The CEELI Institute is an independent, not-for-profit, international provider of post-graduate, professional legal education headquartered in Prague, Czech Republic.

Our mission is to develop and train an international network of legal professionals committed to a rule of law. Through innovative training programs and other activities, we work with judges, lawyers, civil society, government officials, and other professionals in countries building laws-based societies to support fair, transparent, and effective judicial systems, strengthen democratic institutions, combat corruption, build respect for human rights, and promote the continuing development of market economies.
Fifteen years after U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright cut a symbolic ribbon in Brno to announce its creation, the CEELI Institute is now implementing its rule of law mission more broadly around the globe and on a sounder financial footing than ever before. We now have a clear path to achieving the long-term sustainability of the CEELI Institute.

The heroes of this story are many. Chris Lehmann, our current Executive Director, Quinn O’Keefe, his immediate predecessor, and our superb staff in Prague have populated our calendar with professional training programs both at our state-of-the-art facility in Prague and at off-site locations where we implement programs directly in host countries. Volunteers like Joel Martin, who has masterfully managed our Tunisian judicial training, and Bill Meyer, our first Executive Director, who launched the Institute on a shoestring in borrowed space, have given us great credibility. And generous financial supporters have sustained the development of the Institute to a point of operational self-sufficiency.

The regional Chief Justices Conference begun by the Institute and nurtured by Judge John Walker, is now in its fifth year and has spawned the Institute's network of junior judges, which held sessions this year in Prague, Warsaw, and Tbilisi. In Tunisia, the Institute continues its efforts to train nearly one thousand judges and has also recently begun training in partnership with Tunisia’s new anti-corruption commission. The Institute’s own highly acclaimed program, “Investigating and Prosecuting Official Corruption,” will hold its third annual session this spring.

In Burma, the Institute is providing advocacy skills training to the independent Myanmar Lawyers Network; in Prague, we convene and support NGO human rights advocates from across Eurasia; and in Ukraine, the Institute is now working with legal reformers and anti-corruption advocates. Through a strategic alliance with the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES), the Institute recently hosted a program on identifying and remedying election fraud. And many other initiatives are also underway.

In this anniversary year – also the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta – the CEELI Institute seeks to maximize its impact by concentrating on areas critical to maintaining the rule of law and in which we can offer unexcelled training. Although considerable elasticity is today attributed to the phrase “rule of law,” the Institute’s priorities continue to include the integrity and independence of judges, fighting official corruption, protecting fundamental human and individual rights, and restraining repressive and arbitrary government action – all of which are values at the heart of the mission of the CEELI Institute.
Twenty-five years ago, the American Bar Association launched its Central and East European Initiative, which famously became known as ABA/CEELI, with the goal of assisting the countries of the region as they negotiated the transition to democratic systems. ABA/CEELI worked to support and establish the rule of law, promote the independence of the judiciary, ensure respect for due process, and expand access to justice. Over time, ABA/CEELI grew to involve hundreds of volunteers and staff, who advised on legislation, supported institutional reforms and above all provided training for literally thousands of judges, lawyers and other legal professionals across the region. Since 2000, the CEELI Institute has carried on that legacy, on a permanent basis, from our headquarters in Prague. Since 2006, the CEELI Institute has been housed at our permanent home at the Villa Grebovka.

“I have come here specifically to congratulate the CEELI Institute. It seems important to me to remind all of us how difficult it is to build the rule of law, especially in a country which was long ruled by a totalitarian regime. I do appreciate the CEELI Institute, which devotes energy in many countries to the education of judges so that they become independent.”

Vaclav Havel, June 8, 2007
In 2007, the CEELI Institute helped to launch the Conference of Chief Justices of Central & Eastern Europe, which brings together the senior judges from the region’s highest courts to share and develop strategies and best practices to promote judicial integrity and accountability, to improve court management and to combat corruption in the courts. The Conference was initiated with the support of the US Department of State and the personal involvement and commitment of Chief Justice John Roberts and Justice Sandra Day O’Connor. CEELI Institute has continued its on-going support for the Conference, which has become a stand-alone and sustainable network that meets annually. CEELI continues to provide guidance and expertise to the Conference, and CEELI Board Member, Judge John Walker of the US Second Circuit Court of Appeals, has taken an ongoing role in coordinating such support and leadership for the conference.

