

**INPUT
TO THE 2025 ANNUAL REPORT ON THE RULE OF LAW**

**29 January 2025
City of Sofia**

List of abbreviations used

ACC	Anticorruption Commission
AFCOS	Protection of the European Union Financial Interests Directorate
AMoI	Academy of the Ministry of Interior
APIA	Access to Public Information Act
ASA	Amendment and Supplement Act
BCP	BorderCheck Points
BNR	Bulgarian National Radio
BNT	Bulgarian National Television
BPGD	Border Police General Directorate
CA	The Customs Agency
CAC	Commission on Appraisal and Competitions
CACIAF	Commission for Anti-Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture
CC	Criminal Code
CCA	Counter Corruption Act
CCIAF	Counter Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture Act
CECBM	Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Magistrates
CM	Council of Ministers
CPC	Civil Procedure Code
CPD	Commission for Protection against Discrimination
CRB	Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria
CC	Constitutional Court
EC	European Commission
ECA	Electronic Communications Act
EJTN	European Judicial Training Network
ID	Inspectorate Directorate
ISD	Internal Security Directorate
ISJC	Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council
JA	Judiciary Act
JMWJSC	Judicial Map, Workload and Judicial Statistics Commission
LAA	Legal Assistance Act
LMDPOWADMSP	Law on the mandatory deposit of printed and other works and on the announcement of distributors and media service providers
LNA	Law on Normative Acts
LRT	Law of Radio and Television
MC	Ministry of Culture
MF	Ministry of Finance
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MH	Ministry of Health
MJ	Ministry of Justice
MoI	Ministry Of Interior
NA	National Assembly
NHIF	National Health Insurance Fund
NIJ	National Institute of Justice
NIS	National Investigation Service

NPGD	National Police General Directorate
NRA	National Revenue Agency
NRRP	National Resilience and Recovery Plan
PADVA	Protection Against Domestic Violence Act
PPA	Public Procurement Agency
PPA.	Public Procurement Act
SAC	Supreme Administrative Court
SANS	State Agency for National Security
SAPO	Supreme Administrative Prosecutor's Office
SCC	Supreme Court of Cassation
SCPO	Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office
SJC	Supreme Judicial Council
SJCP	Supreme Judicial Council Plenum
SPC	Supreme Prosecutor's Council
UAAFA	Unlawfully Acquired Assets Forfeiture Act
UIISC	Uniform Information System of the Courts

I. Justice System

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the justice system (if applicable):

Recommendation Take steps to adapt the relevant legal framework to avoid the long-term secondment of judges to fill vacant posts, taking into account European standards on secondment of judges.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 1, provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation

1. By Decision No. 13 of July 26, 2024 on constitutional case No. 1/2024 of the Constitutional Court, the changes in Art. 23; Art. 84, point 16 (in the part "respectively by the Supreme Prosecutorial Council"); Art. 91b; Art. 99, para. 7; Art. 110; Art. 126, paras. 2 and 3; Art. 129; Art. 130; Art. 130a; Art. 130b; Art. 130c, point 1; Art. 132a, para. 4, second sentence; Art. 133 (in the part "The Supreme Prosecutorial Council") and Art. 150, para. 3 of the Constitution, as introduced by § 1, 4, 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (SG, issue 106 of 22.12.2023) are declared unconstitutional as invalid from the date of entry into force of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (SG, issue 106 of 22.12.2023). The indicated constitutional provisions retain their wording prior to entry into force of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (SG, issue 106 of 22.12.2023).

The above decision rejected the requests for establishing the unconstitutionality of the changes in Art. 93, para. 2; Art. 117, para. 2; Art. 126, para. 1; Art. 127, points 5 and 6; Art. 128; Art. 130c, point 4; Art. 132a, para. 4, first sentence and Art. 150, para. 2 of the Constitution, as introduced by § 6, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19 and 21, as well as § 22 and 23 (transitional and final provisions) of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (SG, issue 106 of 22.12.2023)

2. By Order of the Minister of Justice, a working group was formed to ensure compliance of the Judiciary Act with the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, promulgated, SG, issue 106 of 2023 and with Decision No. 13 of 26 July 2024 on constitutional case No. 1/2024; to consider the proposals received in connection with working groups on draft Laws on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act on competitions and attestation, secondment; disciplinary proceedings; e-justice.

On 19 December 2024, a draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act¹ was published for public consultations for a period of 20 days.

The proposed amendments and supplements to the Judiciary Act aim to optimize the legal framework in the following main areas:

- Assurance of compliance of the Judiciary Act with the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (SG, issue 106 of 2023) and Decision of the Constitutional Court No. 13 of 26 July 2024 in constitutional case No. 1/2024.
- Clarification of the provisions on competition procedures to ensure timely regular competitions for promotion in order to avoid long-term secondment of judges to fill vacant positions, taking into account European standards for the secondment of judges;
- Improvement of the regulation on attestation;
- Progress on legislative amendments aimed at improving the functioning of the

¹ Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act, available at <https://www.strategy.bg/publicconsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=8785>

Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council (ISJC) and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving the judiciary in the selection of its members;

- Changes in the activities of conducting checks on the integrity and conflict of interest of judges, prosecutors and investigators, their property declarations, as well as for establishing actions that harm the prestige of the judiciary, and those related to the violation of the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators;

- Increasing the effectiveness of the training activities of the National Institute of Justice, reflecting the accumulated experience, the challenges facing European judicial training and the increasing requirements for those working in the judiciary;

- Introduction of real and full-fledged e-justice, as well as facilitating access to justice.

The draft is available at the Website of the Ministry of Justice at <https://justice.government.bg/home/index/9a1c0da6-6c6d-4148-81e2-afabbed5ff3d>

On 5 April 2024, a draft Act amending and supplementing the Code of Administrative Procedure² was published for public consultation.

The proposed amendments relate to the following areas:

- compliance with the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 24 November 2022 in case C-289/21, IG, according to which the principle of effectiveness, enshrined in Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, must be interpreted as precluding a procedural rule of a Member State under which — where a national legal provision challenged by an action for annulment in court on the ground that it is contrary to Union law is repealed by a subsequent provision and therefore ceases to have any future effects — it is assumed that the subject-matter of the challenge has ceased to exist and that there is therefore no basis for a ruling, without the parties having previously had the opportunity to state their possible interest in continuing the proceedings and without such interest having been taken into account.

In this regard, changes are proposed in the procedure for challenging general administrative acts and subordinate normative administrative acts. Even after the act is annulled in the course of its challenge, the case should continue, with the court exercising control over legality, in which case it may declare the act null and void, establish the illegality of the act in whole or in part, or reject the challenge (new Art. 182b). The complainant may also claim damages and expenses.

- the creation of a framework that would provide for the optimization of the work and efficiency of administrative bodies and the judicial system in the process of introducing digitalization in justice.

In implementation of the measure "Entry into force of legislative amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code regulating the legal framework for e-justice in administrative cases (Q4/2024)", reform 1 "Accessible, effective and predictable justice" of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, proposals for legislative amendments to the Administrative Procedure Code have been prepared, which would provide an opportunity for:

- the judicial act to be drawn up as an electronic document in the unified registry database and to be signed with a qualified electronic signature;

- exercise of procedural rights and performance of procedural actions in electronic form by the parties to judicial proceedings by filing administrative documents in electronic form through protected identification;

- holding remote virtual open sessions.

The scope of persons obliged to submit a request to the administration in electronic form has been determined. A legal obligation to maintain the administrative file in electronic form

² Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code, available at <https://www.strategy.bg/publicconsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=8272>

has been introduced. The methods of electronic service have been specified.

The changes proposed through the draft of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code are aimed at ensuring the right of access to court, a low percentage of costs for citizens, legal entities and legal practitioners and improving the level of awareness by ensuring a secure and protected communication environment.

Recommendation Progress on draft legislative amendments aimed at improving the functioning of the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving the judiciary in the selection of its members.

Please, see the information under the previous recommendation.

The amendments to Article 132a, para. 4 of the Constitution provided that the Chief Inspector and the Inspectors may be re-elected to the same position for only one more term.

According to Art. 132a, para. 2 and 3 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Chief Inspector and the Inspectors are elected by the National Assembly with a two-thirds majority of the members of parliament for a term of five and a term of four years, respectively.

The draft Judiciary Act proposes a procedure for nominating candidates for Chief Inspector and Inspectors, which would ensure the inclusion of the judiciary. The bill provides that proposals for candidates for Chief Inspector and Inspectors shall be made no later than two months prior the election before the specialized standing committee of the National Assembly. Proposals will be made by the members of the parliament, the general assembly of judges of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court, and the prosecutors of the Supreme Prosecutor's Office and the investigators of the National Investigation Service at a general assembly.

The envisaged possibility for no less than half of the Inspectors to be elected from the candidates nominated by the judicial authorities will guarantee the independence of the ISJC to a greater extent, avoiding the risk of political influence, and on the other hand, the institutional capacity of the ISJC will be strengthened.

The envisaged changes in Chapter Nine, Section Ia, regarding checks on the asset declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators aim to unify the details of the declarations of assets and interests that magistrates submit with the declarations submitted by other persons holding public positions, regulated by the Anti-Corruption Act.

The draft law includes proposals repeatedly advocated by the ISJC for changes to the regulatory framework regarding:

- The selection of inspectors in the ISJC (Article 44 of the Judiciary Act)

The most significant proposal in this regard is that more than half of the members of the ISJC (the Inspector General and the inspectors) should be persons proposed by the Judiciary. The proposal stems from recommendations in a number of reports of the European Commission on the rule of law, including the 2024 Report, as well as those expressed by the Venice Commission, to “make progress on legislative amendments aimed at improving the functioning of the ISJC and avoiding the risk of political influence, in particular by involving the Judiciary in the selection of its members”. According to the recommendations of the two commissions, more than half of the members of the ISJC should be persons proposed by the Judiciary.

The draft law develops a detailed procedure for nominating candidates for the Inspector General and inspectors, which would ensure the involvement of the judiciary. It is envisaged that proposals for the Inspector General and for inspectors will be made no later than two months before the election before the specialized standing committee of the National Assembly. Proposals shall be made by the Members of Parliament, the General Assembly of judges of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court, the prosecutors of the Supreme Prosecutor's Office and the investigators of the National Investigation Service at a General Assembly. The six times larger number of candidates for the Inspector General and the three times larger number of candidates for inspectors from the judicial authorities will enable the Members of Parliament to make a well-founded choice, given their powers under the Constitution, and to select those of them who most fully meet the requirements for holding the position. In this way, on the one hand, the independence of the ISJC will be largely guaranteed, avoiding the risk of political influence, and on the other hand, the institutional capacity of the Inspectorate will be strengthened.

- The so-called "deontological prevention"

An amendment is envisaged in Art. 37, para. 9 of the Judiciary Act, according to which the professional ethics committees of the two colleges of the Supreme Judicial Council (the SJC) shall prepare opinions on ethical issues arising from the application of the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Judges and the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators. The proposed amendment is an expression of the position of the ISJC that in implementing the state policy for the prevention of integrity violations, the ISJC and the SJC must cooperate. With regard to the Inspectorate, with a previous legislative amendment in Art. 54, para. 1, p. 19 of the Judiciary Act (SG, No. 84 of 2023) provided for the power to summarize good and bad practices in the field of ethical behaviour of Bulgarian magistrates in connection with the integrity checks conducted by the ISJC, on the one hand, and the relevant international and European standards, and good practices in other countries in this area, on the other hand. The information is provided to the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), which is the deciding body on the checks conducted by the ISJC, and the professional ethics commissions of the judicial and prosecutorial colleges practically examine the moral qualities of candidates in competitions for positions in the judicial authorities, of candidates for administrative heads and for deputies of administrative heads.

The creation of a system for deontological prevention, in which magistrates will have the opportunity to raise ethical issues before the ethics committees of the SJC colleges, in order to be provided with deontological assistance, following the example of the existing mechanism in France, will contribute to the prevention of identifying and counteracting violations of the rules of integrity and ethical behaviour of Bulgarian magistrates.

- Verification of asset declarations of judges, prosecutors and investigators (Chapter Nine, Section Ia of the Judiciary Act)

Amendments are provided for in Chapter Nine, Section Ia of the Judiciary Act in order to unify the circumstances subject to declaration in the asset and interest declarations that magistrates submit to the ISJC with those in the declarations submitted by other persons holding public office, regulated in the Law on Countering Corruption, the thresholds for declaration and establishment of non-compliance, and the obligation to submit an asset declaration by dismissed judges, prosecutors and investigators one year after the final declaration (Art. 175c, para. 1, point 4 of the Judiciary Act), analogous to the regulation in the Law on Countering Corruption (Art. 52, para. 1).

- Checks for integrity and conflict of interest of judges, prosecutors and investigators, as well as for establishing actions that harm the prestige of the judiciary, and those related to violating the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators (Chapter Nine, Section Ib of the Judiciary Act)

A new version of Art. 175k of the Judiciary Act has been proposed, which specifies the definitions of integrity violations - the subject of checks under Chapter Nine, Section Ib of the Judiciary Act, so as to achieve greater clarity regarding the components of the violations.

- Checks of applications against violation of the right to consider and decide the case within a reasonable time (Chapter Three "a" of the Judiciary Act)

Amendments and additions have been proposed in Art. 60c, para. 4 and 5 of the Judiciary Act, which regulate a more detailed procedure for notifying applicants of irregularities in applications for delayed justice, considered under the procedure of Chapter Three "a" of the Judiciary Act, similar to the procedure for notifying magistrates of the elimination of established inconsistencies in property declarations (Art. 175g, para. 2 of the Judiciary Act). The current regulation under Chapter Three "a" of the Judiciary Act provides that in the event of irregularities in the submitted application, the applicants shall be notified and if they do not eliminate the irregularities, the application shall be rejected. Since, under the procedure of the CPC, acts of the Minister of Justice for the rejection of applications have been annulled by the court on the grounds that the applicants were not notified of the elimination of the irregularities, it is necessary to provide for the security of the delivery of this notification. The proposal is to publish the notification on the ISJC website for a period of no less than 7 days, after which the notification will be considered delivered, and if the applicant does not eliminate the irregularities, the application together with the annexes will be rejected.

Regarding the accountability of judges, prosecutors and investigators, including the disciplinary liability of magistrates and compliance with ethical rules, in 2024 the ISJC took the following measures:

1. On the basis of Art. 312, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act, 15 proposals were made to the SJC's judicial panel to initiate disciplinary proceedings to impose disciplinary penalty on judges for established violations in the movement and/or completion of cases - systematic failure to comply with the deadlines provided for in the procedural laws, as well as for action or inaction that unjustifiably delays the proceedings (Art. 307, para. 3, points 1 and 2 of the Judiciary Act).

On all proposals under Art. 312, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act, 15 disciplinary proceedings have been initiated, of which as of 15.01.2025:

- 13 proceedings have not been concluded;
- 2 proceedings have been concluded, with the panel of judges imposing a disciplinary penalty under Art. 308, para. 1, point 2 of the Judiciary Act in one of them, namely "reduction of the basic salary by 20 percent for a period of 1 year" for disciplinary violations committed under Art. 307, para. 3, points 1 and 2 of the Judiciary Act, and imposing a disciplinary penalty under Art. 308, para. 1, point 1 of the Judiciary Act in the other, namely "observation" for disciplinary violations committed under Art. 307, para. 3, points 1 and 2 of the Judiciary Act.

2. On the basis of Art. 312, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act for integrity violations, 3 proposals have been made:

- the prosecutorial college of the SJC to initiate disciplinary proceedings to impose a disciplinary penalty on a prosecutor for a violation under art. 307, para. 3, point 3, in conjunction with art. 175k, para. 4 of the Judiciary Act and art. 175i, para. 1 of the Judiciary Act and to initiate proceedings to establish a conflict of interest under art. 175i, para. 1 of the Judiciary Act.

Based on the proposal made under Art. 312, Para. 1, Point 3 of the Judiciary Act, general proceedings were initiated to impose a disciplinary penalty for a committed disciplinary violation under Art. 307, Para. 3, Point 3 in conjunction with Art. 175k, Para. 4 and to establish a conflict of interest under Art. 175i, Para. 1 of the Judiciary Act. By decision under Point 6 of Protocol No. 28 of 17.07.2024, the prosecutorial college of the SJC accepted that no evidence

of a conflict of interest under Art. 175i, Para. 1 of the Judiciary Act was established in relation to the prosecutor and did not impose a disciplinary penalty on him, since he did not commit the elements of a disciplinary violation within the meaning of Art. 307, Para. 3, Point 3, in conjunction with Art. 175k, para. 4 and art. 175i, para. 1 of the Judiciary Act. The decision of the prosecutor's college was appealed by the ISJC before the Supreme Administrative Court, as by 15.01.2025 the court proceedings had not been concluded, and

- two of the proposals were submitted to the judicial college of the SJC to initiate disciplinary proceedings for imposing disciplinary sanctions on two judges for violations committed by each of them under art. 307, para. 3, point 3 in conjunction with art. 175k, para. 4 of the Judiciary Act.

Based on the two proposals made under art. 312, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act, disciplinary proceedings were initiated before the judicial college for disciplinary violations committed under art. 307, para. 3, point 3 in conjunction with art. 175k, para. 4 of the Judiciary Act, which as of 15.01.2025 have not been completed.

3. On the basis of Art. 54, para. 1, point 5 in connection with Art. 311, point 1 and Art. 327 of the Judiciary Act, 14 signals were sent to administrative heads of judicial authorities with recommendations for imposing a disciplinary measure under Art. 327 of the Judiciary Act or for engaging the disciplinary liability of judges and prosecutors for delays in the movement and/or completion of a specific case/correspondence committed by them. With one act on the results of a comprehensive planned inspection of a judicial authority, the administrative head was given a recommendation for imposing a disciplinary measure under Art. 327 of the Judiciary Act on a judge for violations of the deadlines for preparing judicial acts.

