

## 2023 REPORT OF THE PRESIDENT

### European Presidents Conference

Vienna, February 2024

Dear Colleagues, Dear Friends,

I have the pleasure to present to you the Report on the activities of the European Association of Lawyers (AEA-EAL) in 2023.

The year 2023 shall be remembered as a time of great unrests in various parts of our world. It should be a lesson of the need to resolve conflicts in a peaceful way and to defend human rights.

It was a busy year for our Association. AEA-EAL organized and co-organized numerous conferences and webinars, continued the Mentoring Program, our representatives attended various events as speakers or guests.

AEA-EAL was co-organizer of two large international conferences – one in Tbilisi, Georgia on business and human rights and second in Gdynia, Poland on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity.

Hereby I would like to thank all our members and friends for their contribution in the works of our organization.



Maria Ślęzak  
President

### Lawyers and the Prevention of Money Laundering: an Euro-American Comparison [17.05.2023]

On May 17 an online conference promoted and supported by AEA-EAL and the General Council of the Spanish Bar took place, with Spanish and Argentine specialists on the treatment and obligations of lawyers in the prevention of money laundering and the financing of terrorism in Europe and South America, sparking a lively debate on the professional secrecy of lawyers and their defense in this matter.

### (Open) Strategic Autonomy – Foundations and Tools [07-08.09.2023]

Our traditional conference in **Bern, Switzerland**, on September 7-8, 2023, supervised by AEA-EAL Director, Prof. Philipp Zurkinden in cooperation with the University of Bern. The conference focused on the problem of open strategic autonomy.

### Business and Human Rights [10.11.2023]

On November 10, the international conference – Business and Human Rights for Legal Practitioners took place in **Tbilisi, Georgia**. This event, organized by AEA-EAL in partnership with the Georgian Bar Association, drew participation from more than 170 individuals, including lawyers and legal professionals from various countries, such as Austria, Poland, Latvia, Estonia and Italy. Delegations from Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan also attended the conference.



### Artificial Intelligence and Cybersecurity – Business. Algorithm. Law. [16-18.11.2023]

On November 16-18, the second edition of the International Conference BAL was held in **Gdynia, Poland**, organized by AEA-EAL and the Legal Tech Committee of the Gdańsk Bar Association of Attorneys-at-Law. This event became an arena for inspiring discussions on artificial intelligence and cybersecurity, opening new horizons for lawyers and business. The opening speeches for the conference were provided by Magdalena Witkowska – Dean of the Gdańsk Bar Association of Attorneys-at-Law, Maria Ślęzak – President of AEA-EAL and C. M. Chan – President of the Law Society of Hong Kong.



#### **EYBA Spring Conference [25.03.2023]**

On March 25, our President Maria Ślęzak participated virtually in the European Young Bar Association General Meeting and addressed the audience. It was highlighted that EYBA, celebrating this year 30th Anniversary, and AEA-EAL have strengthened cooperation in the last five years through various common activities and projects. Further collaboration of both Associations will be continued in the interest of members and in the interest of justice systems of their countries.

#### **Lawyers for the Rule of Law [04-05.04.2023]**

On April 4-5, International Scientific and Practical Conference "Lawyers for the Rule of Law. Strengthening the Impact of Education on Justice. Restoring the Right to Defense in New Realities, and the Human Rights Lawyers' Right to Association" took place in **Vilnius, Lithuania**. The special attention was given to the situation of Lawyers in Belarus. Our Association was represented by its President Maria Ślęzak, who addressed the audience in the first panel "European instrument on the protection of lawyers and lawyers' associations: status and a search for answers to the main questions". The considerations of organizers concentrated on the necessity of creating safe conditions of work for human rights lawyers, especially in countries where bars are not independent.

#### **Gender Equality as Part of the International Human Rights Law [01-04.06.2023]**

On June 2, this international conference took place in **Baku, Azerbaijan**. The event was organized by the Azerbaijan Bar Association, the Chamber of Advocates of the Republic of Uzbekistan, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The conference covered such topics as: gender equality and mainstreaming from the international perspective, ending violence against women and addressing gender equality and women's empowerment. By the end of the meeting, participants analyzed and reviewed the adoption of the joint Baku Declaration on Achieving Gender Equality. AEA-EAL was represented by its Vice President -David Asatiani who in opening remarks highlighted that gender equality and women's rights are vitally important topics when it comes to defending

human rights, promoting the rule of law, and supporting democratic reforms.

