



**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.

*Supreme Court of Spain*

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

*35.000*

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

*35.000*

### **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 (Yes, as long as certain conditions are met. First, it must be a piece of pre-constitutional legislation concerning which the court understands that it has been left without effect as a consequence of the primary value of the constitution and its derogatory effect on all those**





provisions that oppose its content. Secondly, an interpretation according to the constitution must be impossible. In other cases, only the constitutional court could declare legislation unconstitutional. Note that legislation equals statutes passed by Congress. As regards any executive decree or order, any court cannot apply it if it contradicts the Constitution)

- 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. Please see elaboration to question 6**

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.

### **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).*

- We have no data**

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).*

- We have no data**

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).*

- **We have no data**

*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).*

- **We have no data**

*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.*

The Spanish Supreme Court closely follows the jurisprudence of the international courts related to the conventions and treaties to which Spain is a party in the field of human rights and tries at all times to adapt its standards to those consolidated at the international level.

*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.*

The recent judgement of November 3, 2023, of Section 4 of the Administrative Chamber of the Supreme Court (ROJ: STS 4484/2023 - ECLI:ES:TS:2023:4484), resolved a case of pay discrimination among public servants of the social security system.

The judgement starts from art. 14 of the Constitution (principle of equal footing or equal treatment) to recall that according to the jurisprudence of the Court itself, there is an abundant jurisprudential doctrine which proclaims that it is not compatible with art. 14 of the Constitution a treatment, whether general or specific about specific areas of working conditions, which configures temporary workers as a group in a second-rate position in relation to workers with contracts of indefinite duration.

In line with the above, the judgement is based on the abovementioned principle of our constitution, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and the interpretation of its articles carried out by the Court of Justice.

It is essential to highlight the following paragraphs.

*"To sum up, the acts whose review and declaration of nullity is sought enshrine a situation that violates European Union Law, as well as the principle of equality that is part of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (art. 20 principles of equal footing, art. 21 prohibition of discrimination), which is*





*a violation of the principle of equal treatment. 21 prohibition of discrimination), which gives special force to the need to restore its full respect through the removal of acts that have disregarded it and that, moreover, in this case, maintain their effects "pro futuro" since in no way has the appellant Administration explained to us that measures had been adopted to put an end to the discriminatory treatment. The CJEU has stated that "[...] since the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter must be respected when national legislation falls within the scope of Union law, there is no situation covered by Union law in which those fundamental rights do not apply. The applicability of Union law implies the applicability of the fundamental rights guaranteed by the Charter [...]" ( judgement of the CJEU of February 26 2013, C-617/10, paragraph 21)."*

*"Finally, it is also relevant to note that, given all the circumstances of the case, we are faced with a situation of infringement of European Union law that would deserve to be classified as a sufficiently severe infringement and would be susceptible to being remedied, if not in this way of ex officio review, by that of the financial liability of the Administration for breach of European Union law. The fact is that even though specific pronouncements of a national Court could support the point of view defended here by the appellant Administration, the case law of our Court on different aspects of the obligatory comparison between long-term temporary personnel and permanent statutory personnel is not precisely recent, as we have explained in connection with the judgement of June 30, 2014, cited above, and the previous decisions that it invokes."*

To answer this question, we have selected a very recent case from our jurisprudence that constitutes an obvious example of our court's approach to the application of domestic law. Indeed, as a European court, the Supreme Court of Spain applies and interprets the fundamental rights enshrined in the constitution according to European law and jurisprudence and in accordance with the postulates established by those jurisdictions established by conventions or treaties to which Spain is a party.

