

IV ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION **LEGAL SERVICE**

17.04.2026

Charlemagne Building
Brussels, Belgium
Webstreamed



**TOWARDS A GENUINE
EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION:
THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE
OF EU DEFENCE POLICY.**

**SIMPLIFICATION:
THE KEY TO UNLOCK
COMPETITIVENESS
IN THE UNION?**

WELCOMING REMARKS



Alberto de Gregorio Merino
Director-General of the Legal Service,
European Commission

It is my great pleasure to welcome you to the Fourth Annual Conference of the European Commission Legal Service.

Since the launch of its annual conference in 2023, the Legal Service has sought to provide a forum for reflection on the role of the European Union law and of discussion of the major legal questions facing the European Union. This fourth edition continues that commitment by bringing together judges, academics, practitioners, representatives of the European institutions, officials from the administrations of the Member States, and other participants, both in Brussels and online.

The subjects selected for this year's conference are of particular significance for the Union at the present time. First, we will reflect on the legal dimensions of European defence and the paths towards a genuine European Defence Union. Second, we will discuss the impact of legislative simplification on the Union's competitiveness and the development of European industrial policy.

Both topics are of clear legal, institutional and strategic importance. They go to the heart of the Union's capacity to act effectively in a changing world, while remaining firmly anchored in the rule of law.

The presence of such distinguished speakers and the participation of a highly experienced and diverse audience offer a valuable opportunity for meaningful exchange across institutions, disciplines and professional backgrounds. It is through such collective reflection and dialogue that we can deepen our understanding of the challenges ahead and contribute to the broader debate on the future of the Union.

I wish to express my sincere appreciation to all our speakers for sharing their expertise and insights, and to all participants for their presence and engagement.

I wish you a successful and rewarding conference.

Alberto de Gregorio Merino

Since 1 December 2025, **Alberto de Gregorio Merino** is the Director-General of the Legal Service of the European Commission. From August 2023 to November 2025, he was the head of the team "Business Law" in the Legal Service of the EC, covering, among other areas, establishment and services, movement of capital, transport, intellectual property and the information society. Alberto de Gregorio Merino started his career in DG Trade of the European Commission (November 2002–February 2005), before joining the Legal Service of the Council of the European Union where he was successively Legal Adviser (March 2005–May 2016) and Director (June 2016–August 2023). In addition to his core managerial and advisory roles, he has provided legal advice across a wide range of EU policies and institutional questions and played a leading role on major files in recent years, including crisis-response mechanisms, Brexit-related matters, and instruments supporting Ukraine, as well as work linked to Next Generation EU, the Multiannual Financial Framework, the Rule of Law Conditionality Regulation and the system of Own Resources, supported by extensive litigation experience before the Court of Justice of the European Union. He began his career as an Assistant Professor in Public Law at the University of Salamanca and then practiced as a lawyer at the Bar of Madrid. Alberto de Gregorio Merino holds a Master's degree in Law from the Universidad de Salamanca and an LL.M. from the College of Europe.

MORNING

8:30 - 9:30

REGISTRATION AND WELCOME COFFEE

9:30 - 9:45

WELCOMING REMARKS

Mr Alberto de Gregorio Merino, *Director-General of the Legal Service, European Commission*

FIRST SESSION

Towards a genuine European Defence Union: the legal landscape of EU defence policy

9:45 - 10:00

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Mr Andrius Kubilius, *Commissioner for Defence and Space, European Commission*

10:00 - 12:00

ROUNDTABLE

Moderator

Ms Yona Marinova, *Assistant to the Director-General of the Legal Service, European Commission*

Panellists

Ms Mikaela Kumlin Granit, *Permanent Representative of Sweden to the European Union*

Mr Jean-Baptiste Laignelot, *Director, External Relations, Legal Service of the Council of the European Union*

Ms Belén Martínez Carbonell, *Secretary-General of the European Union's External Action Service*

Dr. Carolyn Moser, *Research Group Leader, Max Planck Institute, European Security Revisited (ENSURE)*

12:00 - 12:15

CLOSING REMARKS OF THE FIRST SESSION

Mr Clemens Ladenburger, *Deputy Director-General of the Legal Service, European Commission*

12:15 - 13:45

NETWORKING LUNCH (BUFFET PROVIDED FOR THE CONFERENCE ATTENDEES)

AFTERNOON

13:45 - 14:00

Launch of the book "*Exploring the new frontiers of EU law*" by **Ms Florence Clotuche-Duvieusart**, *Director of the Directorate M (European Civil Service Law) of the Legal Service, European Commission* and **Ms Hilde Hardeman**, *Director-General of The Publications Office*.