#### **Fostering Access to Justice in Turkmenistan: the Role of a Lawyer in International and European Law and Practice [12.10.2023]**

President Maria Ślęzak represented AEA-EAL as the speaker at this international conference, organized by the Council of Europe in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice of Turkmenistan. AEA-EAL was present at this event at the invitation of the Council of Europe. The conference took place in **Ashgabat, Turkmenistan**.

#### **Everything You Always Wanted to Know About Woman Lawyers but Were Afraid to Ask [14.03.2023]**

On March 14, a special online event took place which was dedicated to International Women's day. It was organized jointly by AEA-EAL and the Opole Bar of Attorneys-at-Law. The event was featuring lawyers from Poland, India, China, Italy, Germany, Austria, Romania, Serbia, and the UK. The meeting was focused on sharing personal experiences by answering questions regarding the personal life of a lawyer woman, work-life balance challenges as well as the system of legal education. It was highlighted that, although women slowly have found their place in the legal profession since the 19th century, they still face some challenges.

#### **Representation and the Role of Lawyer in Mediation [15.03.2023]**

On March 15, an interesting online meeting took place, organized by AEA-EAL Mediation Committee. It focused on presenting information regarding the European Code of Conduct for Mediators, including the priority of interests of clients, the main principles in the mediation process, appropriate ethical behaviors for mediators, as well as "How lawyers can avoid ruining mediation". During the opening remarks information was presented regarding the ECHR Knowledge Sharing platform (ECHR-KS). It was highlighted that the mission of the platform is to share convention case-law knowledge, complementing the existing information tools such as HUDOC.

#### **AI in Chinese Courts – A First-Hand Account [20.04.2023]**

This webinar was organized on April 20 by AEA-EAL New Technologies Committee with the involvement of the Shenzhen Lawyers Association. The general overview, as well as the moderation of the webinar, was made by Iain G. Mitchell KC – the Chair of the New Technologies Committee. The meeting focused on information regarding Artificial Intelligence tools in the European Legal and Judicial System, as well as on the situation in

the United Kingdom. The speakers also made an overview of ethical guidelines for Artificial Intelligence in Europe. Our invited guests from the Shenzhen Lawyers Association presented issues regarding the Application of AI Technology in legal proceedings in China.

#### **Learning about the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and Using It Effectively in Practice [24.05.2023]**

On May 24, an online meeting was organized by AEA-EAL with partnership with the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights and the Białystok Bar Association of Attorneys-at-Law. The first half of the meeting was dedicated to the introduction, while the second part covered the issue regarding FRA's Practical Tools and Materials on the EU charter. By the end of the meeting, attendees had the opportunity to exercise in Practical Case Study on the EU Charter.

#### **AI in Chinese Courts and Europe – a First-Hand Account [30.05.2023]**

On May 30, a follow-up to the April 20 webinar was organized by AEA-EAL New Technologies Committee with the involvement of the Shenzhen Lawyers Association. The meeting was focused on covering questions such as: "Can AI ever replace judges?" and "Can AI ever replace lawyers?". During the discussion, it was highlighted that the question of whether AI can replace judges is a complex and debated topic. Judicial decision-making involves not only interpreting and applying the law but also considering the nuanced aspects of each case, such as empathy, context, and moral judgment.

#### **Preparing Lawyers to Conduct War Crime Cases in Ukraine Before Courts and Tribunals [20.06.2023]**

On June 20, an online seminar was organized by AEA-EAL, the Opole Bar Association of Attorneys-at-Law and the Rechtsanwaltskammer Sachsen. Participants from many countries had a chance to watch 5 brilliant presentations of experts, translated to 4 languages: English, Polish, Ukrainian, and German: Admissibility of evidence collected during the armed conflict in Ukraine from the perspective of international criminal law, rights of the victim in criminal proceedings, hearing the accused of war crimes in court proceedings – procedural methodology, the victim as an auxiliary prosecutor in cases of war crimes – procedural rights and how to use them, preparation for interviewing a victim of war sex crimes.

#### **Mediation in Digitalization Era, Forms and Practice of Mediation [26.10.2023]**

On October 26, AEA-EAL Mediation Committee under leadership of its Chair Irakli Khandashvili, organized the

online webinar that included presentations from speakers revealing the forms and practice of mediation in the digitalization era in such countries as the UK and Ukraine.

