

EFFICIENCY AND QUALITY OF THE SLOVAK JUSTICE SYSTEM

The project “**Strengthening the efficiency and quality of the Slovak judicial system**” aimed at supporting the efforts of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic (MoJ) with a view to continuing reforms of the justice sector. During the mission period of two years between April 2017 and July 2019 the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ) team aimed to improve the Slovak judicial system through a thorough assessment of the efficiency and quality of the court and application of CEPEJ tools and methodology.

The Project focus was divided between the three main goals and expected results:

- **assessment of efficiency and quality** of the Slovak judicial system by CEPEJ experts;
- **the capacity development** of the Analytical Centre and more efficient use of the IT systems;
- **enhancement of the efficiency and quality** of courts through application of CEPEJ methodology and tools on judicial time management and quality of justice in pilot courts.

Regarding the first goal, the CEPEJ expert team developed and presented two reports: “Efficiency and quality of the Slovak judicial system. Assessment and recommendations on the basis of CEPEJ tools” and “Evaluation of the current state of affairs of IT tools for the Slovak judicial system and advice on their development”. The first report puts forward an expert view on the state of affairs in the Slovak judicial system and the possible ways of improving the efficiency and the quality of courts. The second report contains a critical assessment of the information systems currently in use in the justice sector and detailed recommendations on the better future use of information and communication technologies. Both reports were used by the MoJ in its effort to reform the judicial system.

Throughout the Project’s **implementation of the second goal**, the Analytical Centre was building up its capacities for the purpose of becoming a key institution in the evaluation of efficiency of the entire judicial system, in charge of developing proposals for future reforms in the justice sector. Expert advice has been provided and contributed to several important developments. In particular, the Analytical Centre launched in 2019 an application to improve the collection of statistical data and connected it to the resulting data warehouse interactive dashboards for evaluation of courts.

The CEPEJ methodology can be successfully applied at the level of courts, without central regulation or significant resources. Therefore, **within the scope of the third goal**, six pilot courts were engaged in the testing of these instruments, with a view to developing good practices and capacities for their subsequent dissemination country wide. The pilot courts, supported by a team

of CEPEJ experts and the Analytical Centre, accomplished a series of activities and produced analytical reports on the performance of courts, on monitoring of the compliance with the recommended timeframes, while two of them also participated in carrying out court user satisfaction surveys.

The Project was contemporary to on-going policy reforms in the justice sector. The MoJ pursued reforms such as the optimisation of the court map and further specialisation of courts, simplification of some judicial proceedings, introducing electronic payment orders, enhancing the ICT tools and statistical data analysis for the purpose of a better court management and more efficient courts. In this regard, the CEPEJ reports contain a large number of recommendations which could help to further improve policies shaping the Slovak judicial system and its tools. Among these recommendations can be underlined the following:

- **precise information and well-defined indicators** are needed to understand the internal functioning of Slovak courts, before making fact-based policy decisions;
- **annual reports on the activity** of the court system and of individual courts shall be drawn up and published through a general, well-established practice of reporting by court management;
- number of judges and court staff to be allocated to courts is to be connected to **clear and objective criteria**, based on an analysis of the caseflow, administrative workload, performance and an estimation of the average time needed to accomplish different judicial and non-judicial functions in the courts;
- issue of judges' specialisation is **strongly connected to the size of courts** (judicial map), as well as the specialisations of courts or their divisions. Judges' specialisation can be carried out only in specialised courts, or in courts that are big enough to manage fairly the caseload of all judges;
- **budgetary process** in the judiciary of the Slovak Republic needs an overhauling. The allocation of funding should be based upon explicit and transparent criteria (correlated to the workload, complexity of the caseflow, performance etc.), which should be clear to the entire judiciary and to other stakeholders;
- the MoJ was recommended to adopt **two main ICT priorities**: putting in place a new and versatile court management system and developing an efficient way of collecting statistical data and information for the purpose of assessing the court performance.