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Dear friends, regarding the period from 1985 to 2005, I would like to draw your attention on three points:

1. Our background: Experience with totalitarian systems, 2. Big size or identity, 3. The logo of MEDEL.

1. Our background: experience with totalitarian systems

In the period of fascism in Europe the judiciary generally failed miserably, with only few exceptions. Instead of defending the rule of law and the civil rights, the judiciary delivered legitimacy to tyranny. After the collapse of the fascist systems, a great part of the judges remained in their functions. The judges' organizations were mainly interested in the defence of good working conditions and privileges, they were not interested in discussions about the past. Only in the younger generation of judges there were groups that discussed history. Their conclusion was that the defence of democracy requires a democratic judiciary. These groups got in touch with each other at the ending seventies and beginning eighties of last century and created a European organization which since then unites them. On June 15th 1985 we met in Strasbourg in the building of the European Parliament for the foundation of what we named "Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés". The experience that judiciary had not resisted to political power in totalitarian systems is the base of our activities: We see judicial independence not as a privilege but as indispensable base of professional commitment for the protection of rule of law and human rights.

2. Big size or identity

After the breakdown of the wall a friend said happily: Now the comrades from German Democratic Republic can come and join us. He ignored completely that these judges and prosecutors had been on the side of the oppressors, legitimating the oppression of civil rights for which we had sworn to fight. Now we had two conflicting goals which we discussed in the administration board: Some of us wanted to become powerful by the number of members. Others emphasized the importance of our identity. For them our relevance is not based on the number of members but on the persuasiveness of our arguments and on the sincerity with which we act according to our values. There were colleagues from Croatia who applied for membership of the Croatian judges' association which represented the majority of Croatian judges. In the board of MEDEL we had a controversial discussion: Some of us argued that such an association contained not only democrats but also those who had supported the authoritarian system and that we should not accept them as members. The other opinion inside our board was that for our political importance it would be helpful to have many members. In our voting big size prevailed over identity. However, they stayed away after some time, we lost the contact. We met judges and prosecutors in other countries. These contacts began mainly on the base of private initiatives. It was a procedure of trial and error. We could not know beforehand who the judges were whom we met. Several seemingly positive contacts ended with a disappointment. But we also met persons who turned out to be fighters for democracy and rule of law: In Warsaw we found

Teresa Romer, in Prague Antonin Mokry. They and their friends were our first trustworthy contact persons in their countries. After the foundation of the polish JUSTITIA Theresa was vice president of MEDEL for several years. In Serbia, after the fall of Milosevic, we contacted a Serbian Civil Rights Organization to find out if there were judges in the judiciary in whom they trusted. So we came in contact with Radmila Dragicevic and Omer Hadziomerovic. Serbian Judges' Association has become a powerful element of MEDEL. Now we see with satisfaction that apparently MEDEL did not sacrifice identity for big size.

3. The logo of MEDEL

Did you ever look with attention at the logo of MEDEL? It was created in the nineties of last century by a Belgian designer whose name I don't remember. His idea of two birds flying over a book is a wonderful symbolic combination of commitment and freedom. The book represents the written texts as base of the rule of law. The birds represent the freedom of thought. They represent liberty as mentioned in our name: Magistrats Européens pour la Démocratie et les Libertés.