4. By decision of 11.01.2024, on the basis of Art. 54, para. 1, point 18 of the Judiciary Act, the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council adopted templates for reporting on the completion of cases and files within the established deadlines by the judicial authorities, after coordinating them with the two colleges of the SJC. The templates were published on the ISJC website at: <http://www.inspectoratvss.bg/bg/page/188> and based on them, all judicial authorities (courts, prosecutor's offices and investigation departments to them) submitted their reports on the completion of cases and files within the established deadlines in 2023 by 15.03.2024.

Pursuant to Art. 54, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act, based on the reports provided by the judicial authorities, the ISJC prepared an Analysis of the results of the cases and files concluded within the established deadlines by the courts, the prosecutor's office and the investigative authorities for 2023. The authority to prepare this analysis was assigned to the ISJC by an amendment to the Judiciary Act of 2023 (Promulgated, State Gazette, No. 84 of 2023) in order to strengthen the role and capacity of the ISJC to prevent and combat corruption in the judiciary. The analysis contains summarized statistical data on the total number of cases and files initiated and examined by the courts, the Prosecutor's Office and the investigative authorities in 2023, the concluded and remaining not accomplished cases and files at the end of the reporting period. The number of cases concluded with an effective judicial act was also reported in order to provide information on the percentage of proceedings concluded with a final act. It was investigated which judicial authorities has a higher percentage of uncompleted cases and files at the end of the reporting period, as well as in what time the proceedings are concluded. The examination of the data provided with the reports allows us to draw conclusions both about the timeliness of the completion of cases and files, and about the types of cases, the consideration of which takes longer.

The analysis also continues the implementation of the fourth indicator under the measure assigned to ISJC "Strengthening the role of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council for the prevention and counteraction of corruption in the judiciary (Q4/2022)", set out in Reform 2: "Countering corruption" in the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria (NRRPRB).

The analysis was published on the ISJC website at: <http://www.inspectoratvss.bg/bg/page/16>.

Recommendation Advance work on plans to adopt a mechanism to introduce safeguards regarding the procedure for appointing the members of the Supreme Prosecutorial Council elected by the National Assembly, in order to guarantee their independence and take into account European standards, especially with regard to the role of the Council in the appointment and dismissal of the Prosecutor General.

A. Independence

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to the independence of justice, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Please, see the information under the previous recommendation

In October 2024, in the Public Register³ of Cases of Encroachment on the Independence of the Judiciary, available on the website of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), an opinion⁴ of the Plenum of the SJC has been published in relation to its constitutionally established powers to elect the Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria and the President of the Supreme Administrative Court. Since the creation of the Register in 2018 until 31.12.2024, a total of 59 reactions have been published.

In connection with information circulated in early 2024 about the possible involvement of magistrates in a network for influencing the judiciary, the SJC colleges took timely measures to clarify the case and created special sections on the SJC website.

On 13.02.2024, the Judicial College of the SJC established a Temporary Commission to establish facts and circumstances related to the participation of judges in the activities of the group around Martin Bozhanov⁵. Vladislava Tsarigradska, judge at the Pleven District Court, in connection with threats and a negative media campaign against her, Nikolay Staykov, investigative journalist and co-founder of the Anti-Corruption Fund Foundation, Borislav Sarafov, acting as Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria and other persons were heard.

The Temporary Commission examined court cases, requested information from judicial authorities, the Supreme Prosecutor's Office, the General Directorate Combating Organized Crime (GDCOC), the State Agency for National Security (SANS), the Sofia Directorate of Internal Affairs (SDIA), the National Revenue Agency (NRA), the Inspectorate of the Supreme Judicial Council (ISJC), the National Bureau for Control of Special Intelligence Means (NBCSIM) and others. The minutes of the 16 meetings of the Commission, as well as a report on its activities, have been published.

On 21.02.2024 the Prosecutor's College of the SJC decided to hear magistrates and other persons, as well as to collect information regarding the presence of unregulated influence in the judicial system and affiliations of representatives of the judiciary, incompatible with the standards of independence and professional ethics, and the activities of the group around Martin

³ <http://www.vss.iustice.bg/page/view/106204>

⁴ The position was adopted by decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council under protocol No. 7/17.10.2024 in response to appeals from representatives of the established authorities and NGOs not to hold or suspend the open procedures for the election of the Chairman of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Prosecutor General. The representatives of the constitutionally established state bodies were appealed not to cross the boundaries of the legal order.

⁵ <https://vss.justice.bg/page/view/110235>

Bozanov aka the Notary⁶.

In September, the Parliamentary Committee sent the received materials and documents to the National Assembly.

The two chambers also examined the information received about the former investigator Petyo Petrov - Euroto.

In October 2024, the Judicial Committee heard Judge Tsarigradska on the development of the criminal proceedings⁷ related to the threats made against her, as well as on the responses received to her claim to the supervising prosecutor.

Also in October, the Parliamentary Committee sent to the Chief Inspector of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council a letter from Assoc. Prof. Dr. Atanas Slavov, former Minister of Justice, with a request to verify the alleged facts and circumstances of pressure exerted on Zhivko Kotsev in his capacity as Chief Secretary of the Ministry of the Interior. The decision of the Parliamentary Committee was sent to the Minister of Justice, since the investigation of the case and the imposition of disciplinary liability are within his competence.

In October 2024 the Judicial Committee agreed to participate in a survey⁸ among judges on their independence within the framework of the Independence, Accountability and Quality of Justice project for 2024-2025 of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary. The anonymous survey was published on the SJC website. The SJC has also participated in previous surveys on the independence of judges.

SJC representatives participate in the Independence and Accountability and Quality of Justice and the Digital Justice Forum of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary (ENCJ) projects, as well as in the thematic groups for dialogue on disciplinary standards and Judiciary and Media of the ENCJ for 2024 - 2025.

Given the principle proclaimed by the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria that an independent budget is one of the main guarantors of the independence of the judiciary, adopting on 12.12.2024 the opinion of the Ministry of Finance on the draft Decision of the Council of Ministers on the approval of a draft law on the state budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2025, the SJC Plenum drew attention to the fact that it continued to maintain its decision under Protocol No. 14/05.12.2024, point 16⁹ on the parameters approved by it on the draft budget of the judiciary for 2025.

- *Irremovability of judges; including transfers (incl. as part of judicial map reform), dismissal and retirement regime of judges, court presidents and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)*

Information from the SCC on this issue is set out in paragraph 1.

- *Promotion of judges and prosecutors (incl. judicial review)*

Please, see as well the detailed information in Attachment 1, provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation

By Decisions of the Judicial Collegium of the Supreme Judicial Council on Minutes No. 34 of 17.09.2024, Minutes No. 37 of 08.10.2024 and Minutes No. 40 of 29.10.2024, 20 (twenty)

⁶ <https://vss.justice.bg/page/view/110231>

⁷ PP No. 124/2024 on the inventory of the General Directorate "Fighting Organized Crime" at the Ministry of Interior

⁸ <https://vss.justice.bg/page/view/111043>

⁹ <https://vss.justice.bg/root/f/upload/44/kqpr14-05.12.2024-plenum.pdf>

administrative judges were promoted and assumed the position of “judge” at the Supreme Administrative Court.

During the reference period, the Supreme Administrative Court examined and ruled on appeals filed by participants in other competitions announced by the SJC. These administrative cases were dealt with within approximately three months of their initiation, and the relevant panel of judges delivered its judgment within one month of the last hearing held in the case.

By decision of the Panel of Judges of the SJC, performing the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council, pursuant to §23, para. 2 of the Transitional and final provisions of the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated by SG 106/22.12.2023), on the basis of Art. 160 in conj. with Art. 165, para. 1, item 1 of the Judiciary Act, Ms Zhaneta Petrova-Boseva is dismissed from the post of Judge of the Supreme Administrative Court, with the rank of Judge of the SCC and SAC, as of 18.09.2024.

Judge Biserka Tsaneva was dismissed from the position of chairperson of a division in the Supreme Administrative Court by decision under Minutes No. 19 of 16.04.2024 of the Panel of Judges of the SJC, acting as the Supreme Judicial Council, pursuant to § 23, para. 2 of the

Transitional and final provisions of the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated by SG 106/22.12.2023), as of 18.04.2024. Biserka Tsaneva held the position of Deputy Minister of Justice. She was reinstated as a judge of the Supreme Administrative Court by decision of the Panel of Judges of the Supreme Judicial Council of 15.10.2024 and took office on 15.10.2024.

Judge Vasilka Shalamanova was dismissed from her position as a judge of the Supreme Administrative Court by decision of the Panel of Judges of the Supreme Judicial Council with decision under Minutes No. 39 of 22 October 2024, as of 22 October 2024. She held the position of Deputy Minister of Justice. She was reinstated as a judge at the Supreme Administrative Court by decision of the Panel of Judges of the Supreme Judicial Council of 10.12.2024, Minutes No 46 of 10.12.2024, and took up her duties on 10.12.2024.

- *Allocation of cases in courts*

§ 2 of the above-cited draft of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act proposes the introduction of normative detailing of the rules for case allocation. § 2 of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Civil Code of Procedure, promulgated, State Gazette No. 67 of 2024¹⁰, postponed the entry into force of the centralized allocation of order for payment proceeding to 01.07.2025. On December 10, 2024, the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) adopted rules for the allocation of order for payment proceeding in order to even the workload of all cases¹¹.

- *Independence (including composition and nomination and dismissal of its members), and powers of the body tasked with safeguarding the independence of the judiciary (e.g. Council for the Judiciary)*
- *Accountability of judges and prosecutors, including disciplinary regime and bodies and ethical rules, judicial immunity and criminal/civil (where applicable) liability of judges (incl. judicial*

¹⁰ <https://dv.parliament.bg/DVWeb/showMaterialDV.jsp?idMat=224080>

¹¹ <https://vss.justice.bg/root/f/upload/44/final-Правила-за-разпределение-на-заповедните-дела.pdf>

review)

On 19 December 2024, a draft of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act (the draft law under points I.1. and I.2.) was published for public consultation for a period of 20 days.

In response to recommendations of the Venice Commission (Opinion CDL-AD (2024)004 on the Code of Ethical Conduct of Judges and Opinion CDL-AD (2024)005 on the Code of Ethical Conduct of Prosecutors and Investigators), the draft law includes provisions that provide for basic substantive legal norms for ethical conduct of judges, prosecutors and investigators in the organizational law of the judiciary and a definition of disciplinary violations (§ 32 and 80 of the draft of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act).

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 1, provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation, and Bulgaria's input of 2020 and 2024

In 2024, the Supreme Administrative Court has heard and ruled on cases initiated on appealed disciplinary decisions of the SJC. These administrative cases have been heard within three months of their initiation, and the relevant panel of judges has issued a judgment within one month of the last hearing in the case.

With regard to the ethical standards for prosecutors and investigators, the following information should be provided:

By its decision under protocol No. 28/17.07.2024, the Prosecutorial College adopted a draft Code of Ethical Conduct for Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators (CECBPI), which reflects the recommendations of the Venice Commission, in accordance with the opinion prepared by it with reference No. 1177/2023 regarding the CECBPI. In implementation of the same decision of the Prosecutorial College, the draft Code of Ethical Conduct for Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators, together with the opinion and recommendations of the Venice Commission, were sent to the bodies of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Prosecutorial College and the Chamber of Investigators for expression of opinions and proposals on the submitted draft.

Within the specified period, the Prosecutorial College received opinions from the bodies of the Prosecutor's office, summarized by the acting Prosecutor General, as well as from the Chamber of Investigators.

The Acting Prosecutor General made specific recommendations, expressing reservations to the proposed changes and proposing the formation of a working group to develop a new Code of Ethical Conduct for Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators. By decision of the Commission on Professional Ethics under Protocol No. 16/31.10.2024, a proposal was made to the prosecution authorities and professional organizations of prosecutors and investigators to designate representatives to participate in a working group to develop a new Code of Ethical Conduct for Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators. In the meantime, a letter has been received from the Minister of Finance, containing recommendations from the European Commission to be taken into account in the CECBPI. The recommendations relate to providing guidelines for action in cases where prosecutors/investigators are faced with instructions that they consider to be erroneous or illegal, a correction of the text related to the filing of reports of irregularities and the disclosure of misconduct in the workplace is recommended, as well as a recommendation to consider the rights of magistrates to participate in external activities, such as lectures, seminars, etc. The activities referred to in the recommendations are subject to regulatory framework and are related to the procedural

obligations of prosecutors and investigators, as well as their obligation to perform their duties without allowing a situation of incompatibility. The Judiciary Act exhaustively lists the external activities that magistrates may perform and in the implementation of which there are no incompatibilities. Given this, they should not be regulated in the CECBPI.

The Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators, with the recommendations of the Venice Commission, the European Commission and the prosecution authorities reflected and adopted therein, was adopted on the basis of Art. 30, para. 5, point 23 of the Judiciary Act by a decision under protocol No. 42 of 04.12.2024 of the Prosecutorial College of the Supreme Judicial Council and approved by a Decision under protocol No. 15 of 12.12.2024 of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council. It defines the basic principles establishing standards for regulating the conduct of prosecutors and investigators in and outside the service they perform.

The consideration of the recommendations made by the Venice Commission for amending the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Judges has been postponed until the adoption of legislative amendments to provide the relevant competence for this to the Judicial College, performing the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council.

At a meeting of the PEC to the Judicial Committee, performing the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council pursuant to § 23, para. 2 of the TFP of the ASA of the CRB, held on 15.07.2024, after discussion, draft amendments to the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Judges in accordance with the recommendations made. It was sent for information and proposals to all courts in the Republic of Bulgaria. The Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Judges, amended and supplemented in accordance with the recommendations made by the European Commission for Democracy through Law, was adopted by decision under protocol No. 46 of 10.12.2024 of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council and approved by Decision under protocol No. 15/12.12.2024 of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council.

- *Independence/autonomy of the prosecution service*

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

- *Independence of the Bar (chamber/association of lawyers) and of lawyers*

The ECHR decision on applications 13777/18 and 49090/18 held that the disciplinary courts of the bar meet the requirements for independence and impartiality.

- *Significant developments capable of affecting the perception that the general public has of the independence of the judiciary*

B. Quality of justice¹²

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to the quality of justice, please specify which, regarding in particular topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Accessibility of courts (e.g. court/legal fees, legal aid, language)*

¹² Under this topic, Member States are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined under section 2.

- With an addition in the State Gazette, issue 18 of March 1, 2024. The Legal Assistance Act added as a type of legal assistance, such as representation upon detention under Art. 13 of the Military Police Act.

The draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act, referred to in point I.1., modernizes the rules for e-justice. The same goal is pursued by the draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code.

- *Resources of the judiciary (human/financial/material¹³), remuneration/bonuses/rewards for judges and prosecutors, including observed changes (significant and targeted increase or decrease over the past year),*

By decision of the General Assembly of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) of 07.03.2024 "Table No. 1 of the SJC for determining the maximum basic monthly salaries of judges, prosecutors and investigators" has been approved, effective from 01.01.2024. In 2024, the basic monthly salaries of judges, prosecutors and investigators were indexed by 13% compared to 2023. Rank-based remunerations were also indexed by the same percentage.

By decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council of 07.11.2024, additional remunerations for judges and prosecutors in the amount of up to 2 basic monthly salaries with rank included were determined and paid.

- *Training of justice professionals (including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff, clerks/trainees)*

The draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act, referred to in point I.1., reforms the regulation of judicial training.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office and Annex Training for Justice Professionals

- *Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technology, including electronic communication and AI tools, within the justice system and with court users, procedural rules, access to judgments online)¹⁴*

On December 19, 2024, a draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Act (the draft law under points I.1. and I.2.) was published for public consultation for a period of 20 days.

The draft law aims to introduce real and full-fledged e-justice, as well as to facilitate access to justice.

The proposed changes aim to specify the powers of the Supreme Judicial Council in relation to the information systems used by the judicial authorities. In accordance with Art. 130a, para. 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria in Art. 30 of the Judiciary Act provides that, after consultation with the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Electronic Governance, the SJC judges' panel approves the automated information systems of the courts, the prosecutor's panel approves those of the prosecution and investigation, and the plenum

¹³ Material resources refer e.g. to court buildings and other facilities. Financial resources include salaries of staff in courts and prosecution offices.

¹⁴ Factual information presented in Commission Staff Working Document of 2 December 2020, SWD(2020) 540 final, accompanying the Communication on Digitalisation of justice in the European Union, COM(2020) 710 final and Figures 40 to 48 of the 2024 EU Justice Scoreboard, does not need to be repeated.

approves those systems that are common to the judicial authorities and ensures their systemic integration and interoperability.

The draft law introduces precision regarding the electronic form of acts and certification statements, on the one hand, of the judicial authorities, while at the same time providing for the acts and statements to be issued in another form, when this is provided for by law or the electronic form is not possible. It is explicitly stated that the judicial authorities may perform all other procedural actions provided for in the law using electronic means, unless due to their nature this is impossible or the law provides for their performance in another way. On the other hand, the technical requirements that the electronic statements of the participants in the proceedings must meet are formulated, as well as a corresponding obligation for the authorities to accept, verify and confirm them when they meet these requirements.

