

## “e - Justice”, progress and future prospects

For several years now the EU has been working on the use of the Internet to promote European law. But gradually the need has emerged to examine which cross-border IT applications should be developed in the legal sector to facilitate Europe-wide public access to Justice and communication between members of the European judiciary.

Germany took the initiative to launch negotiations on this subject during its Presidency in the first six months of 2007. Work continued under the Portuguese and Slovene Presidencies and the subject is included in the justice priorities of the French Presidency's six months.

### ⇒ **The e-Justice group has the advantage of being multidisciplinary**

The group brings together members of the European judiciary who are aware of the issues involved in legal cooperation as well as specialist lawyers and IT engineers. In this field, computer skills are on an equal footing with legal knowledge.

### ⇒ **The work done over the last 18 months has included:**

- drawing up an inventory of what has been achieved in practice or existing pilot projects related to eJustice at both the European and national levels. Presentations have included the websites of the European Civil and Criminal Judicial Networks, the pilot project to interconnect national crime registers, the experimental system for checking electronic signatures on notarial instruments, the pilot project to interconnect registers of wills, etc.;
- establishing the possible scope of application of information and communication technology to cross-border legal affairs such as interconnecting registers, automatic translation of existing forms, automation of existing simplified European procedures;
- defining the ideal content of an e-Justice portal, conceived as a one-stop point of entry to Justice in Europe for individuals, companies and legal professionals.

### **So far in practice, the ongoing negotiations in Brussels have been mainly concerned with four applications:**

- prototype of the portal;
- interconnection of insolvency registers known as “debtors’ registers”;
- video conferencing;
- European order to pay.

⇒ On 30<sup>th</sup> May 2008, the European Commission adopted a communication entitled “**Towards a European strategy on eJustice**” in which it proposed to refocus projects on specifically legal activities, emphasise linguistic problems and launch a multi-year action plan.

⇒ **During its Presidency of the EU Council of Ministers**, France hopes that work on eJustice will cover the following points:

- developing concrete services available to the public such as the option of filling in forms on line
- prioritising projects that will in time be supported by a majority of Member States, e.g. electronic applications providing legal assistance or mediation in consumer affairs
- setting up a management structure that is coordinated at European level.

⇒ To achieve this, it is France's aim to see **an ambitious multi-year plan** adopted by the end of 2008 that will provide a project management structure.