

GJYKATË E HAPUR

Basic Court of Prizren Newsletter
July – September 2014

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("Open Court")

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A new window of transparency

Dear readers,

Kosovo judiciary, one of the most important pillars of power, has gone through an important period of transition for ensuring rule of law, achieved with the establishment of preconditions for independence, impartiality, and professionalism in its operation. A key element for the best functioning of the judiciary is cooperation between the court and the citizens. The Basic Court of Prizren has therefore started publishing a quarterly newsletter - an essential component of its work.

This first Newsletter on the work of the court will be a help to our work, as this is yet another effort into promoting the spirit of cooperation between the citizens and the court. This periodic publication will provide information on the work of the court, on the statistics on cases handled, on activities, projects, citizens' access to the court, media inclusion, and on other matters related to the transparency and accountability towards the citizens.

This Newsletter is a new window of transparency in the work of the Basic Court of Prizren, aiming at strengthening citizen confidence and credibility in the justice system in general and in the work of the court in particular. I would hereby wish to express my highest considerations to all the men and women who contributed into the preparation and publication of this Newsletter.

Ymer Hoxha

President of the Basic Court of Prizren

SUCCESS STORY

Increased communication between the citizens and the court

The Basic Court of Prizren has open doors to all citizens interested in visiting it and learning more about their court. Communication between citizens and justice providers is a pre-condition for establishing confidence in justice served at this court, and at the same time keeps the court updated of citizens' demands. With the aim of increasing such a mutual confidence and credibility, the Basic Court of Prizren in cooperation with NGO EC Ma Ndryshe regularly arranges the activity called 'Visit to the Court', thus further enhancing communication between the citizens and this court. During such visits, the citizens have the opportunity to get acquainted with the court premises, courtrooms, and the work of the administration and judges from various departments. The President of the Court receives the citizens in one of the courtrooms, discussing on demands, needs and concerns of both parties in relation to the court and justice.



NEWS

A new court project

The Basic Court of Prizren is working in a close cooperation with NGO EC Ma Ndryshe in implementing a project called "Linking Communities to Justice Providers", supported by USAID and monitored by ATRC. This project aims to improve communication between citizens and the court in order to improve citizen inclusion and building their trust in the justice sector. In this regard, project/court profiles have been opened on social networks named "Gjykatë e Hapur", launching on daily basis court-relevant information, such as trial schedules, press releases, court media coverage, visits, debates, court contacts, etc.

"The Court and the Citizens" Debate

In cooperation with NGO EC Ma Ndryshe, the Basic Court of Prizren has organized a public debate called "The Court and the Citizens", aiming at encouraging communication between the citizens and this court. This debate hosted by Ymer Hoxha, President of the Basic Court of Prizren, Afërdita Kicaj, spokesperson of the Basic Court of Prizren, Naim Kurtishi, civil judge, Skender Çocaj, criminal judge, and Sefer Gutaj, minor offence judge.



USAID visits the Basic Court

On 8 August 2014, senior representatives of USAID including Acting Deputy Mission Director Tom Cornell, representatives from USAID Effective Rule of Law Initiative and Contract Law Enforcement visited the Basic Court of Prizren. The visitors were welcomed by the President of the Court, Mr. Ymer Hoxha, who briefed them on the work of the court and on its functioning under the new structure. He also tackled the investments on model courts premises at the Basic Court of Prizren and at its branches in Suharekë and Dragash, including their standard based designs. Furthermore, they also discussed on the work and challenges of the court, the need for constructing another court premise, or construction of another floor on top of the existing building.

Group of children pay a visit to the Basic Court of Prizren

The Basic Court of Prizren hosted a group of children from the Inter-municipal Library of Prizren. In August this year, within the scope of activity "Playing while learning, learning while playing", around 40 children and 5 project implementers visited the Basic Court of Prizren. The children were given the opportunity to get to know their court and to learn more of its functioning. At the end of the visit, a question and answer session was organized, where the children expressed their curiosity on the work of the court by posing questions to the Information Officer of the Basic Court of Prizren.



The community briefed on women's inheritance right

On 12 September 2014, the Basic Court of Prizren and NGO EC Ma Ndryshe held the regular debate between the citizens and court representatives with the topic "Women's inheritance right". This debate aimed at encouraging discussion between the citizens, panellists and the Basic Court of Prizren on fundamental concepts of inheritance by will and law, with a special emphasis on women. The panellists included Mehmet Ndrecaj, judge at the Basic Court of Prizren, and Valbona Salihu, from NORMA Lawyers' Association. Please see the press release.



Twenty interns finish internship at the Basic Court of Prizren

The Basic Court of Prizren has for the first time accepted such a big number of interns, engaging them in various departments of the court. The twenty interns engaged for a period of one year have now successfully finished internship at the court. The President of the Court, Mr. Ymer Hoxha, took this opportunity to thank the interns for their work and maximum engagement during this period. He stated that interns have always shown willingness to accomplish their duties, and such a one-year experience will be helpful for their professional carrier".



The Court adopts new communication tools

The Basic Court of Prizren conducted a press conference introducing new products aiming at increasing transparency and fostering communication with the public, including the Court Communication Strategy; leaflet “How to access the court?“, and the video “Open Court“. The Communication Strategy implements the concrete plans for promoting transparency, establishing a strong connection with the public, as well as applying new means and technology for fostering the court's relations with the public. The second product that was promoted is the leaflet “How to access the court?“ that contains information relevant to the work of the court and the citizens' rights. Thirdly, the court presented a short TV spot containing information on the work of the court, aiming at informing the public of their rights related to the court.



