

TARGETED LEGAL RESEARCH ONLINE – A CASE STUDY



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ABSTRACT

The Institute of Comparative Law provides expert, focused and reliable information on foreign regulations and case law to government institutions, legal practitioners and academics. In order to obtain up-to-date and reliable information, its researchers use the internet as a valuable tool, but also face a number of challenges, including limited access to specialized legal databases. In legal research, the fact that national legislation and case laws, as a rule, are not translated into foreign languages presents a particular challenge. Using a comparative study on restrictions for foreigners to acquire rights on immovables, conducted in August 2015, covering eight European states, the authors will show how they overcame this challenge and adjusted the research methodology to available resources. Finally, the authors will formulate recommendations aimed at improving access to key pieces of translated national legislation online, which can help promote national legislative solutions as best practice examples at the European and global level.

Key words: Legal research, internet, national legislation, translation, free access, Europe, databases

INTRODUCTION

The Institute of Comparative Law in Belgrade has a long-standing tradition as an institution of academic excellence and a source of reliable and up-to-date information on foreign and international law and jurisprudence⁷. As a part of its regular work, the Institute often conducts comparative research on behalf of various government institutions and legal practitioners. Usually, this type of research is used to find good, if not the best possible law (Zweigert, & Kötz, 1998, p. 15) and is often concurrently motivated by investigating the possibility of implement-

⁷ More information on the Institute of Comparative Law in Belgrade can be found at official website.

ing legal transplants (Watson, 1974). This is particularly important given that as of 2003 Serbia has been continuously harmonizing its legislation with that of the EU and in that practice has often used the experiences of other former socialist countries in implementing EU law – either as examples of good or poor practice.

In August 2015, a request was made to the *Institute of Comparative Law* to conduct research relating to the rules on whether foreigners can acquire immovable property in the European Union countries. The three authors of this paper, researchers at the *Institute of Comparative Law*, were entrusted with conducting this research and delivering a paper on the results of the research within one week. This paper consists of four parts: the first one presents more thoroughly the task assigned to the researchers; the second one describes the methodology the authors had to apply in order to accomplish the assignment and to overcome the challenges described in the third part whilst the fourth part includes recommendations for the improvement of legal transparency of national legislation by, in the first place, establishing the centralized on-line legal database.

THE TASK

The task that the researchers faced was a twofold challenge:

- to find the best way in which to respond to a relatively vague request,
- to deliver high-quality, up-to-date and reliable information within a tight timeframe.

In order to be able to adequately respond to the second challenge, the researchers had to concretize the request and to make sure that the research methodology enabled them to conduct the research with speed and accuracy. Based on previous experiences in conducting similar research, the researchers agreed that, the countries of the European Union to be covered by the research had to include both the “old” members, and “new” member states, more specifically, the states that were formerly, just like Serbia, under the communist/socialist regime and that, consequently, may have harbored the same reservations towards the possibility of foreigners acquiring immovable property in their country. In addition, it was decided that research should include one country that used to be a part of the Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia, with which Serbia shares common legal and economic history.

As mentioned above, the request of the government institution was imprecise, and gave little or no guidance as to whether the research should cover every existing form of limitation on rights *in rem* over immovable property for foreigners, or only the issue of whether foreign nationals may acquire ownership on immovable property in the given countries. A brief overview of relevant legislation has shown that the restrictions related to the rights foreigners can acquire on immovable property can be coupled with restrictions that are not commonly the subject of private international law, a body of national law regulating relationships between individuals in an international context, which was expected to be the primary normative instrument governing the topic of research, in addition to the norms of the countries’ constitutions. It was unclear whether this wider body of various national laws should be analyzed and if so, to what extent.

Due to the time-restriction of the research, an executive decision needed to be made to focus primarily on investigating the norms regulating the rights of foreign nationals and, specifically, of non-EU nationals – both natural and legal persons – to acquire ownership on immovable property either *inter vivos* or *mortis causa* in national laws and in EU law. Namely, even though the EU does not provide a detailed regulatory framework relating to this issue, the principles the EU is based on – the free movement of persons, goods, services and capital – and EU citizenship have resulted in the abolition of restrictions on the possibility for an EU member-state national to acquire ownership on an immovable in another EU country. Since EU legislation was the general and overarching regulatory framework for all the countries that were included in the research, it therefore had to be briefly elaborated on. In addition, special care was taken to investigate whether in the countries covered by the research there were some transitional periods following their accession to the EU related to the subject of research and if so, how long they lasted and how they were implemented.

