



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

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In the past year, the Supreme Bar Council of Bulgaria traditionally carried out its activities in several directions:

- Organizational-administrative and financial activity, including, but not limited to: maintenance of the Unified Register of lawyers and relations with the Bar councils of the country's colleges;
- Activities directly related to the legislative activity of the National Assembly, to the interpretive practice of the Supreme Court of Cassation and the Supreme Administrative Court and activity in the exercise of the authority under Art. 150, para. 4 of the Constitution, including participation of the Supreme Bar Council as an interested party in the proceedings before the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Bulgaria;
- Control activity;
- Preparation and completion of the activity of creating a new Bar Act;
- Educational, scientific and training activity;
- Interaction with state and/or judicial institutions on problems of lawyers, as well as establishing and maintaining institutional contacts on fundamental issues of the society's agenda;
- Interaction with the National Legal Aid Bureau;
- Conducting exams for admission to the Bar;
- Disciplinary activity;
- Participation in official events and other protocol celebrations;
- International activity;
- Activities to implement the communication policy of the Bulgarian Bar.

Since it is not possible to comprehensively cover all the activities of the Supreme Bar Council within the framework of this report, I will try to highlight the most notable activities that we have achieved in the past year.



In connection with the devastating earthquakes in Turkey and Syria, an initiative committee was promptly established to help the injured lawyers and their families, and they were supported financially. Deeply shocked by the tragedy that befell the people in Turkey and Syria, the Bulgarian lawyers immediately responded to the initiative of the President of the Supreme Bar Council to make joint efforts of all Bar associations in the country to provide assistance to the victims of the severe earthquakes.

The institutional cooperation between the Supreme Bar Council and the executive authorities was deepened, and a number of meetings and initiatives were held with the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Labor and Social Policy, and the Minister of Internal Affairs. Among the fruits of these joint institutional efforts was the signing of a Memorandum for the Protection of Victims of Domestic Violence between the Ministries of Justice and the Interior, the National Legal Aid Bureau and the country's Bar associations. For nearly 2 years, the National Legal Aid Bureau has been implementing the project "Improving access to justice for persons living below the poverty line with a special focus on women, children and the Roma community", one of the activities of which is the creation of a coordination mechanism at the local level for the protection of victims of domestic violence within the regional counseling centers of the Bar associations in the country. The memorandum envisages that in every established case of a victim of domestic violence, the authorities of the Ministry of Interior will inform the victim of the possibility of using free legal aid and, upon expressed desire, assist her/him in contacting the Bar council in the relevant town. Bar councils, in turn, publish a list of on-call lawyers specializing in domestic violence and assign a lawyer from that list to counsel the victim. Bar councils provide a lawyer on duty for every report from the authorities of the Ministry of Interior about an established person who has suffered from domestic violence, who goes to the place of the institution where the victim is located. At the end of the year, under the auspices of the Council of Ministers, a mobile application to help victims of violence also began to function.

The Supreme Bar Council and the Social Assistance Agency signed a Cooperation and Partnership Agreement to guarantee the rights and interests of children involved in parental



conflicts and participating in administrative and judicial proceedings. It is the result of joint efforts with the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy.

The institutional dialogue with the National Assembly was also deepened, as the Presidents of both institutions held several meetings, within which the significant role of the Supreme Bar Council in relation to legislative proposals and amendments, as well as the overall presence of the Bar in the legislation of our country, was highlighted. The President of the Parliament expressed his confidence that the institutions will work together to protect the rights and legitimate interests of citizens. During the meetings, a request was made for a good and transparent institutional dialogue.

A partnership agreement was signed between the Supreme Bar Council and the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency. The long-term cooperation will be aimed at presenting the activities of both the Supreme Bar Council and the Bar councils in the country.

An important highlight of the activities of the Supreme Bar Council last year was the participation in the debates on the proposed amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. The Supreme Bar Council was one of the key participants in the latest round of meetings of the Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional Affairs. The main focus of the debates were the deputies' proposals for changes to the Constitution related to the structure and functions of the Supreme Judicial Council, the powers of the Prosecutor General, the status of the Inspectorate at the Supreme Judicial Council, as well as the regulations related to the individual constitutional appeal. The general impression from the opinions expressed was that almost all institutions have serious reservations about the proposed amendments. In the framework of the debate, the opinions of the Supreme Bar Council were presented, and a large part of the considerations were taken into account by the constitutional legislator.

It should also be emphasized the extended international activity developed by the Supreme Bar Council in 2023. The President held a number of meetings and took an active part in numerous international forums and conferences, including:

- Participation in the European Presidents' Conference, which was held in Vienna, Austria;



- International conference on Gender equality as part of international human rights law, which was held in Baku, Azerbaijan;
- Working meeting with the President of the National Association of the Romanian Bars Prof. Traian Briciu and the Director of the National Institute for the Training and Improvement of Lawyers Prof. Dan Oancea, as well as participation in a workshop organized by the Romanian National Institute for the Training and Improvement of Lawyers and the Romanian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, on Evidence in International Commercial Arbitration held, which was in Bucharest, Romania;
- Conference of the European Criminal Bar Association, which was held in Sofia, Bulgaria;
- Working meeting with representatives of the Romanian and the Greek Bars under the auspices of the Supreme Bar Council of Bulgaria in connection with planned international events regarding legal aid and training and qualification of lawyers, which was held in Sofia, Bulgaria;
- Participation in the celebrations on the occasion of the 155th anniversary of the Bar Association of Slovenia, which was held in Bled, Slovenia;
- Participation in a conference organized by the CCBE in the European Parliament on the occasion of the European Lawyers Day, which was held in Brussels, Belgium;
- Participation in the CCBE plenary sessions in Chania and Athens, Greece;
- Participation in launch events of the HELP Programme of the Council of Europe, together with the Athens Bar Associations, which were held in Sofia and Athens.

Probably, some of the processes in 2023 related to justice in our country remain insufficiently visible to the general public, but for the legal community and in particular for us, the lawyers, they are more than logical and expected. For example, according to the 2023 Rule of Law Index of the World Justice Project, 65% of last year's recommendations globally have been fully or partially implemented. And one of the highlights of the report is that Bulgaria marks the biggest improvement worldwide in the rule of law index compared to last year (2022). Considering that legislative reforms usually take too long, the significant development in just one year is evident. Without reassuring us or making us proud, it is important to emphasize that the Bulgarian lawyers also made a significant contribution to this result.

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