SECOND SESSION

Simplification: the key to unlock competitiveness in the Union?

14:00 - 14:15

KEYNOTE SPEECH

Mr Michael McGrath, *Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, European Commission*

14:15 - 16:15

ROUNDTABLE

Moderator

Gregor von Rintelen, *Acting Director of Directorate A (Business Law) of the Legal Service, European Commission*

Panellists

Mr Jean-Denis Combexelle, *Président de section honoraire du Conseil d'État (Honorary Section Chairman of the French Conseil d'État)*

Prof. Dr. Meinrad Dreher, *Former Judge at the Constitutional Court of Rhineland-Palatinate, Former Chair of European Law, Private Law, Commercial and Business Law, and Comparative Law at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz*

Dr. Alix Frank-Thomasser, *Chair of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) Company Law Committee*

Ms Kerstin Jorna, *Director-General of the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission*

16:15 - 16:30

CLOSING REMARKS OF THE SECOND SESSION

Mr Paolo Stancanelli, *Director of the Directorate F (Institutions) of the Legal Service, European Commission*

MORNING SESSION

**TOWARDS A GENUINE
EUROPEAN DEFENCE UNION:
THE LEGAL LANDSCAPE
OF EU DEFENCE POLICY**

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Andrius Kubilius
*Commissioner for Defence and Space,
European Commission*

Andrius Kubilius has been European Commissioner for Defence and Space since December 2024. Born on 8 December 1956 in Vilnius, Lithuania, he graduated from the Faculty of Physics at Vilnius State University. Throughout his long-standing public service, Mr Kubilius has held a number of senior political responsibilities at both national and European level. He was actively involved in Lithuania's pro-independence movement and served as Secretary-in-Charge of the pro-independence Reform Movement Sąjūdis from 1990 to 1992. Commissioner Kubilius was a Member of the Seimas of the Republic of Lithuania from 1992 to 2019 and served twice as Prime Minister of Lithuania, from 1999 to 2000 and again from 2008 to 2012. From 2003 to 2015, he was Chairman of the Homeland Union – Lithuanian Christian Democrats. From 2019 until December 2024, Mr Kubilius was a Member of the European Parliament, where he also served as Chair of the European Parliament Delegation to the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly from 2019 to July 2024. Since December 2024, Mr Kubilius has been a Member of the European Commission, with responsibility for Defence and Space.

MORNING SESSION

Towards a genuine European Defence Union: the legal landscape of EU defence policy

European defence policy has moved rapidly to the forefront of the Union's agenda in response to a changing geopolitical environment and growing security concerns. As the EU expands its role in this field, important legal and institutional questions arise as to the scope of its competences, the instruments available under the Treaties, and the relationship between Union action and Member States' responsibilities. The panel will explore the legal foundations of EU defence policy at the intersection of the TEU and the TFEU, examine how the different actors, mechanisms and procedures interact in practice and explore what the next steps towards achieving a true European Defence Union could be.

MODERATOR

Yona Marinova, *Assistant to the Director-General of the Legal Service, European Commission*



Yona Marinova
*Assistant to the Director-General
of the Legal Service,
European Commission*

Yona Marinova has been an Assistant to the Director-General of the Legal Service of the European Commission since July 2021, where she is responsible for overall legal coordination within the Service. Prior to that, she was a member of the Internal Market Team (January 2017–January 2020) and the External Relations Team (February 2020–June 2021) of the Legal Service. In those roles, she has provided legal advice on a broad range of EU policies, including defence, internal market, industry, energy and various aspects of the Union's external action, as well as litigated numerous cases before the Court of Justice of the European Union. In particular, she has been actively involved in the development

of the EU defence-related instruments over the past ten years. Prior to joining the Legal Service, Yona Marinova was Head of the Legal Sector in the Directorate-General for Energy (where she worked from February 2011 to December 2016) and a member of the Legal Unit in the Directorate-General for Health and Consumer Protection (April 2009–January 2011). Before joining the European Commission, she worked in the United Kingdom, in academia and at the Law Commission, and in Bulgaria, as a lawyer in private practice. Yona Marinova holds a Master of Laws degree from the University of Sofia, a Master of Laws degree from the University of Warwick, and a PhD in Law from the University of Aberdeen.



