

Information within the competence of the Supreme Judicial Council in connection with the preparation of the chapter on the Republic of Bulgaria for the Seventh Rule of Law Report for 2026

Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section A “Independence”:

In connection with the statutory deadline for initiating the procedure for a new election of members of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), pursuant to §17 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Judiciary Act, promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 6 of 2025, in force as of 21 January 2025, the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council (P-SJC) discussed, in March 2025, the procedures, methods, and modalities for the direct election of members from the professional quota. Subsequently, by decisions of the Judicial College and the Prosecutorial College, opinions were requested from the bodies of the judiciary and from the professional community. In May, the consolidated opinions were discussed by the P-SJC and submitted to the Minister of Justice. The same were published on the website of the Supreme Judicial Council, for which purpose a dedicated section was created¹.

Following a working meeting with the Minister of Justice, at the end of May the P-SJC adopted a decision that voting in the forthcoming election of members of the Supreme Judicial Council from the professional quota shall be conducted by means of paper ballots. In July, Rules for the conduct of elections by judges, prosecutors, and investigating magistrates were also adopted, ensuring the secrecy of the vote through the use of paper ballots.

The need to adopt effective provisions in the Judiciary Act concerning the conditions and procedure for holding direct elections of members of the Supreme Judicial Council by judges, prosecutors, and investigating magistrates, as well as the optimisation of the electoral process with regard to voting methods, the number and location of polling stations, the format of candidates’ election campaigns, and the profile of SJC members, was discussed at meetings of the Partnership Council. By an adopted decision, both types of voting for direct elections were supported—electronic voting and voting by paper ballot. It was clarified that, in the event

that it is not possible within the prescribed time limit, pursuant to §17 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Judiciary Act, in force as of 21 January 2025, for the electronic information system introduced in 2017 for the direct election of SJC members from the judicial quota to be upgraded in accordance with the standards for electronic voting under European and national legislation, voting by paper ballot shall be used, with specific proposals provided regarding the organisation of polling stations. It was recommended that, in the long term, a new electronic voting system for judges, prosecutors, and investigating magistrates be developed and implemented.

Also in May 2025, the P-SJC discussed the implications of the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) of 30 April 2025 in Joined Cases C-313/2023, C-316/2023, and C-332/2023, in relation to the exercise of the powers of the Supreme Judicial Council. Invitations were sent to all habilitated university lecturers in the field of law.

Experts in constitutional law and European Union law, entered in the national Register of Academic Staff maintained by the National Centre for Information and Documentation, were invited to provide legal opinions on the implications of the above-mentioned judgments of the Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) for the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC). An invitation was also sent to the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria to hold a joint discussion on the consequences of those judgments, as well as on the need to bring the regulatory framework into compliance with them.

On 15 July 2025, the Prosecutorial College (PC) reached a consensus that the mandate of Borislav Sarafov as Acting Prosecutor General continues beyond 21 July 2025, since the decision on his appointment was adopted prior to the entry into force of Article 173(15) of the Judiciary Act; therefore, the six-month time limit for holding the office is not applicable to his mandate.

In September 2025, in connection with a letter from Daniela Taleva, a prosecutor at the Supreme Cassation Prosecutor's Office performing the functions of prosecutor for the investigation of crimes committed by the Prosecutor General or by a Deputy Prosecutor General, the PC adopted a decision establishing that Mr Sarafov was designated as Acting Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria by virtue of a final administrative act - namely, a decision of the PC adopted under Protocol No. 21 of 16 June 2023, item 1.1. The College issued a confirmatory clarification stating that Mr Sarafov is designated as Acting Prosecutor

General until the assumption of office by a new Prosecutor General and held that Article 173(15) of the Judiciary Act is inapplicable to the legal relationship arising from its decision.

In connection with the above-mentioned provision, in July the Judicial College (JC) referred the matter to the Plenum of the Supreme Administrative Court, requesting that it make a proposal for the designation of an Acting President of the Supreme Administrative Court (SAC). After the Plenum of the SAC declined, in September, to make such a proposal, the JC issued an invitation, pursuant to the statutory rights of the judges of the SAC, for expressions of consent to assume the position. On 14 October 2025, the College designated the Vice-President of the SAC, Marinka Cherneva, as Acting President of the Supreme Administrative Court.

The Supreme Judicial Council appointed four of its members - two from each College - to participate in the selection committee for candidates for the position of European Public Prosecutor from the Republic of Bulgaria, established pursuant to a Decision of the Council of Ministers dated 29 October 2025.

On the “Public Register of Cases of Interference with the Independence of the Judiciary” published on the website of the Supreme Judicial Council, four positions adopted by the Judicial College and two positions adopted by the Prosecutorial College have been published in connection with infringements of the independence of magistrates and judicial bodies. Since the establishment of the Register in 2018, a total of 65 declarations have been published.

Judicial College

On 25 February 2025, institutional support was expressed for Miroslav Petrov, a judge at the Sofia District Court, in connection with a report concerning a negative campaign related to a judicial act delivered by him.

On 25 March 2025, institutional support was expressed for Ivan Kalbatsev, a judge at the Plovdiv District Court, in connection with pressure exerted on him in the course of adjudicating an administrative case.

On 19 September 2025, a position was published in response to media publications, statements by representatives of parliamentary political parties, and reactions from civil society concerning court cases of high public interest.

On 28 October 2025, a position was published in connection with an attack against Ivo Iliev, a prosecutor at the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office.

Prosecutorial College

On 5 February 2025, a position was published in response to an increase in instances of damage to the authority of the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria and attempts to exert pressure on supervising prosecutors.

On 24 October 2025, a position was published in connection with an attack against Ivo Iliev, a prosecutor at the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office.

In October, in connection with a negative media campaign, clarifications were issued regarding the mechanism for determining the remuneration of members of the Supreme Judicial Council and the draft budget of the judiciary for 2026 proposed by the Supreme Judicial Council.

In view of the principle enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria that an independent budget constitutes one of the fundamental guarantees of the independence of the judiciary, the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted and submitted to the Ministry of Finance a series of opinions—dated 11 December 2025, 28 October 2025, and 25 September 2025—supporting the approved parameters of the draft budget of the judiciary for 2026 and the updated budgetary forecasts for the period 2027–2028.

In connection with the budgetary procedure for 2025, in February the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council expressed the view that it supports the decision adopted in September 2024 approving the parameters of the draft budget of the judiciary for 2025 and the updated budgetary forecasts for the period 2026–2028.

Over the past year, an intensified and clearly discernible trend has emerged whereby representatives of non-governmental organisations and lawyers appear as leading speakers and commentators on podcasts and websites specialising in legal matters. Their opinions and positions influence public attitudes and perceptions, and through their dissemination on social media, the topics they promote subsequently gain traction in traditional media. In this regard, in October 2025, the Civil Council to the Supreme Judicial Council referred the matter to the Ethics Committee of the Sofia Bar Association concerning public statements made by lawyers affiliated with the “Justice for All” Initiative and other colleagues, which are impermissible

under Article 21 of the Bar Act. Positions were also adopted opposing impermissible conduct within the legal profession.

Public discourse, involving political figures and lawyers, and the resulting public pressure on the work of judicial panels were also addressed.

In response to public attention regarding road traffic fatalities and juvenile victims of road traffic accidents, members of the Supreme Judicial Council held meetings, and in February the Judicial College heard representatives of the association “Angels on the Road,” which brings together relatives of persons who have been injured or killed in road traffic accidents. Discussions focused on possibilities for expediting proceedings in such cases, the rights of victims and their relatives, and strengthening punitive measures against drivers who have caused death after the use of alcohol or narcotic substances.

Trends in transport-related criminality and emerging offence profiles, the legislative framework, and current judicial practice were discussed by the Partnership Council to the Supreme Judicial Council, prosecutors, and representatives of the European Center for Transport Policies. A decision¹⁴ was adopted in support of enhanced cooperation among civil society representatives, judicial authorities, and members of the Supreme Judicial Council, with a view to improving public awareness of the administration of justice and increasing public trust in the work of judicial authorities in fulfilling their mission of legality and justice.

The central role of proactive communication by the Supreme Judicial Council and judicial authorities is reflected in the joint Educational Programme of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Ministry of Education and Science, entitled “The Judiciary – Informed Choice and Civic Trust,” as well as in the initiatives “Open Courts and Prosecutor’s Offices”¹⁵ and the information campaign “Open Doors Day”¹⁶. Interest in the Programme continues, with participation by over 100 courts and prosecutor’s offices, reaching approximately 300,000 students nationwide.