Where applicable, it was also agreed that the research should cover restrictions related to national security concerns and, also, where applicable, the research should provide an overview of the benefits or incentives related to acquisition of property by foreign nationals, as these were restrictions and incentives that directly affect the majority of transactions concerning immovable property *inter vivos* or *mortis causa*.⁸ The researchers decided not to investigate the restrictions on disposal of agricultural land and restrictions related to environmental concerns in detail.

The restricted time-frame for research had also mandated some other decisions. When selecting the EU member states that were to be included in the research, particular care needed to be taken of the official language or languages of that country. Namely, previous experience has shown that the majority of European states largely refrain from the practice of translating their legislation into English or another major European language. Even when certain pieces of legislation are translated, the translation should be taken with a certain degree of reservation, given that many of available translations are not official, or are not updated.⁹ The limitations of the available web-based sources of law will be discussed in detail later in the text.

It is needed for a researcher to be able to read and interpret the national legislations of the countries included in the research in the source language, that is, in the official language of that country. In the case of the specific research that is used as a case study in this paper, this meant that the three researchers have had to concretize the task by adding an additional criterion of their language proficiency in the selection of the countries to be included in the research.

Consequently, the following countries were included in the research:

- Germany,
- Hungary,

8 For instance, in Spain, the acquisition of immovable property of a certain value provides a beneficial treatment for the foreign national who has purchased the property in acquiring the right of residence in the country. For more information see: Lopez Azcona, 2015.

9 One of the most comprehensive databases including links to national legislation in official languages and their translations to English language is Lexadin (The world Law Guide website).

- Slovenia,
- Bulgaria,
- Romania,
- Finland,
- The Netherlands,
- Spain.

In addition, all three researchers have already conducted online research including the legislations of these countries and were familiar with the available databases of their national laws, which was also an important element that helped ensure that the research would be completed within the set timeframe.

THE METHODOLOGY

The research methodology was predominantly influenced by the time constraints, a lack of web-based primary sources as well as by the scope and character of the entrusted task. The research was planned to be predominantly based on primary sources of law, more specifically on national laws, in their source language and where available, in English language. In this case, the research consequently implied a sometimes rather tedious task of finding the up-to-date versions of national constitutions, laws, secondary case laws and codifications and singling out the relevant norms across a rather broad set of regulations – the law of obligations, property law, law of inheritance, special laws governing the issues of national security, investment laws, special laws regulating the rights of foreign nationals and transitional periods set in relevant accessions agreements. However, access to updated and reliable national legislations was limited, and the researchers also had to rely on secondary sources, including but not limited to relevant academic publications, expert analyses and commentaries available online. These sources proved to be a very important tool as they helped the researchers in both initial locating and further understanding the law.

The research was conducted primarily for a practical purpose, as an overview of applicable legislation in a number of countries, and the focus was therefore on presenting the legislative solutions, country by country. The researchers took the position that this would be the most informative way of presenting the research results – however, the research did include a conclusion, which was made using the comparative law method, on the general trends related to the restrictions imposed on foreign nationals and, specifically, on non-EU nationals, with relation to the acquisition of ownership on immovable property in eight EU countries.

In conducting the analysis, the research team planned to primarily utilize the comparative law method, the exegetical method, but had also planned to resort to the legal-historical method and the interdisciplinary method. Following the dominant approach in comparative law, which states that it is important to look at a broader social context to understand the developments of legal rules, the researchers also applied the interdisciplinary method, so called “law in context approach” (Bell, 2011, p.170; Watkins, & Burton, 2015, p. 5). Putting law in context is necessary in order to identify the real extent of differences and similarities between

various systems. The interdisciplinary method is helpful in assessing whether specific foreign legal solution could be successfully implemented in the respective national system. Further, this model is used as an interpretative tool to provide understanding of vague, incomplete or even missing translations of relevant pieces of legislations. Finally, the researchers anticipated they would apply the legal-historical method to help them identify the developments in the regulatory treatment of the right of foreigners to dispose of immovable property and the current trends on the EU level.

The researchers took as a starting point the officially verified summaries of EU legislation (available on the EU website), which were linked to the topic of purchasing property in other EU countries. However, due to the fact that the scope of the entrusted task was focused on the restrictions applicable to foreign nationals and, specifically, non EU nationals, the available EU summaries were not of key importance for their study. Namely, the real property law is to date one of the few legal branches which have remained predominantly within the scope of national law, and in which differences among national laws remain greatest.