The formation, content, right of access, maintenance and storage of electronic cases and their reproduction have been monitored. The electronic case file represents not only linked electronic records and electronic documents, and information created or provided by the participants in the proceedings, but also stores and processes electronic images of documents and evidence submitted on paper, and electronic images of acts and statements made by the judicial authorities in another form/on paper. Documents and evidence received on a physical medium are stored in a corresponding file. The parties' access to electronic cases is facilitated and guaranteed, the possibility of obtaining copies on a technical medium, as well as references to the web-based system, which eliminates the need to provide certified paper copies for persons with public functions. Procedural guarantees are created to protect the rights of the parties in case of incompleteness of the electronic case file. The rules for maintaining the register of judicial acts and for public access to them through the unified e-justice portal have been specified.

The transitional and final provisions of the bill distinguish three periods regarding the conduct of court cases in paper and electronic form:

- cases initiated by June 30, 2021 shall be concluded in paper form in all instances. Procedural actions may be performed in electronic form by the participants in the proceedings in these cases. Acts and certification statements of the judicial authorities may be issued in electronic form, when the Supreme Judicial Council has provided a technological opportunity for this.

When a judicial authority has taken an electronic image of pending or concluded cases, the relevant authority may provide access to them for reference purposes only.

- first-instance cases initiated in the period from July 1, 2021 to January 1, 2026 may be conducted in electronic form or be conducted simultaneously in electronic form and in paper form until their completion in all judicial authorities. In the second case, in these cases, all documents submitted electronically and acts and statements issued by the judicial authorities in electronic form shall be reproduced and certified on paper and attached to the case file. All documents submitted and acts and statements issued by the judicial authorities in paper form shall be reproduced in electronic form and attached to the case file. The judicial authorities shall ensure full and accurate correspondence between the paper file and the electronic file through the information systems used.

- first instance cases initiated from 1 January 2026 will be conducted exclusively electronically.

The Supreme Judicial Council should ensure the necessary technical conditions for the courts to fulfil the obligation to access electronic cases in the premises where their administrations are located by 1 December 2025, and by 1 September 2025 it should ensure connectivity between the Unified Information System of the Courts and the Unified Case Management Information System.

Amendments to the procedural laws corresponding to the changes in the Judiciary Act are also provided for - in the Administrative Procedure Code, in the Civil Procedure Code and in the Criminal Procedure Code.

With the provisions specified in points I.1 - I.3. of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code introduces rules facilitating, and in some cases making mandatory, the electronic exchange of information and the issuance of acts in electronic form within the framework of proceedings before administrative bodies and before administrative courts.

Progress regarding order for payment proceeding and the Court Case Management System (CCMS):

The Supreme Judicial Council identified as a significant problem the uneven workload of the district courts in the country, which in certain cases reaches a difference of nearly 7 /seven/ times in the caseload between courts of the same level.

The reform of the order for payment proceeding aims to lead to an even workload for district judges and acceleration of the procedure, as well as the introduction of a modern, functional and centralized electronic system for managing the order for payment proceedings.

Act amending and supplementing the Civil Procedure Code, regulating the centralized distribution of order for payment proceeding according to workload data and fully electronic processing of the writ cases was promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 11/02.02.2023, and was scheduled to enter into force on 1 July 2024.

The deferred effect (*vacatio legis*) of the law that entered into force had a single purpose to ensure all the necessary conditions for the reform supplementing the by-laws in accordance with the ASA of the CPC, as well as building the module for the centralized distribution and electronic processing of order for payment proceedings in the Unified Information System of the Courts.

On 28.05.2024, and after a procedure under the Public Procurement Act, a contract was concluded with Information Services AD, under which Information Services AD undertakes to carry out all works related to the design, development and implementation in CCMS of the software product.

At the moment, the selected contractor is at stage 2 of the project implementation - development of a System Project and a detailed technical specification of the future module, which describes in detail the architecture of the module's software and is awaiting its acceptance by the SJC.

According to the approved schedule of the contract, it is planned to be completed by the end of May 2025 by preparing the module itself, and in June it is planned to implement it and conduct training on working with it.

In compliance with the legal requirement of Art. 30, para. 5, point 20 of the Judiciary Act, the Judicial Committee of the SJC, by its decision under protocol No. 46/10.12.2024, point 29, adopted the Rules for the Distribution of Cases in accordance with Art. 9, para. 3 of the Judiciary Act, which will enter into force as of July 1, 2025. The Rules aim to regulate the conditions and procedure for the distribution of order for payment proceedings in a manner that ensures an even workload for the district courts. The workload is measured by taking into account the weight coefficients of all cases received in the district courts, determined under the conditions of Art. 13 of the Rules for Assessing the Workload of Judges (RAWJ). The algorithm also provides that the average total workload of the district courts will be determined based on the arithmetic mean of the sum of the weight coefficients of all cases received for the previous month in each district court, excluding only order for payment proceeding, which will be distributed centrally. The equalization of the total workload of the courts will be carried out by determining the appropriate number of order for payment proceeding that each district court will receive in order to reach the average total workload. The complex algorithm will also take

into account the actually occupied positions for a judge in each district court, in order to ensure a fair and even distribution of the workload.

In achieving the goals of this reform, it is entirely possible to take similar steps to equalize the workload of the district and appellate courts through the centralized distribution of cases that are considered in closed sessions by these courts.

The "Development and implementation in the judicial system of software for accelerated creation and reproduction of acts and other documents through dictation and automatic conversion of voice recording into text (Voice-to-Text) and accompanying processing systems" project was successfully completed, under which the Supreme Judicial Council is a beneficiary under a contract financed under the 2014-2020 Good Governance Operational Program through a grant agreement dated 23.09.2020, headed by Daniela Marcheva, member of the SJC Judicial College.

By decision under protocol No. 25/29.09.2023 The Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted the results of the implementation of the project activities, approving and implementing the created "artificial intelligence" type software in all bodies of the judiciary, through which a reduction of at least 60% of the time for compiling a document is achieved. Its implementation will improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the work of magistrates and court employees, modernize and digitize the work processes in the judicial system, and instead of manually typing judicial acts, dictation will produce automatically typed text, allowing for quick formatting, searching and outputting words, referencing, annotation and other options for additional text processing and references to all key segments of the acts. The implementation of the project was successfully completed on 01.12.2023, with the results of the tests conducted with judicial acts from various areas of the administration of justice showing over 90% recognition. These results exceeded the expectations of the project team, taking into account the challenges they faced during its implementation, namely: the consequences of the COVID pandemic, which led to delays in all deliveries and work processes; the extremely short period for developing a system without analogues in Bulgaria; the scale of the preparatory work related to organizing and engaging hundreds of magistrates who participated in the "training" of the software; the complexity of the process of creating the necessary data with which to train the voice recognition system and transcribe it into text, etc.

On 16.04.2024, a presentation of the system's functions was made to representatives of the European Commission auditing the Audit of European Union Funds (AEUF), including representatives of AEUF and Basic Income Support for Sustainability (BISS). The congratulations received and the admiration expressed by these representatives for the achievements of the project are fully deserved, since despite the extremely insufficient time, artificial intelligence software was created, which has no analogues not only in our country, but also in other European countries.

Currently, over 2152 users from the judicial system use the software system. As the exclusive owner of the copyright on the system, SJC has issued an invitation to grant the right to use it to all state and municipal authorities that have expressed a desire to use it, as they need to have a certain technical infrastructure and conclude a license agreement.

On 05.06.2024 BISS has published information in the information system for management and monitoring of EU funds in Bulgaria (ISUN) about the successful fulfilment of all obligations by the SJC and, accordingly, about the completion of the project.

Undoubtedly, like any system, V2T needs upgrading and improvement, which will continue by upgrading the volume of data in the system, for which the necessary organization is currently being created.

With the implementation of the project, in particular the integration of Voice-to-Text with CCMS, measure 54 of the Roadmap for the implementation of the Strategy for the

Development of Electronic Governance in the Republic of Bulgaria for the period 2019-2023 is also being implemented.

The Supreme Administrative Court has been implementing the project “Digitalization of key court processes in the system of administrative justice” approved within the framework of the Recovery and Sustainability Plan continues to optimize the work of magistrates and court officials in the administrative justice system through the introduction and use of digital technologies in the processes.

In 2024, the implementation of three of the activities envisaged in the project has started - “Development and implementation of a module for the interconnection of EDIS with the Electronic Portal for summons of the SJC and that of the SAEG on the parties in administrative cases”, “Development and implementation of an information module enabling digital remote submission and receipt of electronic documents in court cases by the parties and their legal representatives” and “Development and implementation of an information module for conducting remote closed court hearings”.

- *Use of assessment tools and standards (e.g. ICT systems, including AI-based systems, for case management, court statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, surveys among court users or legal professionals)*

Judicial statistics

Pursuant to Art. 30, para. 5, point 13 of the Judiciary Act, the Judicial and Prosecutorial College of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) shall every 6 months request and summarize information from the courts, the prosecutor's office and the National Investigation Service on their activities.

Currently, decisions to optimize the staffing are made on the basis of workload per staff, number of cases received, number of cases to be considered and number of completed cases. By a decision of the SJC in 2009, statistical reporting forms for the appellate, district, military, regional and administrative courts were approved, which are updated in the event of a change in legislation or if additional information on the activities of the courts is needed. The statistical tables are summarized by the SJC and published on the website in the Court Statistics section.

The statistical reporting forms contain Appendix 1 - a general reporting form for civil and commercial cases, criminal cases and administrative cases, respectively; Appendix 2 - a report on civil and commercial cases; Appendix 2 - a report on criminal cases; Appendix 3 - a report on the activities of judges at the relevant court level for civil, commercial and administrative cases; Appendix 3 - a report on the activities of judges at the relevant court level for criminal cases.

In the appendices for civil and commercial cases of the statistical reporting forms, a distinction can be made between contentious civil and commercial cases and uncontested cases, for example - cases considered as first instance in district courts, initiated on an application for issuing an order for the execution of a monetary obligation under the procedure of Art. 410 and Art. 417 CPC - the so-called order cases and cases for divorce by mutual consent. Cases for registration of political parties, registration of community centres associations, registration of a housing and construction cooperative, registration of a law firm, registration of a pension fund /funds for additional mandatory pension insurance and funds for additional voluntary pension insurance/, registration of religious institutions and their local branches, or the so-called "register cases" are subject to the jurisdiction of a district court as a first instance.

The contentious civil and commercial cases include and take into account civil cases under the general procedure of claims, expedited proceedings under Art. 310 of the CPC, private civil cases and other civil cases.

Progress on the Rules for Assessing the Workload of Judges (RAWJ) and the Court Case Management System (CCMS)

By decision under protocol No. 44/26.12.2024 of the SJC judges' panel, the Rules for the Assessment of the Workload of Judges (RAWJ) was supplemented and as of January 1, 2025, the workload of administrative judges and administrative courts is reported according to the data from the workload module in the Unified Administrative Information System (UAIS).

By decision under protocol No. 7/05.03.2024, the Supreme Administrative Court, performing the functions of the SJC pursuant to § 23, para. 2 of the TFP of the ASA of the CRB took note of comments on the recommendations and proposals made in the Report on the Methodology for Control and Verification of Statistical Data and in the Report on the Existing Criteria for Measuring the Workload System and Recommendations for Updating the Workload System, prepared within the framework of the "Establishing a Balanced Distribution of the Workload in the Judicial System in Bulgaria" project, co-financed by the European Union and the Council of Europe. The objective of the project is to improve the workload system of the United Information System, which is supposed to assign cases to judges and courts in an equitable manner. In the framework of the Action, a particular focus was placed on:

- Improving control and verification of statistical data;
- Improving workload management of judges.

The Judicial Map, Caseload and Court Statistics Commission (CMCCSC) to the Judicial Committee of the SJC decided that the analysis of the data on the workload of judges and courts would be carried out by the two external experts - a sociologist and a statistician, and they would be provided with all available information on the cases filed in the appellate, district, military and regional courts in 2022 and 2023.

Subsequently, it was found that an upgrade of the system was necessary in order to be able to generate the data from the Workload module in CCMS in the form, structure and volume necessary for preparing the analysis.

By decision under protocol No. 6/29.10.2024, point 3 of the CMCCSC, a temporary working group was formed with the task of assessing and proposing what changes should be adopted in the RAWJ and the Nomenclature of Statistical Codes by Case Types. Within the framework of the work of the temporary working group, negative opinions were expressed regarding the advisability of conducting an empirical study.

The members of the temporary working group should assess the need to amend the basic coefficients of cases, which are the primary measures that take into account the various aspects of the factual and legal complexity of cases, as well as the need to add new proceedings and, respectively, determine the basic coefficients of these new proceedings.

The goal is for the amendments and supplements to the RAWJ and the annexes to it and the Nomenclature of Statistical Codes by Case Types to be implemented in the future module for the centralized distribution of order for payment proceedings, as well as to achieve an even and fair workload for judges.

- *Geographical distribution and number of courts/jurisdictions ("judicial map") and their specialisation, in particular specific courts or chambers within courts to deal with fraud and corruption cases.*

§ 2 of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Civil Code of Procedure,

promulgated in SG No. 67 of 2024, postponed the entry into force of the centralized distribution of order for payment proceedings to 01.07.2025. On December 10, 2024, the SJC adopted rules for the distribution of order for payment proceedings in order to equalize the workload of all cases. The SJC has concluded Contract No. SJC-10823/28.08.2024 (No. PO-16-2901/28.08.2024 of "Information Services" AD), concluded between the Supreme Judicial Council and "Information Services" AD with the subject "Design, development and implementation in the Court Case Management System (CCMS) of the module "Centralized distribution and electronic processing of order for payment proceedings", integrated with the Single e-Justice Portal.

Questions for input on the single market dimension of the Rule of Law Report

Pillar I:

Quality of justice

- Specialisation (of judges/specific courts/chambers within courts) and training for the judiciary to deal with commercial cases.
- Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms and mediation

C. Efficiency of the justice system¹⁵:

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to efforts to improve the efficiency of the justice system (e.g. as regards length of proceedings), please specify: about update on conditions, appointments and expired terms of office for high level posts

Currently, the Constitutional Court functions with 11 judges. The mandate of the Constitutional Court judges Mariana Karagyzova-Fipkova, Filip Dimitrov, Tanya Raykovska and Konstantin Penchev was terminated on the basis of Article 148, paragraph 1, item 1 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria on 12 November 2024. On 14 November 2024, the newly elected Constitutional Court Judge Galina Nikolaeva Toneva-Dacheva and the newly appointed Constitutional Court Judges from the quota of the President - Sasho Georgiev Nenov and Nevin Feti Osman-Yordanova took office. It is necessary for the National Assembly to elect a judge from its quota to fill the vacant seat in order to complete the composition of the Constitutional Court to the 12 judges required by the Constitution

Please see as well Annex Mediation

Other – please specify

II. Anti-corruption framework¹⁶

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the anti-corruption framework (if applicable):

Recommendation Ensure a solid track record of investigations, prosecutions and final judgements in high corruption cases and ensure the effective functioning of the Anti-Corruption Commission.

¹⁵ Under this topic, Member States are not required to give statistical information but should provide input on the type of information outlined under section 2.

¹⁶ Where previous specific reports, published in the framework of the review under the UN Convention against Corruption, of GRECO, and of the OECD address the issues below, please make a reference to the points you wish to bring to the Commission's attention in these documents, indicating any relevant updates, changes or measures introduced that have occurred since these documents were published.

The Law on Countering Corruption was promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 84 of 06.10.2023.

The legislative amendments provide for:

1. Structural and administrative reform and division of the current Commission for Anticorruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture (CACIAF) into two bodies - the Anticorruption Commission (ACC) and the Commission for Illegal Assets Forfeiture (CIAF).

2. A wide range of activities to counter corruption: prevention, operational and investigative activities, conducting investigations into corruption crimes, in the cases, under the conditions and according to the procedure of the Criminal Procedure Code; declaring incompatibility of the property and interests of persons holding public positions and persons related to them; ensuring public access to declarations; verifying declarations; establishing a conflict of interest and imposing sanctions and other measures in the event of an established conflict of interest; public disclosure of the names of persons who have not filed declarations or whose declarations are found to be inconsistent, and of the names of persons for whom a conflict of interest has been established; referral to the competent authorities in the cases provided for in this law; analysis of the corruption risk related to the exercise of public office, as well as the persons holding them, and taking follow-up actions in the event of a high risk; other methods and means provided for in this law.

3. The Law for Countering Corruption (LCC) provides for a wide subjective scope of the law. It includes 52 categories of persons holding public office that fall within the scope of the activities of the Anticorruption Commission (ACC).

4. In order for the ACC to carry out its activities, its financial and political independence is ensured. The Commission is a primary budget spending authority. The amendments provide that the management of the ACC is appointed within a transparent procedure. Special requirements are placed on the members of the ACC, which guarantee their political neutrality.

5. In order to achieve the objectives of the law, it is envisaged that the ACC will have the power to investigate through the figure of investigating inspectors and to use the evidence it collects in criminal proceedings, subject to appropriate legal guarantees for the rights and freedoms of individuals and undertakings.

6. It is possible to appeal against rulings refusing to initiate pre-trial proceedings under the procedure of Art. 213b of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as well as rulings terminating criminal proceedings – in the cases and under the procedure of Art. 243 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

7. The close cooperation and interaction of the investigating inspectors from the ACC with the European Public Prosecutor's Office is explicitly regulated.

8. The law provides for referral to the authority for unlawful confiscation in the event of a discrepancy of not less than BGN 25,000 in the property declared by persons holding public positions, as well as in the event of a conflict of interest (Art. 109, para. 2, point 2 of the LCC).

9. In order to guarantee the integrity of both the employees of the Commission and other persons from the public administration, the Commission will adopt rules for conducting checks on the integrity of its employees and will organize their conducting; will develop methodologies for assessing corruption risk, ethical standards of conduct, integrity verification systems and provide assistance in their implementation.