Mikaela Kumlin Granit
*Permanent Representative of Sweden
to the European Union*

Since 2023, **Mikaela Kumlin Granit** has served as the Permanent Representative of Sweden to the European Union. From 2021 to 2023, she was Ambassador of Sweden to the UK. Between 2018–2021, she served as Ambassador of Sweden to Austria, with side accreditations to the Slovak Republic and the Republic of Slovenia, while also acting as Permanent Representative of Sweden to the International Organizations in Vienna. She also chaired the International Atomic Energy Agency Board of Governors between 2019 and 2020. From 2012 to 2018, she was Deputy Director-General and Head of the Department for European Affairs at the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Sweden. She served as Foreign Policy Adviser in the Cabinet of the President of the European

Council between 2010 and 2012. Between 2007–2010, she worked as Director and Foreign Policy Adviser in the Office of the Prime Minister of Sweden.

Her previous roles at the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs include Head of Unit for Institutional Issues in the Department for European Affairs (2005–2007), European Correspondent and Head of Unit (2005), and Deputy Director for U.S. Affairs (2004). She also served abroad as First Secretary at the Embassy of Sweden in Washington, D.C. (1999–2004) and Second Secretary at the Embassy of Sweden in Harare (1997–1999). Mikaela Kumlin Granit holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics from Stockholm University (1992). She speaks Swedish, English, French and German.

MORNING SESSION



Jean-Baptiste Laignelot
*Director, External Relations,
Legal Service of the Council
of the European Union*

Since 1 October 2020, **Jean-Baptiste Laignelot** is Director for External Relations at the Council Legal Service, in charge of legal issues related to common foreign and security policy (CFSP), common security and defence policy (CSDP), defence industry, international trade, development and enlargement. From October 2014 to October 2020, he was Director for Institutional Questions, Staff Regulations, Budget and Litigation. Before joining the Council Legal Service, he served as member of the Conseil d'Etat in France. He was seconded as national expert at the Commission Legal Service (internal market-energy-environment team) from 2006 to 2010, at the Prime Minister office for European Affairs (SGAE) from 2010 to

2012 and at the Permanent Representation of France to the EU from 2012 to 2014. In addition to his core managerial and advisory roles, he has provided legal advice across a wide range of EU policies and institutional questions and played a leading role on major files in recent years, including crisis-response mechanisms, sanctions, trade and other international agreements, foreign policy, security and defence, support to Ukraine, as well as in the reform of the CJEU, Brexit-related matters and Rule of Law issues, with litigation experience before the Court of Justice of the European Union. Jean-Baptiste Laignelot holds a Master's degree in Law from the University of Paris-Panthéon Sorbonne, a Master's degree in Economics from the University of Paris-Dauphine.



Belén Martínez Carbonell
*Secretary-General, European Union
External Action Service*

Belén Martínez Carbonell is the Secretary-General of the European Union's External Action Service (EEAS) since 1 February 2025. Prior to this posting she was the Managing Director in the EEAS, responsible for Global Agenda and Multilateral Relations since 1 September 2021. Before she held the position of Director for Human Resources of the EEAS from April 2018 until 31 August 2021. Before assuming this function, she was the Head of Policy Coordination Division in the EEAS in charge of preparations of Foreign Affairs Councils for the HRVP among

other tasks. Belén Martínez Carbonell had also worked in various functions related to external relations at the EEAS and the European Commission, including as Head of Division for Andean Countries, Member of the Cabinet of the Trade Commissioner, Member of Cabinet of the Commissioner for External Relations, Political Counsellor at the EC Delegation to the US. Belén Martínez Carbonell holds an MA in International Relations of the Université Libre de Bruxelles and an MA in European Studies from the College of Europe.



