Briefing by the Head of Mission on the successful conclusion of EUJUST THEMIS

A year ago, at the request of the Georgian authorities, the European Union decided to assist Georgia in the rule of law reform process, via establishing an EU rule of Law Mission in Georgia, in the context of the European security and defence policy (ESDP), EUJUST THEMIS.

EUJUST THEMIS was led by the Head of Mission Ms Sylvie PANTZ. Senior Legal Experts (SLE) and Georgian Legal Assistants (NLA) were co-located in the different rule of law institutions: Ministry of Justice, Tbilisi Appeals Court, Ministry of Interior, General Prosecutor’s Office, High Council of Justice, Public Defender’s Office, and the Supreme Court of Georgia.

The EUJUST THEMIS team assisted the high-level working group established by the decree of the President of Georgia No 914 of October 19, 2004 to develop a strategy for reforming Georgian criminal legislation. This high-level working group was the main co-ordinating mechanism and strategic decision making body of the criminal justice reform process in Georgia. It was headed by the Minister of Justice of Georgia Mr Kemularia and it included the Secretary of the National Security Council, the Secretary of the High Council of Justice, the Minister of Finance, the Chairman of the Supreme Court, the General Prosecutor, the Public Defender, the Head of the Legal Press.
Affairs Committee of the Parliament, two Members of Parliament, a Member of the working group on the Criminal Procedure Code, a representative of the Liberty Institute and the NGO “IRIS Georgia”.

This high-level working group finished its work and submitted the strategy to the Government of Georgia. With its order No195 on 20 May 2005 the Government of Georgia expressed satisfaction with the strategy and established a Steering Group for the development of the plan for implementation and implementation of the strategy. On July 13, 2005 the Minister of Justice Mr Kemularia and the Deputy Minister of Justice Ms Tkeshelashvili and the HoM Ms Pantz and the EUJUST THEMIS team met with the President of Georgia Mr Saakashvili. The HoM gave an overview of the strategy, pointed out some shortcomings and stressed the importance of the implementation of the strategy.

The HoM presented to the Minister EUJUST THEMIS recommendation of the implementation of the strategy. The President expressed satisfaction with the strategy and deep gratitude for the work of EUJUST THEMIS and EU support to the rule of law reform process. The President noted that the Strategy will be a part of the ENP Action Plan and its implementation will be one of the top priorities of this government. The President took note of the shortcomings, at the same time he pointed out that the public confidence in judiciary is still low and therefore continuations of reform is necessary. The President agreed that good judiciary is an independent judiciary. Finally, the President emphasised the fact that this strategy is a Georgian strategy and therefore it is Georgian own interest to implement it and carry through the reform process.

EUJUST THEMIS notes that although there are some shortcomings in the strategy, EUJUST THEMIS assesses the strategy to be comprehensive and in accordance with best European and international standards. The Steering Group, led by the Minister of Justice will be in charge of the implementation of the strategy.

The first EU rule of law mission under the ESDP, EUJUST THEMIS in Georgia has achieved its main aims and has successfully completed its tasks and therefore finished its work on 14 July 2005.

The EU’s Political and Security Committee today welcomed the presentation by the HoM and congratulated the EUJUST THEMIS team on the successful conclusion of the mission within the timeframe envisaged.