

Speech on Presentation of
Functional Review of the Courts System of Cyprus

Dr Michael Mulreany

Assistant Director General

Institute of Public Administration, Dublin

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President of the Supreme Court, Distinguished Members of the Cypriot Judiciary, Minister of Finance, Minister of Justice and Public Order, Members of the Judges Association, Members of the Cyprus Bar Association, Head of EU Representation in Cyprus, Ambassador of Ireland, British High Commissioner, Members of the Structural Reform Support Service of the European Commission, Members of the Courts System, Members of the Court Reform Steering Committee, Director of the Office of Reform and Training and his team, Members of the wider Cypriot Government and Public Administration.

The Impetus to Reform

For the past number of decades across the western world there has been a major thrust to reform public services. The ideal to which the reform aspires is a public service which is high performing, flexible, efficient, open, transparent and accountable and which delivers high class services with integrity, impartiality, equality and honesty. Such a reformed public service would have a culture of quality-service supported by effective financial and human resource management systems. At its head, there would be skilled senior leaders and effective governance systems.

As you can see these outcomes are rather general and aspirational. However, it is good to have aspirations and vision. Without them organisations and institutions cannot be fully clear where they are going. As the old quotation says: "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there".

The Courts System

These high aspirations reach down to public service institutions, organisations and systems in every developed country and are present in the strategies and reform plans they adopt.

For example in Ireland in 1996 a Working Group on the Courts Service harnessed these aspirations to the practicalities of our courts system. They pointed to the reforms needed in areas such as strategic planning, management and reporting structures, accountability and responsibility, performance measurement, information technology, the gathering and dissemination of financial and statistical information and the training and development of professional management and of staff in general.

Therefore, in taking on this work on the Courts system in Cyprus it is fair to say that our team approached it with a great degree of empathy and with the comforting knowledge that Ireland had gone ahead on this difficult path and now has a court service which, though not perfect, has greatly improved and has many achievements to demonstrate to other countries embarking on the same journey.

We also have a sense of fellowship with Cyprus because we recently shared the effects of an unprecedented economic and financial crisis and the challenges of pushing ahead with reform with limited resources at our disposal. It seems to me that both countries have won their big battles and that Cyprus is currently sending out a clear message of stability, credibility, reform and change.

The Report

This is the background against which, and the spirit within which, we conducted our work. We did our utmost to listen attentively, identify the issues to be addressed, assess the possible solutions, use reasoned arguments and produce a credible road-map for reform. Underlying all our recommendations in this report is an irreducible message that there is a need for change. As one of the great US Presidents has said: "Change is the law of life".

It is our hope that the relevant authorities in Cyprus will build on the recommendations in this report in a purposive manner. Undue delay is a false friend. The Courts System is one of the cornerstones of an effective justice system and, as such, there is an urgent necessity to reform it and secure it against the demands not just of today but of the future.

I will take this opportunity to thank those in the Cypriot system who took the time to meet us and who provided information and insight. A particular thanks is due to retired Supreme Court Judge George Erotocritou who arranged privileged access to

our discussants, supplied us with necessary information, and provided wise advice. I must also add that he did all of this with willingness, warmth, spontaneity, persistence and patience.

Of course the report would not have been possible without the support provided by the European Commission and I would like to acknowledge the contribution made by Eirini Georgiopolou, Sebastien Renaud and Daniele Dotto from the Structural Reform Support Service.

The IPA is 60 years old this year. It is a pleasure for me in this anniversary year to present such an important report and to acknowledge with great gratitude the work of our team. I can say without hesitation it is one of the best teams I have worked with in terms of its professionalism, application and 'esprit de corps'.

I will now hand over to Dr Brian Cawley the project manager to present the key details of the report.