Carolyn Moser
*Research Group Leader, Max Planck
Institute, European Security Revisited*

Dr Carolyn Moser has headed the independent research group ENSURE (European Security Revisited) at the Max Planck Institute for Comparative Public Law and International Law (MPIL, Heidelberg) since 2022. Previously, Dr Moser held the Alfred Grosser Chair at Sciences Po Paris (2023–24). She served as a junior group leader (2019–22), and as a (post-) doctoral researcher (2013–19) at the MPIL. She began her career as a junior public governance consultant at the Basel Institute on Governance (2011–13). Dr Moser's interdisciplinary work has earned her several awards, such as the Otto Hahn Medal and the European Court of Auditors Award, and has been supported by several funding bodies. She regularly shares her expertise

with public institutions and in the media. Dr Moser's publications include the monograph «Accountability in EU Security and Defence» (Oxford University Press, 2020) and the co-edited volume «The Legal Framework of the OSCE» (Cambridge University Press, 2019). Her peer-reviewed work further deals with the European Parliament's role in EU defence (HJIL, 2024), the impact of the war in Ukraine on the CSDP (Nomos, 2024), and constitutionalisation of EU security (ICON, 2022). She has also critically engaged with Germany's Zeitenwende. Dr Moser studied Law and Political Science at Sciences Po Paris and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University in the USA, before earning her doctorate from Utrecht University.

CLOSING REMARKS OF THE FIRST SESSION



Clemens Ladenburger

*Deputy Director-General of the Legal Service,
European Commission*

Clemens Ladenburger has been the Deputy Director-General of the Legal Service of the European Commission since March 2022. From 2017 to 2022, he was Director for Justice and Home Affairs in that Service. From 2008 to 2017, he served as Assistant to the Director-General of that Service, tasked with overall legal coordination. Before, he had mainly worked on institutional law, as a member of the Legal Service's Team "Institutions" (2000-2002 and 2003-2007), as rédacteur seconded to the inter-institutional secretariat of the Convention which drew up the draft Constitution for Europe between 2002 and 2003, and as a lawyer in the Commission's team for the "Charter" Convention of 2000. Mr Ladenburger started his EU career in the Council, working in the Cabinet of then Secretary-General Jürgen Trumpf (1998-1999). Before coming to Brussels, he had been an official of the German Federal Ministry of Justice and an academic assistant at Heidelberg University. He teaches as Honorary Professor at the Europa Institute of the Saarland University. In 2012 and 2023, he served as institutional (co-)rapporteur for FIDE. He has published and lectured widely on fundamental rights, Justice and Home Affairs, criminal law, the Treaty of Lisbon, the Convention method, economic governance, administrative and environmental law. Mr Ladenburger holds a doctor iur. from Heidelberg University and an LL.M. from University of Chicago. He passed his first and second State Exams in law in Baden-Württemberg (1992 and 1995), after studies in Freiburg and Geneva.

AFTERNOON SESSION

**SIMPLIFICATION:
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IN THE UNION?**

KEYNOTE SPEECH



Michael McGrath

Commissioner for Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection, European Commission

Mr Michael McGrath assumed the role of EU Commissioner on 1 December 2024. Commissioner McGrath has specific responsibility for upholding the rule of law, protecting democracy and fundamental rights, tackling disinformation, improving criminal justice cooperation and strengthening the rights of victims of crime, and improving EU competitiveness through the reform of company law and civil law. Commissioner McGrath has lead responsibility for consumer protection policy for almost 450 million consumers in the EU and works to ensure full enforcement of the General Data Protection Regulation, and promoting trusted data flows with international partners. Prior to this, Commissioner McGrath served as Ireland's Minister for Finance from 2022 to 2024, as Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform from 2020 to 2022, and was an elected member of the Irish Parliament between 2007 to 2024. As Minister for Finance, he had a key role in decisions made across government and was Ireland's representative at the Eurogroup and Ecofin meetings of European Finance Ministers, and was Governor of a number of international bodies that Ireland is a member of, including the European Investment Bank, the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Commissioner McGrath holds a Bachelor of Commerce from University College Cork, is a qualified Chartered Accountant and has undertaken studies with the London School of Economics and Political Science. He held senior roles in both the private and public sectors before entering politics full-time.