Therefore, in performing their research researchers had to focus on online sources of national laws of the eight reviewed countries.

CHALLENGES

As already indicated, the researchers faced a number of challenges in conducting this research. More specifically, the problem of a lack of available primarily legal sources had adversely affected each stage of the study.

During the preliminary stage, the scope of the research was tailored in line with the available sources and personal researcher skills - the researchers tried to overcome the language-related issues, by adding an additional criterion of their language proficiency in the selection of the countries which were supposed to be reviewed. However, this did not fully eliminate the problem of lack of official English translations of national legislations or summaries of national legislation available online. Namely, even though most of the countries covered by the research publish their legislations online in their source language, the subject-matter of the research is not always found in laws that are the "usual suspects" for regulating it. Variations across different national systems mandate a broad and comprehensive search and also a sound general knowledge of the legal system of the given country - whether it has a civil code or it regulates civil matters in numerous specific laws, whether there are some other specificities related to investment promotion, defense or special status of certain categories of foreign or domestic nationals (e.g. foreign nationals of domestic origin, as was the case in Slovenia, or national defense related concerns, like in Spain).

In addition, certain notions from foreign legal acts cannot be easily understood due to specific meaning and position they have in the relevant national legal system, regardless of researchers' language skills. In order to understand them the researchers have to look at the broader context so as to determine the accurate meaning of the given terms, which would be in accordance with the general

framework they belong in¹⁰. In this regard, some authors claim that the researcher must avoid "the great danger of legal imperialism" that assumes that the "other systems" share the same understanding of a given term; even "law" itself (Watkins, 2015, p. 5). This is a challenge which comparative lawyers face on a regular basis, and where official translations or official summaries of national legislation in English language provide precious guidance; however, availability of both is an exception rather than a rule.

The subsequent stages of the research also influenced by the limited access to primary sources and some of the envisaged methods, such as the comparative law method and the exegetical method, could not be fully implemented. Instead, a much stronger reliance was made on the interdisciplinary method, which implied review of the secondary sources of law.

In a nutshell, the problem of the unavailability of updated, complete and official legal translations of summaries of national legislations was the major challenge for producing quality research. Namely, although, nowadays (with a widespread usage of Internet) there are numerous online legal databases containing English translations of legal acts, most of them do not provide high credibility¹¹.

Firstly, most of the reviewed online free access bilingual databases do offer unofficial and non-consolidated versions of statutes, while excluding pieces of secondary legislation and relevant case law. On the other hand, official versions of both primary and secondary legislation can be found in official gazettes in the official language of the respective states, which are available online through the services that are, in most cases, fee-based and not bilingual¹². However, they are not of key relevance for the comparative law research, as it is hard to imagine that comparative researchers are equipped with such broad language skills needed for comprehensive comparative research.

Furthermore, while some of the reviewed free-access legal databases are run by specific national state authorities (government authorities, ministries or national assemblies) and refer exclusively to the specific national system¹³, others are created by private companies¹⁴ or international organizations (or sometimes donor-

10 For example, German law recognizes so called maximum amount mortgage, which cannot be found in other legal systems. In order to understand its principals, one has to be familiar not only with legislation concerning this legal institute, but also legislation related to land charge and their correlation.

11 For the comprehensive overview of legal & law-related research databases (see: Harvard Law School website).

12 For instance, services in Germany are Makrolog- Recht für Deutschland, juris, beck-online, Legios, Das Deutsche Bundesrecht, while in Netherlands there is Opmaat published by SDU (see: OpMaat Website).

13 For instance, Germany and Finland (Finlex database is run by the Ministry of Justice and contains consolidated statutes (see: Act on the Monitoring of Foreigners' Corporate Acquisitions in Finland). On the other hand, Dutch (see: National database Tweede Kamer). Romanian and Bulgarian national legal bases (see: Chamber of Deputies website; National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria website) are run by respective National Assemblies and do not contain integrated legal acts. Similarly, the Slovenian official database, hosted by the Slovenian National Assembly, does not include consolidated versions of laws, whilst the Spanish database, hosted by the official journal, does include some consolidated laws and codes.

14 Lexadin.

funded organizations)¹⁵ and endeavor to publish English translations of primary and secondary sources of law.