The Conference was hosted in 2014 by the Supreme Court of Georgia, and was opened by Georgian President, Giorgi Margvelashvili, who welcomed 30 delegates from thirteen countries across the region for three days of candid, off-the-record discussions. The topics discussed ranged from standards for drafting and issuance of clear, well-reasoned decisions; judicial case management (including use of new technologies, such as online conferencing); and effective application of disciplinary mechanisms.

Building off the success of the Conference of Chief Justices, in 2012 the CEELI Institute launched a similar effort for younger, non-high court judges, with the support of the State Department’s Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs (INL). Known as the Central & Eastern European Judicial Exchange Network, this effort has now brought together 63 young, reform-minded judges and court administrators from 19 countries across the region, including Albania, Azerbaijan, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine. The Network is designed to (1) build professional solidarity around issues of judicial integrity and (2) promote best practices for judicial transparency and accountability. The CEELI Institute organizes a number of annual events designed to build a sustainable peer support network around the issues of judicial integrity and court efficiency.
In June 2014, the CEELI Institute hosted the Network’s third annual Roundtable in Prague. The program centered on using international standards to strengthen judicial independence. Within this theme, the judges focused more deeply on topics such as the challenges of balancing judicial accountability against judicial independence. The judges compared best practices as well as lessons-learned from their own individual national experiences. Two expert mentors, the Honorable Jack Tunheim, United States District Judge from Minnesota, and the Honorable Jon Weshoff, Vice-President of the Amsterdam District Court, led Roundtable discussions with several participant judges serving as co-moderators. June’s Roundtable was one of active debate, with each topic of discussion introduced by provocative, participant-led presentations. For example, the director of the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives, Bilyana Wegertsoeder, presented on her organization’s “Transparent Judicial Appointment Initiative” that sparked an impassioned debate among the judges on balancing the public’s interest in having transparent judicial appointments and the accompanying requirements for financial disclosure by judges against the infringements on their personal privacy from the release of such personal financial information. Judge Cristi Danilet of Romania presented on international standards relevant to the function of the judiciary, and the application of those standards to the work of individual judges. Effectively using international standards as mechanisms to support individual endeavors has become a key focus of the Network.

The CEELI Institute also uses the Network to organize specialized workshops in partnership with member country institutions as a means for participant countries to provide expertise on an area of rule of law in which they have had success implementing and enforcing reforms. Such smaller Network activities were held this year in Tbilisi and Warsaw, as well as at the CEELI Institute in Prague.

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CEELI Institute Co-sponsors Network Workshop with the Georgian High School of Justice

Tbilisi, Georgia - February 2014 The CEELI Institute and members of the Judicial Network partnered with the Georgian School of Justice in February on a program to address challenges judges face both in combating corruption and in handling the public pressures on the judiciary. Georgian participants provided an in-depth perspective on recent initiatives and reforms enacted to create a more independent and impartial judiciary in Georgia. Representatives from Croatia and Romania offered comparative perspectives on their own reforms and transition processes. As one Network participant from Albania stated in articulating the importance of the event, “We are countries of similar legal, political and economic cultures so we face similar experiences. We can benefit from Western countries but we cannot copy them. We must exchange information with each other and make the best choices for our countries in order to find the right approach. This is why this specific forum of exchange is so important for us.”

In his opening remarks at the Warsaw program, Judge John Walker stated: “A bedrock objective in developing a sound system under the rule of law is building public respect for the courts and the administration of justice. Of course that requires good decisions by the courts and judges who are independent, clean and incorruptible. But public respect is also a function of sound administrative practices. Such practices should, to the greatest extent possible: reduce unnecessary delays, eliminate opportunities for corruption, and promote transparency.”