Within the framework of these initiatives, meetings are held with representatives of vulnerable social groups who may be potential victims of crimes such as telephone fraud, domestic violence, distribution and possession of narcotic substances, and trafficking in human beings, including migrants. Through participation in public events, initiatives, charitable campaigns, and discussions on key issues, these activities contribute to strengthening the role of magistrates within local communities.

Bulgarian judges participated in a survey on their personal independence conducted under the project “Independence, Accountability and Quality of Justice” for 2024–2025 of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary, through an anonymous questionnaire¹⁷ published on the website of the Supreme Judicial Council.

Representatives of the Supreme Judicial Council participated in the projects “Independence and Accountability – Quality of Justice” and “Digital Justice Forum of the ENCJ,” as well as in thematic dialogue groups on disciplinary standards and “Judiciary and Media” within the ENCJ for the period 2025–2026.

In June 2025, the Supreme Judicial Council was awarded the prestigious first prize¹⁸ of the European Network of Councils for the Judiciary for positive change. The award was granted to the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice and its free mobile application, “eCase”.

Information under Item 6 – Accountability of Judges and Prosecutors, Including Disciplinary Regime and Bodies, Ethical Rules, Judicial Immunity, and Criminal/Civil Liability (where applicable) of Judges (including judicial review)

With regard to “other significant developments” from January 2025 to the present, related to the disciplinary accountability of judges, court presidents and their deputies, reference should be made to the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 30 April 2025 in Joined Cases C-313/23, C-316/23, and C-332/23. In that judgment, the Court held that Article 19(1), second subparagraph, of the Treaty on European Union, read in conjunction with Article 47 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, must be interpreted as meaning that the principle of judicial independence precludes the practice of a Member State whereby members of a judicial system body of that Member State—who are elected by its parliament for fixed terms and are empowered to review the activities of magistrates in the exercise of their functions, to carry out integrity and conflict-of-interest checks, and to propose to another judicial authority the initiation of disciplinary proceedings with a view to the imposition of disciplinary sanctions—continue to perform their functions after the expiry of the constitutionally prescribed term of office until new members are elected by that parliament, where the continuation of expired mandates is not based on an explicit legal basis in national law containing clear and precise rules governing the exercise of those functions, and where it is not guaranteed that such continuation is limited in time.

That judgment raised questions as to the compliance of the national legal framework with EU law, in particular with regard to the continued performance of duties by members of the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council (ISJC) after the expiry of their mandates (at present, the mandates of all members of the ISJC expired in 2023 and the National Assembly has not elected new members). In addition, in official positions published on its website, the ISJC announced that, in light of the judgment of the Court of Justice of 30 April 2025, it would refrain from exercising its powers under Article 54(1)(6) of the Judiciary Act, namely from submitting proposals to the relevant College of the Supreme Judicial Council for the initiation of disciplinary proceedings against magistrates, as well as from carrying out inspections of magistrates to establish conduct that undermines the prestige of the judiciary.

In view of the judgment of the Court of Justice of 30 April 2025 and the position adopted by the ISJC, and taking into account the importance and role of court presidents, on the one hand, as disciplinary authorities under Article 314 of the Judiciary Act, and, on the other hand, as bodies empowered to submit proposals for the initiation of disciplinary proceedings for the imposition of disciplinary sanctions pursuant to Article 312(1)(1) and (2) of the Judiciary Act, the “Disciplinary Activity and Interaction with the ISJC” Commission within the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council organised, in September 2025, training for court presidents in connection with the exercise of their powers under Chapter Sixteen of the Judiciary Act, “Disciplinary Liability”.

By a final judgment of 17 November 2025, delivered in Administrative Case No. 12075/2024, the Supreme Administrative Court of the Republic of Bulgaria held that, as at the date on which the proposals for the initiation of disciplinary proceedings were submitted—7 March 2024—the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council (ISJC) did not have the competence to submit proposals for the initiation of disciplinary proceedings for the imposition of a disciplinary sanction on a prosecutor, nor to initiate proceedings for the establishment of a conflict of interest, in light of the judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union of 30 April 2025 in Joined Cases C-313/23, C-316/23, and C-332/23.

The judgment of the Court of Justice of the European Union does not have a direct factual impact on the activities of the Prosecutorial College in imposing disciplinary sanctions for committed disciplinary offences by prosecutors and investigating magistrates. Following the amendments to the Judiciary Act in 2016, in addition to the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council, proposals for the initiation of disciplinary proceedings for the imposition of a

disciplinary sanction on a prosecutor or investigating magistrate may also be submitted by the relevant administrative head and deputy administrative head, as well as by the superior administrative head (including the Minister of Justice, pursuant to Article 312). A significant proportion of the proposals submitted for the imposition of disciplinary sanctions originate from administrative heads within the Prosecutor's Office, in the exercise of their powers under Article 312 of the Judiciary Act and their function of organising the work of the relevant prosecutor's office.

In 2023, the Prosecutorial College of the Supreme Judicial Council initiated 18 (eighteen) disciplinary proceedings against prosecutors and investigating magistrates: 10 (ten) upon proposals by the Acting Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria, 6 (six) upon proposals by administrative heads, and only 2 (two) upon proposals by the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council. In one of the latter cases, the disciplinary sanction of "reprimand" was imposed and entered into force, while in the other case the imposition of a disciplinary sanction was refused and the case was brought before the Supreme Administrative Court following an appeal by the Inspectorate.

In 2024, the Prosecutorial College initiated 12 (twelve) disciplinary proceedings: 6 (six) upon proposals by the Acting Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria, 5 (five) upon proposals by administrative heads, and 1 (one) upon a proposal by the Inspectorate. In the case initiated upon the proposal of the Inspectorate, the Prosecutorial College refused to impose a disciplinary sanction. That decision of the Prosecutorial College underwent two instances of judicial review and was upheld by the court.

In 2025, the Prosecutorial College initiated 2 (two) disciplinary proceedings: 1 (one) upon a proposal by the Acting Prosecutor General of the Republic of Bulgaria and 1 (one) upon a proposal by an administrative head.

For the period 2023–2025, administrative heads within the Prosecutor's Office imposed 12 disciplinary sanctions of "reprimand," 7 of which were confirmed by the Prosecutorial College.

In 2025, the Commission "Disciplinary Activity and Interaction with the Inspectorate to the Supreme Judicial Council" within the Prosecutorial College of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted a decision to organise, in 2026, a training seminar for administrative heads within the Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria concerning disciplinary proceedings and the

preparation of proposals for the imposition of disciplinary sanctions, given that the resolution of matters related to the disciplinary accountability of prosecutors and investigating magistrates constitutes one of the core powers of the Prosecutorial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, pursuant to Article 130a(5)(3) of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and Article 30(5)(3) of the Judiciary Act, as well as the manner in which those powers are exercised being of essential importance for the legal status of prosecutors and investigating magistrates and for guaranteeing their independence as a constitutionally enshrined value of the rule of law.

Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section B “Quality of Justice”, Item 11 – Resources of the Judiciary (Human/Financial/Material), Remuneration/Bonuses of Judges and Prosecutors, Including Observed Changes (Significant and Targeted Increase or Decrease over the Past Year)

With regard to the management of the judiciary’s building stock, construction and renovation works for major and routine repairs of court buildings are planned and carried out on an annual basis, including works initiated at the request of administrative heads of judicial authorities, with the aim of ensuring an appropriate working environment for magistrates and judicial staff.

****Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section B “Quality of Justice”, Item 13 –Digitalisation (e.g. use of digital technologies, including electronic communication tools and artificial intelligence, within the judicial system and in interaction with court users, procedural rules, online access to judicial decisions)****

1. Reform of Order for Payment Proceedings

In 2025, the reform of order for payment proceedings in the Republic of Bulgaria, initiated in 2018, was completed. The reform aimed not only at the comprehensive electronic processing of order for payment cases—which account for approximately 40% of all cases filed annually with the courts—but also at substantially addressing the problem of the uneven distribution of workload among district courts. Processes of globalisation and the concentration of population in larger cities have led to significant disparities in court workloads, particularly in courts located outside regional centres, where workload differences between certain courts have reached up to sevenfold levels.