While free-access national databases are in most cases available in the source languages the international legal databases are usually available only in English¹⁶. However, the common feature and, at the same, the major drawback, of both types of free access legal databases is that they do not encompass either bylaws or relevant cases. It is quite difficult to discern how national courts apply relevant national legislation in the absence of the translated pieces of secondary legislation and relevant court decisions and commentaries, and hence, contextual and exegetical methods cannot be applied or are very difficult to apply.

In addition, even when these databases occasionally do offer official translations, these are often neither up to date nor consolidated, which undermines the reliability and credibility of the databases. Moreover, both types of free access databases - the so - called world law and national law guides - exceptionally contain summaries and commentaries of relevant legislation (on some topics), which are useful tools for understanding the scope of any given law, the subject -matter it regulates and provide an overview of the regulatory solutions contained therein, unfortunately, they are usually out of date and again, seldom constitute a reliable source. The one exception in this respect is the Summaries of EU legislation, as published on the Eur-Lex webpage (website EUR-Lex, Access to European Union law).

In the pursuit of updated information and materials, the researchers had to resort to the websites or blogs of legal practitioners, which are becoming increasingly popular and which have indeed constituted a useful source of summary information on national legislation on the topic of research¹⁷. However, the information included therein is not officially verified, unlike the case with the summaries of EU legislation on the EU website, and therefore needs to be taken with caution. In addition, although these blogs do contain relevant commentaries, they do not contain official translations of national legislation nor case laws, and therefore cannot constitute the only source of information for producing sound legal analysis.

15 Specialized databases are created, inter alia, by the Council of Europe initiative covering some other areas of law and policy. For instance, information service named "Compendium" deals with cultural policies and trends in Europe (see: Compendium Cultural Policies and trends in Europe). Also, Legislationline (see: Legislationline website) was created in 2002 to assist OSCE participating States in bringing their legislation into line with relevant international human-rights standards. Legislationline is available in English and in Russian.

16 The exceptions in this respect are national databases of Finland and Germany. For instance, the Finlex is an online database of up-to-date legislative and other judicial information of Finland, which is owned by the Finland's Ministry of Justice. Although, most of the acts are only available in Finnish and Swedish, some translations of Finnish acts and decrees are also available in English (see: Act on the Monitoring of Foreigners' Corporate Acquisitions in Finland). In other countries, such as Slovenia, laws and summary information and/or summaries of legislation are available in English on the webpages of line ministries or competent state institutions i.e. the Ministry of Justice or the National Bank of Slovenia.

17 See for instance more about the Lexology website (Fratila, 2014), the International Comparative Legal Studies website (see: International Comparative Legal Studies website), the International Bar Association website (see: International Bar Association website), the Lawyers Bulgaria website (see: Lawyers Bulgaria website), the ID law firm website (see: Purchase of agricultural land in Bulgaria, n.d.), the KPMG website (see: Investment in Bulgaria, 2015) and the PWC website (see: PWC website).

Table 1

An overview of the availability of legislation and summary information in source language and English language

Country	Primary legislation available in source language	Official translations Constitution and legislation available (English and other languages)	Legislation governing the topic of research available in English	Official sources – summaries and outlines of applicable legislation available	Unofficial sources – translations, summaries, outlines of applicable legislation available
Bulgaria	Yes Available national legislation is updated, but legal acts are not consolidated. They are available at the National Parliament website.	Only the Constitution is available in English at the National Parliament website.	Some pieces of it are available but most of them are not updated (for instance the Ownership Act (see: The world Law Guide website)	Yes, although not fully updated (see: Investbulgaria agency website).	Yes (see: ID Law Office website; KMPG website; Real Estate 2016, etc.)
Finland	Yes, available at the FINLEX online database owned by the Finland's Ministry of Justice.	Only unofficial are available: The FINLEX database contains around 600 full-text unofficial translations of Finnish acts, while for the rest it provides reference information on the availability of a translation.	Only some relevant pieces such as the Act on Right of Foreigners and Certain Legal Entities to Own and Posses Real Property and Shares no. 219/1939.	They are not updated.	Yes, but mostly not updated. The updated one is available at: "2015 Investment Climate Statement – Finland".
Germany	Yes Updated primary legislation is available online at the Federal Ministry of Justice's website. These are not the official versions. These can be found only as paper versions of the Official Gazette.	On the same website translation of the Constitution and several laws can be found.	Legislation related to this research topic is available because it is regulated in German Civil Code BGBI. I S. 3719), which can be found both in English and German.	Closer information on every law can be found at the website of the Federal Ministry in charge of the certain issue. Bundesministerien (see: Die Bundesregierung website).	Yes, but most of them do not contain updated summaries (see: Buying a house or apartment in Germany; Properties 24 website; Buying a Germany property (n.d.).

