



# REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA SUPREME BAR COUNCIL

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## REPORT ON CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE SUPREME BAR COUNCIL OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA

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*President of the Supreme Bar Council*

In 2022 within the first year of the new mandate of the Supreme Bar Council, the Bulgarian Bar has achieved remarkable successes.

Despite the unstable political and legislative situation in the country, frequent parliamentary elections and change of governments, the Bar maintains its stability and leading public role. Our initial ideas of goals and vision have evolved, developed and I find that the Supreme Bar Council is currently working well and in sync.

Numerous opinions of the Supreme Bar Council on draft laws, on interpretative and constitutional cases, were recognized, considered and became part of the legal framework in the country.

A significant progress in the efforts to defend the interests of Bulgarian lawyers is that we were able to fairly resolve the issue of the increase in the legally recognized costs for lawyers, which has been requested for years. The National Assembly increased the legally recognized costs of lawyers from 25 to 40%. The statement of reasons for the request states: "The COVID-19 pandemic has affected both individual self-employed lawyers and law firms and associations extremely hard. We are fully aware that this applies to the legal profession as well as to other liberal professions. However, our work, associated with the risk of its nature as a free profession, was almost completely restricted by the state, the commercial turnover was

reduced to almost a minimum, the business almost completely limited its expenses for legal services, and we were not assisted in any way. We were not able to take advantage from almost none of the measures provided by the state, both in the first and in the second stage in the provision of aid, except for the general possibility for all Bulgarian citizens to obtain an interest-free loan from the Bulgarian Development Bank. However, such an opportunity does not constitute a working mechanism for lawyers and an almost insignificant number of them have taken advantage of it".

The Bulgarian Bar continued and deepened the institutional dialogue, in addition to the judicial and legislative, also with the executive power, by holding a number of meetings and reaching cooperation agreements with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Economy, the Ministry of Innovation and Growth, etc. As a result, the interests of lawyers providing free legal aid through the National Legal Aid Bureau were protected. Another great success is the planned opportunity for law firms to have access to European funding. The inclusion of only law firms at this stage is in relation to the conditions of the specific program and in particular – differences in the tax treatment of firms and individually practicing lawyers. But it is important to note that the Supreme Bar Council continues, within the framework of an active dialogue with the Ministry of Innovation and Growth, to look for options for access to European funding for individual practicing lawyers as well. We worked on the topic with many colleagues from the country, and this shows that when we are united, the results are not late.

The Supreme Bar Council increased the minimum attorney's fees specified in the Regulation, thus reflecting them in line with the current economic and financial situation in the country and growing inflation.

The Bar is already included in the Council for the Implementation of the National Coordination Mechanism for the Rule of Law, as the focus of the meetings held so far has been the topic of media pluralism and freedom of speech, as well as necessary changes in criminal and civil legislation, guaranteeing the rule of law in the country.

The Bulgarian Bar also supported a number of socially significant causes - for example, we made donations for those affected by the floods in Bulgaria last summer, we donated funds for ill children within the framework of the charity initiative of the President of the Republic "Bulgarian Christmas", we were the voice of society at cases of violation of human rights and the rule of law.

Internationally, the Bulgarian Bar had the honor of hosting two significant events - the congresses of the two largest international lawyers' organizations – the CCBE and FBE. The events took place in June 2022 in Sofia, and according to unequivocal assessments, with its

hosting, the Bulgarian Bar proved that it is a worthy member of the European family of lawyers and demonstrated the highest standards in organizing and holding a forum of such magnitude.

A number of joint initiatives were also discussed during the meetings of the leadership of the Bulgarian bar with representatives of the Greek bar - the President of the Athens Bar Mr. Dimitrios Vervesos, the President of the CCBE Mr. Panagiotis Perakis, as well as with Mr. Nikolaos Koutkias - President of the CCBE Training Committee. On the Bulgarian side, we proposed to modernize the forms of cooperation, and Mr. Vervesos undertook to attract all 63 Bar Associations from our southern neighbor. As an immediate step in this direction, the participants agreed to organize a joint seminar in Sofia in February 2023. A reciprocal forum will be held later in Greece with the participation of representatives of the Bulgarian Bar Associations.

We also carry out significant cooperation under the HELP program of the Council of Europe, as several courses for Bulgarian lawyers were held last year, and a cross-border course is to be held together with the Slovak Bar Association in Bratislava in February 2023 on the topic of cybercrime and electronic evidence. Our cooperation with the European Lawyers Foundation, of which the Bulgarian Supreme Bar Council has been a member since last year, is also a great honor and advantage for us. We envisage deepening the cooperation with the European Judicial Network.

In conclusion, I believe that with joint efforts our successes in the name of protecting the interests of Bulgarian lawyers will continue in the future and I thank you for the opportunity to share them with you.

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