.

The treasurer Ralf Höhne takes the floor to explain which solution was deemed to be the simplest, as well as the most likely to reach consensus, that is to say, the following linear raise:

From 1300 to 1500 euros for “normal” fees (+ 200 euros, +15%)

from 300 to 350 euros for the “reduced” fees (+ 50 euros, +16,6%)

€30 for individual members (unchanged)

**The GA approves raising the membership fees (yes: 18; no: 0; abstention: 1 (Jasna Segan\*))**

*\*At the time of the GA, Jasna Segan had no proxy on this matter because the Slovenian association had not decided yet on this matter. Shortly after the GA, it decided to accept the increase of the membership fees by 50 euros.*

It votes for reduced fees (350 euros) for certain countries: Bulgaria, Cyprus, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Slovenia, Ukraine

**The GA approves (yes: 19; no: 0)**

And “super reduced fees” for Ukraine and Hungary (100 euros)

**The GA approves (yes: 19; no: 0)**

## **11. Reports on the situation in Member States**

### **Slovenia**

Jasna Segan takes the floor.

She thanks the General assembly for its support last year.

The government has increased judges’ salaries, and they will receive this raise gradually.

There is still a preliminary ruling pending at the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU).

### **Austria**

Markus Thoma takes the floor.

The appointment of administrative court presidents in Austria lacks meaningful involvement from the judiciary. Austria has not progressed to participation of the judiciary into selecting administrative court presidents. Executive authorities retain control, which weakens the authority and legitimacy of court presidents.

New appointments for the President and Vice-President of the Supreme Court are expected. Reforms were made—now the judiciary’s personnel committee provides a shortlist for the President and Vice-President of the Supreme Court. Still, these officials are formally appointed by the executive (via the Justice Minister or Cabinet and the President). This arrangement may still undermine legitimacy and raises concerns.

There are also disciplinary sanctions being imposed on judges from the Administrative Court of Vienna.

Our Austrian colleagues propose a request to the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE), of which Markus Thoma also is a member.

The topic of the next CCJE Opinion will be on judicial well-being.

### **Greece**

Fani Sotiriadou takes the floor.

Since 2020, reforms have affected Greek administrative judges, aiming to tackle long case backlogs by tying judges’ performance to disciplinary measures. These reforms undermine judicial independence.

For example, judges on maternity or sick leave are still held accountable. If a case takes more than 8 months to complete, salaries are automatically reduced, and judges can face disciplinary measures.

Furthermore, internal administrative rules stipulate for:

- Automatic salary reductions if a case remains unresolved for over 8 months.
- Possible disciplinary actions, such as warnings or even removal, for judges failing to meet deadlines—even when delays are due to legitimate reasons (e.g., maternity or sick leave).
- Such sanctions are often determined arbitrarily by internal commissions, creating risks of double penalties (having both salary cuts and formal disciplinary measures).

Fani Sotiriadou requests that the GA adopt a resolution she has prepared. President Sylvain Mérenne suggests continuing joint work in order to prepare a statement issued by the Board.

Fani Sotiriadou also speaks about the situation in Gaza. The Greek Association of Administrative Judges has adopted a resolution denouncing human rights and humanitarian law violations by Israel.

She adds that neutrality always ends up favoring the weak.

She shares this resolution with the group.

## **Montenegro**

Miodrag Pesic, president of the Administrative Court of Montenegro takes the floor.

The Administrative Court of Montenegro was established in 2005 to address disputes involving public administration. Its mission is to ensure legality and the protection of individuals' rights in administrative matters.

The court has currently 16 judges, each handling a very heavy caseload—roughly 500 cases per judge. This is consistent with broader judicial pressure in the country.

Montenegro's judicial system faces significant inefficiencies, including severe backlogs and extended resolution times, due to staff shortages and insufficient infrastructure. The combination of high caseloads and limited resources places serious strain on judges.

There are also payment difficulties due to Euro usage.

Montenegro unilaterally adopted the euro in 2002, doing so without formal EU or ECB agreements. This means they use the currency but cannot print euros or participate in the Eurozone governance. This situation creates payment and budgetary constraints: wages and court funding are determined in local currency (euro), yet Montenegro relies entirely on imports of physical euro, and cannot adjust monetary supply locally.

## **Kosovo**

Rexhep Gashi takes the floor.

In 2013, Kosovo centralized its administrative case consideration by establishing an Administrative Department within the Supreme Court, staffed with 11 judges. This move was part of the broader reform to create a two-tiered administrative justice system—handling appeals and legal uniformity at the highest level.

Alongside the Supreme Court's department, the Commercial Court in Pristina includes an Administrative Department of its own, consisting of 5 first-instance judges.

These judges handle administrative disputes alongside commercial work—a structure that's transitional until full administrative courts are established.

Kosovo's Assembly recently adopted a Law on the Administrative Court aimed at creating a dedicated administrative court—a first instance and a supreme administrative court system (with branches across major centers)

This reform is scheduled to enter into force in 2025, but is presently awaiting review by the Constitutional Court on key provisions such as court jurisdiction, composition, and appointment mechanisms.

Kosovo is preparing for an evaluation by the Council of Europe. It is currently undergoing a comprehensive judicial assessment by it, notably via the Venice Commission and the CEPEJ, which has consistently supported data-driven improvements, capacity-building, performance monitoring, and training across Kosovo's judiciary—activities reinforced through the KoSEJ II program (2019–2022) and ongoing “Dashboard Western Balkans” (2023–2026).

## **Poland**

Pawel Groński takes the floor.

Since the 2017 reforms, Poland's judiciary has been polarized between “old” judges (appointed under the pre-2017 system) and “neo-judges” (appointed through the reformed, politically influenced National Judicial Council, KRS)

In some districts, “neo-judges” (or newly appointed judges) have been reassigned or prevented from hearing cases, and in turn some of their rulings have been suspended at appeal.

The government has responded by ignoring or withholding publication of court and constitutional tribunal rulings it disfavors—including by refusing to publish them in the official Journal of Laws.

Aleksandra Wrzesińska-Nowacka is part of a special commission working to address some of the problems caused by earlier judicial reforms. This commission reflects efforts by the current government (since Dec 2023) and its justice ministry to evaluate the legal status of the newly appointed judges, define categories (those with legitimate pathways, those who need to revert, and those who may require reappointment or demotion) and ensure any review or corrective process is individually tailored, allows for appeal, and respects ECtHR/Venice Commission guidance.

## **Turkey**

Mehmet Tank takes the floor and expresses gratitude to the AEAJ (Association of European Administrative Judges) for its support, especially to Edith Zeller, the former president of AEAJ.

Mehmet Tank is a former tax judge from Turkey with a dedicated career in the judiciary and a steadfast commitment to judicial independence.

He began his career as a tax inspector in 2002 before entering the judiciary in 2005. He served as a tax judge within the administrative justice system. He was involved in YARSAV, the independent Turkish association of judges and prosecutors, especially as officer for international affairs. YARSAV was the AEAJ member for Turkey.

Mehmet faced repeated reassignments - a form of punishment - between 2011 and 2016, and was finally arrested, dismissed and imprisoned until being released on parole in 2021.

He fled Turkey in 2023 with help from European colleagues and is now based in Switzerland, where he lives with his family.

He reads with great emotion an article he wrote in 2015, that, in a metaphorical way, discusses how quickly an authoritarian state can emerge, seize power, and threaten anyone who opposes it.

The participants applaud with emotion.

***Signatures:***

*President: Sylvain Mérinne*

*General Secretary: Camille Vinet*