

EU's commitment to making everyday life easier for European families

On 19 and 20 March the European Commission, together with the Council of Notaries of the European Union, organised a symposium in Brussels on the theme of judicial cooperation in the service of European families. The symposium set out to examine the legal issues facing families because of their European dimension, the remedies already available under European law and the solutions to meet European citizens' expectations in future.

After the symposium, Commission Vice-President Jacques BARROT expressed satisfaction, saying that "in a European area without internal borders, any legal barriers that could undermine the freedom of movement of individuals must be eliminated. The main objective of Community instruments in this domain is to simplify things for those 'living as Europeans' by providing solutions to the problems encountered by people who live, get married, work, retire or inherit in a different Member State to that of their nationality."

The symposium provided an opportunity to take a look at transnational problems that can occur at major stages in the life of a European citizen, for instance, the marriage of a couple holding different nationalities and living in a third Member State, the divorce of such a couple and the property implications, and the succession rules applicable to them.

It was also possible to compare these situations with the remedies available under Community family law regulations and to take stock of the resulting improvements for European citizens in terms of the guarantee of greater legal certainty and the smoother flow of court rulings between Member States.

The challenges which future Community instruments must deal with were also discussed, with the emphasis on strengthening mutual recognition in the European judicial area.

The development of judicial cooperation between Member States in the area of family law is fully in line with the Stockholm programme laying down the European Union's objectives for the period 2010 to 2014.