Country	Primary legislation available in source language	Official translations Constitution and legislation available (English and other languages)	Legislation governing the topic of research available in English	Official sources – summaries and outlines of applicable legislation available	Unofficial sources – translations, summaries, outlines of applicable legislation available
Hungary	Yes. Primary legislation is available in Hungarian at the National legislative Database and at the Website of the Official Gazette.	Translation of the Constitution and some laws can be found at The World Law Guide but these are not the official versions (see: Legislation Hungary)	Not. Only short summaries could be found.	No.	Yes, some summaries can be found in English (Köztársaság, n.d.)
Spain	Yes. Primary legislation is available at www.boe.es . Some pieces of legislation are consolidated.	Constitution available in English	No.	Some are available at websites of line ministries.	Summaries on some topics available in both Spanish and English. Unofficial translations of laws and secondary legislation available on websites of various associations and academia.
Slovenia	Yes. Primary legislation is available at www.dz-rs.si . Legislation is not consolidated.	Official translations of selected laws available on websites of line ministries and competent state institutions.	No.	Yes, either in source language only or in source language and in English. Detailed information on purchase of immovable by foreigners available in Slovenian only.	Summaries were available in both source language and English.
The Netherlands	The updated laws are available at the Dutch House of Representative's website, although amendments are not integrated. There is a free internet service (Rechtspraak.nl) which contains selected full-text judgments in Dutch.	Selective translations of legal acts are provided at various websites (such as database of OSCE participating states and FAOLEX members) which are not fully focused on real estate issues. Some of them do not constitute official translations.	Only exceptionally.	Selective available official summaries in English (for instance on notaries) (see: Notaries in the Netherlands: legal professionals, n. d.).	There are a few periodicals however, which publish English summaries of case law. However, access to them is limited. Also there are some not updated summaries in English which are available at various free access websites (Expatica website; European University Institute website).

Country	Primary legislation available in source language	Official translations Constitution and legislation available (English and other languages)	Legislation governing the topic of research available in English	Official sources – summaries and outlines of applicable legislation available	Unofficial sources – translations, summaries, outlines of applicable legislation available
Romania	Yes.	Only the Constitution is available in English at the National Parliament website.	No.	The summaries of case law are available in Romanian.	The summaries and outlines of applicable legislation in English are inter alia available at the websites of various associations and law firms, such as Lexology (see: Lexology website), International Comparative Legal Guides (see: OCLG website), Herzfeld & Rubin (see: The Romanian Digest, n.d.).

Source: Author`s research.

When it comes to case law, some guidance on national jurisprudence and positions taken by national courts can be found in the jurisprudence of the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the European Union, and in academic papers, but such information is also often out of date or incomplete.

The following table is an overview of the availability of legislation and summary information in source language and English language, created by the authors in the course of the research.

LESSONS LEARNED AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the broad language skills of the researchers, with regards to some countries, such as Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Netherlands, their findings were mainly based on updated data coming from reliable websites and blogs which were created by legal practitioners and other private sector representatives. On the other hand, in these countries, the websites run by the public authorities were not sufficiently up to date to constitute a useful source of information on national legislations.

In other countries, such as Spain, Slovenia and Finland, the websites of public authorities were up to date and transparent, but secondary sources, such as academic papers or summary information on professional blogs, had to be used to identify the entire body of legislation applicable to the subject-matter investigated.

Comparative research has also shown that although, as a general rule, statutes and their respective amendments must be published accordingly, the consolidated statutes are quite rarely available on websites of public authorities¹⁸ - naturally, this complicates research, but also the provision of legal services across different countries. One needs to be well acquainted with the laws of every country and regularly keep track of any updates, and at the same time, always keep the initial version of the law at hand. This is in stark contrast to the publication practices of the EU, where EurLex website regularly publishes up to date consolidated versions of EU regulatory texts. Moreover, in the countries covered by the research, the websites of public authorities are only exceptionally bilingual, or the information provided in English was not comprehensive or complete, as shown in the table. For instance, the webpage of the Slovenian Ministry of Justice provides comprehensive information on the rights of foreign nationals to purchase immovable property in Slovenia - only in Slovenian, whilst the English version of the webpage does not provide such information¹⁹.