Warsaw, Poland - October 2014 The CEELI Institute worked with the Polish Judges’ Association, Iustitia, to jointly host a judicial training workshop in Warsaw on the topic of caseload management. The meeting brought together members of the Institute’s Judicial Exchange Network, including judges from Lithuania, Romania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, and Albania, with their Polish counterparts. CEELI Institute board member, the Hon. John Walker of the Second Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals, along with the Honorable Katarzyna Gonera from the Supreme Court of Poland, provided opening remarks as well as moderated discussion over the two days. During discussion sessions, participants shared best practices on case allocation, judicial staffing and effective methods for preventing and eliminating backlogs, particularly focusing on mediation techniques. On the second day of the workshop, participants were hosted by Justice Gonera at the Supreme Court of Poland, and were also invited to join the President of the Supreme Court, Professor Tadej Paprycki, for more conversation on issues of court administration and judicial independence.
Since 2012 our work has brought us to Tunisia where the CEELI Institute is part of an extraordinary effort to train and mentor nearly one thousand Tunisian judges on judicial accountability and judging in a democracy. Funded by the Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA), and working in partnership with the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC) and the International Bar Association (IBA), this program brings together judges from all ranks and courts in Tunisia to twice-monthly trainings designed to improve professional skills, and to build the public’s confidence in the judiciary.

The bi-monthly programs run by the CEELI Institute and the IBA each program consist of approximately 30 judges. The course stresses the leadership role judges play in society, the importance of judicial independence, and political issues of leadership. Consistent with these ideas, the course provides training in a variety of areas, including the role of a judge in a democratic society, tools required to make courts fair and efficient, judicial independence, ethics, relations with the public and with other branches of government, court administration, human rights principles, and transparency in procedure and decisions. Tunisian participants in the course report the immediate positive impact the training has had on their work on matters such as ethical principles and preparation of judicial decisions.

This course is led by the CEELI Institute’s Director of Special Projects, Joel Martin together with other rotating faculty. Faculty members brought to Tunisia have been both extremely well received by the participant judges and uniformly impressed by the Tunisian judges. The faculty has included U.S. Federal District and Appeals Court judges, a former Chief Justice of Sweden’s Supreme Administrative Court, a judge from the Special Tribunal for Lebanon, justices from the High Court in Prague, and judges from a host of courts throughout Central & Eastern Europe.

In 2014, the CEELI Institute launched a multi-year program to provide support and training to the newly established Tunisian Anti-Corruption Agency, Instance Nationale de Lutte Contre Corruption (INLUCC). With funding from the Swedish International Development Agency and in partnership with the International Legal Assistance Consortium, the CEELI Institute’s program began with a series of comprehensive consultations with the INLUCC leadership and staff to develop a baseline of their training needs on how to identify, investigate, and build cases for prosecution.

The INLUCC, under the capable leadership of internationally renowned Tunisian lawyer Samir Annabi, is charged with spearheading Tunisia’s anti-corruption efforts. The INLUCC has responsibility both for pursuing the investigation and prosecution of public corruption cases, and for coordinating the efforts of a broad cross section of other Tunisian government agencies with responsibilities for combating corruption. The CEELI Institute’s efforts are designed to support the INLUCC as it takes on its role as the lead body coordinating the Tunisian government’s response to public corruption, as well as to support INLUCC staff in identifying and investigating cases involving both official and commercial corruption.

The CEELI Institute initiated a series of targeted trainings, using both international and Tunisian experts, in April 2014. The initial course, addressing “Corruption Detection and Basic Financial Investigation Techniques” brought together participants not only form INLUCC staff, but from a wide range of Tunisian stakeholder agencies with anti-corruption responsibilities, including the Central Bank, the Finance Ministry and the Ministry of Interior. Subsequent trainings focused both on corruption detection and on basic financial investigation techniques, with experts coming from the United States, Slovenia and Croatia. Because the participants are experienced professionals, the programs also emphasize broader concepts of anti-corruption policy, more effective coordination among relevant government bodies and detailed technical training in the basics of financial investigation specific to anti-corruption.