At the same time, the reform sought to accelerate order for payment proceedings and to introduce a modern, functional, and centralised electronic system for the management of such proceedings, intended to serve as a model for other types of cases as well. In implementation of Recommendation No. 6 under the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, the State undertook commitments to identify and apply sustainable solutions to overcome disparities in court workloads, including through the development of a roadmap for reform of the judicial map by means of the advancement of electronic justice.

At the very beginning of its mandate, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council (JC of the SJC) identified the reduction of significant disparities in workload among district courts as a priority. In early 2018, a series of steps were undertaken to implement a reform of order for payment proceedings, which envisages the decentralisation of order for payment cases by disregarding the principle of local jurisdiction and introducing centralised allocation of such cases in order to equalise workload among district courts. Upon a proposal by the Commission on Judicial Map, Workload and Judicial Statistics (CJMWJS), by decision adopted under Protocol No. 7 of 22 February 2018, item 9, the JC of the SJC approved a *Concept for a system for centralised electronic processing of order for payment cases*. This concept served as the conceptual framework for the “**Order for Payment Proceedings**” project implemented under Contract SRSS/SC2019/012, in particular Position 1, with the Structural Reform Support Service of the European Commission, as well as for the project “**Continued Reform of Order for Payment Proceedings,**” implemented under Contract REFORM/SC2020/133 with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission, carried out by Ernst & Young Bulgaria.

By decision adopted under Protocol No. 42 of 1 December 2020 by the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council (JC of the SJC), and by decision adopted under Protocol No. 1 of 21 January 2021 by the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council (Plenum of the SJC), an expert working group was established, comprising judges, lawyers, representatives of the academic community, and private enforcement agents, and chaired by Daniela Marcheva, a member of the Supreme Judicial Council. The working group was tasked with drafting specific proposals for amendments and supplements to the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) for the purpose of implementing the reform.

By decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted under Protocol No. 16 of 28 April 2022, item 30, the draft Act Amending and Supplementing the Civil Procedure

Code, together with the report and annexes on the activities of the expert working group within the framework of the project “Continued Reform of Order for Payment Proceedings,” implemented under Contract REFORM/SC2020/133 with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission and carried out by Ernst & Young Bulgaria, were transmitted to all parliamentary groups represented in the National Assembly and to the Council of Ministers for the exercise of legislative initiative.

At the same time, by Council of Ministers Decree No. 157 of 7 July 2022, the Supreme Judicial Council was designated as the responsible institution for the implementation of Investment C10.1, entitled “Strengthening, Further Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts,” under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria. Activity 2 of the project provides for the creation of a module within the Unified Information System of the Courts for the centralised allocation and fully electronic processing of order for payment cases.

By decision adopted under Protocol No. 27 of 15 September 2022, item 11, the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council established a working group for the implementation of Activity 2 of the project, tasked with preparing and submitting to the Plenum, by 31 December 2022, draft amendments and supplements to the secondary legislation, as well as technical specifications for the design and development of a “Order for Payment Proceedings” module within the Unified Information System of the Courts.

The Act Amending and Supplementing the Civil Procedure Code, adopted and promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 11 of 20 February 2023, provides for the centralised allocation of order for payment cases in accordance with rules adopted by the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, with the aim of equalising the workload of district courts through workload assessment based on the Rules for the Assessment of Judges’ Workload. The derogation from the general principle of local jurisdiction and the facilitation of access to justice are achieved through the full electronic form of order for payment proceedings: all procedural actions, including the issuance of an order for payment and a writ of execution, are carried out electronically, and applications and annexes are submitted via the electronic form of the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice of the Republic of Bulgaria. The deferred entry into force of the Act is justified by the need to ensure the necessary conditions for the reform, namely the supplementation of secondary

legislation and the development of a module for the centralised allocation and electronic processing of order for payment cases within the Unified Information System of the Courts.

Pursuant to Article 410(5) of the Civil Procedure Code (CPC), as of 1 July 2025, the electronic form becomes mandatory for certain categories of applicants, namely credit and financial institutions, insurance companies, suppliers of electricity, gas and water, providers of postal and electronic communications services, notaries, private enforcement agents, as well as state authorities and municipalities. An exception is предусмотрено for applicants who are not traders and are not represented by a lawyer, who may submit applications in written (paper) form.

Pursuant to Article 410(4), second sentence, of the CPC, where an application is submitted electronically, all subsequent procedural actions shall be carried out in electronic form, with the exception of actions relating to appeals against acts under Chapter Thirty-Seven and proceedings under Articles 422–424, with a view to ensuring access to justice and a smooth transition to full digitalisation. Applications and acts submitted on paper are processed by the court administration in electronic form.

In implementation of § 30 of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Civil Procedure Code (promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 11 of 20 February 2023), by decision adopted under Protocol No. 30 of 13 October 2023, items 2 and 3, the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council approved the draft Regulation amending and supplementing Regulation No. 5 of 1 June 2017 on the organisation and procedure for keeping, storing, and accessing electronic case files, as well as the method for storing evidence and means of evidence in cases, and the internal circulation and storage of other information processed by the court administration. By the same decision, the Plenum also adopted a Regulation amending and supplementing Regulation No. 6 of 3 August 2017 on the performance of procedural actions and the certification of statements in electronic form. Both regulations were promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 93 of 7 November 2023.

Despite the Operational Agreement signed between the Supreme Judicial Council and the “National Fund” at the Ministry of Finance for the implementation of Investment C10.1 under the project “Strengthening, Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts” within the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, for a period exceeding ten months the executive branch failed to secure funding for the investment aimed at upgrading the Unified Information System of the Courts. This served as

grounds for the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council to propose to the 50th National Assembly the adoption of an amendment to the Civil Procedure Code providing for the postponement of the reform of order for payment proceedings until 1 July 2025, which was effected by § 2 of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Civil Procedure Code (State Gazette, No. 67 of 9 August 2024).

At its meeting held on 27 February 2024, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council (JC of the SJC), acting as the Supreme Judicial Council pursuant to § 23(2) of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Act Amending and Supplementing the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 106 of 22 December 2023), adopted the Technical Specifications prepared by the working group established by decision adopted under Protocol No. 18 of 15 June 2023, item 7, of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council. The Technical Specifications concern the “Design, Development and Implementation within the Unified Information System of the Courts (UISC) of a Module for Centralised Allocation and Fully Electronic Processing of Order for Payment Cases, Integrated with the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice (UPEJ),” in implementation of Activity 2 of the project “Strengthening, Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts” under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria.

Following a public procurement procedure conducted under the Public Procurement Act in May 2024, a contract was concluded with Information Services JSC, pursuant to which the company undertook to carry out all activities related to the design, development and implementation within the Unified Information System of the Courts of the software product (module) for the centralised allocation and fully electronic processing of order for payment cases. In connection with the concluded contract and the final deadline for the implementation of the module—1 July 2025—by decision of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted under Protocol No. 6 of 10 October 2024, item 17, a working group was appointed with the participation of judges, the majority of whom have been involved for more than seven years in the process of implementing the reform of order for payment proceedings. The members of the working group were tasked with: providing a functional specification, including a project description of user models and data; defining the technical architecture; drafting rules and algorithms for the allocation of order for payment cases; testing the developed functionalities and assessing user interfaces; preparing opinions on the readiness for acceptance of the module and accompanying documentation; providing assistance in the implementation

of the module integrated with the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice; and supporting user training.

In implementation of Article 30(5)(2) of the Judiciary Act (new—State Gazette, No. 11 of 2023, effective as of 1 July 2025), the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council adopted, by decision under Protocol No. 46 of 10 December 2024, item 29, Rules for the Allocation of Cases pursuant to Article 9(3) of the Judiciary Act (“the Rules”). The Rules govern the procedure for the allocation of applications for the issuance of an order for payment—both in cases where the principle of local jurisdiction is derogated from and in cases where that principle is observed.

Cases under Article 417(1)(3), (6) and (10) of the Civil Procedure Code, in which applications are submitted in accordance with the rules of local jurisdiction, are registered and allocated through the module for centralised allocation and electronic processing of order for payment cases among judges of the district court having jurisdiction over the applicant’s current address or registered seat, and, in the absence of a current address, over the applicant’s permanent address.