Regarding the rules of procedure of the Nomination Committee, we draw your attention to the fact that according to Art. 8, para. 4 of the LCC, the rules of procedure of the Nomination Committee, which will select the members of the new ACC, are adopted by the Standing Committee of the National Assembly responsible for combating corruption.

In the 50th National Assembly, such rules were prepared and submitted for consideration to the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on Countering Corruption. They were submitted for preliminary review and approval by the EC. Due to the early termination of the powers of the 50th National Assembly, the rules were not adopted. We hope that after the constitution of the 51st National Assembly, they will be subject to discussion and voting in view of the overall implementation of the stage.

Despite the fact that there are no approved new rules for the election of members of the ACC, we note that according to § 7, para. 2 of the transitional and final provisions of the LCC, the members of the ACC and CIAF existing at the time of the entry into force of the law continue their mandate until the election of the ACC composition.

An interdepartmental working group has been established under the Council of Ministers by order of the Prime Minister. According to measure 5 of the Roadmap to the 2021-2027 National Strategy for Prevention and Countering Corruption, "Development of a Code of Ethical Conduct for Persons Holding Senior Public Positions in the Executive Branch" is a commitment of the National Council on Anti-Corruption Policies and the General Inspectorate to the Council of Ministers. In view of the above, the current information is within the competence of the Council of Ministers - National Council on Anti-Corruption Policies and the General Inspectorate.

In connection with the changes to the Criminal Procedure Code (effective from 01.03.2024) based on the provision of § 79, in conj. with § 9 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Law on Counteracting Corruption (LCC), an Investigation Department has been established in the Anti-Corruption Specialized Directorate and investigative inspectors have been appointed to carry out the activities under Art. 19, para. 3 of the LCC.

In connection with the competences of the investigators of the Specialized Directorate for Combating Corruption, in accordance with the provision of § 9 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the CPC, the Directorate receives and initiates pre-trial proceedings related to corruption offences within the meaning of Art. 3, para. 1 of the CPC, committed by persons holding public office, for investigative actions.

From the short period of the ACC's power to investigate corruption offences committed by persons holding public office (effective from 01.03.2024), the Commission can report positive circumstances, such as:

- all pre-trial detention measures requested by the ACC have been confirmed and imposed by the relevant court;
- all initial investigative actions carried out, in cases of urgency, are approved by the court.

Please, see as well the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

Recommendation Improving integrity among senior positions in the executive, taking into account European standards, and in particular ensuring that clear integrity standards are in place for government, as well as an appropriate sanctioning mechanism.

To implement priority 1 "Strengthening the capacity and increasing transparency in the work of anti-corruption bodies and units" of the National Strategy for Prevention and Counteraction of Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027) and the Roadmap for the implementation of the strategy, measure 5 "Development of a Code of Ethical Conduct for Persons Holding Senior Public Positions in the Executive Branch" has been set.

Such a recommendation is given in p. 206, iv of the GRECO report (fifth round of evaluation of Bulgaria), namely: 1) to adopt, publish and supplement a comprehensive code of conduct for persons holding high-ranking public positions, with clear guidelines on conflicts of interest and other integrity-related issues (contacts with third parties, gifts and other benefits, additional activities, contracts with public authorities, post-employment restrictions, etc.) and 2) to accompany this code with a reliable and effective supervisory mechanism, providing for precise sanctions for violations and instruments for their implementation (paragraph 44).

To implement the measure and the recommendation given by Order No. P-15 of 23.01.2024 of the Prime Minister, an interdepartmental working group was appointed to prepare drafts of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Administration and the Code of Conduct for Persons Holding Public Positions in the Central Executive. Due to the changes that occurred during the year both in the composition of the Council of Ministers (two caretaker governments were appointed) and in the interdepartmental working group, no drafts of such regulatory documents have been prepared at present.

A. The institutional framework capacity to fight against corruption (prevention and investigation / prosecution)

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to the institutional framework capacity to fight corruption, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- List any **changes** as regards relevant authorities (e.g. national agencies, bodies) in charge of prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of corruption and the resources allocated to each of these authorities (the human, financial, legal, and technical resources as relevant), including the cooperation among domestic and with foreign authorities. Indicate any relevant measures taken to effectively and timely cooperate with OLAF and EPPO.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

The Law on Counteracting Corruption Act established the Anticorruption Commission (ACC). In terms of the LCC, the ACC is a body for the prevention and combating of corruption and the identification of conflicts of interest. The ACC performs functions of prevention of corruption, detection and investigation of corruption offences, establishment of conflict of interest and acceptance and verification of declarations of assets and interests of persons holding public office. No legislative changes have been undertaken with regard to the ACC since the adoption of the LCC in force since 06.10.2023. Pursuant to § 7, paragraph 2 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the LCC, until the election of the composition of the ACC, the members of the Commission for Anti-Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture (CACIAF) in office at the time of the entry into force of the law shall perform the functions of members of the Commission. In accordance with the provisions of § 6, paragraph 6 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the LCC, the Commission has taken the necessary steps to transfer the corresponding part of the general administration of the CACIAF necessary for the performance of its functions by separating the staff in the general administration into the ACC and the Commission for Illegal Assets Forfeiture (CIAF). Pursuant to § 1(1) of the Additional Provisions of the Protection of Classified Information Act, the ACC is a security service, therefore specific data on the human resources supporting the Commission's activities cannot be provided. With the adoption of the LCC, new functions have been assigned to the ACC, which according to § 79 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Law entered into force

on 1 March 2024. Under the new legislation, a mechanism for the detection and investigation of acts of corruption committed by persons holding public office is regulated.

The relevant specialized administrative capacity has been built up to support these activities, and investigators with high professional qualities and experience have been appointed to the Anti-Corruption Directorate of the ACC.

In connection with the establishment of the Investigation Division under the Anti-Corruption Directorate of the ACC, internal rules and orders have been adopted for the successful implementation of the new investigation function.

The management of human resources in the ACC is carried out in compliance with the legal framework regulated in the Law on Civil Servants, the Law on Counteracting Corruption, the Labour Code, the current Regulations on the Structure and Activities of the CACIAF and its Administration and the applicable by-laws. In order to secure the administrative capacity of the Commission, 40 competitive procedures have been announced in 2024.

The financial provision of the ACC for 2024 shall be carried out in accordance with the provisions of Art. 32 of the State Budget Act of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2024. The available financial and technical resources ensure the necessary conditions for the implementation of the legal powers of the ACC, in accordance with the currently effective structure and rules of procedure of the Commission.

The Commission continues to cooperate with international organisations and networks with which very good contacts and synergies have been established over the years: OLAF, Interpol, Europol, CARIN, ALEFA, ARINSA, RRAG, EUROJUST, Egmont Group, Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI/RAI), GRECO, GRETA, European Partners Against Corruption (EPAC), European Anti-Corruption Contact Network (EACN), Network of Corruption Prevention Authorities - NCPA, Network for Integrity; European Network of Integrity and Whistleblowing Authorities (NEIWA) and the International Association of Anti-Corruption Agencies (IAACA).

The Commission cooperates with the European Public Prosecutor's Office in the exercise of its powers based on an agreement.

In order to strengthen the capacity of the Ministry of the Interior authorities to collect quality evidence for the purposes of criminal proceedings, focused training measures are being implemented (see also information under question "Training of justice professionals including judges, prosecutors, lawyers, court staff, clerks/trainees").

Good interaction is maintained with the Prosecutor's Office, ACC, control bodies, as well as those with sanctioning powers.

Effective international cooperation is being carried out with partner organisations in EU and third countries, as well as with relevant European agencies and international organisations. There is good interaction between the Bulgarian competent authorities and the European Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol), the European Anti-Fraud Agency (OLAF) and the European Public Prosecutor's Office.

The necessary capacity to work in combating crimes affecting the EU's financial interests has been built. The Ministry of the Interior continues to provide assistance in OLAF investigations, while effectively cooperating with the managing authorities of operational programmes and the relevant EC Directorates-General. Effective interaction is being carried out with the European Public Prosecutor's Office.

In the reporting period, remote access was provided to employees of the Directorate for the Protection of the Financial Interests of the European Union (AFKOS) at the Ministry of the Interior to the information system of the Register of Bank Accounts and Safes, which is regularly used in the work of these employees.

In connection with the measures implemented in the field of prevention and

counteraction to corruption in the Ministry of the Interior, it should be noted that the Ministry of the Interior is subject to evaluation within the framework of the fifth round of evaluations of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). The degree of implementation of the recommendations addressed to the department was assessed in the first GRECO report on the implementation of the recommendations to Bulgaria, adopted in November 2024.

According to GRECO, nearly half of the recommendations addressed to the Ministry of the Interior have been satisfactorily implemented. These are the recommendations related in particular to:

- the legal framework and practice in the area of donations;
- the measures taken to strengthen the representation of women in the police at all levels;
- the improvement of working conditions in the police;
- the adopted amendments to the Code of Ethics, covering all issues of integrity in the police;
- the enhanced induction and in-service training for police officers on integrity, ethics and the fight against corruption, including senior positions;
- the establishment of a system of special confidants to provide confidential advice to police officers on issues related to ethics and integrity;
- the provision of a clear requirement for police officers to report any integrity-related breaches they may encounter in the service.

The report also reflects on the implementation of the remaining recommendations, most of which have been assessed as partially implemented.

Work continues on the implementation of all remaining GRECO recommendations from the Fifth Evaluation Round report on Bulgaria.

- *Safeguards for the functional independence of the authorities tasked with the prevention and detection of corruption.*

The Anticorruption Commission (ACC) is a body for the prevention and counteraction of corruption and the establishment of conflicts of interest within the meaning of the law. According to Art. 7 LCC, the Commission is an independent specialized permanent state body for the implementation of the policy of prevention, counteraction of corruption and the establishment of conflicts of interest and guarantees have been created to ensure it as a politically and financially independent body for the fight against corruption.

1. To ensure the financial independence of the Commission, it is envisaged that it will be a legal entity supported by the budget with its headquarters in Sofia, and the budget of the Commission is drawn up, implemented and reported in accordance with the Public Finance Act (Art. 7, para. 3 of the LCC). The Chairman of the Commission is the primary budget spending authority (Art. 8, para. 6 of the LCC).

2. To ensure the political independence of the Commission, it is envisaged that the proposal and appointment of the members of the Commission will be clearly separated with different institutions responsible for each stage of the process. It is envisaged that for each election of members of the Commission, a special Nomination Committee of five independent members will be formed - one member proposed by the Supreme Court of Cassation, the Supreme Bar Council, the Ministry of Justice, the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Court of Audit, each, and the members of the Nomination Committee must meet the requirements that must also be met by the members of the Commission Countering Corruption. The Nomination Committee will consider the motivated proposals for members of the Commission made by members of Parliament or by non-profit legal entities for the public

benefit, will carry out a selection for eligibility and, after a public hearing and discussion procedure, will submit a report to the Standing Committee to the National Assembly responsible for combating corruption. The rules of operation of the Nomination Committee will be adopted by the standing committee of the National Assembly responsible for combating corruption.

3. It has been agreed that the Commission is a collective body of three members who must meet the requirements expressly provided for in the law, guaranteeing their political neutrality. The Commission will be chaired on a rotating basis for two years by each of the members, with the order of chairing being determined by drawing lots among them upon their assumption of office. The term of office of the members of the Commission is envisaged to be 6 years without the right to re-election and to start running from the date of their assumption of office.

4. In order to achieve the objectives of the law, it is envisaged that the ACC will have the power to investigate through the figure of investigating inspectors and to use the evidence it collects in criminal proceedings, subject to appropriate legal guarantees for the rights and freedoms of individuals and undertakings. Investigating inspectors shall carry out investigations in cases, under the conditions and in accordance with the procedure of the Code of Criminal Procedure. Investigating inspectors may not be assigned any activities other than investigative actions. In exercising their powers, investigative inspectors shall make decisions based on their inner conviction, based on an objective, comprehensive and complete examination of all circumstances of the pre-trial proceedings, guided by the law. Investigative inspectors and other employees in management positions in the Commission may be subject to periodic and incidental integrity checks during their tenure, but not more than twice a year. Failure to pass an integrity check may be grounds for dismissal from the position held.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

To implement priority 1 "Strengthening the capacity and increasing transparency in the work of anti-corruption bodies and units" of the National Strategy for Prevention and Counteraction of Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027) and the Roadmap for the implementation of the strategy, measure 3 "Upgrading the capacity of inspectorates, as particularly important units for countering corruption" has been set. The activities envisaged for the implementation of the measure are: 1) improving the financial and resource security of the inspectorates and 2) initial and ongoing training of inspectors.

As of the end of 2024, the determined number of two of the inspectorates under Art. 46 of the Administration Act (under the Minister of Environment and Water and under the Minister of Education and Science) has not yet been brought into line with the requirements of the Regulation on the structure and minimum number of inspectorates, the procedure and manner of carrying out their activities and the interaction with specialized control bodies. For some inspectorates, including the General Inspectorate, actions have been taken to ensure their resources, by holding competitions for the appointment of civil servants or procedures for mobility in the state administration. Only some of them have ended with the appointment of inspectors.

In some inspectorates, there are still vacant positions, including for heads of inspectorates, due to the unattractiveness of the control activity and the insufficient financial security for the work carried out.

As for the investigation of crimes, according to the current legislation, the investigating police officers and other investigative bodies make their decisions on the basis of internal

conviction, based on *"an objective, comprehensive and complete examination of all the circumstances of the case, guided only by the law"* (Article 14, Paragraph 1 of the CCP). The investigative bodies act under the leadership and supervision of the prosecutor (Article 52, paragraph 3, point 3 of the CCP). The prosecutor's written instructions on the investigation are mandatory for the investigative bodies. Higher-ranking managers are not entitled to give instructions on the performance of investigative actions and the preparation of a written opinion, as well as to interfere in the investigation in any other way (Article 15, paragraph 5 of the Law on the Ministry of the Interior).

In addition to the cited provisions, with regard to disciplinary liability in the event of evidence of corruption by employees of the Ministry of the Interior, it should be noted the categorical normative distinction between the functions of the disciplinary punishing body and the disciplinary investigating body, as a guarantee of functional independence of the bodies tasked with uncovering corruption. According to Art. 207, para. 3 of the Law on the Ministry of the Interior, *"the disciplinary investigating body is obliged to carry out all procedural actions for a full, objective and comprehensive investigation. When carrying out their functions in disciplinary proceedings, the disciplinary investigating bodies are independent and subject only to the law"*. Within the framework of its powers, the disciplinary investigating body independently decides what actions should be taken and is responsible for their timely and lawful implementation. (including disciplinary – in case of failure to perform its statutory functions, according to Art. 207, para. 6 of the Law on the Ministry of the Interior).

In addition, in order to ensure independence and impartiality in the performance of their functions and tasks, the two key structures of the Ministry of the Interior in terms of preventing and combating internal corruption - the Internal Security Directorate and the Inspectorate Directorate - have been removed from the usual lines of hierarchy and control and are directly subordinate to the Minister of the Interior.

- *Information on the implementation of measures foreseen in the strategic anti-corruption framework (if applicable). If available, please provide relevant objectives and indicators.*

In 2024, the measures under the competence of the ACC in the Roadmap for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027) continued to be implemented. For example:

With regard to Priority 5, Measure 5. "Building on the activity of developing anti-corruption plans and developing a methodology for assessing the effectiveness of the implementation of anti-corruption plans", in order to build on the activity of developing anti-corruption plans by the ACC in 2024, a Report on the analysis of anti-corruption plans of primary and secondary budget authorising officers for the relevant year for 2024 and a Report on the analysis of the reports on the implementation of anti-corruption plans for 2023 were developed and adopted.

With regard to Priority 1, Measure No. 6 "Promotion of activities to increase transparency in the activities of the bodies of the executive power", the "Internet Reception" on the website of the ACC continues to function, through which it is possible to address electronically inquiries from interested parties. An electronic form for reporting corruption and/or conflict of interest is also maintained on the website. Information on the filing of declarations of assets and interests and on conflict of interest activities is also regularly published in the "News" section. Decisions on draft laws on which the ACC has exercised its powers of consultation on corruption risks are also available.

Regarding Priority 5, Measure 3, Activity – "Improving the professional qualification of the employees in the administration working in the field of public procurement on conflict of interest and corruption", the ACC organized and conducted a training on "Conflict of Interest -

Procedures for Prevention, Detection and Consequences under the Anti-Corruption Act". The training was conducted in the context of prevention of corruption with EU funds and public sector officials were trained.

At the invitation of the Air Force Command, training was provided to Air Force lawyers during a two-day training session on 28 and 29 November 2024. on the subject: Obligated Persons under the Anti-Corruption Act (ACA). Filing, registration and publication of returns under the ACA. Types of declarations. Contents and procedure for filing. Concept of conflict of interest, private interest, related parties and benefit under the ACA. Prohibitions after dismissal from public office. Procedure for identifying and sanctioning conflicts of interest.

The Annual Report on the Implementation of the Measures Included in the Roadmap for the Implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027) for 2022, adopted at the National Council on Anti-Corruption Policies meeting held on 18.10.2023, and the drafts of the updated strategy and Roadmap have not yet been reviewed and adopted by the Council of Ministers

The anti-corruption plans of the Ministry of the Interior are drawn up in accordance with the national anti-corruption strategy and are coordinated within the framework of the Interdepartmental Coordination Council for Combating Corruption at the Ministry of the Interior. The texts of the plans and reports on their implementation for the first half of the year and on an annual basis are published on the department's website.

Structurally, the plan is divided into corruption risks and measures to address them, indicating the goals, deadlines and structures responsible for their implementation. Its final part includes information on the ways to file reports on crimes committed, corrupt behaviour, abuse of power or other unlawful acts by employees of the Ministry of the Interior.

