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| **SPEECH****PRESENTATION OF THE REPORT ON THE REFORM OF THE COURT SYSTEM** **Date: Tuesday 27 MARCH 2018 (11.00-14.00)****Speech by Thea Pieridou, Acting Head of EC Representation in Cyprus, expected at 11.20*****Place : Supreme Court’s Lecture Room in Nicosia*** |

***Check against delivery - Ισχύει μόνο ότι λεχθεί***

 **Honourable President of the Supreme Court
Honourable Ministers**

**Honourable Members of Parliament
Your Excellencies
Ladies and gentlemen**

**It is with great pleasure** that I attend today's event concerning the presentation of the report on the reform of the court system, which should become the basis for the much-needed judicial reform in Cyprus.

The European Commission is **actively supporting** Cyprus on its judicial reform efforts. Following Cyprus' request, the Structural Reform Support Service (SRSS) is providing technical support in the implementation of these reforms, particularly by mobilising expertise from other Member States.

Notably, through the SRSS and in coordination with its Directorate General for Justice, there are **six ongoing projects** financed by the European Commission, (with a total budget of more than a million euro).

These projects aim to support:

1. **The Court Reform** with the review of the Supreme Court and the District Court operations;
2. The **efficiency of the Law office** of the Republic of Cyprus;
3. The review of the **rules of civil procedures**;
4. The implementation of **e-justice;**
5. The **training of judges**;
6. The judges' **selection** and appointment procedures

Let me reiterate that **today could be a milestone.** It could be the beginning of a comprehensive judicial reform in Cyprus. This is important -- and not only for the judicial system.

Judicial reform is a **key element** of the whole reform agenda. There are plenty of inter-linkages with other areas of the economy, and especially of the business environment. Therefore, today is an important milestone for the reform process from a general perspective. **Without an effective judicial reform, reforms in other areas could turn to be less effective and less enforceable**, weighing on overall economic confidence**.**

Therefore, effective judicial systems not only defend fundamental rights, but also support economic growth. Europe promotes and defends the rule of law, supporting individuals and businesses in enjoying their rights, strengthening mutual trust and building a business and investment-friendly environment in the Single Market. For these reasons, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of national justice systems is a well-established priority of the European Commission.

In Cyprus, the judicial system presents persisting inefficiencies and critical challenges*.* Inefficient court procedures and limited capacity lead to significant delays in processing court civil and commercial cases and to weak contract enforcement. This undermines the general business environment, by creating uncertainty and raising barriers to the well-functioning of the economy.

In this context, in 2016, the Cypriot Authorities expressed their willingness to undertake a program of reforms to improve the judicial system in Cyprus to reduce delays caused by inefficient court procedures and the limited capacity of the Court Administration. These critical issues have been highlighted by the European Commission Country reports before and after that date. They have also been highlighted in the EU Justice Scoreboard, which shows that length of proceedings and backlogs in litigious civil and commercial cases in Cyprus are among the highest in the EU.

Subsequently, the Supreme Court of Cyprus requested from the SRSS technical support in undertaking an in-depth review of the courts operations and in developing a reform plan. The request was the review to be undertaken by the Institute of Public Administration of Ireland (IPA), where a judicial system reform expertise has built up, and the system has similarities with the Cypriot one.

Since day one, the SRSS and the Irish experts of the IPA have worked very closely with the Supreme Court, its President, its judges, its registrars and the Members of the Steering committee (with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Finance, the Bar Association, the Judges Association) as well as Judges and Registrars of the District Courts under the leadership of Mr Erotocritou to define the scope of the project and to ensure its optimum implementation.

We are here today to present the results of this project. The European Commission would like to thank the IPA for their excellent cooperation, strong support and dedication to the project.

The in-depth functional review of the Supreme Court and District Courts operations aims at speeding up the judicial system to process cases. The IPA will present the details of the recommendations and our understanding is that the Cypriot Authorities are satisfied with the cooperation and quality of their work.

**Regarding the implementation of the experts' recommendations, I would like to stress the following important issues:**

The experts' report is delivered today formally to the President of the Supreme Court. **The implementation of the reform of the judicial system depends now solely on the Cypriot authorities.**

As I have mentioned already, the European Commission strongly supports the judicial reform in Cyprus. We consider that now is the most critical phase where the reforms need to be implemented. **Therefore, we urge the Cypriot authorities to adopt and implement the action plan presented in the report as soon as possible**. **This action plan has been tailored by the experts to fit the needs of Cyprus.**

To implement the reforms, the **Cypriot reform project team** has a crucial role to play. Therefore, the team should have the necessary capacity to implement its mandate efficiently and effectively.

The SRSS will maintain the flow of communication with the Cypriot authorities to discuss on how the recommendations of the experts will be addressed and followed up in the next weeks.

We would like to convey that the European Commission, via the SRSS, stands ready to further support the Supreme Court and the Cypriot authorities in the implementation of this important reform.

Also, please allow me to thank, on behalf of the SRSS, all the colleagues involved in this project, the President and all the judges of the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Justice, the judges, the lawyers, the registrars, and Mr Erotocritou for the essential role he played to put in place all the projects related to the judicial reform for Cyprus.

Now the implementation of the much-needed reform fully depends on Cyprus. We wish to see the reform being delivered swiftly and with high efficiency to allow Cyprus to increase its performance in the judicial sector, safeguarding the rule of law and enhancing its business environment.

We trust that the enthusiasm shown for the development of the project will continue in the implementation phase!

Thank you for your attention

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