All other order for payment cases, exhaustively listed in Articles 410 and 417(1)(1), (2), (4), (5), (7), (8) and (9) of the Civil Procedure Code, in which applications are submitted by derogation from the principle of local jurisdiction, are allocated automatically, in the order of their receipt in the module for centralised allocation and electronic processing of order for payment cases, among district judges included in a general group for centralised allocation. This group is formed in accordance with the applicable internal rules of the respective courts, and in the absence of such rules, includes all judges of the respective district court. The Rules also provide for the procedure for the inclusion, exclusion, and temporary suspension of judges from this general group.

The Rules set out in detail an algorithm for the centralised allocation of order for payment cases among district judges nationwide, in compliance with the principles of randomness, equal treatment, and equalisation of overall workload, both among district courts and among district judges.

A central element of the allocation mechanism is the determination of the average overall workload of district courts. The main criteria for calculating the average workload of district courts include:

1. the actual number of adjudicating judges, taking into account that in most district courts, for various reasons—such as secondment, maternity leave, promotion following a competitive procedure, and others—the actual number of judges is lower than the formally approved staffing level; and

2. the actual workload of district courts, calculated as the sum of the workload coefficients (determined in accordance with the Rules for the Assessment of Judges' Workload) of all cases filed during the preceding month in each district court, excluding order for payment cases.

Through this allocation coefficient, the distribution of order for payment cases is regulated so as to equalise overall workload among district courts, with more heavily burdened courts allocating a correspondingly smaller number of order for payment cases, while courts with lower workload (including, for example, the Sofia District Court) allocate a greater number. At the beginning of 2025, certain district courts did not allocate order for payment cases at all.

At the beginning of each month, the algorithm calculates the average overall workload of each district court, taking into account the workload coefficients of all cases filed during the preceding month, excluding order for payment cases. Courts whose baseline workload exceeds the average are temporarily excluded from allocation, while courts with lower workload are given priority inclusion.

District courts with a baseline workload below the average overall workload receive order for payment cases on all working days of the month, with the volume of allocated cases for each court gradually decreasing in proportion to the value of the baseline workload of the actual number of judges included in the centralised allocation group.

Once all district courts reach the average overall workload, the algorithm switches to proportional allocation of order for payment cases based on the number of judges in each court.

At the end of each month, monitoring is carried out of the overall workload achieved by all district courts, taking into account the sum of the workload coefficients of all cases filed and the order for payment cases allocated during the month. The purpose of this monitoring is to track the convergence of workloads between low- and high-burden courts and to ensure that no district courts remain below the average overall baseline workload.

1.1. Module “Centralised Allocation and Electronic Processing of Order for Payment Cases, Integrated with the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice”

The technical aspect of the reform of order for payment proceedings consists of the module “Centralised Allocation and Electronic Processing of Order for Payment Cases,” developed and implemented within the Unified Information System of the Courts (UISC). The module was created in implementation of Activity 2 – “Creation of a Module within the UISC for the Centralised Allocation and Fully Electronic Processing of Order for Payment Cases” under the project “Strengthening, Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts,” Investment C10.1 of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria. The module ensures full digitalisation of order for payment proceedings—from the electronic submission of applications, through centralised allocation among courts, to the initiation and electronic examination of order for payment cases.

Digitalisation also extends to enforcement proceedings. Following the issuance of the order for payment and the signing of an electronic writ of execution, an electronic record of the writ of execution is created, protected by an access code. This process does not require any additional action on the part of the judge or the applicant. The enforcement agent is granted access to the electronic record once the creditor provides the access code generated by the court.

The module provides an access interface via the electronic portal of the Unified Information System of the Courts, enabling the completion and submission, in structured form, of single or multiple applications for the issuance of orders for payment and objections through a user interface, as well as through an application programming interface (API) via integration with the applicants’ own software systems. The process is designed to be significantly simpler and faster than the traditional paper-based procedure.

The module delivers concrete and measurable benefits for all participants in order for payment proceedings. For creditors, applicants, and lawyers, it guarantees the submission, payment, and provision of the service electronically, with minimal geographical and technological constraints:

- Applications may be submitted at any time, including on non-working days and public holidays—24/7 access. Users are not required to comply with court working hours.
- Data entry in the electronic form—concerning the parties to the proceedings, the claim (type, currency, etc.), the factual grounds of the claim, the method and account for

payment by the debtor, and the claimed costs—is carried out through fully intuitive functionalities providing access to the individual sections of the form.

- Interlinked logical checks are embedded, depending on the content of the completed fields, and warning messages are generated when mandatory fields are not completed or where the content does not meet validation requirements.

A key feature is that the system automatically verifies whether the application meets all formal requirements, whether the necessary documents have been attached, and whether the data have been correctly completed.

- At the final stage, attachments may be uploaded, and the system automatically calculates a 15% reduction of the fee due. After completion, the form is electronically signed and submitted with a single action.

- Following the signing of the application, the fee may be paid via a virtual POS terminal by card or by bank transfer to the account of any district court, with proof of payment attached.

- The user immediately receives a unique tracking number. A significant facilitation is the automatic granting of access to the newly instituted case, without the need to submit a separate application for electronic access, as is required for other types of cases.

For applicants outside the categories of persons obliged to submit applications exclusively by electronic means (Article 410(5) of the Civil Procedure Code), an option is provided to choose whether to submit the application on paper or electronically. The Module includes functionality enabling court staff to enter into the system applications for the issuance of an order for payment that have been filed with the court, by inputting the data from the application into specifically designated fields (structured data) and attaching a scanned electronic image of the original application and its accompanying documents. Paper-based applications may be filed with any district court.

- Upon completion of the registration/digitalisation of the application by the court official, the Module generates and assigns a unique incoming number in the unified electronic register, indicating the date, time, and order of receipt of the application.

- Upon completion of the process of completing and registering the application, whether submitted via the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice or registered at the court, the

application is automatically transmitted to the allocation module in the order of receipt and is automatically allocated centrally, through random allocation, to judges nationwide, irrespective of the initial place of submission.

The system also provides functionality for the registration of accompanying documents filed with any district court, which may be linked to the relevant order for payment case or cases.

1.2. Results Concerning Court Workload for the Period 1 July – 31 December 2025

Following the Operation of the Module for Centralised Allocation and Electronic Processing of Order for Payment Cases

A sustained trend is observed towards an unprecedented reduction of the existing disparities in workload among individual district courts.

- **July 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 July 2025 amounted to 14.36 workload units per judge. Seventy-seven (77) district courts recorded workload levels below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 11.00 workload units per judge, while thirty-six (36) courts exceeded the average, with 18.04 workload units per judge. By the end of the month, the average workload of the lower-burden district courts reached 15.33 workload units per judge. A clear process of convergence between low- and high-burden district courts was observed, alongside a gradual reduction of the initial disparities.

- **August 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 August 2025 amounted to 12.92 workload units per judge. Seventy-eight (78) district courts were below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 9.73 workload units per judge, while thirty-six (36) courts were above the average, with 15.96 workload units per judge. By the end of the month, the average workload of the lower-burden district courts increased to 14.05 workload units per judge, closely approaching the average workload of the higher-burden courts and confirming the effectiveness of the workload equalisation mechanism.

- **September 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 September 2025 amounted to 11.66 workload units per judge. Seventy (70) district courts recorded workload levels below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 8.26 workload units per judge, while forty-three (43) courts were above the average, with 15.23 workload units per judge. By the end of the month, the average workload of the

lower-burden district courts reached 14.05 workload units per judge. The convergence of workloads between low- and high-burden courts and the gradual reduction of initial disparities continued successfully.

- **October 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 October 2025 amounted to 11.10 workload units per judge. Seventy-six (76) district courts were below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 7.91 workload units per judge, while thirty-seven (37) courts were above the average, with 14.58 workload units per judge. By the end of the month, the average workload—calculated as the sum of the average workload at the beginning of the month and the workload coefficients accrued from the allocation of order for payment cases as of 31 October 2025—of the lower-burden district courts reached 12.57 workload units per judge. This reflects the consistent application of the principle of directing order for payment cases to less-burdened courts, with a view to aligning their workload with that of higher-burden district courts.