On the other hand, the intensive engagement of legal practitioners through blogs and law firm websites clearly demonstrate their common interest for enhancing the level of legal transparency across Europe.

The apparent imbalance of contribution between private and public sector actors when it comes to making available useful information on legislation related

18 The term "consolidated statute" refers to a version of the statute which incorporates all of its amendments into the original act.

19 Compare.

to the acquisition of immovable property by a foreign national in English language, the modern-day *lingua franca*, is a bit surprising and as such requires a special attention.

It seems that mere existence of official gazettes in the source languages undermined the efforts of government authorities to further improve the internal transparency, more specifically free online availability of national legislation in source languages. Similarly, to the so called "internal" transparency, we find that the "external" transparency is also underdeveloped in the reviewed European countries, as national authorities are not motivated to improve free access to officially verified English translations of national sources of law, or do not assume that improved access to updated, consolidated translations of regulatory acts does fall under their mandate²⁰.

In this specific research, it was clear that in order to strengthen and improve investment climates, national governments should improve access to information on the conditions for the acquisition of immovable properties by foreigners on their national territories. The enhanced legal certainty in this regard would thus boost investments in national real estate markets. This remark concerning lack of online availability of national legislations is to be applied to other areas of law. Relying on websites, blogs or academic papers are to be regarded as auxiliary tools when conducting a research, while mainly focusing on access to national legislation translated to English. Besides, we consider the lack of promotion of national legislative solutions to be detrimental *to the pursuit of foreign policy objectives* of any European state, as well as to their economic interests. Therefore the following lines are going to be dedicated to recommendations aimed at establishing or improving access to national legislation online

CONCLUSION

Apparently countries of Central and East Europe can largely benefit from the promotion of national legislative solutions as best practice examples on European and global level. An excellent example of such a practice is the Slovak National Convention on the European Union, a platform for society-wide debate on the EU accession process, which was systematically promoted by the Slovak Government and was subsequently adopted by the number of European countries, such as Serbia, Montenegro, Albania, Ukraine, and Moldavia; even a regional Convention has been set up (Knežević Bojović, 2015, pp.131-144). The Polish fiscal receipt lottery is used as a good practice example and a starting point for developing a similar lottery, envisaged in the Serbian National Program for Countering Shadow Economy.²¹ As mentioned before, countries that are in various stages of the EU accession process are in constant demand of feasible and applicable models for incorporating EU legislation into their national legal systems and also in feasible

20 For the purpose of this article the term internal transparency refers to free online availability of a national legislation in a source language, while the term external transparency refers to its free online availability in English.

21 Nacionalni program za suzbijanje sive ekonomije, adopted on December 18, 2015 by the Government of Serbia.

legislative and practical models for boosting their economies and creating a more business-enabling environment. Successful regulatory solutions may well become one country's sound foreign policy objective.

The creation of a centralized database, including translations of regulatory acts and also summaries of legislation, similar to the summary of EU legislation, would enhance the "external" legal transparency in Europe and consequently facilitate cooperation among legal practitioners in Europe and also their free movement. More specifically, law firms having recourse to this database would significantly develop their cooperation with foreign clients and foreign law firms in general, as this database would provide them with initial guidance and directions to start with building the future strategy.

Although some may be concerned that such a specialized comprehensive database would reduce the need for providing lawyers' services, we find these arguments to be unfounded. Only trained lawyers will remain competent enough to correctly interpret and apply available legal norms, while others cannot take full advantage of them, given their lack of needed expertise.

Therefore, the proposed centralized on-line legal database should contain official translations of primary sources of law, as well as translations of commentaries related to national laws of European countries. Providing free access to the anticipated on-line specialized database would have multiple beneficial effects on public authorities, legal practitioners as well as on broader audience. This database should be modelled in accordance with the Eur-Lex database in order to provide both translated verified primary sources of laws as well as respective commentaries. However, contrary to Eur-Lex, the proposed database should refer to all European countries, including but not limited to the EU member states and also it should contain bilingual versions of their national legislations and related commentaries. This, in fact, would be a logical extension of the N-Lex database which is currently being built on the EU website (see: website EUR-Lex, Access to European Union law).

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