AFTERNOON SESSION

Simplification: the key to unlock competitiveness in the Union?

Simplification has become a central element of the Union's efforts to strengthen competitiveness. To face the current geoeconomic challenges, the European Commission has launched an ambitious agenda to streamline Union law with the aim of reducing administrative burdens, rationalising reporting obligations and making legislation more accessible without lowering its policy standards. But can regulatory simplification truly unlock the Union's economic potential? The panel will discuss what simplification can realistically deliver, where its limits and trade-offs lie, and how it can contribute to the competitiveness of the Union.

MODERATOR

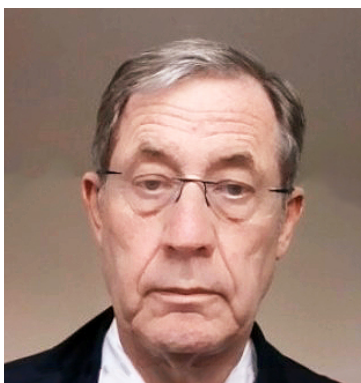
Gregor von Rintelen, *Acting Director of Directorate A (Business Law) of the Legal Service, European Commission*



Gregor von Rintelen
*Acting Director of Directorate A
(Business Law) of the Legal Service,
European Commission*

Gregor von Rintelen has been Acting Director of the Business Law team of the Legal Service of the European Commission since 1 December 2025, following his roles as Deputy to the Director (2024–2025) and Senior Expert in the same team (2021–2023). Earlier, he served as Legal Assistant to the Director-General of the Legal Service (2019–2021), Legal Assistant to the Deputy Director-General with responsibility for the infringement policy and coordinating all infringement procedures within the Legal

Service (2016–2019), and as a member of the agriculture and maritime policy team (2009–2016), working in particular on the 2013 reform of the Common Agricultural Policy and phytosanitary law. Before joining the Legal Service, he worked in DG Research and Technology on fusion energy and procurement matters and, prior to that, practised as a lawyer in Brussels. He holds a Doctorate in Law from the University of Mainz (2003), following the Second State Law Examination (1999) and the First State Law Examination (1996).



Jean-Denis Combrexelle
*Président de section honoraire du
Conseil d'État (Honorary Section
Chairman of the French Conseil d'État)*

Jean-Denis Combrexelle is Honorary Section President of the Conseil d'État (France). He is the former President of the Social Section and of the Litigation Section. He served as Chief of Staff to the Minister of Justice and subsequently to the Prime Minister. He is

the author of the report *La négociation collective, le travail et l'emploi* (2015), as well as of two books: *Les normes à l'assaut de la démocratie* (2024) and *Du bon exercice du pouvoir* (2026). He is currently President of the consulting company Combrexelle ASR Conseil.

AFTERNOON SESSION



Professor Dr. Meinrad Dreher, LL.M. (UPenn) taught European and commercial law from 1991 to October 2024, first at the University of Giessen and subsequently at the University of Mainz. He served as a part-time judge in the competition division of the Higher Regional Court of Frankfurt from 1993 to 1998 and as a judge at the Constitutional Court of Rhineland-Palatinate from 2014 to

2024. He was a visiting professor in the USA and Korea and an expert in various commercial law legislative procedures at German and European level. From 2009 to mid-2024, Professor Dreher was also deputy chairman of the supervisory boards of companies within an insurance group in Germany. He is the author of numerous publications on national and European commercial law.

Meinrad Dreher

Former Judge at the Constitutional Court of Rhineland-Palatinate, Former Chair of European Law, Private Law, Commercial and Business Law, and Comparative Law at the Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz



Alix Frank-Thomasser is a lawyer in private practice who was admitted to legal practice in Austria in 1986. She is a founding partner of ALIX FRANK RECHTSANWÄLTE GmbH in Vienna. Her practice focuses on corporate law, including Austrian private foundation law, litigation, corporate cross-border structuring, comparative corporate

law, M&A, antitrust law, and European law. She is currently Chair of the CCBE (Council of Bars and Law Societies in Europe) Company Law Committee.