Open channels of communication with citizens are maintained, conditions for filing reports have been created (including by telephone, electronic form, and from 2023 - also through the created mobile application). Immediate checks are conducted on all reports from citizens, organizations or businesses.

Upon appointing an applicant to the Ministry of the Interior, a psychological examination is conducted as a mandatory stage of the competition procedure, which, among other things, measures attitudes relevant to the risk of maladaptive and/or corrupt behaviour. In 2024, as a result of these examinations, 549 candidates for appointment to the Ministry of the Interior (about 13% of all applicants) and 118 candidates - cadets for the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior (about 23% of applicants) were rejected.

In implementation of the Anti-Corruption Plan of the Ministry of the Interior, the Academy and the Centres for Specialization and Professional Training at the Academy of the Ministry of the Interior annually conduct new and refresher trainings on topics related to integrity, ethics and counteraction to corruption: "Conflict of Interest Occurrence", "Actions to Prevent Conflict of Interest", "Declaration of Incompatibility and Private Interests", "Factors for the Spread of Corruption", "Countering Corruption Practices", "Conflict of Interest", "Concept and Practices", "Conflict of Interest in the Context of Counteracting Corruption", "Causes of Corruption in the Ministry of the Interior and Countermeasures", "Conflict of Interest - Concept, Detection, Actions and Consequences", "Analysis of Corruption Practices", "Corruption and Corrupt Behaviour. Counteracting Corruption", "On the Implementation of Instruction No. 81213-877/ 06.07.2021. About the Discipline and Disciplinary Practice in the Ministry of the Interior", "Essence of the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants in the Ministry of the Interior and Relations between Civil Servants", etc. The curriculum and materials used in the training are updated periodically and are in line with changes in domestic legislation and international standards.

Professional ethics as a topic is present in all courses for initial professional training,

professional qualification and additional training. In 2024, 1417 employees of the Ministry of the Interior were trained in courses on the Code of Ethics for Civil Servants.

Employee rotation is carried out in the identified areas with increased corruption risk (see also the information to question “Specific measures to enhance transparency, integrity and accountability in sectors with high risks of corruption, with a view to monitor and prevent corruption and conflict of interests, and where applicable measures to prevent and address corruption committed by organised crime groups”).

B. Prevention

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to the prevention of corruption, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Measures to enhance integrity in the public sector (including as regards incompatibility rules, revolving doors, codes of conduct, ethics).*

In implementation of the strategic framework for combating corruption, in 2024 the ISJC took the following measures to enhance integrity and transparency in the judicial system, as well as to prevent corruption and prevent conflicts of interest:

1. To increase integrity in the judicial system in 2024, 18 inspections were initiated under Chapter Nine, Section Ib of the Judiciary Act – inspections for integrity and conflict of interest and to establish actions that harm the prestige of the judiciary, and inspections related to violating the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators, of which:

- 1 from those inspections initiated in 2024 ended with a proposal under Art. 312, Para. 1, Point 3 of the Judiciary Act – to initiate disciplinary proceedings to impose a disciplinary penalty on a judge for a committed disciplinary violation under Art. 307, Para. 3, Point 3 in conjunction with Art. 175k, Para. 4 of the Judiciary Act;
- 15 inspections have ended with a decision to terminate the inspection due to lack of sufficient data on a violation under Art. 175k of the Judiciary Act;
- in 2 cases the deadline for conducting the inspection has not expired.

Based on the proposal under Art. 312, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act, disciplinary proceedings have been initiated before the SJC's judicial board, which have not been concluded as of 15.01.2024.

2. In order to increase integrity in the judicial system and prevent corruption, in 2024 the ISJC prepared an analysis of good and bad practices regarding compliance with ethical rules in accordance with relevant European and international standards in connection with inspections under Chapter Nine, Sections Ia and Ib of the Judiciary Act for 2023. The analysis was prepared in exercise of the authority of the ISJC under Art. 54, para. 1, point 19 of the Judiciary Act (supplemented – State Gazette, issue 84 of 2023) to annually summarize good and bad practices regarding compliance with ethical rules in accordance with relevant European and international standards in connection with checks on integrity and conflict of interest of judges, prosecutors and investigators, their property declarations, as well as for the identification of actions that harm the prestige of the judiciary and those related to the violation of the independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators.

The analysis also aims to continue the implementation of the first indicator under the measure assigned to ISJC - "Strengthening the role of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council for the prevention and counteraction of corruption in the judiciary (Q4/2022)", set out in Reform 2: "Countering corruption" in the NRRPRB.

The good and bad practices highlighted in the analysis will serve as a guide for judges, prosecutors and investigators as to which actions and inactions are in line with the requirements

for ethical behaviour of magistrates within the meaning of the Judiciary Act, the Code of Ethical Behaviour of Bulgarian Judges and the Code of Ethical Behaviour of Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators, respectively, which behaviour is "good practice" and which is "bad practice". The European and international standards derived in the analysis in relation to the ethical behaviour of judges, prosecutors and investigators will contribute to the introduction of good practices in the field of prevention and counteraction to corruption and to improving the results of the fight against corruption in the judicial system.

In order to overcome the deficiencies that hinder the effective implementation of checks on the property declarations of magistrates, it is necessary to comprehensively update the substantive legal framework in accordance with the changed socio-economic and technological conditions in the country. Full protection of these public relations can be ensured through:

- regulatory decisions stimulating the conscientious procedural behaviour of the persons obliged under the Judiciary Act and providing the ISJC with a wider range of mechanisms for collecting evidence;

- granting the Inspectorate explicit authority to analyse the submitted declarations of assets and interests and, based on this analysis, to assess the risk of corruption activity in certain magistrates. Through such an analysis for a specific year or for several years, it will be possible to establish whether the financial capabilities of the magistrates allow the acquisition of certain assets, and thus better results will be achieved in the prevention of corruption in the judicial system;

- undertaking legislative amendments to unify the subject matter and powers of the Commission for Countering Corruption and the ISJC in relation to the mechanism for verifying asset declarations, types of declarations, thresholds of non-compliance and other circumstances.

The analysis highlights the need to establish uniform guidelines for the conduct of judges, prosecutors and investigators in cases where they are faced with ethical dilemmas, as well as to continuously improve ethical standards and practices in order to ensure a high level of professionalism and integrity in the judicial system. The imposition of uniform ethical standards for judges and prosecutors can be achieved by: introducing training programs for continuing professional development, which should include topics such as conflict of interest, integrity and independence; strengthening control and accountability mechanisms; improving procedures for declaring assets and interests to ensure greater transparency; improving the institutional framework by assigning various bodies in the judicial system to carry out deontological prevention; strengthening cooperation with international organizations and exchanging good practices with other countries; conducting campaigns to raise public awareness about ethical standards and the role of the judicial system and involving civil society in the process of monitoring and evaluating ethical standards. These measures would contribute to a higher level of professionalism and integrity in the judicial system, as well as to strengthening public trust in it.

The analysis was published on the ISJC website at <https://www.inspectoratvss.bg/bg/page/16>

The adopted LCC regulates a new power of the ACC according to Art. 1(8) of the LCC, the Commission to verify reports in relation to declarations of incompatibility of persons holding public office and, in case of incompatibility, to refer the incompatibility to the election or appointment authority for appropriate action. In this respect, in 2024 the Commission carried out 51 checks on signals relating to declarations of incompatibility of persons holding public office under Article 6(1) of the LCC. The Commission has taken action on the following matters in 36 of these signals the Commission initiated only incompatibility checks, and in 15 signals it initiated conflict of interest proceedings and checks under Article 13(1)(a) of the Act. (8) of the

LCC. In two of these cases, where incompatibility checks were also initiated, the Commission found incompatibility and accordingly referred them to the authorities responsible for the election or appointment of the persons concerned for appropriate action. Separate from these decisions, the Commission has also found incompatibility of persons holding public office under Article 6(1) of the LCC in four cases where it has only initiated incompatibility checks under Article 13(1)(8) of the LCC, and has also notified the result to the authorities electing or appointing the persons found incompatible.

The ACC has carried out actions related to enhancing integrity in the public sector by conducting trainings on topics related to conflict of interest and incompatibility and providing a total of 147 opinions on specific queries from stakeholders on the application of the LCC.

Representatives of the ACC participate in an inter-ministerial working group, formed by Order of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, under the leadership of the Council of Ministers, which is to prepare a draft Law on amendment and supplement to the Law on Administration and a draft Code of Conduct for persons holding public office in the central executive power. A study has been carried out by the ACC based on Article 45, paragraph 3 and Article 46, paragraph 2 of the Constitution. 1(5) of the ACA on “Identification of rules in force on the receipt and declaration of gifts and other accepted benefits/obligations by persons holding senior public office in Member States or bodies of the European Union”. The study of European practices was provided to support the task of drafting the Code.

On the part of the ACC, pursuant to Art. 1, item 5, in conj. with Art. 44, item 2 of the ACA, a draft “Methodology for the analysis of the specific risks to the integrity of persons holding public office in the central executive branch and for determining measures” has been developed. It is important to note and acknowledge that the document is not final and some of the proposed texts are subject to discussion with the other institutions relevant to the implementation of the recommendation by GRECO.

In 2024, the National Institute of Justice conducted trainings on “Corruption Crimes. Bribery. Bribery of a Foreign Official”, “Corruption in Infrastructures and Projects and Public Procurement” and “Problems in the Investigation of Official Embezzlement” which addressed various strategies and tactics for detecting and prosecuting corruption crimes, including abuse of power, giving and receiving bribes in the public sector, and other forms of corruption that compromise state institutions and public order.

In the framework of the Memorandum of Cooperation with the Basel Institute for Management, self-study courses on the following topics are available on the e-learning portal of the NIJ:

- Operational analysis
- Financial analysis using Excel
- Countering the financing of terrorism
- International cooperation and mutual assistance in criminal matters
- Analysis of the source of funding and how the funds will be used
- Intelligence using open sources

In implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention and Counteraction to Corruption in the Republic of Bulgaria (2021-2027), its Roadmap and the Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Executive Council of the Agency for Public Enterprises and Control has adopted a Code of Ethical Conduct for Persons Employed in Public Enterprises.

By Order No. P-15 of 23.01.2024, the Prime Minister appointed an interdepartmental working group to prepare drafts of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Administration and a Code of Conduct for Persons Holding Public Positions in the Central

Executive Authority. Due to the changes that occurred during the year both in the composition of the Council of Ministers (two caretaker governments were appointed) and in the interdepartmental working group, no drafts of such regulatory documents have been prepared at present.

- *Measures to enhance general transparency of public decision-making (including rules on lobbying, asset and interest disclosure rules, gifts policy, transparency of political party financing).*

New members joined the Ministry of Justice's working group, drafting lobbying provisions, based on the approved Concept for the Regulation of Lobbying Activities in the Republic of Bulgaria. On November 28, 2024, the working group held a meeting and discussed the specific provisions concerning the register and its administration.

In 2024, the ISJC checked 4,216 Tax Return declarations of assets and interests for 2023, submitted by judges, prosecutors and investigators. In the course of the checks, a comparison was made between the declared circumstances of the assets of judges, prosecutors and investigators, their spouses or persons with whom they are in de facto cohabitation on a matrimonial basis, as well as their minor children, and the information received from the relevant registers, in which the declared circumstances are subject to entry, announcement or certification. The assets of 9,562 persons were actually checked, including the balances in their bank accounts as of December 31, 2023.

In 4,215 of the checked declarations, some correspondence was established between the declared facts and the information received. In one declaration, a discrepancy was found between the declared facts and the information received, which was not eliminated within the 14-day period under Art. 175g, para. 2 of the Judiciary Act, therefore the ISJC referred the competent authorities (the National Revenue Agency and the Anti-Corruption Commission) to conduct an inspection of the person's property status.

In 2024, in connection with violations of the obligation to submit declarations of property and interests within the statutory deadlines, 41 administrative-criminal proceedings (ACP) were initiated in the ISJC, of which:

- 9 proceedings against magistrates (5 judges, 2 junior judges, 1 junior prosecutor and 1 junior investigator), who failed to submit an initial declaration of assets and interests within the deadline (Art. 175c, para. 1, point 1 of the Judiciary Act);
- 27 proceedings against magistrates (23 judges and 4 prosecutors), who failed to submit an annual declaration of assets and interests within the deadline (Art. 175c, para. 1, point 2 of the Judiciary Act);
- 2 proceedings against persons who have lost the capacity of investigator, who have not submitted a final declaration of assets and interests within the deadline (Art. 175c, para. 1, point 3 of the Judiciary Act);
- 3 proceedings against persons who have lost the capacity of prosecutor, who have not submitted a final declaration of assets and interests within the deadline (Art. 175c, para. 1, point 4 of the Judiciary Act).

The established ACPs have concluded with:

- 9 agreements under Art. 58d the Law on Administrative Offences and Penalties (LAOP) with a total amount of fines imposed and paid of BGN 1,890;
- 3 penal decrees, 2 of which have entered into force and 1 has been appealed, with the court proceedings not yet concluded. The fines imposed under the penal decrees that have entered into force, totalling BGN 1,300, have been paid in full.
- 29 warnings under Art. 28 of the LAOP due to the insignificance of the case.

Immediately after the entry into force of the LCC, the ACC adopted a decision to supplement the model declaration of assets and interests in accordance with the new legal requirements to be declared, and the model is published and available on the Commission's website - <https://register.caciaf.bg/>. Among the new circumstances to be declared are agreed interest rates on loans, cryptocurrencies and participation in civil societies, secret and informal organizations and societies. With the adoption of the ACA, the possibility for public figures to declare that they do not want information on the persons with whom they are in a de facto conjugal relationship and on their property and income to be published has been removed. In order to inform the public, information is regularly published on the Commission's website.

In 2024, during the campaign for submission of annual declarations of assets and interests, letters were sent to all over 300 administrative structures and bodies of the executive power and a publication was made on the website of the ACC in order to remind the obligation of the persons falling within the scope of Art. 6, para. 1 of the ACA to submit an annual declaration of assets and interests by May 15, 2024. In 2024, 147 opinions and instructions were provided in connection with the new legal requirements.

The adopted new LCC did not disrupt the process of work related to the acceptance, processing and verification of declarations submitted by the obliged persons, although the volume of submitted declarations increased significantly due to the addition of new categories of persons under Art. 1(50) to (51) of the LCC.

In 2024, 18,093 declarations of assets and interests under the LCC were accepted and processed.

In 2024, 14,656 annual declarations of assets and interests relating to the calendar year 2023 were audited, as well as 12,118 opening and closing declarations submitted by obliged persons from the entry into force of the law.

In 2024, 2 919 letters were also sent to resolve discrepancies found in the declarations of assets and interests submitted by obliged persons under the Counter Corruption and Illegal Assets Forfeiture Act (CCIAF) (ex).

The sanctioning activity of the ACC in 2024 has been increased threefold, with 2 275 administrative penalty proceedings initiated and 495 penalty decrees issued.

In 2024, competitive procedures were held to strengthen the administrative capacity of the specialised directorate.

The Commission continues to provide detailed statistics and accountability in its Annual Activity Report, which it submits annually by 31 March to the National Assembly, the President of the Republic, and the Council of Ministers; the report is published on the Commission's website.

- *Measures to prevent conflicts of interest in the public sector. Please specify the features and scope of their application (e.g. categories of officials concerned, types of checks and corrective measures depending on the category of officials concerned).*

Specifically, in 2024, the ISJC conducted two trainings on the topic "Current moments in judicial practice on the application of the conflict of interest, integrity, independence and damage to the prestige of the judiciary", in which magistrates from various judicial authorities, inspectors and experts from the ISJC participated. The trainings were conducted in implementation of the authority assigned to the ISJC in 2023 under Art. 54, para. 1, point 17 of the Judiciary Act (supplemented SG, issue 84 of 2023) to organize and conduct anti-corruption trainings and trainings to strengthen the integrity and independence of judges, prosecutors and investigators and conflict of interest.

During the trainings, the legal regime of conflict of interest and the methods for preventing it in the judiciary were examined, as well as the procedure for establishing a conflict

of interest in relation to judges, prosecutors and investigators. The main emphasis was placed on the practical application by the individual panels of the cases of conflict of interest, and the problem areas in the procedure for establishing a conflict of interest in the practice of the ISJC and the SJC and judicial challenge were discussed. The legal framework of the standards of conduct of judges, prosecutors and investigators, the grounds for engaging their disciplinary responsibility and the individual aspects of the disciplinary proceedings were also examined, as well as the practice of the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) on the application of the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Judges and the Code of Ethical Conduct of Bulgarian Prosecutors and Investigators, and on Chapter Nine, Section Ib of the Judiciary Act. Trends in the disciplinary practice of the SJC and SAC were commented on the topics, with an emphasis on the criteria and deadlines for initiating disciplinary proceedings.

The trainings conducted by ISJC are part of the overall ISJC strategy to enhance the integrity of magistrates and to promote the high standards of independence, ethics and integrity, which are the basis of trust in an effective and fair judicial system.

The trainings also continue the implementation of the second indicator under the measure assigned to ISJC "Strengthening the role of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council for the prevention and counteraction of corruption in the judiciary (Q4/2022)", set out in Reform 2: "Countering corruption" in the RRP.

The draft Regulation on the organization and procedure for verifying declarations, as well as for establishing a conflict of interest, prepared by the interdepartmental working group (Order No. P-197 of 24.10.2023 of the Prime Minister), including provisions for the protection of persons reporting conflicts of interest and corruption, was published on the Public Discussion Portal and sent for interdepartmental coordination. During the coordination procedure, a negative opinion was received from the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, which is why it was not submitted for consideration at a meeting of the Council of Ministers.

