



**EUROPEAN COMMISSION**

**Viviane Reding**

Vice-President of the European Commission, EU Justice Commissioner

## **The 2013 EU Justice Scoreboard**

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Es gilt das gesprochene Wort

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## **Effective Justice Systems and Economic Growth**

I am here today to present **a new tool** that the Commission has just adopted. The EU Justice Scoreboard is designed to **promote effective justice systems in Europe**. By improving the justice system we also want to **contribute to restoring growth** in Europe.

Our reasoning is simple: an efficient and trustworthy justice system will bring an economic benefit. **Trusting that the rule of law is fully upheld directly translates into the confidence to invest** in the economy.

Predictable, timely and enforceable justice decisions all have a **key impact in making a country an attractive location for business and investment**. Because **justice delayed is justice denied**: How can businesses and states prosper when it takes up to 4 or 5 years for a first hearing to be held before a court, and up to 10 years for a final decision?

Effective justice systems in one member state are also important for the whole of the EU. Because **whenever a national court upholds EU law, it acts as a 'European Union court'**. For example, national courts play an essential role in enforcing EU competition law and other legislation crucial for the Single Market. So shortcomings in a national justice system are not only a problem for a particular Member State, but can affect the functioning of the Single Market and, more generally, the **whole EU legal system, which is based on mutual trust**.

It is exactly in this context that since 2011 already experts from the European Commission's Justice department **have been going to the programme countries** (Ireland, Latvia, Portugal and Greece) to see how the justice systems work there and to give tailored recommendations to these countries on where further progress in the area of judicial reform might be needed.

And we have included this expertise in the **European Semester**, the yearly cycle of economic policy coordination between the Commission and the 27 EU Member States. In 2012, there were **already recommendations on justice** aspects in the Country Specific Recommendations to **six countries** (namely Bulgaria, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia).

One of the aims of the 2013 **Annual Growth Survey** – the European Semester priorities – is to "improve the quality, independence and efficiency of national judicial systems". So that we can reduce costs for businesses and increase the attractiveness of the country to foreign investors

Therefore, as of today, the **Justice Scoreboard** will help us to systematically look – within the European Semester exercise – at the **efficiency, quality and independence of the justice systems in all 27 EU-Member States** – on the basis of objective, reliable and comparable data.

**This is not a beauty contest**. It's **not about ranking national justice systems**. In Europe we have rich and varied legal traditions that need to be safeguarded. But whatever the model of the national justice system, timeliness, independence, affordability, and easy access are hallmarks of an **effective** justice system.

## Main Findings

I would now like to present some of the main findings of this first justice scoreboard which **for the time being covers only the civil, commercial and administrative law area**:

- **BACKLOGS**: The length of judicial proceedings varies considerably between EU Member States, with **one third of Member States having a length of proceedings at least twice as long as the majority of Member States**. Problems can be compounded where low rates of resolving cases lead to an increasing number of pending cases - this means that outstanding cases stack up and the courts are then faced with a backlog, which exacerbates the system.
- **MEDIATION**: Another important way of reducing the workload of the courts and therefore making the system work more quickly is to use **alternative out-of-court methods for resolving disputes**, such as mediation. These are of course already in use in many instances, but the data shows they **could be used much more widely**.
- **INDEPENDENCE**: Finally, in terms of perceived independence of national justice systems, these also vary widely. Even though several Member States are among the top 10 worldwide leaders in terms of the perception of judicial independence, there are others that find themselves lower on the ladder. This will require special attention in future. Because **justice must not only be done, but also be seen to be done**.

## Next Steps

I would like to end by saying a few words on the next steps. We have put together this first, very useful overview of the different justice systems in the Member States. On the basis of this Justice Scoreboard, the European Commission is now inviting the Member States, the European Parliament and all stakeholders to take part in an **open dialogue about how to continue improving the national justice systems** in the EU.

Of course, the Scoreboard is an **evolving tool** - **we will gradually expand the indicators and the areas covered in the future**.

What we are doing today is establishing **an early warning mechanism** – a reliable and comparable set of data which will help identify trends in the functioning of national justice systems over time. So that we can help prevent any negative growth spiral that comes with a lack of confidence of businesses and citizens in their institutions.

This is a good first step.