Giving Answers, Raising Questions

The Czech Constitutional Court Introduces Europe's First Apex Court Chatbot

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Constitutional case law is becoming increasingly difficult to navigate. Apex courts across Europe now produce vast bodies of jurisprudence, comprising thousands of decisions accumulated over decades. Even legal professionals often struggle to determine what the law requires – let alone citizens seeking to understand their rights. Courts have responded in various ways: redesigning case law databases, publishing simplified summaries of judgments, and developing more user-friendly interfaces to make their jurisprudence more accessible.

The Czech Constitutional Court has recently taken a more ambitious step. A few weeks ago, it introduced an AI-powered legal chatbot directly on its official website, allowing users to ask questions in natural language and receive answers that synthesise the Court's case law. In doing so, it appears to be the first apex court in Europe to deploy such a tool.

At first glance, the innovation appears to offer a more convenient way to navigate constitutional jurisprudence. Yet the chatbot does more than help users find decisions. By selecting relevant cases, synthesising their meaning, and presenting the result as an answer to a concrete question, it inserts a new interpretive layer between the Court and the public. This shift raises deeper constitutional questions about transparency, accountability, and the growing role of digital systems in shaping constitutional meaning.

What the Chatbot Does

At first sight, the chatbot resembles an advanced search and assistance tool. Users can pose questions in natural language and receive responses that identify relevant decisions, summarise their reasoning, and link directly to the underlying judgments. The system operates across languages and draws on constitutional and statutory provisions and the Court's extensive database of case law.

A typical interaction is straightforward. When asked, for example, whether the police may search a home without a warrant, the chatbot responds that, as a rule, they may not. It identifies relevant strands of the Court's jurisprudence, explains the principles that emerge from them, notes certain exceptions, and provides links to the underlying decisions. All responses are then accompanied by a disclaimer stating that the chatbot does not provide legal advice, cannot predict the outcome of proceedings, does not offer a binding interpretation of the law, may be inaccurate, and does not propose procedural steps.

Used in this way, the tool promises clear benefits closely tied to well-known weaknesses of current legal systems. For citizens without legal training, constitutional case law is often difficult to navigate and, in practice, frequently inaccessible without professional assistance. A system that helps users locate relevant decisions and grasp their basic reasoning can therefore reduce complexity, improve access, and make constitutional jurisprudence more understandable. For legal practitioners, the tool may also prove useful, for example when orienting themselves in unfamiliar areas of case law or quickly identifying relevant decisions.

Yet even the simple examples recounted above point to a more significant shift.

From Search Tool to Legal Interpreter

Traditionally, court case law databases and collections of judgments perform one primary function: they help users locate relevant decisions. They structure the material through keywords, areas of law, or legal provisions, but leave much of the task to the reader. Lawyers, scholars, and citizens must still decide which

cases matter, how they relate to one another, how to read them, and what they imply for the legal problem at hand.

The chatbot alters this structure in a fundamental way. Instead of merely providing access to legal information – legal provisions and judicial decisions – it performs a form of interpretation. It identifies relevant jurisprudence, synthesises it into a structured summary, translates it into a natural language, and presents the result as an answer to a user's question – sometimes even suggesting the likelihood of success. In doing so, it shifts part of the interpretive work – traditionally carried out by individuals and outside the Court's institutional space – into a technological system introduced by the Court itself.

The implications of this shift become particularly visible in situations where the law has not been authoritatively settled by the Court. When asked, for example, whether the President is obliged to dissolve the Chamber of Deputies following a three-fifths vote for self-dissolution (as provided for in Article 35(2) of the Constitution), the chatbot responds that the President must do so and has no discretion. Relying on the wording of the Constitution ("the President dissolves"), it presents this conclusion as a straightforward consequence of the constitutional text. While this reading appears to reflect the dominant view in constitutional doctrine, a different position has been articulated – most notably by the President in 2021, who argued that a degree of discretion remains. Crucially, the Constitutional Court has never ruled on this issue.

This example illustrates that the shift is not merely technical. The chatbot shapes which decisions users encounter, what counts as relevant case law, and how the boundaries of legal protection are perceived.

