



**SEMINAR ORGANISED BY THE SUPREME ADMINISTRATIVE COURT OF FINLAND  
IN COOPERATION WITH ACA-EUROPE**

**MAPPING THE MULTILEVEL PROTECTION OF FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS IN EUROPEAN ADMINISTRATIVE  
COURTS**

**Questionnaire**

*The Finnish presidency of ACA-Europe focuses on the vertical dialogue between the national supreme administrative jurisdictions and the European Courts, i.e., the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) and the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR). This questionnaire addresses this vertical dialogue from the perspective of the pluralist framework of European fundamental rights protection on the one hand and the national constitutional framework of fundamental rights on the other hand.*

*The term “fundamental right” in the title of the questionnaire is used as an umbrella concept. It refers to rights recognized as fundamental by the respective legal orders. This implies that those rights are in some sense supreme norms, often judicially protected against violation by public authorities, including the legislature.*

*In national legal systems, these rights are usually laid down by the constitution, or they may be provided by domestically applicable international human rights conventions. Within the scope of application of European Union law, the Charter of Fundamental Rights (CFREU) provides the main source of fundamental rights. Quite often, these various sources of law are simultaneously applicable in concrete cases. Furthermore, each individual system usually provides for specific court(s) or other authorities regarded as supreme or authoritative. In this sense, the fundamental rights protection in Europe may be regarded as "pluralist".*

*As legal norms, fundamental rights norms in Europe have several features that complicate their application in national courts. First, they are usually open to different interpretations, which in turn emphasises the role of precedents delivered by both national and European courts. Secondly, because of the pluralist nature of the European fundamental rights system, national courts sometimes need to decide which of the different sources of fundamental rights should be given primacy over the others and on what grounds. Third, it seems that there is not a single right answer to the second question. For instance, European Union law has primacy over national law, and this also applies to national constitutions. However, as provided by Article 52.4 of the CFREU, fundamental rights recognized by the Charter should be interpreted in harmony with the constitutional traditions of the Member States.*

*Building on the above-mentioned framework, the following questionnaire is prepared with a view to a comparative assessment of the functioning of the system of fundamental rights protection in the light of the legal practice of supreme administrative jurisdictions in Europe.*

*For this purpose, the questionnaire starts with questions concerning the basic institutional framework for the application of fundamental and human rights in the domestic legal order and then moves to questions about the modes in which the interpretation of national and European fundamental rights norms interact in the practice of national courts.*

*Acknowledging the differences between European legal cultures, please, feel free to complement any answer with additional and/or clarifying information.*





### **I Background information**

1. The formal title of your court? Please include the country.

**Council of State, Italy**

2. The number of decisions your court gives annually (average)?

**The Council of State has both jurisdictional and advisory functions.**

**Considering the five-year period 2019/2023, the average number is:**

**Jurisdictional decisions: 8.540**

**Advisory decisions: 1.500**

3. The number of published precedents your court gives annually (average)?

**The Council of State publishes on its institutional website all decisions given annually, both jurisdictional and advisory**

### **II Constitutionality of legislation and the applicability of fundamental rights norms. Mark your answer with bold letters.**

4. Does your country have a written Constitution?

- Yes**
- No

5.a Is your court authorised to apply the (written or unwritten) Constitution directly in its decisions?

- Yes**
- No

5. b. If yes, how often does this happen in practice?

- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often**

5. c. If yes, what areas of constitutional law are typically involved in these cases?

- Fundamental rights**
- Democratic principles**
- Rule of law**
- Federalism and local self-government**
- Legislative process**
- Finance**
- Other. Please describe below.

5. d. If your court is not authorized to apply the Constitution directly, please explain briefly how your national system works.





6. a. Is your court authorised to repeal a piece of ordinary legislation if it is found unconstitutional?

- Yes
- No

6. b. If yes, how often does this happen in practice?

- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- Very often

6.c. If not, which institution, if any, has the power to decide on the constitutional validity of ordinary legislation (either in abstracto or in concreto)?

The Constitutional Court is competent to rule on disputes or litigation "on the constitutional legitimacy of laws and acts having the force of law enacted by the State and the Regions" (Art. 134, Const.).

If a court has doubts about the constitutionality of a rule which it must apply in order to decide the dispute brought before it, it may not disapply the rule deemed unconstitutional, but must refer the question of constitutionality to the Constitutional Court and suspend the trial until the Court's ruling.

In the Italian legal system, the Court also deals with "conflicts of attribution" between the various powers of the State (legislative, judicial, administrative), between the State and the Regions, and between the Regions themselves. In this area, it can rule on administrative decisions that give rise to conflicts.

7. During the last 10 years, has your court given precedents involving the following topics:

- Right to asylum
- Social rights
- Environmental rights
- Rights of future generations
- Rights of indigenous peoples
- Human Dignity
- Fundamental rights in the context of national security
- Fundamental rights in the context of state of emergency

8. In the cases where your court has referred to the Constitution, what kind of role has the Constitution had in the reasoning? Choose all applicable options.

- Symbolic / Decorative
- An additional argument supporting a decision which is inherently based on ordinary legislation
- A source of interpretation which provides for the correct application of ordinary legislation in the concrete case at hand (i.e. fundamental rights friendly interpretation)
- A decisive role so that the decision is based solely on constitutional grounds in a situation where ordinary legislation is silent or unclear on the issue at hand
- An overriding role so that otherwise applicable ordinary legislation is set aside/declared invalid on constitutional grounds





- Other. Please explain and/or provide an example: **The fundamental principles of the Constitution described in Articles 1 to 12 and in Part I "Rights and duties of citizens" characterise the legal system to such an extent that it would collapse or be transformed into another system if they were not respected or implemented. The values listed, which are translated into fundamental rights, inviolable rights, assume such an essential legal value that the very organisation of the public authorities is functional for their development and implementation.**

### **III Interplay of national and European fundamental rights and international human rights norms**

9.a. Is your court authorised to apply international human rights conventions and follow their international case law in its decisions?

