

INFORMATION
on the Educational Programme
of the Supreme Judicial Council and the Ministry of Education and Science
**“Judiciary - informed choice and public confidence.
Open Courts and Prosecutor’s Offices”**

At the initiative of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC) in the Republic of Bulgaria, the Educational Programme “Judiciary - informed choice and public confidence. Open Courts and Prosecutor’s Offices” is conducted and it is directed towards the formation of legal literacy and culture among pupils, to increase the level of confidence in the judiciary and to observation of law.

The Programme started as a pilot Programme in the autumn of 2014 in pursuance of the SJC's Annual Programme in the part “Development of information campaigns for explanation of the structure of the Judiciary, the functions of the Supreme Judicial Council (SJC), the Court and the Prosecutor’s office” and as a result of a Cooperation Agreement signed between the SJC and the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). The Programme is directed to 10-12 grade pupils, and the lecturers are magistrates and judicial officers from the judiciary authorities who participate voluntarily and free of charge.

The current composition of the Supreme Judicial Council, for the first time since the establishment of the Council in 1991, elects from its composition the Commission “Public Communication” (CPC), which conducts the SJC’s information policy, ensures coordination and interaction with the judiciary authorities, the non-governmental organizations and the professional organizations of magistrates. The Commission existed to the spring of 2016, when as a result of the Act of Amend and Supplement (AAS) of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria (CRB) and AAS of the Judiciary System Act (JSA), the Supreme Judicial Council began to exercise its powers through the Plenum, the Judicial and the Prosecutor Colleges. With the new Rules of organization of the SJC’s activity and its administration the Commission of legal and institutional affairs (CLIA) at the Plenum of the SJC is designated as a successor of the CPC in relation to the organization and coordination of the implementation of the Communication Strategy of the Judiciary 2014-2020.

The idea of conducting the Educational Programme dates back to March 2014, when the CPC assigned to the Directorate “International Activities” to explore the experience of the Republic of Hungary with the successful initiative “Open Courts”. On the basis of the information received, the CPC requested from the Directorate “Public Communication and Protocol” to propose a project concept for the development of a pilot Educational Programme among pupils in order to raise their awareness of the structure, functions and importance of the judiciary. In June 2016, the CPC approved the project concept and undertook

actions for carrying out initial conversations and organizing a working meeting with representatives of the Ministry of Education and Science for the implementation of the Pilot Programme.

In July, a working meeting was held between the members of the SJC and the management of the MES and based on the motion of the Ministry a project of agreement and cooperation was prepared in order to ensure conditions for greater efficiency in achieving the objectives. The target group of the Pilot Programme - pupils of the 10th grade was defined taking into account the possibility that the topics proposed by the SJC to be synchronized with the “Ethics and Law” curriculum. Coordinators and contact persons were appointed by both institutions.

The projects of the concept were agreed in advance by the legal departments of the SJC and the MES.

By decision of the SJC, Minutes No. 34/23.07.2014, the Concept of the Pilot Educational Programme (the Concept) and the Cooperation Agreement between the SJC and the Ministry of Education and Science (the Agreement) were approved for its realization. On the same day, the Agreement was signed by the representative of the SJC and by the Minister of Education and Science.

The Agreement clarifies that the Pilot Programme Concept is an integral part of it, as approved by the decision of the SJC. The first Agreement contains 8 points on: the duration, scope, objectives and principles of cooperation between the institutions; the obligations of the SJC and the obligations of the Ministry of Education and Science. The final provisions provide for an opportunity to extend the scope and duration of the Agreement in order to include other classes and schools in the country.

According to the Agreement, the Pilot Programme has duration from October 2014 to May 2015 (during the school year) and was held in 28 pre-defined schools in the towns - administrative centers in the 28 districts of the Republic of Bulgaria (according to the administrative division of the Republic of Bulgaria), which have district courts and prosecutor’s offices. The pilot Programme was conducted within the framework of the “Ethics and Law” curriculum.

The objectives of the cooperation envisaged: enriching pupils’ knowledge of the status, structure and functions of the judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria; the formation of legal literacy and culture; enhancing the observation of law; achieving of understandable and open to the public justice; enhancing confidence in the judiciary.