In anticipation of the fall parliamentary elections, the CEELI Institute partnered with the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES) to organize a September 2014 program on election fraud and abuse of state resources in the electoral process. Additional 2014 programs focused on fraud in public procurement. Based on an INLUCC request, the CEELI Institute is currently preparing trainings on various other topics including corruption in tax.
The CEELI Institute held its second annual training program "Investigating and Prosecuting Official Corruption" in May 2014. The program brings together an all-star faculty consisting of some of the world’s most experienced anti-corruption prosecutors, forensic accountants and practitioners, and provides participants with a comprehensive framework for investigating and prosecuting official corruption.

The weeklong program included participants from Albania, Bosnia & Herzegovina, Moldova, Slovakia, and Ukraine and provided a comprehensive framework for investigating and prosecuting official corruption. It is the Institute’s first tuition-based course and one that we will offer on a regular basis, especially as official corruption has emerged as one of the most prevalent and pernicious threats to the rule of law around the world. The 2015 iteration of the course is scheduled for the week of May 11, 2015.

The 2014 course addressed the investigation and prosecution of official corruption, with the keynote presentation delivered by Director of Legal Affairs at the Paris-based Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Nicola Bonucci. His speech emphasized developing strategies to combat corruption by examining the key drivers, elements, conditions and actors. Although the primary focus for the course remained on combating corruption, Transparency International Czech Republic’s Director, David Ondráčka, also joined course faculty on the final day for a panel discussion on strategies for preventing official corruption.

Like all CEELI Institute programs, this one relied heavily on participant engagement and interactive teaching techniques. Throughout the program, participants, who included prosecutors, investigators, and anti-corruption agency officials, worked in small groups through a hypothetical case scenario to develop a case theory and investigative and prosecutorial plans. Faculty drew upon past and present cases to illustrate corruption schemes and successful preventative and investigative techniques. Course materials included a flash drive with a comprehensive electronic library of anti-corruption reference and resource materials, and faculty used participant polling throughout the course.

Feedback from 2014 Participants:

“This was really the best quality course that I have ever attended.”

“Most interesting and impressive information about tactics and methods of combating corruption.”

“I have been involved in dozens of anti-corruption training programs, and these materials are the best I have ever seen.”

2014 Faculty Member

“Please do such a course also for prosecutors and investigators in my country!”

“An extraordinary opportunity to develop analytical skills in the anti-corruption field”

“Magnificent - extremely useful and helpful.”
The CEELI Institute is organizing workshops for lawyers and civil society representatives from Ukraine and other Eurasian countries, focusing on mechanisms for enhancing government accountability to civil society, and on strengthening the public’s capacity to demand transparent government. The program is designed to support civic-minded organizations in their efforts to access and obtain public information, to undertake public oversight activities, and to use such information to conduct advocacy campaigns, investigative efforts and legal actions aimed at increasing government accountability. The program puts particular emphasis on developing capacity to successfully request and obtain public source records from government sources, and to use that information in creative public information and anti-corruption campaigns designed to present public information in clear and accessible formats.

As part of the program, participants are also encouraged to develop personal action plans to practically implement the information provided in the trainings. Participants articulate and identify specific research and advocacy objectives, the specific steps necessary to reach their goal, the hurdles that can reasonably be expected, and the means to overcome them. Representative participant projects have included examinations of how municipal appropriations have been spent, and investigations into the ways in which public procurement processes have been conducted.

Building Practical Skills for Members of the Myanmar Lawyer’s Network

The CEELI Institute has undertaken an exciting but challenging effort to assist Burmese lawyers as their society begins its transition towards implementation of the rule of law. Since 2013, we have been working closely with the Myanmar Lawyer’s Network (MLN), a national grass roots association that was organized to provide pro bono legal services to indigent communities, as well as provide professional development and support services for its own membership.