<https://www.strategy.bg/publicconsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=8102>

*→ For the three previous points, **please also provide information and figures on their application/enforcement**, such as number of detected breaches/irregularities of the various rules in place and the follow-up given (investigations, sanctions, etc.).*

In connection with the signals received under Article 63 of the LCC in conjunction with Article 15, paragraph 2 of the Whistleblowers and Public Information Protection Act, the Commission adopted 594 decisions in the period from 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2024 in the part "conflict of interest" as follows:

In the admissibility phase, 408 decisions were adopted, of which:

- 169 decisions to initiate conflict of interest proceedings, 15 of which were also subject to checks under Art. 13, para. 1, item 8 of ACA;

- 194 decisions for lack of grounds for initiating conflict of interest proceedings (due to anonymity; the sender denies having reported to the Commission; they concern persons who do not hold a public office under Art. 6, para. 1 of the ACA; irregularities in the alert have not been corrected after due notification thereof - no specific data on violations under Chapter Eight of the ACA have been indicated, etc.), including 60 alerts concerning persons under §2 of the AP of the ACA have been forwarded to the relevant election or appointment authorities;

- 45 decisions which only initiated checks under Art. 13, para. 1(8) of ACA on signals relating to declarations of incompatibility of persons holding public office under Art. 6, para. 1 of the ACA.

In the merits phase, 186 decisions were adopted, of which:

- 150 decisions, of which 24 decisions identified 49 conflicts of interest, two of which

also identified incompatibility, and 126 decisions which did not identify a conflict of interest;

- 36 decisions on completed inspections under Art. 1(8) of the ACA, in four of which the Commission found incompatibility and accordingly referred the person to the election/appointing authority for appropriate action.

The 186 decisions are published on the Commission's website in the Conflicts of Interest section.

The decisions which established a conflict of interest in the period from 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2024 mainly concern persons holding public office, as follows:

- Art. 6, para. 1, item 32 of the LCC - 13 persons in total - seven mayors of municipalities, for one of them the Commission has issued two decisions on conflict of interest on different grounds and six municipal councillors;

- Art. 6, para. 1, items 50 and 51 of the LCC - a total of 12 persons - two directors of municipal enterprises, three members of the Board of Directors of a state-owned enterprise, five directors of educational institutions, including vocational schools, a director of a home for persons with special needs; an executive director-representative of the state in a holding company with state participation.

The Commission has also adopted 10 protocol decisions for referral to the Commission for Illegal Assets Forfeiture for carrying out an inspection under Chapter 10, Article 108, paragraph 5 of the Illegal Assets Forfeiture Act, due to a conflict of interest established by a valid act.

In 2024, the Commission imposed fines and ordered forfeitures in excess of BGN 470,000, given its administrative punishment functions related to the identified violations constituting conflict of interest.

The SAC, in the period from 01.01.2024 to 31.12.2024, has confirmed 12 decisions of the Commission establishing conflict of interest, 6 decisions have been annulled, two decisions have been referred back to another Chamber of the Court of First Instance and one decision has been referred back to the same Chamber.

Two decisions of the Commission with a conflict of interest finding and one decision of the court of first instance upholding a decision of the Commission with a conflict of interest finding have not been appealed by the interested parties and have also entered into force in 2024.

Full statistical information on the results of the work in the main areas of activity (corruption prevention, public register, conflict of interest, anti-corruption, organisation of administrative activity, financial and economic activity and international activity) is contained in the report on the activities of the ACC, which is prepared annually by 31 March and published on the Commission's website.

Every six months of the year, the ACC submits to the National Assembly Committee on Preventing and Combating Corruption a Report on the implementation of the activities of the ACC, including information on the decisions adopted by activity.

Information on the activities carried out by the ACC can also be obtained under the Access to Public Information Act.

In 2024, while performing their control functions under the Electoral Code, in 57 cases the auditors of the Court of Auditors found violations of provisions of the Electoral Code related to the transparency of campaign financing (Articles 170 and 171 of the Electoral Code). 17 penalties in the form of fines were imposed on the administrative offences.

For detected corruption of employees of the Ministry of the Interior for the period January - November 2024, 51 disciplinary proceedings were initiated under Art. 207 of the Ministry of the Interior. 35 proceedings were concluded and the employees against whom they were conducted were imposed various types of disciplinary sanctions. Work on 16 of the proceedings initiated in the reporting period is still ongoing.

- *Measures to ensure whistleblower protection and encourage reporting of corruption, including their application (i.e. number of reports received, and the follow-up given).*

In February 2023, the Law on the Protection of Persons Filing Signals or Publicly Disclosing Information on Violations (LPWPPDIV) was promulgated in the State Gazette, issue 11. The law transposes Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of the protection of persons who report breaches of Union law. In order to implement the recommendations of the EC, which established inaccurate transposition of some of the texts of Directive (EU) 2019/1937, as well as to meet the requirements of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan the Ministry of Justice prepared a draft LPWPPDIV. An interdepartmental coordination procedure was conducted on the draft law and it was published for public consultations in the period January 9 - January 23, 2024. After the public consultations and the coordination procedure were completed, on 26 January 2024 the draft law was submitted for consideration and approval by the Council of Ministers. The draft law was not considered at the meeting of the Council of Ministers.

In this regard, and after a preparatory meeting organized by the Ministry of Finance on the occasion of a technical mission of the EC to monitor the implementation of the stages of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, an agreement was reached to prepare a joint letter from the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Finance to the National Assembly with a request to discuss and consider the criticisms of the EC regarding the non-compliance of the law with the requirements of the Directive. The letter was sent to the National Assembly on 5 April 2024.

On 10 April 2024, a Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the LPWPPDIV by a Group of Members of Parliament, reg. No. 49-454-01-47/10.04.2024. The draft law has identical content to the draft law prepared by the Ministry of Justice in January. Due to the termination of the powers of the 49th National Assembly, the draft law was not adopted.

On June 21, 2024, the LPWPPDIV was again submitted to the 50th National Assembly by a group of MPs, which is identical in content to the draft prepared in January by the Ministry of Justice.

By letters dated August 1 and 8, 2024, the Ministry of Justice expressed its opinions supporting the proposals of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the LPWPPDIV and also proposed amendments and supplements to the transitional and final provisions of the draft law on the Law on Local Self-Government and Local Administration.

Due to the termination of the powers of the 50th National Assembly, the draft law was not adopted.

In connection with the inaccurate transposition of some of the texts, the Ministry of Justice prepared a draft of the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the LPWPPDIV, which was in line with all the received recommendations, comments and proposals of the EC.

After the approval received from the EC, the Ministry of Justice initiated actions under a new interdepartmental coordination procedure, and the draft law was also published for public consultations in the period November 11 - November 25, 2024.

The draft was adopted by Decision No. 907 of the Council of Ministers of December 27, 2024 and submitted for adoption by the 51st National Assembly.

A goal and priority for 2023 of the Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP/the Commission) is also to create the necessary legal prerequisites for starting the implementation of the LPWPPDIV.

It should be noted that in a very short time, the CPDP creates conditions for the start of the functioning of the national system of obligated entities in the public and private sectors under the LPWPPDIV and for guaranteeing the rights of natural persons whistleblowers, in the

capacity of the Commission as a Central Authority for external reporting and for the protection of persons who report or publicly disclose information about breaches.

The CPDP has brought its organizational structure and administrative units in line with the new increased responsibilities. In addition, in 2023, the Commission is building an independent structural unit - the External Reporting Channel Directorate and increased the number of its staff. In parallel, the CPDP - as an obliged entity under the Whistleblowers Protection Act - has also provided conditions for the so-called internal reporting.

To implement the regulatory requirements, the CPDP adopts amendments and supplements to the Rules of Procedure of the Commission for Personal Data Protection and its Administration (RPCPDPA), which reflect the relevant changes in the organizational structure of the Commission.

After the promulgation of the LPWPPDIV on 02.02.2023 (prom., State Gazette, issue 11/2023), in a very short time, the Commission for Personal Data Protection (CPDP) managed to create all the necessary conditions for the start of the functioning of the national system of obliged entities in the public and private sectors, competent authorities and reporting persons under the LPWPPDIV in order to ensure the implementation of the law and achieve its goals.

In 2023, the CPDP developed and adopted the necessary subordinate regulations arising from the LPWPPDIV within the statutory deadlines, as well as methodological instructions for all obliged entities were prepared.

The acts are publicly available on the CPDP website - <https://cpdo.bg/>, and also on the English and French versions of the official website of the Commission - <https://cpdp.bg/en/>, <https://cpdp.bg/fr/>

Information and explanatory materials on all the most important aspects of the new legislation for the protection of whistleblowers are regularly published on the Commission's website.

Pursuant to § 10 of the Final Provisions of the LPWPPDIV, the law enters into force three months after its promulgation in the State Gazette (i.e. from May 4, 2023), and the obligations to establish an internal whistleblowing channel apply to employers in the private sector who have between 50 and 249 workers or employees, from December 17, 2023. For all other employers in the public and private sectors who are obliged entities under Art. 12, para. 1 of the law, the latter applies as of May 4, 2023. For this purpose, on the specified date, a functionality for generating the so-called Unique Identification Number (UIN) was put into operation on the CPDP website, which should be collected by the employees designated under Article 14 of the law, responsible for reviewing signals in the structures of the obliged entities. This number was introduced by the CPDP for the purposes of registering the signals submitted to the obliged entities.

The UIN is of paramount importance for ensuring the individualization and traceability of each breach report and for the implementation of control in the field by the Central Authority. UIN is used to implement control to ensure that the obliged entity from the public and private sectors will not conceal the fact of a report submitted through an internal channel and impede its consideration. This control does not include any action by the Central Authority to influence the handling of the report through the internal channel, nor does it lead to the seizure of the function of handling it by the respective obliged entity. There is also no obligation to provide the Central Authority with the results of the actions taken by the obliged entity on the substance of the report.

In parallel with the efforts of the Commission at a national level, aimed at all stakeholders, the CPDP is taking the necessary actions to bring its organizational structure into line with the requirements of the new law and is building an independent structural unit - the External Reporting Channel Directorate, which will assist it in performing its functions as a Central Authority for External Reporting. An independent information system has been built

through which external reporting and their processing is carried out, which is accessible only to the employees of the Directorate.

To perform its functions as a Central Authority for External Reporting, the CPDP has developed and put into operation the specialized information system of the Commission, designated for registering and working with reports of breaches (“SIGNAL”). The processing of personal data of whistleblowers and of individuals whose information is available in breach reports is carried out in accordance with Regulation (EU) 2016/679 and the special requirements of the LPWPPDIV. In this sense, the CPDP applies a set of appropriate technical and organizational protection measures pursuant to Art. 32 of Regulation (EU) 2016/679, while complying with the confidentiality obligations under Art. 31 of the LPWPPDIV and the requirements for the external reporting channel pursuant to Art. 22, para. 4 of the LPWPPDIV.

It is important to note that the Commission for Personal Data Protection has introduced and applies technical and organizational measures for functional separation of signals received by it in its capacity as a national data protection supervisory authority and a central authority for external reporting under the Whistleblowers Protection Act.

Interaction is carried out with the competent authorities under Art. 20, para. 1 of the Whistleblowers Protection Act, with annual meetings held to discuss the interaction, as well as with the National Office for Legal Assistance, in connection with providing protection to whistleblowers.

It should be noted that pursuant to Art. 20, para. 3 of the LPWPPDIV, when the signal reports breaches committed by persons holding senior public positions (public positions), the CPDP has a legal obligation to send the signal for verification to the ACC.

In compliance with the requirements of Art. 29, para. 2 of the LPWPPDIV (Art. 27, paragraph 1 of Directive (EU) 2019/1937 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2019 on the protection of persons reporting on breaches of Union law - Directive (EU) 2019/1937), the Commission for Personal Data Protection is obliged to send the European Commission information on: the number of reports received; the number of inspections carried out and their results; a report on the financial proceeds from the collected fines and property sanctions and an assessment of established financial damages - <https://cpdp.bg/%D0%B8%D0%BD%D1%84%D0%BE%D1%80%D0%BC%D0%B0%D1%86%D0%B8%D1%8F/>.

Active interaction is also being carried out, both with the entities obliged to implement the LPWPPDIV, and with the non-governmental sector. Joint initiatives have been organized in cooperation with the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives; Transparency Without Borders; and the American Chamber of Commerce in Bulgaria.

Please, see additional statistics and data on trainings and other relevant activities in Annex Whistleblowers Protection

- *Specific measures to enhance transparency, integrity and accountability in sectors with high risks of corruption, with a view to monitor and prevent corruption and conflict of interests, and where applicable measures to prevent and address corruption committed by organised crime groups. Such high-risk sectors could include: public procurement, including construction, transport/infrastructure, defence, cohesion, agriculture, environment, healthcare, citizen/residence investor schemes, large-scale investments of national interest and the spending of EU funds, urban planning.*

Pursuant to the duties of the ACC regulated in Art. 44, item 1 of the LCC for collecting, summarizing and analyzing information on national anti-corruption policies and measures, the Commission has once again prepared reports on “Analysis of the reports on the implementation of the anti-corruption plans for 2024 of the first- and second-level budget authorizers” and “Analysis of the anti-corruption plans for 2023 of the first- and second-level budget

authorizers”. The reports are published on the ACC website at: <https://www.caciaf.bg/bg/prevenција-na-korupcijata/dokumenti>.

The reports track the implementation of the anti-corruption measures planned by the agencies, draw findings for each individual administrative structure, and make suggestions for improving activity and efficiency.

The 2024 report analyses the anti-corruption plans of 32 departments and the 593 measures contained therein, as well as the findings for each administrative structure.

The report also analyses a total of 532 corruption risks specifically identified by the ministries, broken down by area as follows:

- 82 risks in area 1 “Corruption risk - management, disposal or spending of budget funds and assets, including public procurement”;
- 164 risk in area 2 “Corruption risk - carrying out control activities”;
- 60 risks in area 3 “Corruption Risk - Provision of Administrative Services, Concessions, Licensing and Permits, Registration Regimes”;
- 9 risks in area 4 “Corruption risk - competitive procedures/competitions for entry of persons in registers or for carrying out regulated professions”;
- 50 risks in area 5 “Corruption risk - gaps in laws and unclear regulations, leading to contradictory interpretation and/or application of regulations”;
- 65 risks in area 6 “Other measures in view of specific risks in the relevant departments”;
- 102 risks in area 7 “Publicity measures”.

As a result of the analysis, an updated list of 68 corruption risks has been prepared, correlated to the areas of the model anti-corruption plan. The list is essentially a summary mapping of corruption risks. The list is also intended to assist agencies in the process of identifying and formulating the specific corruption risk identified.

The 2024 report again identifies certain trends and makes proposals to build on the work and make it more practical and effective.

Another measure to prevent corruption is the ACA's coordination of 95 draft laws prepared by the executive on the existence of corruption risk. In the process of coordination, recommendations and proposals are made with maximum specificity and practical orientation, which will actually contribute to the improvement of legal acts in the direction of corruption prevention.

In 2024, the Commission will continue to monitor the impact of proposed legislative changes by carrying out an annual ex-post analysis of the impact of adopted legislation that has gone through the consultation procedure, entered into force and been in force for at least 12 months.

In compliance with the principle of transparency, the Commission's activity in the “Conflict of Interest” section is fully public and all decisions of the Commission establishing a conflict of interest or the absence thereof, the decisions of the incompatibility checks carried out, as well as all decisions of the courts of first instance and the Supreme Administrative Court in cases related to the challenge of decisions establishing a conflict of interest are published on its website.

Please, see Annex Specific measures in sectors with high risks of corruption

Questions for input on the single market dimension of the Rule of Law Report

Pillar II:

Prevention

- Measures for the prevention of corruption in relation to the issuing of official permits (e.g. related to environment, energy and various types of construction)

The Subsurface Resources Act contains detailed regulations on the procedures for issuing permits for prospecting and exploration or for exploitation of mineral resources, as well as for granting concessions for the extraction of subsurface resources, which in turn is an objective measure for the prevention and counteraction of corruption in this field of activity.

In addition, it should be noted that the Ministry of Energy annually approves and periodically reports on the implementation of an Anti-Corruption Plan, including specifically identified corruption risks in the field of energy and anti-corruption measures to address them.

The measures set out in the Anti-Corruption Plan of the Minister of Environment and Water for 2024 include:

- implementing a rotational approach to distributing files to the relevant administrative units, including those for permitting procedures. This aims to reduce the prerequisites for the emergence of corruption risks for employees coordinating permitting procedures in the environmental sector;
- periodic review and update of internal departmental acts in order to prevent the conditions for corrupt practices, contradictory ones, as well as to fill the gaps in the regulatory framework;
- uniform interpretation and application of the practice of the normative acts and instructions of the Ministry, with the aim of unifying the application of the normative acts and the subordinate legislation, and preventing subjective attitude;
- maintaining various mechanisms for submitting and processing signals about corruption and conflict of interest;
- publishing anti-corruption information on the website of the ministry and the secondary budget spending units under the budget of the Ministry of Environment and Water;
- updating and publishing information about the administrative services provided, including issuing permits.

The activities undertaken in this area by the Ministry of Economy and Industry:

- Improved mechanisms are being used to raise awareness among citizens and interested business circles on the opportunities and mechanisms for cooperation with NATO and EU partners, as well as on the export control of defence-related products and dual-use items;

- public registers of persons licensed/registered for activities with defence-related products and dual-use items and technologies are maintained - the measure helps to raise awareness and facilitate the search for public information and its possible subsequent processing;

- Measures to improve administrative services in order to achieve a higher level of service to business;

- actions to increase mutual awareness of and coordination between officials;

- Systematic monitoring of the work of the units providing administrative services, issuing certificates, permits and registrations, carrying out administrative control and/or supervision activities, mainly aimed at preventing corruption, taking timely and effective measures to curb and eliminate it;

- the principle of staff rotation is introduced through the establishment and approval of schedules. The practice of inter-ministerial coordination in the preparation of most documents has been adopted, including in cases where this is not regulated by law.

