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A 15-strong delegation of Ukrainian judges visited Estonia from 27-31 May to familiarise themselves with the Estonian court system and the work of the Ministry of Justice, the Office of the Chancellor of Justice, the county courts in Harju, Tartu and Pärnu counties and the Supreme Court. During their time in the country they also met with representatives of the Estonian Bar Association and the Prosecutor's Office.

Speaking at a Court en banc, Ukrainian Supreme Court judge Yurii Chumak said that his country was implementing reforms in order to align with EU standards. He confirmed that cooperation between Estonian and Ukrainian courts was based on shared values such as justice, democracy and the rule of law, which have become even more important in light of the tragic events in Ukraine.

After learning about the Estonian court system and attending the Court en banc, the visitors noted that constructive dialogue between judges is the key to effective court administration. Familiarising themselves with the organisation and practices of the Estonian court system proved to be a valuable experience for the Ukrainians.

The aim of the visit was to bolster the independence of Ukrainian courts and limit corruption by sharing Estonia's experience and know-how.

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On the first day of the visit the Ukrainian judges were welcomed by Chancellor of Justice Ülle Madise ahead of a discussion on the role of parties to judicial proceedings with representatives of the Estonian Bar Association and Prosecutor's Office. The Ukrainians also visited the Ministry of Justice, where they learned about the Estonian court system and the digital solutions currently in use. Photo: Estonian courts

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The following day, the Ukrainians visited Harju County Court, where Chief Judge Astrid Asi and judges Katre Poljakova, Kai Härmand and Enely Sepp gave them an overview of the way work is organised in the court and of case statistics. They discussed how criminal cases involving minors are dealt with and issues pertaining to the service of documents in civil proceedings. The visitors were very interested in how the judges organise their work, with the main court for the hearing of offences and the children's interview room in Harju County Court coming in for particular attention. Photo: Estonian courts

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On the third day, the Ukrainian delegation visited the Supreme Court and Tartu County Court. At the former, Ukrainian Supreme Court judge Yurii Chumak gave an overview of the state of the Ukrainian court system, stressing that justice continues to be administered in the non-occupied parts of the country according to the same rules that applied before the war. On their visit to Tartu County Court, the Ukrainians took part in a demonstration-only virtual court session and learned more about digital files. How the court has arranged its work on alternative premises also piqued their interest. Photo: Estonian courts

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On the fourth day of their visit, the Ukrainians attended a Court en banc in Pärnu. Photo: Estonian courts

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On their last day in Estonia, the Ukrainians visited Pärnu County Court. There they discussed the deadlines for the drafting of court decisions arising from law, possibilities for the service of court papers and options for appeal. Photo: Estonian courts

Giving feedback on their visit, the Ukrainian judges said:

- “We feel safe here.”
- “The sea and nature here in Estonia are so beautiful!”
- “It’s amazing how digitalised the Estonian court system is – we couldn’t get by without paper!”
- “European standards are reflected in Estonia’s courtrooms – those detained or on trial aren’t held in boxes.”

The lunch that rounded out the visit was marked by one heartfelt thank-you after another from the sincere and very friendly Ukrainians. There can be no doubt that the visit gave them, as well as their hosts, a tremendous boost.

The visit was financed by the Estonian Centre for International Development (ESTDEV).

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