- **November 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 November 2025 amounted to 13.29 workload units per judge. Seventy-four (74) district courts recorded workload levels below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 9.77 workload units per judge, while thirty-nine (39) courts exceeded the average, with 17.29 workload units per judge. During November, all district courts in the group reached the national average workload values. In the final days of the month, order for payment cases were allocated automatically among all district courts in proportion to the number of judges and the distance of each court from the national average baseline workload. As a result, by the end of the month, the average workload of the lower-burden district courts reached 14.79 workload units per judge, demonstrating that the applied mechanism reduces recorded disparities and maintains a balanced distribution of workload.

- **December 2025:** The calculated average overall workload of all district courts as of 1 December 2025 amounted to 12.19 workload units per judge. Seventy-seven (77) district courts recorded workload levels below the national average baseline workload, with an average value of 9.02 workload units per judge, while thirty-six (36) courts exceeded the average, with 15.85 workload units per judge. In the final days of the month, order for payment cases were allocated automatically among all district courts in proportion to the number of judges and the distance of each court from the national average baseline workload. By the end of the month, the average workload of the lower-burden district courts reached 13.62 workload units per

judge, confirming the sustainable nature of the applied model and its effectiveness in balancing workloads.

The data for the first six months demonstrate a uniform and sustainable equalisation of the overall workload of district courts.

The functioning of the module for centralised allocation and electronic processing of order for payment cases demonstrates the successful achievement of the reform objectives, leading to a fairer distribution of judicial workload, acceleration of judicial proceedings, and significant progress in the digitalisation of the judicial system.

The results of the overall implementation of the reform of order for payment proceedings and the functioning of the developed module for centralised allocation and electronic processing of order for payment cases during the first three months of its application were presented at a meeting of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, by way of a report prepared by Daniela Marcheva and Boyan Bonevski, members of the Supreme Judicial Council. The report was adopted by decision under Protocol No. 29 of 21 October 2025 of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council and published on the official website of the Supreme Judicial Council.¹⁹

From the moment of the implementation of the module, the members of the working group established pursuant to a decision of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council under Protocol No. 6 of 10 October 2024 have carried out continuous monitoring of its operation and have held regular working meetings. During these meetings, all submitted inquiries and reported issues are reviewed, and assistance is provided to the developer in remedying the identified difficulties and deficiencies. This activity continues to the present date and includes monitoring of case allocation processes, notification mechanisms, the functioning of individual modules, and other related processes. With the support of the working group, fifteen (15) new versions of the module have been implemented since 1 July 2025, aimed at developing core functionalities and optimising the electronic processing of order for payment cases.

Given that order for payment cases are processed entirely electronically, particular importance was attached to defining standardised notifications (internal system messages) necessary for the electronic management of cases. Following the introduction of the module for centralised allocation and electronic processing, workflows were reviewed and notification parameters were refined. The catalogue of standard templates for procedural orders in order for

payment proceedings was expanded by six additional types. Functionality was developed and implemented enabling each judge to create, edit, store, and use their own templates. The template for writs of execution under Articles 410 and 417 of the Civil Procedure Code was optimised, including refinement of the textual content and the addition of information concerning the existence of an electronic record for the writ of execution. Functionality was also implemented to allow for the drafting of an act correcting an obvious factual error, capable of correcting more than one judicial act.

A statutory interest calculator was implemented, based on the base interest rate for the period 2015–2025. A configuration screen for the interest rate was developed for the global system administrator. The following additional functionalities were introduced:

- validation of personal and legal entity identifiers, including checks for personal identification number, foreigner identification number, date of birth; unified identification code and BULSTAT; and verification of a valid lawyer registration number entered in the bar register;
- a document-type catalogue for the processing of applications within the Centralised Registry;
- automatic retrieval of address data from previously submitted applications;
- the possibility for applicants, via the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice, to certify conformity with the original of all attached documents;
- payment of state fees to the bank account of the higher-instance court in appeal proceedings;
- a state fee calculator for multiple applications, automatically calculating the total amount due;
- the possibility to submit accompanying documents in cases to which the user has not been granted electronic access.

Judicial feedback has also proven to be of significant importance. During the period October–December 2025, members of the working group held numerous meetings in the appellate regions of Plovdiv, Burgas, Varna, and Veliko Tarnovo, at which all issues raised by district judges concerning the operation of the module were discussed. Numerous proposals were introduced for the improvement of specific processes and functionalities of the module. A further meeting is planned in the jurisdiction of the Sofia Court of Appeal.

2. “Mediation Module”

In implementation of Activity 2, “Enhancement of Existing Functionalities and Creation of New Functionalities in the Unified Information System of the Courts (UISC),” under Reform C10.1 “Strengthening, Further Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts” of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, during the period 30 September–30 November 2025 a module for the administration of mediation procedures in court cases was developed and implemented within the UISC.

The main functionalities of the “Mediation” module include:

- the possibility, following the initiation of a case and its allocation to a reporting judge, for a court official or the reporting judge to indicate whether the case is suitable for mediation;
- maintenance of a list of mediation centres and coordinators for each centre;
- maintenance of an up-to-date list of mediators for each mediation centre, including the following information:
 1. name of the mediator;
 2. education;
 3. primary profession and professional experience;
 4. mediator’s experience in mediations relating to specific types of disputes;
 5. additional qualifications of the mediator in the field of mediation, supported by documentary evidence;
 6. date of inclusion in the list;
 7. date of expiry of the mediator’s mandate and any extension thereof; as well as the additional circumstances under items 2–5 pursuant to Article 31(1) and (2) of Ordinance No. 12 of 28 July 2025 on Mediators and Mediation Procedures in Court-Based Mediation Centres (adopted by the Supreme Judicial Council by decision under Protocol No. 21 of 28 July 2025, promulgated in the State Gazette, No. 62 of 30 July 2025);

- functionality for recording information on the scheduling of informational meetings for mediation procedures (place, date, and time), as well as maintaining records of all scheduled meetings within the mediation procedure;
- indication of whether the parties attended in person or through authorised representatives;
- functionality allowing court officials to record information regarding the duration of mediation meetings;
- functionality allowing court officials to record the outcome of mediation procedures in compliance with the principle of confidentiality, with such information being accessible to the coordinator;
- functionality for recording settlements reached between the parties as a result of mediation;
- monthly generation of reports for statistical purposes regarding informational meetings and mediation procedures;
- monthly generation of reports for statistical purposes regarding the activity of individual mediators.

By decision adopted under Protocol No. 29 of 21 October 2025, items 18.4 and 18.5, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council approved the nomenclature of statistical codes for civil, commercial, and company law cases—modifications of cases under Article 140a(1)(1)–(11) of the Civil Procedure Code—and the templates for statistical reporting of court-based mediation centres, territorial units, and mediators. These were implemented in the module and, following successful testing, were deployed within the UISC and became fully operational in a live environment as of 30 November 2025.

Statistical data relating to informational meetings and mediation procedures conducted after 1 July 2025 indicate that, at this very early stage of assessing the effects of the reform—and notwithstanding unresolved logistical conditions and the need for forthcoming training of judges and court mediators—between 20% and 30% of cases in which mandatory informational meetings were held were concluded by settlement.

artificial intelligence, for case management, judicial statistics and their transparency, monitoring, evaluation, and surveys among court users or legal professionals)”

1. Progress Regarding the System for Measuring Judges’ Workload

The Rules for the Assessment of Judges’ Workload (RAJW) establish objective indicators for measuring the legal and factual complexity of judicial cases, referred to as workload weighting coefficients. They also regulate the procedure for determining individual judges’ workload and the limits of normative workload for judges in the various courts across the country. The assessment of judges’ workload is intended to establish an objective primary measure of workload, based on the amount of on-site time required for the examination and resolution of different types of cases, in accordance with a previously developed classification of case groups. Each group of cases is assigned a specific weight/coefficient reflecting the time required for their examination and completion.

Pursuant to Article 11(6) of the Rules for the Assessment of Judges’ Workload, and in view of the need to update the weighting coefficients for cases and for judges’ activities, as determined by the results of an empirical study conducted in the period 2014–2015, the Commission on Judges’ Workload within the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council initiated the relevant actions. By decision adopted under Protocol No. 14 of 16 December 2025, item 2, the Commission established a temporary working group composed of judges, tasked with reassessing the weighting coefficients for civil, commercial, and company law cases and refining the scope of the workload groups.