Also, in order to avoid corrupt practices, the composition of the Commission is monitored and, if necessary, changed, and strict compliance with all the rules in force concerning the application of anti-corruption measures is ensured in the implementation of the procedure.

- Reporting on the use of digital technologies to enhance transparency and oversight in public procurement

C. Repression

- ☐ No developments regarding the repression of corruption
- ☐ If there have been developments related to the repression of corruption, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *The legal framework on the criminalisation and sanctions for corruption and related offences, including foreign bribery.*

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

- *Official data on the number of investigations, prosecutions, final judgments, and the application of sanctions for corruption offences (differentiated by offence if possible)¹⁷. Please indicate whether the cases: involve legal persons; are related to the implementation of EU or national funds¹⁸; involve high level corruption. Please indicate which data is publicly available and how policy-making is informed by the data.*

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 1, provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation and the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

In 2024, 306 corruption reports were investigated at ISD - the Ministry of the Interior, and as a result of the investigations, 29 pre-trial proceedings were initiated against employees of the Ministry of the Interior.

- *Potential obstacles identified in law or in practice to the investigation and prosecution of high-level and complex corruption cases (e.g. political immunity regulation, procedural rules, statute of limitations, cross-border cooperation, pardoning).*

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

- *Information on effectiveness of criminal and non-criminal measures and of sanctions (e.g. recovery measures and administrative sanctions) on both public and private offenders.*

Other – please specify

III. Media pluralism and media freedom

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding media pluralism and media freedom (if applicable):

¹⁷ Please include, if available the number of (data since 2022 or latest available data): indictments; first instance convictions, first instance acquittals; final convictions; final acquittals; other outcomes (final) (i.e. excluding convictions and acquittals); cases adjudicated (final); imprisonment / custodial sentences through final convictions; suspended custodial sentences through final convictions; pending cases at the end of the reference year.

¹⁸ For MS participating in the EPPO, data on cases related to EU funds does not encompass investigations and prosecutions carried out by the EPPO.

Recommendation Make further progress on activities aimed at improving transparency in the distribution of state advertising, in particular with regard to state advertising contracted through intermediaries such as media agencies.

A working group has been formed under the Minister of Culture to prepare a draft Act amending and supplementing the Radio and Television Act in connection with the alignment of national legislation with the European Media Freedom Act (Regulation (EU) 2024/1083).

A Permanent Expert Council on Media Literacy under the Minister of Culture was also formed.

A. Media authorities and bodies¹⁹

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to media authorities and bodies, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution:

- *Measures taken to ensure the independence, enforcement powers and adequacy of resources (financial, human and technical) of media regulatory authorities and bodies.*

Taking into account the issues raised by the previous reports on the rule of law with regard to the budget of the Council for Electronic Media (CEM) and the recommendations made in the reports of the European Commission on the funding of the regulatory body, we present information on the annual measures taken to ensure the necessary financial resources for the implementation of the powers of CEM, as defined by the Law on Radio and Television, as well as to ensure the implementation of its main objectives and activities, including the strengthening of the human resources of the agency. In 2024, by decree of the Council of Ministers, additional expenditures were approved under the budget of the Ministry of Education and Science in accordance with Art. 109, para. 3 of the Public Finance Act to overcome disparities in staff remuneration, including to increase staff remuneration. The approved additional financial resource for staff expenditure enables the CEM to address and overcome the existing imbalances in the remuneration of its staff.

By Decision No. 862 of 2024, the Council of Ministers approved the draft Law on the State Budget of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2025. After adopting the decision for its approval, the Council of Ministers submitted the said draft law, registered with entry No. 51-402-01-21 of 13.12.2024, to the National Assembly for consideration and adoption. The Bill provides for the implementation of an income policy to increase personnel costs by 10 per cent. The budget of the CEM provides for additional funds in connection with the update of the remuneration of the members of the CEM, taking into account the envisaged increase in the maximum social security income as of 1 January 2025.

In connection with the draft laws envisaging the implementation of new activities by the CEM, on the proposal of the ministry, the relevant financial justifications to each of the draft laws provide for additional staff and maintenance costs in the CEM budget for 2025 and the following years, which will be allocated to the budget organization after the adoption of the relevant laws by the National Assembly.

The envisaged additional funds for staff costs of CEM are for strengthening the administrative capacity of the regulator and ensuring the conditions for the implementation of the statutory activities and functions of the department.

¹⁹ Cf. Article 30 of Directive 2018/1808 – Bulgaria has fully implemented Directive 2018/1808 by the Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Radio and Television Act effective from 22.12.2020, with the exception of Art. 30, para. 4.

- *Conditions and procedures for the appointment and dismissal of the head / members of the collegiate body of media regulatory authorities and bodies.*

After four unsuccessful votes for a permanent chairman of the Council for Electronic Media, the regulator's members decided to fill the position on a rotating basis. During the period under review, the chairmanship was occupied successively by two members of the CEM elected in accordance with the formal appointment procedure. The rotation took place on 31.10.2024.

- *Existence and functions of media councils or other self-regulatory bodies.*

Article 4b.(1) of the Radio and Television Act (RTA) (New - SG 109 of 2020, in force from 22.12.2020 - i.e. not new) promotes self-regulation and co-regulation through codes of conduct and standards, where relevant and appropriate. Codes of conduct and standards include, but are not limited to:

1. Code of Ethics of the Bulgarian Media, developed by the National Council for Journalistic Ethics Foundation;
2. A single industry-accepted standard for regulating sound levels in advertising;
3. National ethical rules for advertising and commercial communication, developed by the National Council for Self-Regulation, in accordance with the Code of Conduct under Art. 17a, para. 3.

B. Safeguards against government or political interference and transparency and concentration of media ownership

☐ No developments

☐ If there have been developments related government or political interference or transparency and concentration of media ownership, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Measures taken to ensure the fair and transparent allocation of state advertising*
- *Safeguards against state / political interference, in particular:*
 - *safeguards to ensure editorial independence of media (private and public)*
 - *specific safeguards for the independence of heads of management and members of the governing boards of public service media (e.g. related to appointment, dismissal), safeguards for their financial and operational independence (e.g. related to reporting obligations and the allocation of resources) and safeguards for plurality of information and opinions*
 - *information on specific legal provisions and procedures applying to media service providers, including as regards granting/renewal/termination of licences, company operation, capital entry requirements, concentration, and corporate governance*
- *Transparency of media ownership and public availability of media ownership information, including on direct, indirect and beneficial owners*

C. Framework for journalists' protection, transparency and access to documents

☐ No developments

☐ If there have been developments related to the framework for journalists' protection or transparency/access to documents, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Rules and practices guaranteeing journalist's independence and safety, including as regards protection of journalistic sources and communications, referring also, if applicable, to follow-up given to alerts lodged with the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists.*

At present, the long-awaited and extremely important legislative act at the European level – the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA) – is already a fact – on 17.04.2024, Regulation (EU) 2024/1083 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 was published in the Official Journal of the EU. The issues covered in *Pillar III. Media Pluralism* of the Report are subject to regulation by the EMFA, the majority of whose provisions will begin to apply this year.

Although it is binding in its entirety and directly applicable in all Member States, the EMFA requires the state to take action related to amendments to the legislation, including the Radio and Television Act (RTA). To this end, at the end of 2024, the Minister of Culture initiated the formation of a working group to prepare a draft Act amending and supplementing the RTA, which will prepare the necessary amendments in 2025.

With regard to pending proceedings in cases of violence against journalists, the following could be noted:

- the effective verdict of the Sofia City Court against three individuals for beating up the journalist Slavi Angelov (2020), which imposed a sentence of imprisonment for a term of 5 years;
- the charges brought by the Haskovo District Prosecutor's Office against two individuals for a hooligan attack on BTV operator Petar Kartulev (October 2024).

In both cases, reports have been filed with the Council of Europe Platform for the Protection of Journalism.

Given the important role of the media in providing reliable and credible information to citizens and respecting their right to work without censorship and restriction of the right to freely receive and seek information, the necessary professional organization has been created to ensure access to places and sources of information - transparent, fair and non-discriminatory conditions and procedures for participation and asking questions at press conferences and similar events; implementation of clear, transparent and non-discriminatory accreditation procedures.

The Ministry of the Interior continues the established practice of effective communication with journalists in the interest of publicity and transparency and providing clear, timely and specific information on security measures taken by the Ministry of the Interior during mass events.

- *Law enforcement capacity, including during protests and demonstrations, to ensure journalists' safety and to investigate attacks on journalists.*

The Ministry of the Interior conducts on-the-job training on the topic "Protection of the rights of journalists in the performance of their professional activities". The Academy of the Ministry of the Interior has also prepared relevant training content, accessible to all structures in the Ministry's internal network.

- *Access to information and public documents by public at large and journalists (incl. transparency authorities where they exist, procedures, costs/fees, timeframes, administrative/judicial review of decisions, execution of decisions by public authorities, possible obstacles related to the classification of information).*

The Supreme Administrative Court (SAC) considers applications submitted to it for access to public information, which is created or stored at the SAC in accordance with the procedure and within the time limits provided for in the current Access to Public Information Act (APIA). The media also submit requests for information under the APIA.

Decisions to grant access to public information or to refuse to grant access to public information shall be appealed before the relevant administrative court in accordance with the Administrative Procedure Code. The decision of the administrative court shall not be subject to cassation appeal

In 2024, there has been only one refusal by the SAC to provide the information sought, upheld by the administrative tribunal following litigation on appeal by the applicant.

The SAC shall apply internal rules which regulate the procedure and the manner of deletion of the information constituting personal data of the natural persons - parties and participants in the court proceedings, when publishing the court acts, records and other documents on the website of the SAC and when sending the court acts subject to promulgation in the State Gazette.

Following a request of the Minister of Justice for the adoption of an interpretative decision on the question “*Are the court acts in cases where classified information has been applied subject to publication and what part of them?*”, on 21.12.2021 the interpretative case No. 4/2021 of the General Assembly of Judges of the 1st and 2nd Collegium of the SAC was initiated. A closed hearing on the case is to be scheduled on 30.01.2025 for the adoption of the reasons to the answer to the interpretative question.

On the subject of access to information for the public in general and journalists: the SAC shall ensure access to the courtrooms for journalists and citizens during court hearings, except when the case is heard in camera. Access to the courtroom is also granted to photojournalists and broadcasters - subject to permission granted by the judges in the case.

The SAC provides information to the media on all court cases of public importance and on specific cases at the request of the media. The information is disseminated equally, without showing preference to some media and ignoring others. All communications to the media that are distributed by e-mail are also published on the Court's website. Citizens and journalists have access to information on the activities of the SACC through its website, which is updated in a timely manner.

- *Lawsuits (incl. SLAPPs - strategic lawsuits against public participation) and convictions against journalists (incl. defamation cases) and measures taken to safeguard against manifestly unfounded and abusive lawsuits.*

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 1, provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation

Between October 2023 and April 2024, an expert working group was established at the Ministry of Justice, focusing on the implementation of Recommendation (EU) 2022/758 of 27 April 2022 on the protection of journalists and human rights defenders engaged in public participation from strategic litigation (“strategic litigation directed against public participation”).

The working group was composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, doctrine, judiciary and practice. The working group prepared conceptual proposals aimed at ensuring the necessary guarantees in Bulgarian legislation to deal with SLAPP cases. In addition, some specific texts were proposed for introducing amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure.

Following the entry into force of Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on the protection of persons involved in public participation against manifestly unfounded claims or abusive legal proceedings ("strategic legal proceedings directed against public participation"), another working group with a similar composition was established by Order of the Minister of Justice with the task of bringing national legislation into line with the directive. It has already prepared a preliminary draft of legislative amendments, which is still under discussion. There is continuity in the work of the two expert groups. The plan is for the new legislation to cover, in addition to proceedings in civil cases with cross-border implications, also domestic cases. The deadline for preparing proposals for amendments to national legislation is 30.7.2025.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

Other – please specify

In Bulgaria and currently the requirements for media ownership transparency and financing are not included in the Law on Radio and Television, but in the Law on the Compulsory Deposit of Printed and Other Works and on the Announcement of Media Distributors and Media Service Providers, and the Electoral Code sets requirements for the media in an election campaign.

An inter-ministerial working group at the Ministry of Culture to draft an Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Radio and Television Act in relation to the alignment of national legislation with the European Freedom of the Media Act (EFMA) must submit the draft by 30 April 2025. The regulation establishes a requirement for media service providers to disclose information on ownership and financial structures, promoting accountability and reducing risks of political or economic interference, ensuring public access to diverse and reliable information through enhanced editorial independence and reduced government interference in public service media.

It is yet to be decided legislatively whether the current regulator for electronic media will expand its tasks and capacity to take over the implementation of the regulation in full, or whether another solution will be sought.

The EFMA provides for

- publicity of information about public funds (state advertising) or any other remuneration or benefit provided directly or indirectly by public bodies or services to media service providers or providers of online platforms for state advertising and supply or service contracts. EU MS retain the possibility to adopt stricter rules in specific areas, provided that these rules ensure a higher level of protection of media pluralism or editorial independence, without leading to a restriction of the free movement of media services from other MS. (Art. 25)

- MS to designate one or more independent bodies or offices, or put in place mechanisms, free from political influence by governments, to oversee the implementation of the requirements of editorial and functional independence, impartiality and pluralistic audience coverage in line with the public service mission defined at national level (Art. 5)

The EFMA applies from 8 August 2025, However, earlier dates have been set for some provisions: Article 3, which establishes the right of access to pluralistic media content

independent of editorial interference, and the obligation for the EU MS to put in place (if it did not already have in place) framework conditions for the realisation of this right in favour of free and democratic debate, applies from 8 November .If properly implemented in Bulgaria (and following the necessary legislative changes), the EFMA will address the main problems identified in the Rule of Law reports. This includes transparency in media ownership, fair distribution of state advertising, protection from SLPDAPP and strengthening the independence of the media regulator(s).

IV. Other institutional issues related to checks and balances

Please provide information on measures taken to follow-up on the recommendations received in the 2024 Report regarding the system of checks and balances (if applicable): ...

A. The process for preparing and enacting laws

☐ No developments

☒ If there have been developments related to the process for preparing and enacting laws, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Framework, policy and use of impact assessments and evidence based policy-making, stakeholders²⁰/public consultations (including rules and practices on the transparent participation of civil society to policy development and decision-making processes, and transparency and quality of the legislative process both in the preparatory and the parliamentary phase.*

In the context of the process of accession of the Republic of Bulgaria to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and in particular within the framework of the monitoring of our strategic, regulatory and administrative practice by the Regulatory Policy Committee in 2024. efforts continued to improve our regulatory policy in various aspects:

1. A Legislative Program of the Council of Ministers for the first half of 2024 was adopted, which focuses on increasing coordination between ministries in the development of laws, which will lead to a reduction in the number of changes in them and, accordingly, to more sustainable laws - the "single draft laws" approach, in which one change in the law makes relevant changes arising from the obligations to transpose EU law, reforms under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan, initiatives to reduce the administrative burden;

2. A Plan for Reducing the Administrative Burden was adopted (Decision No. 233 of the Council of Ministers of 2024).

In 2024, the preparation of:

1. Government document on the development of Bulgaria's regulatory policy began;
2. Action plan for the implementation of administrative services on the principle of "episode of life".

The legal framework for the transparency of the rule-making process was not changed in 2024. All draft regulations (laws and by-laws of the Council of Ministers and those of individual ministers) are mandatory published on the Public Consultation Portal together with the reasons, the preliminary impact assessment and the opinion of the Council of Ministers administration on the quality of the conducted IA. After the conclusion of the public consultation, a report with feedback on the proposals made is published.

Monitoring of regulatory policy is carried out through the Annual Impact Assessment Report - the last adopted report for 2023.

²⁰ This includes also the consultation of social partners.

- *Rules and use of fast-track procedures and emergency procedures (for example, the percentage of decisions adopted through emergency/urgent procedure compared to the total number of adopted decisions)*

The legal framework provides that online public consultations are held for a period of 30 days, but in exceptional cases, this period may be reduced to at least 14 days. The latest current data on the ratio of the number of consultations with a period of 30 days and with a shorter period is for 2023. Public consultations at the national level with a period of less than 30 days in 2023 are 138 or about 25% of all national public consultations. Their share decreases by 6% compared to 2022 (31%). <https://www.strategy.bg/Publications/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&categoryId=&Id=390&y=&m=&d>

In 2024, the Council of Ministers adopted a total of 1832 acts, of which: 499 decrees (3 classified); 947 decisions (25 classified with a stamp); 3 orders and 383 protocol decisions. Of all the acts, 91 were adopted in absentia in accordance with the provisions of Art. 7, para. 3 of the Organizational Regulations of the Council of Ministers and its Administration, according to which, exceptionally and upon the proposal of the Prime Minister, the Council of Ministers may adopt an act in absentia, i.e. about 5% of all acts were adopted in this order.

- *Rules and application of states of emergency (or analogous regimes), including judicial review and parliamentary oversight.*
- *Regime for constitutional review of laws*

According to the amendments to Art. 150, para. 2 of the Constitution, any court may refer to the Constitutional Court a request to establish a discrepancy between a law applicable to the specific case and the Constitution. As a result, in 2023, a dozen requests were submitted to the Constitutional Court, some of which were admitted for consideration.

