2017 EU justice scoreboard

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The Committee on Legal Affairs adopted the own-initiative report by Jytte GUTELAND (ALDE, SE) on the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard.

The Commission published the 2017 EU Justice Scoreboard to assess the effectiveness, independence and quality of national justice systems, in order to pinpoint any shortcomings, identify good practice and progress and better define Member States' justice policies.

The committee called on the Commission to:

- continue monitoring national justice reforms in the framework of the European Semester, which also draws on information from the EU Justice Scoreboard;
- develop new criteria for better assessing the conformity of judicial systems with the rule of law;
- gather more precise information on the way in which violations of the rule of law and threats to fundamental rights, including corruption, discrimination and breaches of privacy, freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly and association, are being dealt with;
- take into account the fight against corruption, and considers the inclusion of this issue in the Justice Scoreboard to be a priority;
- continue developing concrete indicators to assess, in practice, the upholding of EU values such as the rule of law and respect for fundamental rights;

Efficiency: Members underlined the importance of efficient and timely proceedings. However, they noted with concern that such proceedings are still too lengthy in some Member States and pointed out that a large backlog of pending cases might also make citizens and businesses less willing to trust the judicial system, as well as decrease legal certainty.

Member States are encouraged to invest in the use and continued development of ICT tools in their judicial systems, in an effort to make them more accessible, more comprehensible and easier to use for all EU citizens, especially those with any form of disability and vulnerable groups, including national minorities and/or migrants. They are also called on to **publish all court rulings online** as this will help citizens and businesses become better acquainted with the judicial system as well as make it more transparent.

Further **training** should be offered to judges in the fields of gender roles, norms and stereotypes, judicial ethics, IT skills, judicial management, mediation, and communication with parties and with the press. The importance of adequate training in EU law and in the different EU cooperation structures, such as Eurojust was also stressed.

Quality: Members called on the Commission to add **collective redress** procedures to next year's comparative exercise on accessibility factors of justice systems, as they believe access to justice and efficient dispute resolution to be of prime importance. Collective redress procedures facilitate citizens' access to justice and efficient dispute resolution and consequently eliminate unreasonable barriers, notably for citizens living below the poverty threshold or involved in cases with a cross-border dimension.

Reduced legal fees: the difficulty in obtaining legal aid could be a major deterrent where the court and/or legal fees represent a significant share of the value of the claim. In this regard, Members considered that legal aid should be linked to the poverty threshold in the Member States. Legal costs should, in general, be further lowered, for example by making use of national electronic eJustice portals.

Independence: Members stressed that sufficient autonomy must be ensured to shield prosecutorial authorities from undue political influence. They called on the Commission, therefore, to include a section devoted to the status of public prosecutors and their autonomy in the Scoreboard and to continue assessing legal safeguards for judicial independence, including in cooperation with the networks of the Supreme Courts and the Councils for the Judiciary.

Lastly, Member States are urged to examine the results of the 2017 Justice Scoreboard closely and to determine what lessons need to be drawn therefrom, and to consider whether national measures need to be adopted to correct any irregularities regarding the quality, efficiency and independence of their national justice systems.