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**15th COLLOQUY ON INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND LAW IN EUROPE
“E-JUSTICE: INTEROPERABILITY OF SYSTEMS”**

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National Report of the Slovak Republik

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I. Strategies

The Proclamation of the Slovak Government defined the key political priorities of the government, among them were the following concerning courts and public registers:

- simplification of the procedures in the public administration
- complex services for the citizens
- speeding up the access to the commercial registers and speeding up the procedures at the courts

The computerisation of courts follows a strategy of the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic based on the **Strategic Plan of the Government of the Slovak Republic** and the **Resolution of the Slovak Government - Programme of the Development of the Judiciary** aimed to achieve required level of the use of information technologies (IT) as a necessary component of modernisation of the Slovak courts. The modernisation of the courts will mainly focus on the creation of an optimal model of the court system and the optimal operation of the courts supported by the IT.

The aims of the modernisation of the courts in the area of IT are the following:

- usage of modern IT equipment by the judges and all the administration staff for decision-making and administrative processes in the courts
- electronic processing of the court agendas
- unification and standardisation of the IT used in the justice sector
- communication infrastructure in the courts
- interconnection of the courts by means of a wide area network
- implementation of central information systems (such as the legal information system JASPI, the central commercial register, the central information system of bankruptcies and recoveries)
- access to necessary information from the information systems of the other authorities which will impact the speeding up of the decision-making processes at the courts
- providing information from the central databases to other State departments via governmental network Govnet and to the public via Internet

Main development and implementation of the IT in the sector of justice was planned to be achieved in the years 2000-2003. The problems connected with the introduction of modern technology in the Slovak Republic are mainly due to the limited resources of the State budget. Besides the funds provided from the State budget, the development is achieved with the help of PHARE funds and other international projects such as the project for optimization of the internal procedures in the courts (Project "Court Management" in cooperation with the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police). ABA/CEELI, Open Society Foundation and other donors have contributed to the informatization of the Justice sector.

In 2000 to 2003 the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic is planning to develop new information system for all civil, criminal, commercial and administrative agendas with respect to optimization of internal court procedures and to implement it to all courts in the Slovak Republic.

II. Project "Court Management"

In 1999 the number of civil cases lodged to the court at district and regional courts was 558,079, final decisions were reached in 659,080 cases and 453,011 cases were pending. The number of criminal cases lodged to the court in 1999 was 30,292 and final decisions were reached in 29,469 cases, and 8,811 cases were pending.

Implementation of the project Court Management in all the district courts in Slovak Republic will have great influence on speeding up the court procedures as nearly 90% of the pending cases are in the district courts.

In May 1999 Swiss experts during their visit in Bratislava suggested a Project "Court Management" in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and a court. The aim of the project was redesign of the workflow in the courts with respect to optimisation of the internal working procedures, organisational changes, changes in responsibilities of the judges and the administrative staff and the future use of information technologies. The effectiveness of the proposed changes was planned to be tested in a pilot court. The district court in Banská Bystrica was chosen for this project. The working group consisted of 3 experts from Switzerland, 2 judges, an economist, a lawyer and 2 IT specialists.

After theoretical preparation of the working group in the fields of "New state management" and "Hierarchy of the processes" positive and negative aspects of the current work of the court were discussed from the point of view of every team member. Global analysis of various cases passing through the court was made, responsibilities of the judges and administrative staff were reviewed. New variants of the workflow were suggested. Possible automation of the work was discussed.

In December 1999 a project of case management information system with random case assignment was drafted. The realization of this project started in February 2000 when a SW company was chosen to develop the application. The development of the application was financed by the Swiss government, HW, SW, and communication infrastructure as well as implementation support were responsibilities of the Slovak side. Besides the filing module, two modules of court agendas for the Section of Civil Law and Section of Commercial Law were developed.

The development followed standard methodology of Information System (IS) development:

- Analysis
- Design
- Prototype of the IS
- Development of the IS
- Pilot implementation
- Modifications
- Operational Testing

Results of every phase of the development were approved by the Swiss and Slovak team members on Acceptance days.

The application and database was required to fulfill requirements on data protection of sensitive information and to resist to any attempt for manipulation as well as allow future development and interfaces to other IS.

Results of the measurements according to the criteria for assessment of the efficiency of the new system showed that:

- The project was successful in speeding up the procedures:
 - The time between the filing and the first hearing was reduced from 73 to 49 days
 - The time between the first and the second hearing was reduced from 38 to 16 days
 - 70% increase of cases decided till 3 months from the filing
- The project was successful in making the work of the judges and administrative staff more effective:
 - The judges gained 78% of the working time
 - The time necessary to locate and retrieve a case file was reduced from 15 minutes to seconds
 - Number of steps in the case processing was reduced to 25%
- The project was successful in bringing transparency and reliable and quick information on the cases
 - Random case assignment was introduced
 - Information about the case number and the judge in 3 minutes after the filing.

Apparently none of the results mentioned above would be possible without bringing modern technologies to the court.

