

# Cyprus: A Future Model State

## FOR JUSTICE

**Kyriacos Kokkinos, Deputy Minister of Research, Innovation & Digital Policy, talks about the new mini e-Justice initiative, the main elements of the full digital justice project and how it will ultimately help Cyprus gain a modern, transparent, efficient and accessible justice system.**

**T**he Deputy Ministry has opted to focus on a smaller scale e-Justice project rather than running the digitalization of the justice system as one big overhaul. What

does this smaller project entail and when is it expected to be implemented?

**Kyriacos Kokkinos:** First of all, let me clarify that the interim solution we have crafted does not interfere at all with the design and build of the holistic e-justice project, which continues in parallel and is expected to be fully implemented within a time span of 2-3 years. For this exact reason, and taking into consideration the challenges confronting our judicial system to respond rapidly and effectively in adverse situations, such as the COVID-19 crisis where digital technology was the only way to ensure business continuity, we decided to undertake this initiative. The scope of this mini e-Justice solution is to address the interim needs of the judicial system until the full e-Justice system is in place. The functionality of the mini e-Justice includes basic case filing features and electronic methods of payment of relevant fees, stamps and duties. It also provides for the creation of electronic case management files, accessible by all eligible users (court registrars, judges, law firms, etc.) in a secure and controlled manner for case management or case monitoring, while facilitating two-way communication between internal

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users (courts and court registrars) and external users (lawyers, law firms and citizens). The mini e-justice is already quite advanced and we expect it to be made available to the judiciary and citizens within the next 3 months, following a trial period and relevant training for internal users, scheduled for late September.

**GOLD: Given that the wider e-Justice project has been on a hiatus since 2017, how will this “small sprint” help in speeding up full digital adoption?**

**K.K.:** The mini e-Justice solution not only aims at covering the needs arising in the interim period between 2020 and 2023 – when the new system will be fully in place – but most importantly it lays the foundations for a smoother transition of our judiciary ecosystem to the new digital era. In practice, the cases already registered electronically will be simply migrated to the new system where users will be already familiar with its functionality. This is a highly important side benefit as it will reinforce our justice ecosystem and its stakeholders. It will also enhance their readiness and willingness to accept and embrace this fundamental reform, while in a way “forcing” the redesign of related judicial administrative processes to fit the new digital paradigm. Put simply, this “small sprint” will definitely provide the right culture and adaptation requirements with regard to people, processes and modus operandi. Opting for an interim solution addresses the most important challenge of any transformation process: cultural change! And we strongly believe that interaction with this mini system will result in all stakeholders not only embracing but demanding change.

**GOLD: What are the main elements of the full e-Justice project and its goals?**

**K.K.:** e-Justice is a key enabler and a prerequisite for the strategic reform of our judicial system. The project is a fully functional, fully fledged digital solution aiming at improving the operations, processes and management of the judicial system, as well as its interactions with the public, address-

ing existing inefficiencies across the whole cycle of judicial operations. The solution will practically enable the full collaboration of the whole justice ecosystem: Court Registrars, Judges’ Offices, the Law Office of the Republic, the courts, the Police and other government authorities, lawyers, law firms and other private sector entities, as well as individual citizens. It is a highly complex and demanding project but absolutely necessary for upgrading the efficiencies and productivity of our judicial system. The implementation of e-Justice will introduce case categorization, tracking and monitoring systems to support the streaming of cases, monitor compliance with orders and protocols and manage allocations of cases to hearing. By simplifying the filing, control of, and access to, legal documents, the monitoring of cases can be done much more easily, thus facilitating the work of the judiciary. As a result, a more efficient, faster delivery of justice will be achieved, minimizing time and administrative costs, while increasing the transparency, speed and quality of justice. Most importantly, it will enhance and accelerate service delivery to the public, minimizing the need for on-site visits and increasing confidence in the system and the state institutions as a whole. A very important element of the project is the fact that it includes a business continuity plan, building a shield against future crises or adverse situations.

**GOLD: Where does the e-justice initiative rank on the Deputy Ministry’s list of priorities? And why it is so important?**

**K.K.:** e-Justice is a major structural reform in our agenda, sponsored by the President of the Republic, which makes it a top priority project for both the Deputy Ministry and the Ministry of Justice. We are working closely and in full alignment with the Presidency, the Ministry of Justice, the Supreme Court, the Law Office of the Republic and the Attorney General, as well as with the Cyprus Bar Association, to ensure that this project is implemented in a successful and timely manner. e-Justice is a key determinant of a modern and robust state

for justice, as delays and inefficiencies in the delivery of justice affect not only local society but our country’s image and reputation abroad, and specifically amongst the international business community. Rankings like the 2019 EU Justice Scoreboard of the European Commission and the *Doing Business Report 2020* of the World Bank, which are reference points for foreign investors, show that Cyprus is at a critical point as it scores low in the quality, time and cost of judicial processes as well as the availability of technology. Our goal is an easily accessible, practical and efficient solution, which will allow the successful completion of legal proceedings within shorter periods of time, while providing for easier interconnection and inter-functioning between the information systems of the Republic.

**GOLD: Who did you consult in order to understand what aspects of the legal system are in immediate need of digitization? Was the private sector included in the discussions?**

**K.K.:** As I have already said, this is a highly complex and demanding project, not only in terms of the technological infrastructure and skills required but also with regard to the imperative need for changes to processes, procedures and, most importantly, culture. In order to effectively address all these parameters, we have built a team of stakeholders from both the public and the private sector. This team will need to work together closely on a daily basis to fully understand the manifold requirements and functionalities of the system, as well as to identify and mitigate the effects of the challenges and barriers related to its successful implementation. I would like to thank the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Justice, the Court Registry, the Law Office of the Republic, the Cyprus Bar Association and all other stakeholders involved for their excellent cooperation throughout this period. I am confident that, together, we can achieve our common goal and vision for Cyprus to become a model state for justice, featuring a modern, transparent, efficient and accessible justice system.