In accordance with the principles of cooperation, the SJC and the MES had to ensure transparency of their actions by regularly consulting and exchanging the necessary information on the implemented activities.

The obligations of the SJC were bound to the management and implementation of the Pilot Programme, including offering specific topics, appointing judges, prosecutors, investigators and court officers to participate as

lecturers and mentors in the Programme, organizing information campaign to promote the initiative.

The obligations of the Ministry of Education and Science were bound to the coordination of the Pilot Programme through the Regional Inspectorates of Education (RIE), including agreeing of specific topics, defining specific schools, organizing activities in each one of them.

The concept of the Pilot Programme is structured in 11 points, defining the main objectives, scope, duration, target group, lecturers and mentors, partner institutions, description of the Programme, definition of exemplary topics, events and methodology of its implementation, expected results and validation of the Legal Education Programme.

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES), the Regional Inspectorates of Education (RIE), central and regional media were identified as partner institutions.

The Concept envisaged that the Pilot Programme would take the form of a lecture course, once a month in the class of Ethics and Law. The Programme was planned to take place in schools, as well as to organize visits to the district courts/prosecutor's offices, followed by explanations and discussions, conducting simulation processes and quizzes. For this purpose, mentors - magistrates/officials, representatives of the judiciary authorities from the respective regional city were appointed. The mentors ensured the distribution of the topics among the willing lecturers, implemented coordination between the designated school and the lecturers, organized visits to the lawsuits, assisted in the development of simulation processes and quizzes.

According to the Concept tutors are all persons appointed to contact the SJC with willingness to report on the progress of the Pilot Programme at each stage. At the end of the Programme, the tutors prepare and submit to the SJC an analytical report on how it has gone with relevant recommendations and suggestions on how it could develop in the future.

According to the Concept, the Pilot Programme contains 7 lectures in 7 school classes and one class to summarize what has been learned in the form of simulation process, a quiz or another interactive form. Apart from the school time, 2 or 3 visits to court/prosecutor's office are organized, including lawsuit, as the most suitable for this purpose are criminal cases with interesting for the pupils law texts, at the final stage, so that the participants in the Programme to attend the pleading and reading of sentence.

It is stated in the Concept that the exemplary topics, the manner of their presentation, examples, and the choice of a process suitable for a pupil's visit should be consistent with the pupils' age.

The proposed 10 topics are as follows:

1. Separation of the authorities according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria. Functions of the Judiciary. Structure of the Judicial

- System. Supreme Judicial Council.
2. Major branches of law.
 3. Presentation of the professions of judge, prosecutor, investigator.
 4. Material and procedural law. Specific features of the civil, criminal and administrative process.
 5. How can we protect our rights. Access to justice.
 6. Minors and justice - victims and perpetrators of crime.
 7. Access to information on the work of the Judiciary - websites, information on judicial acts, e-Justice.
 8. Summarization of the lessons learned within the Pilot Programme and checking of the knowledge gained by organizing a quiz, a simulation process etc.

It is envisaged in the Concept that the final schedule of the lectures and discussions to be agreed with the MES and to be the same for all schools participating in the Programme.

The Methodology defines the sequence and timing of each stage of organizing and carrying out the Programme.

In its implementation, the expected results have been achieved in terms of enhancing the pupils' legal culture, creating of stable, new, proactive approach of the representatives of the judiciary for to increase the understanding and confidence of the local public in the work of the judiciary and to improve its public image.

Immediately after the signing of the Agreement by the SJC and MES, the Commission "Public Communication" took organizational measures to start the Programme. At the beginning of August 2014, letters were sent to the administrative heads of the District Courts and the Sofia City Court, as well as through the Chief Prosecutor of the Republic of Bulgaria to the administrative heads of the District Prosecutor's Offices and the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office, to create the necessary organization for the appointment of mentors and lecturers, establishing contact with the RIE, developing programmes with specific lectures and setting dates for their implementation, as well as setting dates for study visits in the court buildings up to September 2014.

In September, a list of schools approved by the Ministry of Education and Science for participation in the Programme was provided by the Ministry of Education and Science.

