**ASSOCIATION OF JUDGES OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA**

To the European Association of Judges

**CONCERNING THE ACTIONS OF RUSSIAN FEDERATION TOWARDS THE JUDGES OF THE REPUBLIC OF LITHUANIA**

Thanking for the opportunity to address you, I would like to briefly return to the statement of EAJ adopted in Athens regarding the financing of Lithuanian courts. It is important to note that the situation with the salaries of judges has radically changed after the parliament, unable to ignore all our efforts, passed the law that increased the salaries of judges by more than 50%. Currently, the main problem remains the financing of the positions of the team members of the judge - assistant judges and secretaries. There are no changes in this field, their salaries are still clearly uncompetitive, there are lots of vacancies as well as decreasing competences, which leads to the higher workload of judges. The next year’s budget is to be approved in the following weeks, so the main task is to draw attention to this emerging problem and this Athens statement is still among our strongest tools in this fight.

And speaking about our new initiative, although the importance of security and independence of every judge cannot be overestimated, the necessity to address the issue related to the actions of the regime that is governing Russian Federation towards specific Lithuanian judges was inspired by the understanding, that the problem may not be view narrowly and regarded as local. It’s a clear offence against the judiciary as a whole, purposeful and systematic attempt to intimidate, influence every judge that may face as their professional duty the issues related to legal responsibility for war crimes and crimes against humanity committed by Russian Federation and officials belonging to the regime. The “must do” thing for us is to clearly identify the real goals of such behavior and to condemn it.

A short overview of what is going on. Four years ago a panel of three judges of Vilnius regional court announced the sentence in a criminal case and found Dmitry Yazov, former Defence Minister of the Soviet Union, Vladimir Uskhopchik, the Soviet army’s former Vilnius garrison commander, Mikhail Golovatov, former commander of the KGB’s special forces and other 64 former officials of the Soviet Union guilty for committing crimes against humanity and war crimes during the events which took place in Vilnius on January 13th, 1991 – military actions against civilians who gathered to protect the institutions of newly established Republic independent from the former Soviet Union. Just after the announcement of the sentence first notifications containing information about initiation of pre-trial criminal investigation against the judges appeared. The purpose of such campaign was quite clear – to influence the judges who will hear the appeals and the cassation. But when the newest information about the issuance of the arrest orders of the judges was announces in August 2023, having in mind that the January 13th case already went through all instances, it became clear that it is not only about the problems those judges may face while traveling abroad, especially outside European Union, it’s not only threatening other Lithuanian judges, it encroaches all the values the judiciary in democratic world is based on. In the face of the ongoing war in Ukraine and the legal procedures that will be implemented after the end of the war, the lack of a clear reaction to such actions can have an unpredictable impact on the community of judges, the justice system and the general rule of law principle.

It is not the politicians who make decisions about the application of sanctions. It’s an attack against the judiciary. This is why we are asking to condemn such behavior, publicize the real goals of the aggressor and call on all responsible institutions, especially those operating at the international level, to ensure real protection of the judicial system and the values it promotes.