After the presentation of the results of the pilot in December 2000 the project gained attention of the Slovak government and the public. The project was highly evaluated by foreign institutions:

"The pilot, which was implemented with support from the Swiss Government, resulted in impressive improvements in the speed and efficiency of case processing and successfully pioneered random assignment of cases to judges." (World Bank)

"The system's goal of achieving substantially increased efficiency appears to have been successfully met... Roll-out of this system to as many courts as quickly as possible is likely to go far toward eliminating two of the major sources that nourish the perception of corruption: the assignment of cases and case processing delay." (M.B.Zimmer, expert under the auspices of Central and East European Law Initiative of the American Bar Association).

III. Other IT Projects in the Justice Sector

The following projects provide necessary HW, SW, or communication infrastructure for the "Court Management" Project and implement other information systems to be accessed by the court users. By integrating these information systems effectiveness of the work will grow rapidly in the future.

The implementation of the IT in the judicial sector was planned in the following phases:

1. *Building up the local communication infrastructure.* In this phase the **local area networks** were built in all the 64 district and regional courts in the Slovak republic. This phase was implemented in 1999-2001.
2. *Purchase of **HW and standard SW equipment** for the judges.* In this phase all the Slovak judges (over 1200) will be provided with PCs and printers. The training of the judges as well as the court staff will be part of this phase. This phase is in the state of implementation – 1H2002.
3. *Interconnecting the courts and the Ministry of Justice.* In this phase all the district and regional courts in the Slovak Republic will be interconnected by means of a **wide area network**. This phase is in the state of implementation – 1H2002.
4. *Establishment of the Centre of Judicial and Legal Information.* In the Centre of Judicial and Legal Information the central databases such as the central commercial register or the legal information system JASPI will be operated. New applications for the court agendas will be developed. Interfaces for connection to other information systems operated by the central governmental bodies will be created and the interface to the central databases for the other authorities will be provided. Some of the collected information as well as selected court decisions will be made accessible to the public by means of Internet applications. This phase will start in 2002.

Legal information system JASPI is currently enabling access (full text search and retrieval of data) to legal rules and regulations, international treaties, court rulings, internal and methodical directives of central authorities in the Slovak Republic by a specialised client-server application at the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic and/or by individual PC desktop installations with CD-ROM media as well as by a new application designed to enable access to JASPI database for users of central authorities through government network Govnet (Internet) using Web browsers.

The system is accessed by the public via Internet since February 2002 at jaspi.justice.gov.sk. The access is free of charge. After building up the wide area network interconnecting the courts (phase 3) the system will be accessed by all the users in the courts.

The database is updated daily in the Govnet, on a weekly basis on the Internet, and the update of the database is distributed monthly on a CD-ROM to the central authorities.

In January 2001 data from the **commercial registers** were published on the Internet by the Ministry of Justice of the Slovak Republic. As the central database of the commercial registers does not exist, the data for the Internet use are exported from the 8 databases of the commercial registers at the courts and the Internet database is updated once in fourteen days. The detailed information and historical information are provided free of charge at www.orsk.sk. The development and publishing on the Internet was sponsored by commercial companies in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice. In accordance with the agreement, the application can

be freely used in the intranets of the courts. After building up the wide area network interconnecting the courts (phase 3) the data accessed by the Internet will be updated on a daily basis.

A new application publishing the data from the information **system of bankruptcies and recoveries** was put on the Internet in 1Q2002. After pilot testing data from the three bankruptcy courts of SR will be published (www.orisk.sk). This application can be freely used in the intranets of the courts.

IV. Roll-out of the Case Management System and Plans for the Future

In 2001 and 2002 Ministry of Justice decided to continue to support IT development and implementation and assigned 30% and 35% (compared to 5% in 1998) of the sectors investment budget to IT to purchase the necessary HW and SW infrastructure for the first phase of the roll-out of the case management system.

The Project "Court Management" including the roll-out of all the modules piloted in Banska Bystrica to all the district courts in Slovakia was submitted to the Government and the funding was approved in May 2001. The financial resources were provided in December 2001, in 1Q 2002 all the necessary equipment was delivered to all the district courts. The installations of the system are coordinated with trainings of the users during the year 2002.

In the nearest future Ministry of Justice in coordination with the courts plans to implement the modules of the IS piloted in Banska Bystrica in 4 other district courts (April-May 2002), and the filing module with the random case assignment in all the district and regional courts in the Slovak Republic. The roll-out will continue to all the district courts (infrastructure prepared in 1Q2002).

EU Delegation (PHARE Programme), ABA/CEELI, Open Society Foundation have promised further help in the necessary trainings and equipment to support the roll-out of the Case Management IS in the Slovak Republic.

The PHARE2000 Project Support to the Implementation of the National Programme of Fight Against Corruption deals with **efficient exchange of information and data processing among Law Enforcement Agencies**. The objective of this project is the analysis of information for the purpose of electronic data exchange among Ministry of Justice, General Prosecutor's Office and Ministry of Interior. The result will be the development/implementation of information systems for prosecution and judiciary. For courts and Ministry of Justice the application module for criminal agenda will be developed on the level of district and regional courts. The project is in the state of tender procedure. The applications are planned to be developed and piloted by the end of 2003.

Speeding up the procedures in the courts is one of the priorities of the Slovak Government in the context of Slovakia's EU accession and implementation of the *acquis communautaire*. The Projects also assist in the creation of anti-corruption environment of the National Programme of Fight against Corruption.