

**INTRODUCTORY REMARKS BY PRESIDENT K. LENAERTS –
PRESS CONFERENCE OF 4TH JUNE 2026**

Good morning,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Court of Justice of the European Union.

At a time of geopolitical uncertainty, growing societal polarisation and increasing pressure on democratic institutions, the rule of law remains one of the essential foundations of the European Union.

The rule of law is not an abstract or technical concept reserved for lawyers. It is the guarantee that public power is exercised within the limits of the law, that courts remain independent, that citizens enjoy effective judicial protection, and that the same rules apply equally to all.

The Institution I have the honour to preside, the Court of Justice of the European Union, has a particular responsibility in this regard. Under the Treaties, it is entrusted with ensuring that “the law is observed” in the interpretation and application of Union law. This task requires independence, impartiality and fidelity to the Treaties.

Within the European Union, if Member states could walk away from the rules and legal commitments that they have established in common, instability would inevitably follow. Mutual trust between Member States, legal certainty for citizens and businesses, and the functioning of our Union itself depend on respect for common rules and judicial decisions.

This was precisely the visionary intent of our Founding Fathers (and Mothers we should actually say, as they were not only men of course) who set out on the road to European integration after the most devastating war and horror this continent has ever seen.

The rule of law is therefore not merely a legal principle. It is a condition for stability, trust and cooperation between European States.

And a very successful one for that matter. Never in its history has Europe known such a long period of peace, stability and economic prosperity.

Of course, the rule of law is not something that can simply be taken for granted. It must constantly be maintained, defended and reaffirmed. It requires institutions capable of acting independently, even in difficult or politically sensitive circumstances. It also requires acceptance that legal disputes must ultimately be resolved through courts and through law, rather than through political pressure, economic power or force.

In recent years, many of the most sensitive issues facing our societies — migration, digital regulation, sanctions, climate policy, judicial independence and fundamental rights — have reached the courts. This demonstrates not judicial expansion, but the central role that law continues to play in European public life.

One particularly important recent example is the judgment delivered by the Court in *Commission v Hungary* concerning the protection of Union values, these 12 fundamental values enshrined in article 2 of the TEU and that are the very core of its identity and purpose.

That case concerned Hungarian legislation restricting access by minors to content relating to homosexuality and gender identity. The proceedings attracted very significant attention throughout Europe because they touched upon highly sensitive societal, constitutional and political questions.

In its judgment, the Court recalled that the European Union is not only an economic union or a common market. It is also a Union founded on shared values, expressly set out in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, namely: human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights.

The Court emphasised that these values are not merely political aspirations or general declarations of principle. They form part of the legal identity of the European Union itself and are binding on all

Member States. Mutual trust between Member States — which is indispensable for the functioning of the Union — depends on the shared commitment of all States to those common values.

The judgment therefore illustrates an important reality of European integration: the Union is based not only on common economic interests, but also on a common legal and constitutional order founded on respect for fundamental rights and the rule of law.

At the same time, it is important to underline that the Court does not intervene in political debates as such. Its task is not to govern Europe, nor to substitute itself for democratic institutions. The Court's role is more limited, but also essential: to interpret and apply the Treaties and the legislation adopted by the Union institutions, independently and impartially.

That judicial role inevitably becomes more visible at moments of tension or controversy. But the existence of judicial review is itself one of the hallmarks of the rule of law. In a Union based on law, all public authorities — European and national alike — remain subject to legal scrutiny.

This is particularly important in today's world, where democratic societies are increasingly confronted with disinformation, geopolitical instability, economic pressure and rapid technological transformation. In such periods, the temptation may arise to view law as an obstacle or

a constraint. In reality, the rule of law is what allows free societies to remain stable, predictable and peaceful even in times of crisis.

Today's press conference offers an opportunity to discuss some of these important developments and to explain, within the limits imposed by judicial independence and pending proceedings, the work of the Court and the General Court.

Thank you for your presence and your continued interest in the work of the European judiciary.

I will now give the floor to the President of the General Court, Marc van der Woude.