#### **Practical Aspects of Redress [25.01.2023]**

On January 25, the webinar took place which was focused on practical aspects of redress in certain European states. The event was organized by the Rzeszów Bar Association of Attorneys-at-Law in cooperation with the Polish National Bar of Attorneys-at-Law. The program focused on presenting information about redress in France, Germany and Italy. AEA-EAL was represented by our member French lawyer – Anna Mizerka-Favergeon, who spoke on the French redress system.

#### **Women in Leadership [29.08.2023]**

On August 29, a virtual meeting was organized by the Law Society of Hong Kong. Our President, Maria Ślęzak was invited as the speaker. Speakers of the meeting focused on sharing insights and experience of their jurisdictions in promoting women in leadership within the legal industry. In her speech President Ślęzak highlighted the importance of cooperation between AEA-EAL and the Law Society of Hong Kong. She mentioned that "If we women – leaders from various countries and even continents, will cooperate regularly, we have a chance to facilitate careers of some young, ambitious ladies. In consequence, the percentage of women in the leaders' position will increase, and this is what we are looking for".



#### **Opening of the Legal Year in Hong Kong [16.01.2023]**

The ceremonial opening of the 2023 legal year was held at the City Hall in Hong Kong. Chief Justice Andrew Cheung highlighted the three main functions of the Judiciary: to uphold the rule of law and administer justice, to protect fundamental rights, and to make laws under the common law system. Maria Ślęzak, AEA-EAL President, represented our Association virtually during the Presidents' Roundtable, organized by The Law Society of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Bar Association. The Roundtable was attended by 80 delegates from 62 lawyers' associations and international legal organizations from 30 jurisdictions.

#### **4th Meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Protection of Lawyers (CJ-AV) [01.03.2023]**

#### **5th Meeting of the Committee of Experts on the Protection of Lawyers (CJ-AV) [03.07.2023]**

President Maria Ślęzak represented AEA-EAL as the observer in the fourth and the fifth meetings of the Committee of Experts on the Protection of Lawyers in Strasbourg, France on March 1 and on July 3. The CJ-AV consists of 15 representatives of member States, and representatives of several international bodies such as the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the European Court of Human Rights, the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, and the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Independence of Judges and Lawyers. Participants of the meeting concentrated on the continuation of drafting the proposal of legal instrument aiming at strengthening the protection of the profession of lawyer and the right to practice without prejudice or restraint. A part of the meeting was devoted to the consideration of enforcement mechanisms.



#### **Official Opening Ceremony of the “House of Advocates” [23.06.2023]**

On June 23, the new office of the Georgian Bar Association, "House of Advocates", was officially opened. The newly built building was opened by the Chairman of the Georgian Bar Association – David Asatiani, the Prime Minister of Georgia – Irakli Gharibashvili, AEA-EAL President – Maria Ślęzak and the Vice-President of the International Bar Association – Claudio Visco.



#### **Secretary General's First Exchange of Views with Civil Society [15.09.2023]**

Sabine Perquy-Forke, AEA-EAL Director, represented our Association at the First Exchange of Views with the Civil Society, organized by the Council of Europe Secretary General on September 15 in Strasbourg, France.



#### **Enhancing Subsidiarity: Support to the ECHR Knowledge-Sharing and Superior Courts Dialogue**

AEA-EAL has started cooperation with the Council of Europe on popularizing this project that aims to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity, which has ever been at the core of the European Convention on Human Rights system and has been inserted into the Preamble of the Convention by Protocol No 15. This principle imposes a shared responsibility between the States Parties, the Court, and the Committee of Ministers (which supervises the execution of judgments from the Court), but the primary responsibility to ensure the application and effective implementation of the Convention lies with the States Parties and national authorities and in particular courts, which are the first guardians of human rights, ensuring the full application of the Convention as interpreted by the Court.

#### **Mentoring Program**

The Mentoring Program is a joint undertaking of AEA-EAL and the European Young Bar Association launched in 2023. This is a unique possibility for sharing cross-border experiences and expanding professional contacts to the development of standards of the profession of lawyer in Europe. Moreover, it guides young lawyers from different countries in their career path and personal development and also contributes to the implementation of the best standards in the exercise of the profession of a lawyer.