The reassessment aims to ensure a **more objective and up-to-date evaluation of the weighted value of cases, taking into account both their legal and factual complexity as well as the time required for their examination and resolution.** By refining the scope of the workload groups, a fairer and more balanced distribution of judges’ workload among district courts adjudicating order for payment cases will be achieved, ensuring that the centralised electronic allocation of such cases reflects the actual time and effort expended by judges in their examination.

2. Progress Regarding the Upgraded Functions of the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice (UPEJ) in Connection with the Operation of the Module for the Allocation of Order for Payment Cases.

During the period 1 July–31 December 2025, an increase in the number of user profiles registered in the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice (UPEJ) was recorded. **A total of 588 new profiles of legal entities and 2,471 profiles of natural persons were registered.**

A sustained increase was observed in the number of applications for the issuance of orders for payment submitted via the UPEJ—from 83.0% in July 2025 to over 99% in December 2025, with approximately 96% of all applications being submitted electronically in practice. This indicates that even persons who are not legally obliged to use electronic submission increasingly avail themselves of this service. By comparison, under a project of the Supreme Judicial Council implemented under the Operational Programme “Good Governance” (BG05SFOP001-3.001-0013-C01) entitled “Delivery and Centralisation of Portals and Information Systems for Citizens’ Access to Information, E-Services and E-Justice,” which introduced the functionality for submitting applications under Article 410 of the Civil Procedure Code, the total number of electronically submitted applications under Article 410 of the Civil Procedure Code for the entire period from the completion of the project in 2022 to the present amounted to only 18 applications.

The total number of applications submitted under Articles 410 and 417 of the Civil Procedure Code amounted to **69,876**, of which:

- 66,700 applications were submitted via the Unified Portal for Electronic Justice;
- 3,176 applications were submitted through court registries.
- In addition:
 - 8,426 state fees were paid electronically;
 - 1,794 state fees were paid by bank transfer;
 - 38,416 electronic case records for writs of execution were generated.
- July 2025: A total of 9,069 applications for the issuance of orders for payment were registered, of which 548 applications were submitted on the basis of Article 417(1)(3), (6), and (10) of the Civil Procedure Code (local jurisdiction), and 8,521 applications were subject to centralised allocation among 77 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During the first month following the introduction of centralised allocation of order for payment cases, 83.0% (7,074 applications) were registered via the UPEJ, while 17.0% were submitted on paper through court registries.

- August 2025: A total of 9,827 applications were registered, of which 515 applications were submitted under local jurisdiction rules and 9,799 applications were allocated centrally among 78 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During this month, the share of applications registered via the UPEJ increased to 95.5%.
- September 2025: A total of 10,674 applications were registered, of which 510 applications were submitted under local jurisdiction and 10,610 applications were allocated centrally among 70 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During September 2025, the share of applications registered via the UPEJ reached 97.4%.
- October 2025: A total of 13,349 applications were registered, of which 716 applications were submitted under local jurisdiction and 12,633 applications were allocated centrally among 76 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During October, only 133 applications (1.1% of all registered applications) were submitted on paper through court registries, while 12,500 applications (98.9%) were registered via the UPEJ.
- November 2025: A total of 12,829 applications were registered, of which 921 applications were submitted under local jurisdiction and 12,955 applications were allocated centrally among 74 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During November, the share of applications registered via the UPEJ reached 99.1% of all applications for the issuance of orders for payment.
- December 2025: A total of 12,932 applications were registered, of which 545 applications were submitted under local jurisdiction and 12,387 applications were allocated centrally among 77 district courts with a baseline workload below the national average. During December, the share of applications registered via the UPEJ reached 99.7% of all applications for the issuance of orders for payment.

3. Material Support for digitalisation in the Judicial System

In implementation of Activity 3 under Reform C10.1 “Strengthening, Further Development and Upgrade of the Unified Information System of the Courts” of the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria, the necessary technical equipment was provided to enable courts to operate entirely online within the Unified Information System of the Courts (UISC). This was achieved through two public procurement procedures for the

delivery of 3,000 desktop computer configurations for court staff and 2,200 mobile computers (laptops) for judges. Under Activity 3, the project allocated financial resources in the total amount of BGN 4,784,800, including BGN 2,697,000 for desktop computer configurations and BGN 2,087,800 for mobile computers (laptops). The delivery of the desktop computer configurations was completed on 25 October 2024, while the delivery of the mobile computers (laptops) was completed on 31 October 2024.

In implementation of Activity 4, the data centres were upgraded through the delivery of hardware and software ensuring the necessary infrastructure for the full digitalisation of judicial proceedings and cases. This includes enabling citizens and businesses to access and exchange electronic documents with the judicial system entirely online and in electronic form. **As a result of the upgrade, the Supreme Judicial Council now operates two modern mirrored data centres and one archival data centre.** Under Activity 4, financial resources were allocated in the total amount of BGN 12,940,940.00 (excluding VAT) or BGN 15,529,128.00 (including VAT). The implementation under this activity was completed on 16 August 2024.

Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section “B – Quality of Justice”, Item 15 – “Geographical Distribution and Number of Courts/Jurisdictions (‘Judicial Map’) and Their Specialisation, in Particular Specialised Courts or Panels for Dealing with Fraud and Corruption Cases”

1. Judicial Map

The reform of order for payment proceedings constitutes a genuine and effective change to the judicial map and represents the only viable alternative to a reform affecting the structure and number of courts in the country—an approach that is inherently highly contentious and, in practice, often met with resistance from affected social groups. The Supreme Judicial Council does not have at its disposal any other option for reform of the judicial map that depends solely on the will of the Council itself. The undertaking of serious legislative amendments, or any reform of the judicial map as such, requires a clear and shared vision on the part of the other two branches of government—the legislative and the executive.

2. Specialisation of Courts, in Particular Specific Courts or Judicial Panels for Dealing with Fraud and Corruption Cases

In connection with the closure of the specialised justice system, pursuant to the amendments to the Judiciary Act promulgated in State Gazette No. 32/2022 and in force as of 28 July 2022, the rules on jurisdiction set out in Article 35 of the Criminal Procedure Code were amended, designating the regional courts and the Sofia City Court as courts of first instance.

Cases involving large-scale fraud, computer fraud, and corruption fall within the jurisdiction of the regional courts, and, for the city of Sofia, within the jurisdiction of the Sofia City Court.

Pursuant to Article 35(4) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the Sofia City Court, acting as a court of first instance, has jurisdiction over cases concerning crimes of a general nature committed by judges, prosecutors, and investigators; by other persons enjoying immunity; by members of the Council of Ministers; as well as cases concerning offences under Chapter One and Chapter One “a” of the Special Part of the Criminal Code, unless the special rules of Chapter Thirty-One apply. This category also includes the so-called “high-level corruption” cases.

Pursuant to Article 35(5) of the Criminal Procedure Code, the Sofia City Court also has jurisdiction over cases falling within the competence of the European Public Prosecutor’s Office.

Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section “C – Efficiency of the Justice System”, Item 16 – “Length of Proceedings”

1. Reform 3 “Introduction of Mandatory Judicial Mediation”

1.1. Legislative Amendments

The Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) and the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) are the institutions responsible for the implementation of *Milestone 227 – Reform 3 “Introduction of Mandatory Judicial Mediation”* under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan of the Republic of Bulgaria (NRRP).

The reform has the potential to significantly reduce the workload of the courts and to enhance efficiency in the field of civil and commercial justice.

As a result of the joint efforts of the SJC and the MoJ, with the direct and active participation of the Minister of Justice, Mr Georgi Georgiev, following the adoption of Decision No. 11/01.07.2024 on Constitutional Case No. 11/2024, by which the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria declared unconstitutional the disputed legislative provisions governing mandatory judicial mediation, a new legislative act was drafted, fully aligned with the reasoning of the Constitutional Court's decision.

The adopted Amending and Supplementing Act to the Civil Procedure Code introduced amendments and supplements to the Civil Procedure Code (CPC) concerning mediation, promulgated in State Gazette No. 55/08.07.2025.

The amendments to the CPC place emphasis on the introduction of a mandatory information meeting on mediation for a defined category of civil and commercial cases.

Pursuant to Article 140a(1)(1–11) of the Civil Procedure Code, the categories of cases in respect of which the court may require the parties to participate in person in an information meeting on mediation are regulated, including obligations, family law, labour, and commercial disputes.

