



8 JULY 2016
JUSTICE
PRESS RELEASES

Justice ministers intend to continue with the discussion on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office

Bratislava (8 July 2016) - The programme of the Slovak Presidency has continued today with the informal meeting of ministers for justice of the European Union Member States. The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice of the Slovak Republic, Ms Lucia Žitňanská. Discussions focused primarily on the topics of the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the fight against cybercrime and electronic communication in the field of justice.

Today's meeting was preceded by an informal meeting of ministers for justice of the Eastern Partnership countries with the representatives of EU institutions, which took place yesterday, 7 July. Discussions were held on anticorruption policies, with a special focus on anti-money laundering measures.

The Eastern Partnership is a political initiative launched at the Prague Summit in May 2009 with the aim of deepening and strengthening relations between the EU and six eastern European partners: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.

Slovakia considers the Eastern Partnership an important political initiative. Since 1989 Slovakia has undergone the process of transformation into a democratic society as well as having successfully concluded the process of joining the EU. The Slovak experience can be valuable for countries that are going through a

similar process and face similar problems to those we have faced.

The informal meeting of justice ministers of 28 European Union Member States took place on 8 July. In the presence of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice Ms Lucia Žitňanská and the EU Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality Ms Věra Jourová, European ministers discussed the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the fight against cybercrime and electronic communication in the field of justice.

European Public Prosecutor's Office

The proposal for a Regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office aims to make the prosecution of crimes affecting the EU's financial interests more efficient. The goal of the discussion was to look at the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO) as an element of the overall system of protection of the EU's financial interests and to consider ways of reaching a consensual, but at the same time efficient, solution as early as possible.

Discussion showed that there was still a need to reach an agreement on the substantive competence of the EPPO, and the outcome of that agreement will have a direct impact on the assessment of EPPO's added value. Ministers expressed their support for the continuation of the discussion on this proposal stressing the need for the instrument to be truly efficient.

Electronic justice

The purpose of discussion on electronic justice, with the focus on utilisation of electronic communication in cross-border cases, was to draw the attention of the ministers to the existence of the e-IDAS Regulation, the possibilities it provides, the obligation it establishes as well as issues which need to be resolved before September 2018 – the deadline from which the Member States will be under an obligation to accept electronic communication from abroad.

Only if those issues are resolved will the European Union have a functioning cross-border e-communication in the area of justice with all the benefits such communication is capable of providing (such as speedy service, simplified cross-border taking of evidence, hearings with parties residing abroad by means of videoconferencing).

Speaking in today's discussion, Lucia Žitňanská, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Justice of the Slovak Republic stated, *'I am pleased that there is a will to seek common solutions even on such a technically demanding, but at the same time highly important topic. I am persuaded that the political support given to the cross-border electronic communication in the area of justice will not have ended with today's discussion, but on the contrary, it has only started. I hope that in two years' time we will be in a position to harness the potential the e-IDAS Regulation offers.'*

Cybercrime

I am persuaded that the political support given to the cross-border electronic communication in the area of justice will not have ended with today's discussion, but on the contrary, it has only started.

Lucia Žitňanská

The last topic of discussion focused on cybercrime – encryption and the fight against crime. The recent terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels once again confirmed that modern technologies are being progressively misused to perpetrate even the most serious forms of crime. The Slovak Presidency submits this topic for discussion for reasons of its timeliness as well as the need to react to the problems of today in the EU's ongoing work.

Law enforcement authorities are faced with problems of encryption when securing e-evidence for the purposes of criminal proceedings. Encryption represents a serious obstacle to bringing criminal investigations and proceedings to a successful end. The purpose of the meeting regarding this topic was to allow for as open a discussion as possible, focusing on the aspects relevant to the area of criminal justice. The analysis of the results of the discussion will inform the process of exploring the scope for further common action by the Member States.