THE COURT IN NUMBERS

Commitment indicated in numbers

The table below shows statistics on cases at the Basic Court of Prizren for the first half of 2014, including backlog cases from the previous year, the new cases, the cases being processed, the cases completed during this six-month period, and the remaining cases. The court's maximum commitment during this reporting period into serving the citizens can be also proved with statistics.

Basic Court of Prizren	Backlog at the beginning of 2014	New cases during the first half of 2014	Total cases processed during the first half of 2014	Cases completed during the first half of 2014	Cases remaining at the end of the first half of 2014
Serious Crimes Department	424	298	722	278	444
General Department	21695	4426	26121	5216	20905
Juvenile Department	310	161	471	166	305
Minor Offense Division	9846	18914	28760	19923	8837
Total	32275	23799	56074	25583	30491

Increased Media Coverage

Apart of developing direct communication with the public, an element into the openness of the court and increased information to the public on the work of this institution is media coverage of court activities. This section of the Newsletter will regularly cover media reports on the work of the Basic Court of Prizren, launching media reports on various activities of this court as well as press articles addressing matters related to the work of this court. The court activities have been covered to a significant extent by the media, including the local as well as the central ones, with around twenty reporting on various news on this court. The media to have followed the court work include broadcasters TV Prizreni, TV Opinioni, TV Besa, dailies Zëri, Koha Ditore, and Kosova Sot, web portals Prizrenpress, 04 Online, and others. During the period covering January to October 2014, the Basic Court of Prizren has released around sixty press releases.



BRIEF INTERVIEW

Significant decrease in backlog cases



SKËNDER ÇOÇAJ

The Basic Court of Prizren stands committed to increase cooperation with all community groups and strongly believes in the necessity for increasing citizen information and participation for ensuring transparency and increasing the quality of services provided.

Same commitment is also applied by Skënder Çoçaj, a criminal judge and Head of General Department at the Basic Court of Prizren, whom we invited for a brief interview for this issue of the Newsletter.

1. What are the challenges in your job?

Challenges faced by a judge are mainly of professional nature, but at the same time they can also relate to the amendments of many laws during this transitional period. Another challenge is the number of cases on one hand, and contact with the public on the other hand. Movement of population, changes to ownership, significant investments, are challenging due to the fact that we need to deal with different matters in a short period of time.

2. What are the principles you apply in serving justice?

It is our duty to apply ethical as well as professional principles. A judge must be impartial and independent against interferences that might come from whatever quarters. A judge must be objective, must treat the parties equally,

regardless of their nationality or language. Furthermore, in exercising his or her duties, a judge must be led by other principles, including the principle of a fair trial and due processes, presumption of innocence, publicity principle, contradictoriness principle.

3. What is the reason behind the big number of backlog cases in our courts?

The Basic Court of Prizren cannot be considered to be a court overburdened with cases. With the new organization of Kosovo courts and additional efforts of all the court staff we have been able to significantly decrease the backlog. Movement of citizens abroad is one of the problems causing delays in resolving a case.

4. Why is it that public perception on the judiciary has until lately not been positive?

It is true that public perception has not been positive. This is due to the citizens not finding speedy solutions at the courts, both because of the big number of cases and small number of judges, lack of proper cooperation of other institutions with the court, etc. Now the court has its Information Office and the offices of the court have been arranged in a manner for them to be more

transparent, that has had an evident effect on changing public perception on the court for the better.

5. What would be the way to improve cooperation with the public and the image of the judiciary?

We already have cooperation with the public, meaning that when Prizren citizens approach the court, they will find the proper information. With regards to the publicity, we have leaflets put on the information corner, we allow for trials to be monitored and every trial is published, we provide information as to who is the case judge and in which room the trial will be conducted. Furthermore, we also have a Facebook account called "Gjykatë e Hapur" (Eng translation: Open Court) with all the information. Court trials allowed by the law are made public and any interested citizen may come and observe the trial. The front door officials are always ready to respond to the demands and questions of citizens.

The court is a place where citizens can enjoy their rights. We are here to make it possible for citizens to enjoy all their rights.

HOW TO ACCESS THE COURT?

What is the jurisdiction of the court?

A basic court is the first instance court to initiate your court proceedings. The Basic Court of Prizren has general jurisdiction, meaning that it handles all first instance cases, unless provided for otherwise by the law.

The Basic Court of Prizren has three departments and one division:

- General Department, handling most criminal and civil cases,
- Juvenile Department, handling cases involving juveniles,
- Serious Crimes Department, dealing with cases provided for under article 15 of the Law on Courts and article 22 of the Criminal Procedure Code of Kosovo, and
- Minor Offence Division, dealing with minor offences.

Did you know...?!

1. The courts shall treat all persons in an equal manner, without any discrimination based on race, color, gender, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, relation to any community, property, economic and social condition, sexual orientation, birth, disability or other personal status. (LAW ON COURTS No. 03/L-199, Article 7)
2. A president of the court has the duty to receive public and respond to their questions or review their complaints. On this respect, the court organizes "Open Days", and the citizens may apply for participation. The 'Open Day' at the Basic Court of Prizren is held every other week, first and third Mondays of the month.



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