A key feature of the regulation is that the court's obligation to refer the parties to an information meeting in such cases is subject to an assessment of whether the dispute is suitable for mediation and whether any obstacles to mediation exist (Article 140a(2) and (3) CPC). The criteria are clearly and exhaustively set out.

The primary objective is to ensure that the parties to specific court disputes are properly and objectively informed about the nature and principles of mediation, the manner in which it is conducted, the role of the mediator, the consequences of reaching an agreement (e.g. reimbursement of part of the paid state fee), as well as the advantages of mediation procedures (time, costs, preservation of relationships), compared to the length of judicial proceedings. The parties may voluntarily and jointly decide, following the information meeting, whether to proceed with mediation, which may be conducted in a court mediation centre.

The information meeting is conducted by a mediator in a judicial mediation centre located within the relevant court and is scheduled prior to the first open court hearing in the case.

The legislative amendments also introduce financial incentives for parties who reach a settlement as a result of mediation proceedings—namely, reimbursement of 75% of the paid state fee where a mediation settlement is approved by the court, and 85% reimbursement where a settlement is reached through mediation conducted in a judicial mediation centre following the mandatory information meeting.

The benefits for the parties are reflected in cost savings, reduced duration of proceedings (mediation procedures are significantly shorter than court proceedings), control over the outcome (the parties themselves reach a settlement rather than having one imposed by the court), and preservation of relationships, particularly important in family and commercial disputes.

By Decision No. 21/28.07.2025, Item 18.1, in connection with the adoption of the Amending Act to the Civil Procedure Code (State Gazette No. 55/2025), the SJC adopted Ordinance No. 12 of 28 July 2025 on Mediators and Mediation Procedures in Judicial Mediation Centres (State Gazette No. 62/2025), as well as Ordinance amending and supplementing Ordinance No. 11 of 30 October 2023 on the structure and organisation of the activities of judicial mediation centres (State Gazette No. 94/2023; amended State Gazette No. 97/2023).

Ordinance No. 12 of 28 July 2025 on mediators and mediation procedures in judicial mediation centres regulates matters related to the conduct of information meetings on mediation, mediation procedures in all judicial cases referred to mediation in judicial mediation centres, including selection, status, and training of mediators in those centres.

Ordinance No. 11 of 30 October 2023 on the structure and organisation of judicial mediation centres (adopted by the SJC with Decision No. 30/30.10.2023, promulgated in State Gazette No. 94/01.11.2023, in force as of 01.07.2024; amended State Gazette No. 97/21.11.2023; amended State Gazette No. 62/30.07.2025) regulates issues related to the establishment and organisation of judicial mediation centres, the status and obligations of centre coordinators, the collection of information and coordination of activities, and the creation and maintenance of a Council on Mediation at the Supreme Judicial Council. Within the scope of the Council's competence are: discussion of aggregated statistical information on the activities of judicial mediation centres; preparation of analyses based on such data; consideration of inquiries and proposals from court presidents concerning the establishment of mediation centres or coordination between centres; identification of problems or good practices in the operation of

judicial mediation centres; proposals for solutions to identified problems; identification of positive and negative trends related to centre activities; proposals for improvement of mediation activities, including through necessary legislative amendments; and determination of the judiciary's communication strategy in relation to mediation carried out by judicial mediation centres. The Council is chaired by Judge Marin Marinov, President of the Court of Appeal – Varna. Its members include: Daniela Marcheva (member of the Supreme Judicial Council); Aleksandar Angelov (judge at the Sofia City Court); Aleksandar Angelov (President of the Sofia District Court); Kalin Balanchev (President of the District Court – Pernik); Mihail Aleksov (President of the District Court – Petrich); Veselka Zlatcheva-Kochakova (President of the Administrative Court – Pazardzhik); Desislava Zhekova (judge at the District Court – Varna); Biliana Gusarova-Vegeter (Director of the Bulgarian Institute for Legal Initiatives); Liliya Simeonova (Deputy Chair of the National Bureau for Legal Aid); Mihail Bozhkov (attorney at the Sofia Bar Association); Yana Toneva (attorney at the Sofia Bar Association); Albena Penova (attorney at the Sofia Bar Association); Donka Avramova (state expert at the “Judicial Legislation Council” Directorate of the Ministry of Justice); and Desislava Moneva-Petrova-Peneva (representative of the Supreme Bar Council).

1.2. Establishment of the Infrastructure of Judicial Mediation Centres

The most substantial and significant activity, in terms of both time and financial resources, concerns the establishment of judicial mediation centres.

Pursuant to Article 84a of the Judiciary Act (new – State Gazette No. 11 of 2023, in force as of 1 July 2024), a judicial mediation centre is established at each regional court, with territorial divisions attached to the district courts. These centres organise and conduct mediation procedures in pending judicial cases in accordance with Chapter Six of the Mediation Act. The legislation also provides that, by decision of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, independent judicial mediation centres may be established at specific district courts. The organisation of information meetings and mediation procedures within the judicial mediation centre is entrusted to one or more coordinators.

By Decision under Protocol No. 10 of 12 March 2024, Item 17, the Judicial College, exercising the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council, approved the determinations made by

the administrative heads of the relevant regional and district courts regarding the designation of premises for the establishment of 28 (twenty-eight) judicial mediation centres.

Already during the period 2023–2024, large-scale measures were undertaken to ensure the material base of the centres in all 28 regional courts and their territorial divisions in 113 district courts, amounting to a total of 141 mediation centres nationwide. These measures included refurbishment and furnishing of existing and newly established centres, as well as the provision of dedicated premises in all district courts across the country or, where necessary, in other public buildings with facilitated public access.

The implementation of this activity began with a functional analysis of the availability, or lack thereof, of suitable premises for mediation within court buildings. For the purpose of identifying appropriate premises, members of the working group were tasked with conducting inspections of court buildings. As a result of these inspections, reports were prepared by the project coordinators designated by Decision under Item 10.4 of Protocol No. 27 of 15 September 2022 of the Plenum of the Supreme Judicial Council.

With the assistance of the administrative heads of the courts and the coordinators, analyses were carried out which demonstrated that, for certain mediation centres, suitable premises could not be identified within court buildings. For this reason, support was sought from central and local authorities for the provision of premises that are state-owned and/or municipally owned.

On the basis of consolidated information provided by regional governors, mayors of municipalities, and court presidents, a detailed analysis was prepared regarding the funds required for refurbishment and furnishing of the premises designated for judicial mediation centres. As the total estimated cost significantly exceeded the financial resources allocated under the project, additional targeted funding was requested; however, this request was declined by the Ministry of Finance.

Following the allocation of the necessary resources for the establishment of mediation centres in regional capitals and the corresponding regional courts, and in view of the identified shortage of financial resources, the available funds were redistributed among the territorial divisions of district courts located outside regional capitals. This necessitated a reassessment of financing options and the selection of suitable premises. It was determined that the activity had to be carried out under a restrictive budget, which made it impossible to fully secure the funds

required for all construction and refurbishment works and for the procurement of equipment for the designated premises.

In order to ensure continuity of activities in the absence of sufficient resources, the following interim measures were adopted: in some locations, courtrooms in district courts were initially used for conducting information meetings, subject to the schedules of hearings; in district courts where the use of courtrooms was not feasible, funds were allocated either for refurbishment and furnishing or, in other cases, solely for the procurement of equipment.

Despite the limited budget, active steps were taken to secure financial support for the centres. By Decision under Item 18 of Protocol No. 17 of 9 April 2024 and Decision under Item 13 of Protocol No. 27 of 18 June 2024 of the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, adjustments were made to the 2024 budget of the Judicial College and the judicial authorities to support the establishment of judicial mediation centres. In this manner, funding was secured for mediation centres in every regional capital where both a district court and a regional court operate.

By Decision under Protocol No. 26 of 11 June 2024, Item 56, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, exercising the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council pursuant to Article 23(2) of the Transitional and Final Provisions of the Amending Act to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (State Gazette No. 106 of 22 December 2023), approved the determinations made by the administrative heads of the relevant district courts concerning the premises for the establishment of judicial mediation centres and allocated funds in a total amount of BGN 230,190.99.

Of this amount, BGN 190,190.99 was provided from targeted funds under the budget of the Judicial College, acting as the Supreme Judicial Council, for the implementation of Reform 3 “Introduction of Mandatory Judicial Mediation” under the National Recovery and Resilience Plan. These funds were earmarked for construction and refurbishment works, the purchase of air-conditioning units, and the procurement of furniture and equipment.

