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The Basic Law – Germany’s constitution – at 70

Doing justice

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The SCARLET ROBE

Who wears it with such exuberance as if it were a public garment adorned with the official arms are worthy of the justice on Germany’s Federal Constitutional Court. The scarlet robe in which the judges wear the red collar embroidered with gold work by judges in 15th-century Florence. The German judges began wearing their characteristic scarlet gowns and white jerkins for court proceedings and state ceremonial events in 1823. Practically made of a heavy double-cloth fabric, the scarlet robes by a higher status and color in 1957, with every new judge inheriting a robe from their predecessor. The scarlet robe is worn by judges in the Federal Constitutional Court. When Fabian von Schlabrendorff was a judge on the Federal Constitutional Court (1963–1973), he was heard poking fun at the scarlet robe. Today it is a symbol of their duty to do justice. But the wearing of the scarlet robe is not just a matter of honor. It is a means of communication, both for the court and for society. The scarlet robe is a symbol of the duty of judges to remain independent and to uphold the constitution. It is a symbol of the judiciary’s role in protecting the constitution and defending the rule of law. The scarlet robe is a reminder of the judges’ commitment to upholding the constitution and safeguarding the rule of law.