

Clemens Lahner, attorney at law, trial observer for the bar association of Vienna

Dear friends and colleagues,

thank you very much for the invitation, it is a great honour for me to participate in this conference and especially in this panel.

I am not a president, I can only speak for myself, but before I do, I would like to deliver greetings of friendship and solidarity from the bar association of Vienna.

As lawyers, we are entrepreneurs, so we are also competitors. We compete for clients, for cases, maybe for media attention, and we may also be competitors or rivals in a political sense. But when the foundations of the rule of law are under attack, we must put all differences aside and stand united.

When I was asked about the role of the bar associations in the protection of the lawyers, an example occurred to me. One lawyer alone can speak up, he or she can point out injustice and fight it in court, but one lawyer alone is also vulnerable. Like one finger which can point, but which can also be broken. All fingers of a hand together make a fist. Likewise, all lawyers and all bar associations must stand united in the democratic struggle for the rule of law and for human rights. If we stand together and speak up, if we stand united across borders and continents, we shall not be silenced.

I am from Austria and I was born in Germany. Two countries that share a common history and a common responsibility. We have seen where it leads when governments begin to curtail the independence of the judiciary, to detain journalists, to oppress minorities, to interfere with academic freedom and with trade unions, to label political opponents as traitors and also to persecute lawyers just for doing their job. It leads to authoritarian rule and it leads to war. The same symptoms that could be observed in Austria and Germany in the nineteen thirties can be observed today in Turkey. It is our common responsibility to speak up and raise our voices against all of it.

We all meet problems during our daily lives, as lawyers and as humans. But when I travel to Turkey and observe how bravely our courageous Turkish and Kurdish colleagues defend the rights of their clients and of all the citizens of this beautiful

country, it always inspires me. My own job may seem difficult sometimes, maybe the courts don't listen to my arguments, maybe my clients don't pay for my work, but no one will threaten me, no one will arrest me for doing my job, no one will label me as a terrorist because I defend certain clients. This would seem normal, it should be normal, but in comparison with the conditions under which you defend the rule of law, it seems like a great privilege.

Friends have asked me, whether I am afraid of travelling to Turkey, of joining such events and observing trials against our colleagues. After all, lawyers have been arrested, journalists have been jailed, judges and prosecutors have been imprisoned, as well as academics. Not only citizens of Turkey, but also from other European countries. You never know who will be detained next. And the truth is, yes, sometimes I am worried what might happen.

But I believe it is everyone's obligation to speak up while they can, and to show solidarity as long as it is still possible, especially from a privileged and protected position. So, on Monday, when yet another trial against our brave colleagues will begin, I will be there, we will be there, we will observe this trial and we will report to the world what is going on.

And I want all of you to know that your courage does not go unnoticed. United, we will make our voices heard.

We stand with you, shoulder by shoulder! Omuz omuza!

Thank you!