

**20CY19 - “Enhancing the capacity of the
Justice System by an effective implementation
of the reform recommendations and processes
in Cyprus”**

Closing event

18th January 2023

Speaking points

Honourable President of the Supreme Court Mr.

Liatsos

Honourable Minister of Justice and Public Order

Honourable Judges of the Supreme Court,

Honourable Director General of the Ministry of

Finance,

Honourable Director of Reform and Judicial

Training

Distinguished guests and speakers,

Dear colleagues,

- **Welcome address:**

It is a great pleasure for me to participate to this event today, marking the successful completion of yet another very important project that supported judicial reform in Cyprus and more specifically the creation of an independent court service and the review and introduction of new administrative processes in the court registries.

On a personal note, allow me to say that I am particularly pleased to be with you in person – among distinguished hosts, colleagues and friends – in order to celebrate not only the completion of the aforementioned project but also the completion of a long and continuous cooperation with the Cypriot authorities and particularly the Supreme Court in the area of justice.

- **Role of DG REFORM in the CY judicial reform**

As you all know by now, DG REFORM has been accompanying and supporting Cyprus in this reform journey since 2017 with our first technical support project on the functional review of the courts' operation – which in our opinion set the basis for the entire reform incorporating 21 recommendations on the way forward along with an action plan.

The functional review was followed up by 6 more technical support projects in different fields like the creation of objective criteria for the selection and promotion of judges, training for judges on judge craft courses, a feasibility study for the introduction of Digital Audio Recording in court proceedings and of course the modernisation of the civil procedure rules, which was one of our most

successful projects, which we had the opportunity to celebrate in December 2021.

It is unusual for us to finance so many consecutive projects, but the spirit of reform in this country and topic, and its materialisation by George Erotocritou, pushed us to keep on working with you, with immense and real pleasure and enthusiasm.

- **Link of follow up projects to the functional review**

All our projects were based on and aimed at providing adequate follow up to the recommendations that were included in the functional review.

- **Brief description of project in question**

This is the case also for the project whose completion we are celebrating today, which was structured around two key objectives:

- Firstly, the activation of the implementation of the recommendation of the functional review about the creation of an independent court service that will gradually relieve judges from the administrative burden and allow them to focus on their core duties, the judicial one
 - And secondly, the review and introduction of new processes in the court registries so as to improve their efficiency, as the registries play a key role in case management.
- The work under the two components was organised around distinct phases including:
 - the description of the current governance, management, administration and staffing of the courts in Cyprus on the one hand and the processes in place in the court registries on the other hand
 - the analysis of the current challenges in the management and administration of the courts and identification of the weaknesses in the current procedures in the court registries

- the comparative analysis of international good practices
- and of recommendations and roadmap for the establishment of a court service and for the reorganisation of the court registries.

- **Importance of the specific project for EC:**

For the European Commission, this project is of high and similar importance to our previous one on the modernisation of the civil procedure rules, which led to the adoption of the new rules and are now expected to enter into force already as of the next judicial year.

The correlation between the two areas that these projects have touched upon is more than evident.

The effectiveness of civil procedure rules by definition is linked to the efficiency of the courts and the resolution of the civil cases in a timely and fair manner.

Court administration and management on the other hand constitute key factors for achieving of encouraging a certain standard in the quality of justice.

Therefore support for the modernisation of the civil procedure rules must proceed in parallel with improving the courts administration and the procedures in the court registries; this will allow us to run the full marathon and meet the challenges and the issues related to the management and administration of the courts that the Supreme Court has to deal with.

Key challenges identified by experts regarding the management of courts:

In particular, some of the key findings of the project was that the Supreme Court, which now has the overall management and leadership responsibility for the courts, simply does not have the time, or the professional expertise, to undertake the onerous role of managing and administering the courts. The complexity of ongoing

technological and societal changes has added to an already heavy workload. In addition, the Chief Registrar has the major responsibility for the day to-day management of administrative matters in the courts and, in order to perform all her tasks, she needs to have available adequate structures to support her in her professional management role.

Strong leadership and management capacity – which is what we are working for - has multiple positive consequences, including in strategic planning, budgetary management, staff management and workforce planning, and planning for courts infrastructure. A strong management capacity will also positively impact on the reform efforts.

Therefore, addressing the current inadequacies in the management and governance structures is a prerequisite for solving the above issues.

- **Importance of judicial projects for MS and the EU as a whole:**

As it has been mentioned in the past, these type of projects are not perceived simply as judicial projects but rather as greater projects that contribute to the reform of the economic environment in Cyprus. As highlighted in the EU Justice Scoreboard but also confirmed by a wide range of studies and academic literature including from IMF, OECD, WB, World Economic Forum etc., effective justice systems that uphold the rule of law have a positive economic impact, which is particularly relevant in the context of the European Semester and the RRF. Where and when judicial systems guarantee the enforcement of rights, creditors are more likely to lend, businesses have higher confidence and are dissuaded from opportunistic behaviour, transaction costs are reduced, and innovative businesses are more likely to invest. In fact, an effective justice system is vital for sustained economic growth. It can improve the business climate, foster innovation, attract foreign

direct investment, secure tax revenues and support economic growth.

In this context, the support that we have been providing to Cyprus during the last 5 years is important not only for the latter but for the EU in general. We very much hope that the Supreme Court will further pursue its reform efforts taking the necessary follow up actions linked to the implementation of the suggestions and activation of the tools provided by the experts and actually set up the independent court service so that next year we have the opportunity to celebrate yet another success of Cyprus beyond the successful completion of a project.

- **Praise and thanks to stakeholders:**

On our side, we feel proud for having contributed to the judicial reform in Cyprus. I would like to praise the Cypriot authorities and relevant stakeholders, including the experts, for their determination and commitment in leading this complex process. I would also like to acknowledge

the fundamental role played by the Supreme Court, the Reform Steering Committee, and the Director of Reform and Training thanking all and each one separately for the excellent cooperation during all these years. Allow me just to say a personal word about George: in my job I have met dozens of people that wanted to change things for the sake of the common good. But very few have been as inspiring as George both as professionals and as human beings. For this, thank you George.

I would like to thank particularly the Council of Europe for their resilience and professionalism during the implementation of both projects we worked together in Cyprus.

I also want to pay a special tribute to Adamantia for her professionalism, dedication and human touch. Adamantia, you were instrumental throughout this year and throughout the projects. I think that we all owe you a lot!

- **Concluding remark:**

Allow me to close with something that you have heard me saying also in other occasions which I feel the need to reiterate as it is so true for Cyprus: Reform is not an easy process, but Cyprus has proven that it is something doable.

Thank you for your attention!