



The International Conference

„Improving protection of victims’ rights: access to legal aid”

On 9th of June 2014 the International Conference *„Improving protection of victims’ rights: access to legal aid”* took place. The Conference was held at facilities of the Faculty of Law and Administration of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań and was a final activity of the project *„Improving protection of victims’ rights: access to legal aid”*, co - financed by European Commission, which addresses the priority “Supporting victims of crime (VICS)”. Partners of the project were: *Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań (Poland) - the Leader, Sabiedriskas Politicas Centrs PROVIDUS (Latvia), Center for the Study of Democracy (Bulgaria) and Consorzio Interuniversitario per la Formazione (Italy)*.

The Conference brought together European experts on victims’ rights – prominent scholars and practitioners delivering necessary help, protection and assistance to victims of crime. The main goal of the Conference was to consider the European Legal Aid System, and legal aid system in Members States, i.a. in Bulgaria, England and Wales, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Spain. The Conference was also serve as an international platform of discussion about the challenges and recommendations of the legal aid system in Europe.

Firstly, participants were welcomed and introduced by Prof. Paweł Wiliński, the Scientific Coordinator of the project. Next, JM Rector Prof. Jacek Witkoś and Prof. Roman Budzinowski – the Dean of Faculty of Law and Administration welcomed participants and stressed out the importance of undertakings such as the project. In the first part of the conference, Deputy Minister of Justice – Stanisław Chmielewski, also underlined the crucial meaning of help delivered to victims and challenges of this process. Then, Marta Kolendowska-Matejczuk, Ph.D., from the Office of the Human

Rights Defender took the floor, giving the perspective of one of the most important body called to take necessary measures to create the system of legal aid in Poland.

During the second part, chaired by Małgorzata Wąsek- Wiaderek, Hab. Ph. D, from the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin in Poland, representatives of the partners of the project – Piotr Karlik, Ph.D., from *Adam Mickiewicz University* (Poland), Sanite Sile from *PROVIDUS* (Latvia), Miriana Ilcheva from *Center for the Study of Democracy* (Bulgaria), Karen Hough from *Consorzio Interuniversitario per la Formazione* (Italy), project coordinator Graciela Fuentes, Ph.D. (AMU) and scientific coordinator Prof. Paweł Wiliński (AMU) took the floor. Each one of them, exposed the most crucial issues connected with delivering help to victims of crime arising in their own country. Partners also presented the structure of legal aid given to victims in their countries. Moreover, Graciela Fuentes, Ph.D. emphasized the need to increase public awareness of victims legal rights. In addition, in this module prof. Paweł Wiliński presented recommendations for European Legal Aid System.

In the third part of the conference, chaired by Ph. D. Natalia Buchowska from Adam Mickiewicz University, challenges of the legal aid system for victims were exposed. Firstly, Sara Chrzanowska from the Procedural Criminal Law Unit Victims Team, DG Justice, European Commission explained the European Union legislation concerning the rights of victims. Challenges of the legal aid system for victims were also shown from British and Spanish perspectives by Prof. Louis Taylor from Nottingham Law School and Prof. Ágata María Sanz Hermida from La Universidad de Castilla-La Manch in Spain. During the third part of the conference, the *Directive 2012/29/EU Establishing Minimum Standards on the Rights, Support and Protection of Victims of Crime* was also talked over by Prof. Cezary Kulesza from Council for Victims. This part exposed challenges before legal aid in Member States and the harmonization of national legal orders with European Union norms.

Next part of the Conference served as an international platform of discussion about the challenges and recommendations of the legal aid system in Europe. The comments were given by Mikołaj Pietrzak - President of the Human Rights Commission from the Polish Bar Council, ECBA, Michał Lewoc from Ministry of Justice in Poland and Barbara Grabowska – the representative of Helsinki Foundation for Human Rights.



After the lunch break, the final part of the Conference took place, chaired by Agnese Lesinska. This part focused on indicators for the development of the legal aid system for victims. Vania Costa Ramos – the lawyer from Portugal presented the Portugal system of legal aid given to victims. Simone de Blasi – lawyer from Italy, focused on the communication as the vital tool of improving legal aid system. Next, Hristo Botev – attorney-at-law from the Sofia Bar Association form Bulgaria stressed out the education as an important indicator for the development of delivered help. In the end, Diana Ziediņa – mediator from Latvia focused on the importance of the mediation in criminal procedure and advantages of using this tool in delivering help to victims.

In the end, the final comments and closing remarks were made by Ph. D. Marta Kolendowska – Matejczuk from the Office of the Human Rights Defender, Agnieszka Lisek - representative of the Polish Center for Mediation and Tomasz Piechowiak - President of Subvenia Victima.

The Conference not only brought together experts in victims' rights – prominent scholars dealing with victims of crime and practitioners delivering necessary help, protection and assistance to victims of crime in their everyday practice, judges, prosecutors, counsels, legal advisors, but also students from Adam Mickiewicz University.

With the encouragement and engagement of partners, representatives of the European Commission, scholars and practitioners from different Member States the Conference could have been successfully held.





Please find more information concerning the VICS project (articles, general report, national reports and other information) on the website: <http://victimsrights.eu/>.