

EU justice ministers focus on EPPO regulation, hate speech at videoconference in Berlin

Setting up the European Public Prosecutor's Office (EPPO), the new EU strategy to combat sexual abuse on children and hate speech were among the items on the agenda of an informal videoconference meeting of the European Union justice ministers, including Romania's Justice Minister Catalin Predoiu.

"Access to justice and the opportunities offered by digitalisation, setting up the European Public Prosecutor's Office, the new EU strategy to combat sexual abuse of children, electronic evidence, anti-Semitism and hate speech, European Council's conclusions on the Charter of Fundamental Rights in the context of artificial intelligence and digital change were also discussed by the EU member states' ministers of justice," Predoiu is quoted as saying in a press statement released by Romania's Justice Ministry on Friday.

"The COVID-19 pandemic brings new challenges to justice decision-makers and practitioners, reflected in the agenda put forth by the German presidency of the EU Council. For example, the digitalisation of justice is gaining unprecedented momentum and the member states are invited to make use of new technologies with confidence and conviction. In these times, the issue of optimising and reducing the length of proceedings is no longer a single. At stake is maintaining citizens' access to the public service of justice in times of crisis. The virtual format of today's ministerial meeting is an illustration to the point of the fact that working methods evolve in the attempt to adjust for the new realities," Predoiu is quoted as saying at the end of the meeting.

According to the ministry, Predoiu called for swiftly setting up the European Prosecutor's Office.

"Romania has supported and continues to support the setting up of EPPO, both through the positions adopted at the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meetings and through concrete measures adopted in its dialogue and co-operation with the European Public Prosecutor's Office. We have continued the dialogue with the chief prosecutor of the European Public Prosecutor's Office. We have identified solutions to supplement the number of 10 prosecutors initially announced. Recently, we have had discussions with Romania's attorney general and the chief prosecutor of the National Anti-Corruption Directorate (DNA) on the matter, concretely analysing the log, staff shortage and their relevant technical parameters. Starting from the fact that legislative changes are expected to widen the base for recruiting prosecutors in specialised units, we were able to increase the number of delegated prosecutors from 10 to 15, without affecting, in perspective, the investigative capacity of DNA, a position communicated both bilaterally to the chief prosecutor of the European Prosecutor's Office, and at the JHA Council meeting," said Predoiu.

Focusing on the publishing by the European Commission of the new EU Anti-racism Action Plan 2020-2025, member states presented the state of play and national outlooks.

"The Ministry of Justice strongly supports the fight against hate speech and anti-Semitism through all national legal means in all EU member states. We endorse the European Council Declaration on the fight against anti-Semitism and the development of a common security approach to better protect Jewish communities and institutions in Europe," said Predoiu.