The formal disclaimers are unlikely to neutralise this effect. What the chatbot says is, of course, not the Court's view, nor is it legally binding, and it would be a mistake to treat it as such. The crucial point, however, is to distinguish between the chatbot's formal status and its practical effects. On this latter level, existing literature consistently shows that even advisory or assistive tools – those offering mere suggestions – can shape how users think, decide, and act, whether due to convenience (legal professionals), limited ability to critically assess and contest the output (laypeople) or a general tendency to trust the "objective machine". In this case, that effect is reinforced by the institutional setting: the chatbot is embedded on the Court's official website and presents its responses as grounded in the Court's case law and the Constitution, thereby drawing on the court's institutional authority. It is therefore reasonable to expect that if the chatbot indicates that a claim is "unlikely to succeed", or privileges certain readings over others, this will influence how users understand the law and how they act upon it – regardless of accompanying disclaimers. By its nature, the chatbot operates as a new cognitive frame through which constitutional meaning is communicated. Once this role is acknowledged, a further question arises: how exactly does the system operate?

The Invisible Design Choices

As with any similar technology, the chatbot inevitably rests on a series of hidden yet consequential decisions. Do all judgments carry equal weight? Should older cases matter more than recent ones, or vice versa? Does the system acknowledge tensions within the Court's case law, or present a single doctrinal line? If it selects among competing strands, on what basis – frequency, outcome, or some notion of the quality of reasoning?

These are all choices shaping how users perceive the content and coherence of the Court's jurisprudence. None of them is neutral.

The difficulty is that all these choices built into the chatbot remain largely invisible. Beyond a general introduction of the tool, the Court has said little about the assumptions and decisions embedded in the system. This may be partly due to the nature of the technology. Like any other AI system, the chatbot operates as a partial black box, with even its designers not fully able to explain all of its outputs. Partly, however, the opacity may result from the fact that the chatbot was developed by an external provider, whose models and methods may be protected by contractual arrangements or trade secrets.

We thus arrive at a situation in which a technological system helps shape how people understand and use the law, without it being clear how it works or who is responsible for its design. This departs from the traditional model of how law and courts operate in a democratic state. At best, it introduces a layer of uncertainty that most users cannot meaningfully assess. At worst, it shifts part of the power to shape legal meaning to developers and private actors operating outside established frameworks of legal accountability.

This would be less troubling if the system concerned the retrieval of ordinary information. Law, however, is not simply information. It is a form of public authority that determines rights, obligations, and ultimately personal liberty. Access to law is itself a precondition for the exercise of rights and for holding public power to account. Once technology begins to mediate access to law, its design inevitably acquires constitutional and political significance.

Seen in this light, the introduction of a chatbot necessarily raises important institutional questions about how such a system should be designed and governed: should courts develop it in-house, or can its creation be outsourced to private actors? What forms of oversight are appropriate, and do courts have a duty to disclose how such tools are designed and operate? Finally, what are the limits to the extent that interpretive functions can be performed by a judicially sponsored chatbot?

Constitutionalising the Infrastructure

The Czech experiment offers a glimpse of a broader transformation. As artificial intelligence becomes more capable and widespread, courts will increasingly rely on technological systems to mediate access to their work. This may significantly improve efficiency and accessibility. At the same time, it may transform how constitutional meaning is produced and disrupt established frameworks of accountability and institutional balance.

The question is not whether courts should use such technologies. Digital mediation of judicial work is already becoming a structural feature of contemporary legal systems, with technology increasingly used to regulate and manage what courts do. The real issue is how these systems are designed and governed. As software, data, and technical infrastructures begin to shape judicial authority, they can no longer be treated as neutral background conditions. They must be understood as sites of constitutional power in their own right.

At a minimum, this suggests a need for greater transparency about how such tools are designed and operate, as well as a more explicit reflection on how far such tools should be allowed to go in shaping legal meaning.

The most important contribution of the first European apex court's chatbot may lie not in the answers it provides, but in the questions it raises.

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