



Project funded by the  
European Union



## **EuroMed Justice III Project**

### **COMPONENT I: ACCESS TO JUSTICE AND LEGAL AID WORKING GROUP 1.1**

#### **PREPARATION OF A HANDBOOK**

**Handbook which identifies and describes possible approaches and best practices to improve access to justice and legal aid**

Paris (FR), 17-19 April 2012  
Hotel Provinces Opéra  
Rue de l'Echiquier 36-75010 Paris

#### **Final Conclusions**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Meeting of the Working Group I on the component “Access to Justice and Legal Aid” of the EuroMed Justice III Project of the European Commission, funded by the European Union, was held on 17, 18 and 19 April 2012 in Paris.

The participants were members of the delegations of the following Mediterranean countries: Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia, and experts from the host country, France, and from Austria (UNODC).

The meeting was opened by Mr Andrés Salcedo Velasco, Team Leader of the EuroMed Justice III Project, who welcomed the participants, and was closed by Mr. Maitrepierre, Head of the European and International Affairs Service at the Ministry of Justice, France, and National Focal Point; as well as Ms Sara Campinoti, Programme Manager, Unit F4 Regional Programmes Neighbourhood South, Directorate-General Development and Co-operation - EuropeAid, European Commission.

The background, the context and the structure of the working group meetings that will be developed under this component, including their overall approach and the main topics suggested for discussion, were introduced by the Project Team experts and the main short-term expert, Mr Georges Assaf, in charge of this Working Group.

In addition, the Project Team presented the project website and the different tools offered in order to support the intermediate work of the participants/experts/project team in between the different meetings of the working group.

Furthermore, two presentations were made during the meeting, the first one on “Legal Aid: international approach and the French experience”, was made by Mr Thierry Pitois-Etienne, Head of the Department of Cooperation, Service of European and International Affairs, and former Head of the Legal Aid Department, Service of Access to Law and Justice and of Assistance to the Victims, French Ministry of Justice. During this presentation the expert introduced an international approach to the topic discussed, including a special reference to the European Court of Human Rights case law. In addition, he explained the French experience related to the topic under discussion, i.e. legal aid.

The second one on “General presentation on Access to Justice and Legal Aid, more specifically for underprivileged social groups” was delivered by Ms Miri Sharon, Drug Control and Crime Prevention Officer, Justice Section, Division for Operations, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. During her presentation, Ms Sharon covered the following issues: Standards and Norms in

crime prevention and criminal justice, in particular Access to Legal Aid, Human Rights issues (e.g. death penalty), UN Rule of Law Training. The speaker presented a general approach to access to justice and legal aid from an international point of view, with special reference to the work developed by the United Nations in this field.

The representatives of the Mediterranean countries took then the floor to make a presentation on the current situation in this field in their respective countries. These presentations were followed by an open debate.

Considering the objectives of this meeting and taking into account the recommendations made during the working sessions and the debate, the participants are of the opinion that this first meeting gave them the opportunity:

- a) To start the debate and the overall approach to the handbook which identifies and describes possible approaches and best practices to improve access to justice and legal aid.
- b) To discuss and agree on the methodology to be followed through the different meetings of this Working Group. In this respect, on the occasion of each meeting there will be a short presentation of the different participants' experience in order to focus the topics to be discussed during the meeting and to facilitate the ensuing discussion and possibly reach an agreement on the best practices. In addition, the different meetings of this working group will provide an EU and international approach thanks to the viewpoint of international experts invited to take part in the meetings. The discussion will be focused on the specific subject selected for each meeting and on possible good practices to be agreed upon.
- c) To be informed that the meetings and the work in between the meetings will be interconnected by means of a separate forum (chat, document folder, etc.) specially developed for this working group, and accessible via the project website, thus allowing for a continued exchange of information and possible contributions.
- d) To promote mutual understanding and knowledge of the different judicial systems concerning legal aid in the different countries which take part in the meeting.
- e) To further strengthen cooperation among the Euro-Mediterranean Partners in the field of justice.
- f) To have a fruitful debate on the state of play in the field of access to justice and legal aid in the Mediterranean countries, while presenting their respective experience and legal framework.
- g) To reach some initial agreement on the contents of the handbook that should be produced by this Working Group at the end of its 5 meetings.

Participants also expressed the intention:

- ❑ To further reinforce the dialogue and to continue to work together in between the five meetings devoted to this component in order to produce the handbook expected at the end of their work. To this end, they could use the virtual platform on the EuroMed Justice III project website.
- ❑ To inform the concerned authorities and institutions in their respective countries of the results of this WG meeting in view of taking advantage of the experience gained during this meeting.

Finally and taking into account the main objective of this working group - the handbook - and considering that the work will be developed during 5 working group meetings, the last one being in April 2013, the participants agreed to continue, if necessary, the discussion on this topic during the next meeting without prejudice of the possibility for them of being in contact with the expert, project team and between themselves through the above-mentioned virtual platform on the project website. In addition, and for the next meeting, the working group will focus - as main topics for discussion - on the length of the procedures, delays and timeframe for judicial proceedings.

Participants agree with the conclusions of this meeting.

Participants are grateful to the Directorate-General Development and Co-operation- EuropeAid, European Commission, and to the Project Team for the organisation of this meeting.

Paris, 19 April 2012