- **Yes**
- No

9. b. If yes, how often does this happen in practice?

- Rarely
- **Sometimes**
- Often
- Very often

10.a. Is your court authorised to apply the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (CFREU) in its decisions?

- **Yes**
- No

10. b. If yes, how often does this happen in practice?

- Rarely
- **Sometimes**
- Often
- Very often

11. When applying fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution, is your court also simultaneously applying similar provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR)?

- Very rarely
- Sometimes
- Often
- **Very often**

12. When applying fundamental rights provisions of the Constitution in the field of application of European Union law, is your court also applying corresponding provisions of the CFREU?

- Very rarely
- Sometimes
- Often





- Very often**
- My court does not apply the Constitution in the field of application of European Union Law.

13. In the cases where your court refers to the ECHR, what kind of role does the convention have in the reasoning? Choose all applicable options.

- Symbolic / Decorative
- An additional argument supporting a decision which is inherently based on ordinary legislation**
- A source of interpretation providing for the correct application of ordinary legislation in the concrete case at hand (i.e. human rights friendly interpretation)**
- A decisive role so that the decision is based solely on the ECHR in a situation where national legislation is silent or unclear on the issue at hand**
- An overriding role so that otherwise applicable ordinary legislation is set aside /declared invalid based on the ECHR.**
- Other. Please explain and/or provide an example.

14. It follows from the case law of the CJEU (see, eg, C-14/83, von Colson) that national courts must interpret and apply the legislation adopted for the implementation of the directive in conformity with the requirements of EU law. Within the scope of the application of EU law, how frequently does this kind of interpretation and application of law appear in the argumentation of your court?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes
- Often**

15. The obligation to interpret national legislation in line with EU law is extensive, but it is not without limits. According to the case law of the CJEU (eg, C-12/08, Mono Car Styling), that obligation is limited by the general principles of law, particularly those of legal certainty and non-retroactivity, and that obligation cannot serve as the basis for an interpretation of national law *contra legem*. Where there is any inconsistency between national law and Union law, which cannot be removed by means of such a construction, the national court is obliged to declare that the provision of national law which is inconsistent with (directly effective) Union law is inapplicable (eg 152/84, Marshall). How frequently does this kind of reasoning appear in the argumentation of your court?

- Never
- Rarely
- Sometimes**
- Often

16. Has your court given any precedents regarding the application of Article 51 (Field of application) of the CFREU? If yes, please provide a brief description of the context and outcome of the decision(s).

**As the Council of State, we have no precedents regarding the application of Article 51 of the CFREU.**

**The Constitutional Court has repeatedly referred to Article 51 in its rulings.**





In ruling No. 111 of 2017, concerning equal pay for women and men, the Constitutional Court, after referring to Articles 21 and 23 of the Charter, stated: "Both provisions may be invoked as they relate to a question of implementation of Union law by the State in accordance with their respective powers (Article 51(1) of the CFREU)". In the case, before the compatibility of the contested Italian legislation with the principles of the Charter, the Court spontaneously raised the question of identifying the relevant competences of the Union.

In ruling No. 63 of 2016, the Constitutional Court clarified that 'in order for the EU Charter of Rights to be invocable in a case of constitutional legitimacy, it is necessary (...) that the case subject to domestic legislation is governed by European law'

17. Has your court given any precedents regarding the application of Article 52 (Scope and interpretation of rights and principles) of the CFREU? If yes, please provide a brief description of the context and outcome of the decision(s).

As the Council of State, we have no precedents on the application of Article 52 of the CFREU.

We can cite the Ordinance No. 24 of 2017 of the Constitutional Court. In that ordinance, the Court, recalling Article 52 CFREU and the well-established constitutional tradition in the interpretation of the principle of determinacy as an emanation of the principle of legality in criminal matters, submitted a number of questions to the Court of Justice in the Taricco affair about interpretation of Article 325 TFEU

18. In the cases where your court has referred to the CFREU, what kind of role has the Charter had in the argumentation? Choose all applicable options.

- Symbolic / Decorative
- An additional argument supporting a decision based on EU law and ordinary domestic legislation
- A source of interpretation which provides for a correct application of EU law and ordinary legislation in the concrete case at hand
- A decisive role so that the decision is based solely on the CFREU in a situation where EU law and national legislation is silent on the issue at hand
- An overriding role so that otherwise applicable ordinary legislation is set aside / declared invalid on grounds based on the CFREU

Other. Please provide an example.

19. Has your court given any precedents regarding the application of Article 53 (Safeguard for existing human rights) of the ECHR? If yes, please provide a brief description of the context and outcome of the decision(s).

No

20. Has your court given any precedents regarding the application of Article 53 (Level of protection) of the CFREU? If yes, please provide a brief description of the context and outcome of the decision(s).

No

21. Has your court applied fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution in a way that provides for a better standard of protection of individual rights than those provided for in international human rights conventions? If yes, please explain and/or provide an example.





*We have no example.*

22. Has your court applied fundamental rights laid down in the Constitution in a way in which the substance of a fundamental rights provision has been defined by reference to either international human rights conventions or to CFREU, and the case law relating to them? If yes, please explain and/or provide an example.

*Where a fundamental right finds protection both in a constitutional norm and in a norm of CFREU, there is an integration of guarantees that must lead to an extension of protection. The referring court may therefore rely on the convention rule as an intervening parameter, pointing out the protection it offers to the fundamental right allegedly infringed by the contested domestic rule, in the context of a comparison with the relevant conventional case-law.*