Myanmar currently has no organized bar, nor any public legal assistance programs, so the MLN fills important gaps, both in helping otherwise disenfranchised parts of society access needed legal services, and in training and mentoring young lawyers in a country where there is little access to professional support. Cases that the MLN takes on often include representation of poor village communities trying to assert legal claims to the lands they have farmed for centuries—which also typically involves fighting off attempted “land grabbing” by corrupt officials and their cronies. Other cases involve human rights and human trafficking.

The need for trainings and education is vast. With support from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and in close partnership with the Burma Center Prague, the CEELI Institute is assisting the MLN through a series of training and program development efforts. In 2014, the CEELI Institute delivered several series of legal trainings in Yangon and Mandalay, primarily designed to provide practical skills development on matters such as case development and organization, use of relevant legal materials in support of legal arguments, and basic advocacy skills. We also carried out a special program to mentor a small cadre of dedicated trainers, helping to prepare talented young lawyers to act as trainers in their own communities. Special efforts are made to include participants from the ethnic and rural regions of Burma, where lawyers traditionally have little opportunity for training or peer development, despite having to bravely persevere under the most challenging conditions.

The CEELI Institute’s work in Burma again allows us to put to use our deep experience from many years of work in the countries of Central and East Europe during the earliest days of their transition to democratic governments. Our workshops with the MLN provide an opportunity for the participants to engage with international and local colleagues to discuss the unique role lawyers can play in advancing human rights and rule of law. Participants discuss lessons learned from other countries that have undergone similar transitions and how to conduct targeted advocacy and outreach to educate communities on their rights.
The CEELI Institute continues to partner closely with a number of institutions that share our strategic mission, including the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the International Legal Assistance Consortium (ILAC), the American Bar Association Rule of Law Initiative (ABA ROLI) and the Burma Center Prague. These partnerships are integral to our operation, enabling us both to engage with a broader cross section of stakeholders, and more effectively implement programs.

The Institute’s annual meeting is an important opportunity for us to bring together our boards and partners, along with distinguished members of the international legal community, local stakeholders, and law reform experts in an annual effort to review and evaluate our priorities for our Rule of Law work. At the CEELI Institute’s annual meeting this past July in Prague we explored the challenges of advancing the Rule of Law in volatile environments. Occurring on the 25th anniversary of the Velvet Revolution, the meeting offered a useful platform for examination of the fact that Eastern Europe again finds itself facing challenges similar to those that were presented in the early 1990’s. Commitments that were made at the time—state legitimacy, governance in accordance with the Rule of Law, and the independence of the judiciary—are once again driving the region’s agendas. The Institute remains well poised to bring together regional leaders and reformers to address these resurgent regional problems. The new challenges in Eastern Europe also reflect larger turmoil in today’s world. The Institute’s legacy of work continues to push it to the forefront of implementing organizations poised to facilitate Rule of Law based responses. Our new programs in Asia and Africa reflect the ability of the Institute to translate past law reform experience onto a broader context.

The CEELI Institute is housed in the historic Villa Gröbovka, nestled above a vineyard in the heart of Prague, Czech Republic. The spacious Villa is a Czech national historic building that dates back to 1871. In a unique partnership, the CEELI Institute has leased the Villa from the city of Prague 2 for 50 years. In return, the Institute has renovated the building back to its original splendor. The renovations were made possible with a seed grant from the U.S. Agency for International Development and key financial support from individuals and corporations, including the construction firm SKANSKA (Czech Republic), which also served as general contractor. In 2014, the city of Prague 2 completed its own stunning renovation of the surrounding park which serves as the setting for the Villa. In addition to its substantial classroom and function space, the Villa has a residential capacity for 44 guests, and on-site dining facility. All Villa facilities are fully handicap accessible.
Christopher Lehmann Executive Director
Christopher Lehmann is the Executive Director of the CEELI Institute. He previously served as the Principal Deputy Director of the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Domestic Preparedness, Development, Assistance and Training (ODPDA), where he managed the design, implementation and management of justice-related programs throughout the world. Mr. Lehmann also holds a security certificate for DGI as Resident Legal Advisor at the U.S. Embassy in Islamabad, Pakistan (2008-10) and Moscow (1994-2002). In 1999-99, Mr. Lehmann served on the First Criminal Law Nation in Europe for the American Bar Association’s Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI). Mr. Lehmann’s earlier career with the Department of Justice included ten years as an Assistant U.S. Attorney in the Eastern District of New York. Mr. Lehmann is a Julia Dexter (J.D.) degree from Washington University School of Law in St. Louis, where he was an editor of the Law Review, and a B.A. degree from the American University’s School of International Service, in Washington, D.C.