Alix Frank-Thomasser

Chair of the Council of Bars and Law Societies of Europe (CCBE) Company Law Committee



Kerstin Jorna is a German national and a civil servant at the European Commission where she has held various positions, amongst others as Head of Cabinet of several Commissioners and different Director posts. Mrs. Jorna is the Director-General for Internal Market,

Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs. Before, Mrs. Jorna was Deputy Director-General for Economic and Financial Affairs. Mrs. Jorna also held positions on the Board of the European Investment Bank, the European Investment Fund as well as the European Innovation Council Fund.

Kerstin Jorna

Director-General of the Directorate General for Internal Market, Industry, Entrepreneurship and SMEs, European Commission

CLOSING REMARKS OF THE SECOND SESSION



Paolo Stancanelli

Director of the Directorate F (Institutions) of the Legal Service, European Commission

Paolo Stancanelli joined the Commission in 1993, first working in the then DG XV (Internal market and services) and then moving to the Legal Service in 1996, to deal in sequence with environmental law, consumers' law and institutional law. In 2001, he was called into the Commission task force tasked to follow the proceedings of the Convention for the Future of the EU. Back to the Legal Service in 2006, he served as assistant in charge of the legal coordination under three Directors General, M. Petite, C.-F. Durand and L. Romero. In 2015 he was appointed principal legal adviser in charge of the State aids and Antidumping team and in 2020 he moved, in the same function, to the Institutional affairs team.

Publications of the Legal Service of the European Commission

Exploring the New Frontiers of EU Law

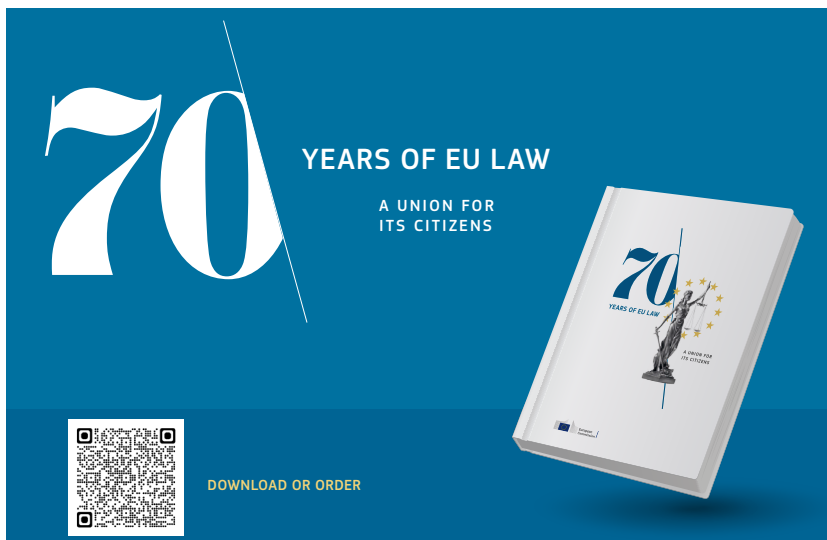
This forthcoming volume explores how the European Union is evolving as a legal order in response to existential challenges that have driven deeper integration, strengthened its institutional framework and broadened its capacity to act. Anchored in the EU's identity as a "community of law", the book shows how the Union continues to adapt creatively within the existing Treaty framework.

Structured in two parts, the book first examines the transformation of the internal market in areas such as digital regulation, industrial policy, cybersecurity and consumer protection. It then turns to the EU's growing role in protecting its collective interests and citizens, addressing developments in health policy, defence cooperation, foreign policy sanctions, investment screening, criminal law and the safeguarding of democratic values.

Overall, the volume argues that the EU is moving towards a form of functional sovereignty. While remaining a union of states, it is increasingly capable of acting collectively to protect its values and interests and to navigate an unstable global environment.

Publication in April 2026

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INFORMATION ON ACCREDITATION

The Conference has been accredited by several national bar associations for the purposes of the continuing professional development (CPD) of their members. Registered participants who need a certificate of attendance can request it after having attended the Conference by sending an email to sj-conference@ec.europa.eu, specifying their first and last names.