At present, activities related to the establishment of judicial mediation centres are ongoing. In regional and district courts across the country, premises have been secured for the conduct of information meetings on mediation procedures and for mediation proceedings. In some cases, such as the mediation centre at the Varna Regional Court, the available premises are insufficient in size to accommodate the expected number of information meetings.

Outstanding issues remain with regard to securing appropriate premises for the territorial divisions of district courts at Elin Pelin District Court, Etropole District Court, and Samokov District Court.

It should also be noted that the greatest needs are at the Sofia District Court, Sofia City Court, and Sofia Regional Court, where case concentration is the highest. Premises have been designated on the second floor of the building at 6 Dragan Tsankov Boulevard. The construction and refurbishment works in the building are expected to be completed by the end of February 2026, after which the premises will be equipped and brought into use for their intended purpose within the shortest possible timeframe.

1.3. Procedure for the Selection of Mediators and the Designation of Judicial Coordinators

By Decision under Protocol No. 14 of 26 March 2024, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, exercising the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council, initiated—pursuant to Article 7(1) of Ordinance No. 10 of 30 October 2023 on the Selection, Status and Activities of Mediators in Judicial Mediation Centres - 28 (twenty-eight) selection procedures for a total of 254 mediators, determining the number of judicial mediators to be attached to each judicial mediation centre at the regional courts.

The rationale of the Judicial College for announcing a higher number of judicial mediators than initially proposed by the presidents of the regional courts was the need to conduct the selection through no fewer than two consecutive procedures. This approach ensures not only the high quality of the selected mediators but also enables candidates to participate in selection procedures across different judicial districts.

In implementation of Article 11(1) of Ordinance No. 10 of 30 October 2023, by Decision under Protocol No. 14 of 26 March 2024, the Judicial College approved a Methodology for conducting a written examination and for assessing candidates for judicial mediators.

Notwithstanding the absence of an explicit statutory requirement to adopt a methodology for conducting oral interviews and assessing candidates for judicial mediators, and with a view to ensuring transparency of the selection procedures and establishing principles of equality and competitiveness based on professional qualities, knowledge, and skills, the Judicial College, by Decision under Protocol No. 22 of 14 May 2024, approved a Methodology for conducting oral interviews pursuant to Article 12 of Ordinance No. 10 of 30 October 2023.

As a result of the selection procedures conducted, a total of 233 candidates were ranked.

As of 1 July 2024, the provision of Article 20(1) of the Mediation Act, which required that judicial mediators be exclusively persons with legal education, was repealed. Consequently, under the current wording of the provision, a mediator in a judicial mediation centre may be any person who meets the requirements of Article 8(1) of the Mediation Act, has completed higher education, and has undergone additional selection and specialised training in accordance with Article 25 of the relevant ordinance.

At the beginning of 2026, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council plans to launch new selection procedures for judicial mediators. In light of the legislative amendment referred to above, all mediators who have completed higher education will be eligible to participate in the upcoming selection procedures.

The preparation for the forthcoming selection also includes measures to ensure the participation of retired magistrates in the role of judicial mediators. This approach is widely applied and strongly encouraged in a number of European states, as the experience and reputation of retired magistrates contribute to public trust and the effectiveness of the process. The overarching objective of including retired magistrates as mediators is to combine their in-depth knowledge of the legal system with the neutrality inherent in the mediation process. Through their participation in mediation procedures, retired magistrates support alternative dispute resolution while bringing authority and legal expertise to the mediation process without compromising judicial independence.

At present, Bulgarian legislation provides for a prohibition on acting judges serving as mediators. Pursuant to Article 4 of the Mediation Act, mediation is conducted by natural persons who may associate for the purposes of carrying out mediation activities. Persons exercising judicial functions within the system of the judiciary may not carry out mediation activities.

The reform concept for judicial mediation envisages the active involvement of retired magistrates as mediators. For the period 2015–2025, approximately 100 (one hundred) retired magistrates - former judges, prosecutors, and investigators released from office pursuant to Article 165(1)(1) of the Judiciary Act—have expressed interest and willingness to participate in this key judicial reform.

The role of coordinators is likewise of key importance for the successful implementation of the judicial mediation reform. By Decision under Protocol No. 35 of 31 October 2023, the Judicial College of the Supreme Judicial Council, on the basis of Article 341(1) of the Judiciary Act, amended the Classification of Positions in Court Administration, under Section II “Specialised Administration,” by introducing a new position, effective as of 1 July 2024, entitled “Coordinator – Judicial Mediation Centre.”

The position of “Coordinator – Judicial Mediation Centre” was also incorporated into the Rules on Court Administration, which provide that, where no designated coordinator has been appointed, the administrative head may, by order, assign the coordinator’s functions to a court administrator, an administrative secretary, or another court official.

At present, in 27 (twenty-seven) regional courts (excluding the Sofia Regional Court) and 86 (eighty-six) district courts across the country, administrative heads have assigned court officials to perform the functions of coordinator by formal orders.

In 2026, mandatory initial training for coordinators is scheduled to be conducted, as provided for in Article 12(2) of Ordinance No. 11 of 30 October 2023 on the structure and organisation of judicial mediation centres. The training will include familiarisation with mediation procedures and, in particular, the specifics of coordinating and organising the activities of judicial mediation centres; interaction with judicial proceedings; communication with parties and their legal representatives; collection of statistical data; gathering feedback from parties regarding their level of satisfaction with information meetings and mediation procedures; maintenance of records of the mediation centre; and training in the operation of the “Mediation” module within the Unified Information System of the Courts.

Information under Pillar I “Justice System”, Section “C – Efficiency of the Justice System”, Item “Length of Proceedings”

The procedural laws do not provide for statutory time limits for the completion of judicial proceedings. There are no fixed standards governing the duration or time frames of court proceedings; however, the criterion of a “reasonable time” applies, within the meaning of the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR).

For the purposes of statistical reporting on the completion of cases, the approved statistical reporting forms used by the courts include indicators reflecting the time periods within which cases are resolved, namely:

For civil and commercial cases at first instance, two reporting periods are applied: cases completed within up to three months and cases completed from three to six months. For appeal civil cases, the reporting periods are up to three months and over three months.

For criminal cases at first and second instance, two reporting periods are applied: cases completed within up to three months and cases completed over three months. Administrative cases are reported under three categories: cases completed within one month, from one to three months, and over three months.

In this way, statistical data enable an objective assessment of the duration of judicial proceedings and the extent to which the examination and completion of cases take place within the adopted reporting periods, as well as the identification of the main trends in court activity.

The aggregated statistical data on court activity, publicly available on the website of the Supreme Judicial Council, show that over the past three years more than 80% of cases completed by district, regional, appellate, military, and administrative courts have been concluded within a period of up to three months.

As regards first-instance civil, commercial, corporate, and administrative cases examined by district, regional, and administrative courts, on average over 80% of cases are examined and completed within a three-month period, while approximately 70% are completed within a period of up to six months. A similar situation is observed with first-instance criminal cases, where approximately 83% of cases are completed within a three-month period.

The proportion of second-instance (appeal) civil cases, examined by regional and appellate courts, as well as cassation cases examined by administrative courts, completed within a three-month period is on average around 70%.

These data demonstrate that the judicial system functions effectively, with the predominant share of cases being examined and completed within the reporting time limits. More than 80% of first-instance cases and approximately 70% of appeal and cassation cases are completed within a three-month period, which demonstrates the courts' capacity to ensure swift and high-quality justice.

¹ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111654>

² https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/46/Pravila_izbor_chlenove-2025.pdf

³ <https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/45/Rol.pdf>

⁴ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111655>

⁵ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111427>

⁶ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111495>

⁷ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111910>

⁸ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111032>

⁹ <https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/44/PK-05.02.2025.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/112023>

¹¹ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/112024>

¹² <https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/47/act-240-1-03.10.2025.pdf>

¹³ <https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/47/act-240-2-03.10.2025.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://vs.justice.bg/root/f/upload/47/R02.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/6563>

¹⁶ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/7165>

¹⁷ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111043>

¹⁸ <https://vs.justice.bg/page/view/111696>

¹⁹ <https://vss.justice.bg/page/view/112022>

²⁰ <https://vss.justice.bg/page/view/1082>