Marek Svedová Director of Programs
Mr. Svedová became Director of Programs at the CEELI Institute in December 2013. He previously worked as the Head of the Human Rights Department at the largest Czech NGO, People in Need. Mr. Svedová managed a portfolio of programs focused on supporting publicly persecuted individuals in repressive countries and on providing assistance to civil society groups in countries such as Belarus, Burma, China, Cuba and Russia. Prior to his work at People in Need, Mr. Svedová worked at the U.S. Embassy in Prague as a Special Projects Officer. He holds a MA degree from the University of Economics in Prague.

Jan Gaspar Development Director
Jan Gaspar has over 15 years of experience in NGO management, including 13 years working in Russia, Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. She worked with NGOs and foundations providing donor advising, technical assistance and development strategy. Jan holds a BA in International Affairs from the George Washington University and an MA in Organizational Development from the University of San Francisco. Jan was a Fulbright Scholar in Hungary, and previous executive director of the Fund for International NGO Development.

Joel C. Martin Director of Special Projects
As Director of Special Projects, Joel Martin manages the special projects carried out by CEELI. After a 35-year career as a teacher and lawyer, Joel Martin became a CEELI fellow in Middle East in 2000. He was an Executive Director of the CEELI Institute from 2001 to 2006, and again from 2010 to 2015. Between his first and second terms at CEELI he worked on international legal education projects in the Central Asia, South Africa, and the West Bank. He is a graduate of Harvard College and the University of Chicago Law School.

Barbara Jungove Program Officer
Program Officer Barbara Jungove serves at the CEELI Institute from the Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs, where she was most recently the head of the Transition Policy Unit and Manager of the Executive Promotion Programme. In that capacity, she worked on program management, including budgeting, programming, monitoring and evaluation of projects and activities of the IPA with focus on exchange of Czech transitional experiences. She previously worked for the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Regional Centre for Europe and the CIS, upon a wish to learn sharing of the Czech experience with democratization and socio-economic transformation. She is a Master’s in Public Administration from the Moscow University in Russia, and speaks Czech, English and French.

Nikola Fialová Seifrtová Logistics Assistant
Ms. Fialová joined CEELI in January 2014 on a logistics assistant. She is responsible for logistics support and organizational components of the Institute’s programs. She previously worked as a project coordinator and for the NGO People in Need, working on several projects, including the human rights documentary film festival One World. She also has experience with organizing exhibitions, film projects, and sporting events. She holds a MA degree in Political Science and Philosophy from the University of West Bohemia in Pilsen and from the Charles University.

Simona Trzninková Residence Manager
Ms. Trzninková began working for the CEELI Institute in May 2007. She is responsible for managing CEELI’s facilities and providing bookings support for program development and implementation. Ms. Trzninková has years of experience in hotel management and degrees from the Academy of Commerce and Economy and the International College of Tourism and Hotel Management.

Joanna Sedláčková Finance and Administrative Manager
Ms. Sedláčková joined CEELI in 2010. She oversees finances and provides administrative support for program development and implementation. She has worked in several NGOs as a financial manager and project coordinator. Ms. Sedláčková earned a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Economics in Prague.

Celina Brezová-Janová Administration Assistant
Ms. Janová joined CEELI in 2019. She supports financial accounting and matters in accordance with the laws of the Czech Republic and with the requirements of donors and funders. She previously worked as the head accountant for several global companies incorporated in international structures. Ms. Janová earned a Master’s degree in Business Administration from the University of Economics in Prague.

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