Questions for input on the single market dimension of the Rule of Law Report

Pillar IV:

The process for preparing and enacting laws

- Safeguards to ensure legal certainty, the stability of the legal framework and non-discrimination. *[this question complements the exiting question on rules and use of fast-track and emergency procedures]*

B. Independent authorities

- ☐ No developments regarding independent authorities
- ☐ If there have been developments related to independent authorities, please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Independence, resources, capacity and powers of national human rights institutions ('NHRIs'), of ombudsman institutions if different from NHRIs, of equality bodies if different from NHRIs and of supreme audit institutions²¹*

The amendments made to Article 99, paragraph 5 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated in SG 106 of 2023) allow the President and the Vice-Presidents of the Court of Auditors to be appointed by the President as caretaker Prime Minister. In 2024, due to the impossibility of forming a regular government, the President of the Court of Auditors was

²¹ Cf. the website of the European Court of Auditors: <https://www.eca.europa.eu/en/Pages/SupremeAuditInstitutions.aspx#>

twice appointed as caretaker Prime Minister and held this position for more than nine months - from 09.04.2024 to 16.01.2025.

- *Statistics/reports concerning the follow-up to recommendations by National Human Rights Institutions, ombudsman institutions, equality bodies, and supreme audit institutions in the past two years.*

In 2024, 498 recommendations and 75 sub-recommendations were verified. The highest relative share of implemented recommendations is 71.03%, partially implemented recommendations are 6.81%, recommendations under implementation are 8.73%. 12.91% of the recommendations were reported as not implemented and 0.52% were found to be not implementable due to significant changes.

Questions for input on the single market dimension of the Rule of Law Report

Pillar IV:

Independent authorities

- Safeguards to ensure the effective independence of supervisory and regulatory authorities with a direct impact on economic operators

C. Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

☐ No developments

☐ If there have been developments related to the accessibility and judicial review of judicial decisions please specify which, in particular regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Transparency of administrative decisions and sanctions (incl. their publication and rules on collection of related data)*
- *Judicial review of administrative decisions: short description of the general regime (in particular competent court, scope, suspensive effect, interim measures, and any applicable specific rules or derogations from the general regime of judicial review).*

The draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Administrative Procedure Code, described in points I.1. – I.3., expands judicial control over general administrative acts and subordinate normative acts, including in the event of interim repeal.

- *Rules and practices related to the application by all courts, including constitutional jurisdictions, of the preliminary ruling procedure (Art. 267 TFEU)*
- *Implementation of final judgments by the public administration and State institutions and follow-up given to supranational judgments, including decisions from the European Court of Human Rights, as well as available remedies in case of non-implementation*

In relation to the worsening record of Bulgaria in the process of the implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, in 2024 a NFM-funded project proposed the adoption of a by-law of the Council of Ministers. The draft by-law provides for the establishment of a formalised procedure within the executive power for the implementation of the Court's judgments against Bulgaria. It shall be tabled for discussion and adopted in 2025 in order to facilitate the implementation process by introducing clear and set roles and time-bound modes of interaction between the respective national authorities.

Questions for input on the single market dimension of the Rule of Law Report

Pillar IV:

Accessibility and judicial review of administrative decisions

- Respect of the good administration principle (including the obligation of the administration to give reasons for decisions) *[this question complements the existing question on transparency of administrative decisions]*
- Safeguards (other than judicial review) regarding decisions or inaction of administrative authorities, including remedies. *[this question complements the existing question on judicial review of administrative decisions]*

D. The enabling framework for civil society

☐ No developments

☐ If there have been developments related to the enabling framework for civil society, please specify which, regarding topics listed below: ...

Relevant topics to be covered in your contribution include:

- *Measures regarding the framework for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. legal framework and its application in practice incl. registration, transparency and dissolution rules)*

On 17.05.2024, a meeting of the Civil Society Development Council (SCDC) was held, which outlined the guidelines for its activities. A procedure for presenting a unified opinion by the SCDC on all draft regulatory acts, strategies, programs and plans that relate to the activities of civil organizations was discussed and adopted (in implementation of Art. 4, para. 4, item 1 of the Law on Non-Governmental Organizations); In 2024, the Chairman of the SCDC sent to the National Assembly (the relevant committees to which the draft laws are assigned) and to relevant ministers opinions of the members of the SCDC regarding: Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Preschool and School Education, published in the State Gazette, issue 69 of 16.08.2024; Bill on Supplements to the Law on Preschool and School Education; Bill on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Child Protection; Bill on Registration of Foreign Agents; two draft laws under the Volunteering Act; Draft of the Legislative Decree of the Act on the Protection of Persons Filing Signals or Publicly Disclosing Information on Violations; Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Act on the Direct Participation of Citizens in State Power and Local Self-Government, draft of the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) Strategy for the period 2024 - 2027; Draft of the Concept for the Regulation of Lobbying Activities in the Republic of Bulgaria of 20.03.2024; Ordinance on Amendments to the Ordinance on Amendments and Supplements to Ordinance No. 1 of 2007 on Keeping, Storing and Accessing the Commercial Register and the Register of Non-Governmental Organizations; Draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Electronic Communications Act.

The focus of SCDC, together with the support of the supporting administration of the Council of Ministers, is aimed at active participation in the development of two key strategic documents, the creation of which is enshrined at the legislative level:

1. Strategy for Supporting the Development of Civil Society Organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria;
2. Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy.

In 2024, the development of a Roadmap for the development of a Strategy for supporting

the development of civil society organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria continued. In 2024, discussions continued on the development of the Financial Mechanism for supporting socially significant projects of civil society organizations.

- *Rules and practices having an impact on the effective operation and safety of civil society organisations and human rights defenders. This includes measures to protect them from attacks – verbal, physical or on-line –, intimidation, legal threats incl. SLAPPs, negative narratives or smear campaigns, measures capable of affecting the public perception of civil society organisations, etc. It also includes measures to monitor threats or attacks and dedicated support services, as well as available remedies.*

Following the entry into force of the Anti-SLAPP Directive/ Directive (EU) 2024/1069, pursuant to Order of the Minister of Justice, another working group with a similar composition was set up with the task to bring the national legislation into line with the Directive. It has already prepared a preliminary draft of legislative amendments, which is still a subject to discussion. There is a continuity in the work of the two expert groups. The plan is the new legislation to cover in addition to the proceedings in civil matters with cross-border implications also domestic cases. The timeline of preparing proposals for amendments to national legislation is by 30.7.2025

Between October 2023 and April 2024, an expert working group was established at the Ministry of Justice, focusing on the implementation of Recommendation (EU) 2022/758 of 27 April 2022 on the protection of journalists and human rights defenders engaged in public participation from strategic litigation (“strategic litigation directed against public participation”).

The working group was composed of representatives of the Ministry of Justice, doctrine, judiciary and practice. The working group prepared conceptual proposals aimed at ensuring the necessary guarantees in Bulgarian legislation to deal with SLAPP cases. In addition, some specific texts were proposed for introducing amendments to the Code of Civil Procedure.

Following the entry into force of Directive (EU) 2024/1069 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 April 2024 on the protection of persons involved in public participation against manifestly unfounded claims or abusive legal proceedings ("strategic legal proceedings directed against public participation"), another working group with a similar composition was established by Order of the Minister of Justice with the task of bringing national legislation into line with the directive. It has already prepared a preliminary draft of legislative amendments, which is still under discussion. There is continuity in the work of the two expert groups. The plan is for the new legislation to cover, in addition to proceedings in civil cases with cross-border implications, also domestic cases. The deadline for preparing proposals for amendments to national legislation is 30.7.2025.

The Ministry of the Interior has a Permanent Working Group on Human Rights, and regional working groups have been established at the regional level. The main priorities in the work of these formats are:

- promoting and improving practices related to human rights in all areas of activity of the Ministry of the Interior;
- respecting the rights of detainees, regulated in the Constitution and laws of Bulgaria and the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms;
- implementing measures related to eliminating findings and implementing recommendations of various national and international bodies and institutions monitoring the activities of police authorities;

- implementing measures to improve the training of police officers in the application of police powers, the use of physical force, auxiliary means and weapons when detaining persons.

Please, see the detailed information in Attachment 2, provided by the Prosecutor's Office

- *Organisation of financial support for civil society organisations and human rights defenders (e.g. framework to ensure access to funding, and for financial viability, taxation/incentive/donation systems, measures to ensure a fair distribution of funding)*

With regard to the organization of financial support for civil society organizations and human rights defenders, the State Budget Act of the Republic of Bulgaria for 2024 approved additional expenditures in the budget of the Ombudsman of the Republic of Bulgaria compared to the previous year, in connection with the new activities assigned to the institution by the enactment of the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers or publicly disclosing information about breaches.

Within the framework of the SCDC, a working group on the development of the Financial Mechanism for supporting socially significant projects of civil organizations is preparing a draft of the Financial Mechanism. By the end of 2024, the Financial Mechanism has not been approved by the SCDC, civil society organizations, members of the SCDC have not come up with a unified opinion on the notes from the administration of the Council of Ministers on the need for legal changes that would create a legal basis for spending the financial resource allocated in the state budget of 1,000,000 leva per year for socially significant projects of civil organizations.

The SCDC Secretariat has presented to the members of the Council a report, based on information from the Ministry of Finance. Information has also been collected from 27 municipalities, which are also centres of administrative districts, on which non-profit legal entities (foundations and associations for public or private benefit, as well as community centres) were paid funds in 2022. and 2023, on what grounds, with what subject of activity and in what amount.

The main task of the Prevention and Protection from Domestic Violence, Cooperation on Ethnic and Integration Issues and Interaction with Civil Society Department of the Civil Society Development Council, until the expiration of the term of office of the current composition of the Civil Society Development Council, is to organize and conduct the procedure for the election of members of the Council, provided for in Chapter Two of the Regulations on the Organization and Activities of the Civil Society Development Council. By order of the Secretary General of the Council of Ministers, a commission was established to organize and conduct the procedure.

E. Initiatives to foster a rule of law culture

☐ No developments

☐ If there have been developments related to initiatives to foster a rule of law culture, please specify which, (e.g. debates in national parliaments on the rule of law, public information campaigns on rule of law issues, contributions from civil society, education initiatives, etc.): ...

Within the framework of the NIJ projects “Modern Learning Environment for Judges, Prosecutors, Investigators and Other Representatives of the Professional Community” and “Prevention and Counteraction of Violence against Women and Domestic Violence”, funded

by the Justice Programme, Norwegian Financial Mechanism 2014-2021, teams of judicial trainers developed the series “Knowledge is Power” - 15 self-learning resources for judges, prosecutors and investigators:

- ✚ “Personal and Organizational Development. Non-legal skills”,
- ✚ “Criminal Trial Management. General guidelines”,
- ✚ “Criminal Trial Management. Proceedings at first instance”,
- ✚ “Criminal Trial Management. Proceedings before the appellate instance”,
- ✚ “Criminal Material law. Manual For Judges, Prosecutors and investigators. Book One.”
- ✚ “Criminal Material law. Manual For Judges, Prosecutors and investigators. Book Two.”
- ✚ “Criminal Material law. Manual For Judges, Prosecutors and investigators. Book Three.”
- ✚ “Prosecutor's Manual. Book One”,
- ✚ “Prosecutor's Manual. Book Two”,
- ✚ “Prosecutor's Manual. Book Three”,
- ✚ “Investigator's Guide”,
- ✚ “Administrative Judge's Manual - General and Special Part. Book One”,
- ✚ “Civil Trial Management. Book One”,
- ✚ “Civil Trial Management. Book Two”,
- ✚ “Guidance on the management of domestic and gender-based violence cases”.

In 2024, the second revised edition of the Council of Europe's Human Rights and the Criminal Process. Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights” by Jeremy McBride.

Between October and November 2024, the sixteen editions were distributed to the judiciary and each magistrate received a personal set of titles relevant to his or her professional role (judge, prosecutor and investigator). The electronic version of the self-study resources is available to registered users on the NIJ e-learning portal.

On March 19, 2024, in partnership with the U.S. Department of Justice at the U.S. Embassy in Bulgaria, the Institute organized a discussion on “Judicial and Prosecutorial Ethics”, which was attended by candidates for junior judges, junior prosecutors and junior investigators, class of 2023-2024.

In 2024, the social anthropological research commissioned by the NIJ on two important aspects of the professional life of Bulgarian magistrates was finalised: communication with the community and the ethical conflicts they face. The study aims to register the current state of the ethical debate in the professional community of magistrates and the communication between this community and the social environment, but also to capture important processes and trends, offering valid explanations for these dynamics. The results are the subject of an in-depth analysis, the conclusions of which will be incorporated into the curricula and training programmes conducted by the NIJ.

In 2024, with the support of the Norwegian Judicial Administration, the initiative “Judges under Pressure in Europe” was successfully completed, resulting in a collection of presentations and materials related to practical solutions to ensure the independence of the judiciary, provided to us by the Norwegian Judicial Administration, in cooperation with the University of Oslo. The proceedings are published in the Institute's Digital Library, on the NIJ e-learning portal, at: <https://e-learning.nij.bg>.

- ✚ With the financial support of the Bilateral Relations Fund under the Justice Programme of the NFM 2014-2021 and in partnership with the Norwegian Judicial Administration, the Institute started the implementation of the Judicial Leadership Development Initiative. The initiative will identify and implement effective strategies for delivering training on Leadership skills of professionals in the judiciary as a prerequisite for enhancing the overall capacity and effectiveness of leaders in the judiciary. The ultimate goal of establishing the Leadership Academy is to provide it with a sustainable

curriculum that meets the training needs of the professional community, which will enhance their competence in the area of rule of law enforcement.

The educational program "The Judiciary - Informed Choice and Civil Trust." Open Courts and Prosecutor's Offices has been implemented jointly by the Supreme Judicial Council and the Ministry of Education and Science for 10 years. Since its inception and in 2014, about 160,000 students have participated in it, who are familiar with the structure, functions and importance of the judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria. The program forms legal literacy and contributes to increasing the level of compliance with the laws, encouraging creative pursuits and performances, as well as to the professional guidance of students to the magistracy professions. Funds have been provided annually for a prize fund, for the preparation of educational materials and for the implementation of initiatives by the courts and prosecutor's offices under the program. Educational and informational materials - the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and 5 types of leaflets on current topics - were centrally printed with funds from the SJC budget. In 2024, 250 hyperlinks to the Internet were published on the SJC website, in the "Educational Program" - "News" section websites of judicial authorities and regional media with information about activities carried out under the Program. The same is also published on the SJC Facebook page.

During the 2023/2024 academic year, a total of 161 judicial authorities have applied for participation in the Program, of which 110 courts and 51 prosecutor's offices, including 6 investigative departments and 13 territorial divisions of regional prosecutor's offices. They partnered with 283 schools, as well as municipal drug councils, children's pedagogical rooms, therapeutic centres, various associations, mediators, preventive information centres, centres for social rehabilitation and integration, local commissions for combating antisocial behaviour of minors and juveniles, investigating police officers and representatives of regional police departments, employees of the General Directorate of Security, NGOs and universities in Burgas, Varna, Stara Zagora and Ruse. Lecturers and mentors under the Program are more than 502 magistrates - judges, prosecutors and investigators, 114 court employees, registry judges and state bailiffs, who participate voluntarily and free of charge. The program covers about 28,000 students from 111 settlements.

1. Information campaign "Open Doors Day" in the judicial authorities under the title "Open for the Judiciary".

The active participation of the judicial authorities in the information campaign continues, with some of them holding Open Doors Day several times a year, and others announcing an "Open Doors Week". In 2024, 144 courts, including the Supreme Court of Cassation and 58 prosecutor's offices, including the Supreme Prosecutor's Office and the National Investigation Service, investigative departments and territorial divisions of regional prosecutor's offices, the Inspectorate at the SJC, as well as the National Institute of Justice, are participating in the initiative. An Open Doors Day section has been created on the SJC website, in which a schedule for the initiative by the judiciary is published annually, as well as information on the announced theme or motto of the event. When providing a hyperlink from the judiciary to publications on their websites about the events held, they are published on the SJC website and Facebook page.

The Rule of Law Report for 2024 contains the finding that *"some further progress has been made in the implementation of the recommendation made in the Rule of Law Report for 2023"*, with regard to the procedures for attestation and competitions in the judicial system, through the prepared draft of the Judiciary Act, which is in accordance with the constitutional amendments adopted in December 2023 for the implementation of the newly adopted constitutional reform. It should be noted that with the Decision No. 13 of 26.07.2024 In

Constitutional Case No. 1 of 2024 of the Constitutional Court, a significant part of the changes introduced by the Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (published in the State Gazette, issue 106 of 22.12.2023) were declared unconstitutional and invalid. In this regard, in order to achieve rhythm and rapid completion of the competition and attestation procedures that concern the career growth of magistrates, without the frequent use of the institution of secondment, the Ministry of Justice has prepared a new Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Judiciary Law, as well as taking into account the constitutional changes following Decision No. 13 of 2024 of the Constitutional Court.

Other – please specify

Attachment 1 Information provided by the Supreme Court of Cassation

Attachment 2 Information provided by the Prosecutor's Office

Annex Data on cases filed for crimes related to EFF in the period 2023 - nine months of 2024

Annex Data cases for corruption related offences in the period 2023 - nine months of 2024.

Annex Data on cases related to corruption with alleged perpetrators - high-ranking officials for the period 2023 - nine months of 2024.

Annex Draft Decree of the Council of Ministers on the implementation of the judgments of the ECtHR and Reasons to it

Annex Mediation

Annex Supreme Court of Cassation - corruption cases - 2024;

Annex Specific measures in sectors with high risks of corruption

Annex Training of Justice Professionals

Annex Wistlebolwers Protection