

Interview with the CCBE President in 2025

THIERRY WICKERS

What is your professional background and what are your interests outside your work as a lawyer?

Thierry Wickers:

I have been a lawyer since 1978. My daughter, who is a member of the New York Bar and the California Bar, is the fourth generation of lawyers in the family. As far as I am concerned, I have always remained loyal to the Bordeaux Bar, my home Bar, of which I was President in 2000 and 2001. I practise in a firm that focuses on business law, and is active in both the legal and judicial fields. My personal activity is essentially judicial. I specialise in banking litigation and enforcement proceedings. However, the knowledge I have acquired in the field of regulated professions has led me to become increasingly involved in assisting notaries, lawyers, bailiffs and doctors.

At the end of my mandate as President of the Bar, I joined the bureau of the *Conférence des bâtonniers* and chaired this organisation, which brings together all the French Bars except the Paris Bar, in 2004 and 2005. I then sat at the *Conseil national des barreaux* (CNB) for six years, first as Vice-President

from 2006 to 2009, then as President from 2009 to 2011. The CNB is the institution that represents all French Bars and lawyers.

The profession of lawyer also interests me as a subject of study, perhaps also because I appreciate sociology as a tool for understanding human organisations. I have always regretted that European lawyers do not arouse the same interest among researchers and academics as their US colleagues. There are many books devoted to US lawyers, and they are enriching reading.

Perhaps that is why I spent some time writing a book about the future of the profession of lawyer – *La grande transformation des avocats*. I am also one of the three authors of *Règles de la profession d'avocat* – the reference work on the deontology and organisation of lawyers in France. I also write an annual review of case law in the profession of lawyer for a major French (and now European) legal publisher. Of course, I also try to communicate on professional social networks.

If I had not been so involved in the profession, I would surely have devoted more time to IT. I am passionate about information technology. I spent long hours developing



> Thierry Wickers officially assumed the position of CCBE President on 1 January 2025.

management software for my practice, at a time when there was no such thing on the market. I loved learning computer programming at the same time. I am delighted that the development of AI is now giving me the opportunity to get back into some form of programming. As soon as I have a bit of time, I take the opportunity to start designing structured prompts to automate certain tasks in the office.

Otherwise, sport plays a significant role in my life. As I was a very poor footballer, I consoled myself by chairing the sports association of the Bordeaux Bar. Running just requires you to be able to put one foot in front of the other: I am a marathon runner and I try to keep running three times a week, in the early hours of the morning.

Finally, since childhood I have been a fan of comic books, particularly Tintin. I am a member of the *Pélicans Noirs*, a secret society that has done a lot of dazzling things, such as inaugurating a Cuthbert Calculus square in Bordeaux. I am also the Syldevian consul.

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> Thierry Wickers and Alex Tallon, CCBE Second Vice-President, at the European Parliament during the CCBE plenary event on 22 November 2024.

Why did you want to become CCBE President?

At the end of my presidency of the CNB, I joined the French delegation to the CCBE. I took great pleasure in participating in the work of the CCBE and discovering the quality of its members. The CCBE is an incredible gathering of talent, and working there is enriching. It is also a complex and fascinating organisation, which takes time to understand. I succeeded Michel Benichou as head of the French delegation.

I have had to get involved in a number of difficult issues that have affected the way the association operates and its role, including the creation of the European Lawyers Foundation, Brexit and the latest reform of the statutes of association.

I also chaired the CCBE Future of the Legal Profession and Legal Services Committee.

Of all lawyers' organisations, the CCBE has a very special feature. It is not an organisation of individual lawyers, nor is it an organisation of local Bars and Law Societies. It is an organisation of national Bars and Law Societies. Many CCBE Presidents have had the experience of chairing a national bar. For me, the Presidency of the CCBE is the final step in a career as a member of the Bar.

The French Bar has been involved in European integration for a long time. It is still very active within the CCBE. I am happy to be part of this tradition. I belong to a generation of lawyers who have been able to measure the extent to which the European project has advanced the rule of law everywhere, including within the national sphere.

Finally, like my predecessors, if I wish to be the President of the CCBE, it is because it gives me the opportunity to play a part in the development of our profession, and of the CCBE itself.

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The priorities of the CCBE in 2025

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What issues will the CCBE be focusing on this year?

I do not know whether we should think of the CCBE's work in terms of calendar years.

First of all, because there are subjects to which the CCBE devotes itself, year after year, without ever turning its back. I am thinking of issues such as the defence of professional secrecy, or endangered lawyers.

Secondly, because the CCBE is also capable of taking action over the long term.

Moreover, even though the President's term of office is twelve months, the Presidency operates as a collegiate body, with each of its members taking an active part in the decision-making process for four years. This counterbalances the shortness of the President's term of office and ensures that the CCBE is not locked into an annual cycle.

The most significant event of 2025 is a perfect illustration of the CCBE's ability to carry out long-term projects.

2025 will see the culmination of a project that has occupied the CCBE for ten years – the adoption by the Council of Europe of

a European convention for the protection of lawyers. It all began in 2015, at a Plenary Session held in Gdańsk, chaired by Maria Ślęzak, in the presence of Lech Wałęsa. The idea for the convention was launched, on behalf of the French delegation, by Laurent Pettiti, who will have been the kingpin of this extraordinarily ambitious project. The final adoption by the Council of Ministers is expected to take place in May 2025. I hope that we will be able to celebrate the event at the Plenary Session in Bordeaux. This convention is unique in the world, and it is an exemplary success for the CCBE. The CCBE now needs to be as effective as it has been over the past ten years in promoting it. This is all the more important as the story does not end there: we will have to get the Member States to ratify the convention for it to come into force. Raising awareness of the convention and working towards its ratification will be priorities in 2025. It is also a great opportunity to finally gain recognition for the role played by the CCBE in serving lawyers.

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→ Continued: "What issues will the CCBE be focusing on this year?"

At the end of 2023, under the Presidency of Panagiotis Perakis, we launched a wide-ranging reflection on the role and future of the CCBE. This was at the heart of the mandate of my predecessor, Pierre-Dominique Schupp. I would like to pay tribute to his energy and commitment. Thanks to him, we can hope that this reflection will be completed in 2025. It should lead to important decisions to modernise the CCBE and make it more effective. I hope that 2025 will also be the year of conversion to AI for the CCBE secretariat.

AI will certainly be one of the major issues of 2025. The majority of lawyers will have become regular users by the end of the year

and will need support. Things will probably move less quickly within the judicial system, but magistrates will be tempted to use it on their own initiative, on an individual basis.

I also hope that we will be able to adopt measures enabling the CCBE to play a role, not only in the service of the profession's policy in its relations with the European institutions, but also as a tool for promoting cooperation between its members, at an operational level, in areas such as communication, IT, and training.

The principles governing the profession of lawyer are almost identical in all the countries of the European area and beyond. Lawyers adhere to common values. They

all recognise the essential nature of legal professional privilege/professional secrecy, and are committed to the defence of the self-regulation of the profession. And yet, in practice, national laws vary considerably. These differences often escape us. Advancing cooperation between the Bars and Law Societies by developing the role of the CCBE, in order to make it a platform for mutual knowledge between its members, is also a great target for 2025. ■



> From left to right: Roman Završek, First Vice-President of the CCBE, Thierry Wickers, President of the CCBE, Alex Tallon, Second Vice-President of the CCBE, and Imbi Jürgen, Third Vice-President of the CCBE.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE CCBE'S ACTIONS IN 2024, GO TO [CCBE.EU](https://ccbe.eu) AND FOLLOW US ON LINKEDIN.

