

TRANSPARENCY PORTALS IN HIGH COURTS OF JUSTICE ARE ROLLED OUT - ROCA JUNYENT

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The General Council of the Judiciary is in the process of rolling out Transparency Portals in the High Courts of Justice of the 17 autonomous communities. This initiative is being undertaken in accordance with the Bill of Citizens' Rights to Justice, which was unanimously passed by the

Working Group of the Monitoring Committee of the Government Pact for the Reform of the Justice System signed on 28 May, 2001 – representatives from the various parliamentary groups and the Ministry of Justice were involved in its adoption.

The roll-out of these portals began 23 November, 2015 with the commissioning of the “pilot project” of the Transparency Portals of the High Courts of Justice of the Balearic Islands and Murcia.

The Bill of Citizens' Rights to Justice is divided into three distinct parts, the first of which concerns the need for justice to be transparent. Citizens may demand compliance with the rights recognised in this Charter and the Administration of Justice must provide the adequate means to ensure its efficacy. The policy of transparency has become the hallmark of the General Council of the Judiciary.

On the one hand, the Transparency Portals of the High Courts of Justice of Andalusia, Castilla-La Mancha, Castilla y León and Valencia were turned on, on 1 February, 2016. On the other hand, those of the High Courts of Justice of Aragón, Asturias, Navarre and La Rioja began operating on 24 February, 2016. The launch of this service in Extremadura, Galicia, the Basque Country and the Canary Islands is scheduled for 1 April this year. In the rest of the Autonomous Communities, this will take place during the first quarter of this year (all portals are expected to be operational before June 2016).

The Transparency Portals of these courts will allow citizens and legal professionals for the first time to gain access to content such as the distribution rules of each judicial body and the agendas or agreements of the Governing Chambers. Moreover, access to other relevant documents will be provided, such as circulars, consolidation of norms and general information. This very last document includes, among other items, hearing schedules, staff duty rosters, announcements regarding the appointment of alternate and substitute magistrates and judges, as well as the management of each High Court budget.

The content of the gateways will be supplemented by statistical data regularly updated and a case law section from which court rulings may be downloaded. The means of access to these portals will either be via the Transparency Portal of the General Council of the Judiciary or via the tab which each court has on its own website. Mar Cabrejas, a member of the General Council of the Judiciary who is in charge of this initiative stated: “Transparency is one of the commitments of the General Council of the Judiciary as a necessary requirement of better governance, a guiding principle for all judicial bodies and a means of establishing closer links to citizens.

The judiciary, just like other public authorities, must be an example of transparency and good management to citizens. Thus, introducing these gateways, with the aim of complying with national and international standards concerning the transparency of operations, is clearly an important milestone in this area.

The current Law 19/2013 of 9 December on Transparency, Access to Public Information and Good Governance, includes the General Council of the Judiciary within the subjective scope of application of Heading I regarding “*Transparency in Public Activity*”, as set out in Article 2 e) thereof.

Even so, these measures go still further, by extending the principle of transparency to the judiciary, a principle which already applies to the executive and legislative branches of the government. In light of this, we can only look favourably upon the measure adopted.

Nevertheless, despite the good intentions and the rapid introduction of the aforementioned portals, it is not yet known if the platform will meet the commitments outlined in the Bill of Citizens' Rights to Justice.

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