In the Public Communication and Protocol Directorate, a register was developed in which the magistrates and judicial officers of the judiciary were involved by districts and by names in the Pilot Programme, taking into account whether they were mentors or lecturers, as well as their distribution in the presentation of the topics, their participation in educational visits to the court buildings, the preparation and implementation of planned events and activities, according to the schedules and programmes submitted. The participants were

requested to coordinate their participation in cases when representatives of the district courts and district prosecutor's offices implemented the Programme jointly.

The summarized information on the designated officers and lecturers on the relevant topics by the judiciary authorities was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science.

A month after the start of the Pilot Programme, a working meeting was held between the members of the CPC and the Deputy Minister of Education in the beginning of November 2014 to optimize the organization of the Programme. Specific problems and difficulties encountered by the judiciary authorities in the implementation of the Programme were discussed as well as the RIE representatives' powers in exercising control over its implementation.

At the discretion of the CPC, the lecturers were given the opportunity to change and include new themes according to the interest of the pupils. In the period June - July 2015 summarized information on the initiative was submitted by 46 judiciary authorities including the Sofia City Court, the Sofia City Prosecutor's Office, 23 District Courts and 21 District Prosecutor's Offices on which basis the best practices, proposals and recommendations were accounted. It was reported about inquiries conducted among pupils, indicating a high degree of satisfaction with the initiative and desire to be continued. The magistrates and lecturers who participated in the Programme appreciated the relevance of the Pilot Programme and reported the fulfilment of the stated goal of forming a legal culture and raising the awareness of the pupils about the structure, functions and importance of the judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria. The greatest interest was given to the professions of magistrates, holding a court hearing and the topic "How to defend our rights?"

At the beginning of July 2015, a summarized report on the implementation of the Pilot Programme containing information on identified difficulties, established best practices, recommendations and analytical conclusions was prepared. The report was sent to the Ministry of Education and Science for information and actions were taken to organize a meeting with the Deputy Minister to discuss organizational issues related to the implementation of the Programme during the school year 2014/2015 and its future continuation.

By decision of the CPC letters were sent to the judiciary authorities - participants in the programme, with a view to the recommendations given by them for improvement and upgrade of the Programme to propose new topics to which pupils have expressed interest, as well as to state which topics were not of interest to drop out of the Programme. The information received was summarized in a reference which was submitted in due time to the Deputy Minister, as well as to the judiciary authorities for acquaintance.

After the meeting of the representatives of the CPC with the Deputy Minister of Education in July 2015, an agreement was reached on the continuation and

upgrading of the Pilot Programme in the school year 2015/2016. By decision of the CPC a project of Cooperation Agreement between the SJC and the MES and a project of concession related to the implementation of the Educational Programme which content was agreed in advance with the Ministry were approved.

By decision of the SJC, Minutes No. 44/30.07.2015, the Pilot Educational Programme was continued among pupils with the purpose of prevention and increasing of their awareness of the structure, functions and importance of the judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria; the Concept and Cooperation Agreement were approved and gratitude was expressed to all judiciary authorities and all magistrates and court officers who participated in the implementation of the Pilot Programme.

A new moment in the Educational Programme is its focus on creating a stable, proactive approach of the representatives of the judiciary to increase the confidence of the local community and to improve the public image of the judiciary in Bulgaria. The signed Agreement explicitly arranges the upgrade of the Pilot Programme again with duration of one year. Unlike the previous year, this time the Programme is implemented both within the curriculum of “Ethics and Law” for the 10th grade during the second school term and in the “Class Hour” for the 8th-12th grade pupils.

The objectives of the cooperation between the SJC and the Ministry of Education and Science are supplemented by the prevention of children’s criminality and the implementation of one of the elements of the civil education in practice.

The Concept has extended the scope of the Educational Programme not only to pupils but also to the judiciary authorities. A possibility is envisaged for participation besides the district courts and the district prosecutor’s offices, but also the regional courts, the regional prosecutor’s offices and the administrative courts. A recommendation was made in the towns with district, regional, and administrative courts, the judiciary authorities to choose different school partners by working closely with prosecutors of the relevant district and regional prosecutor’s offices. In towns with only regional courts and regional prosecutor’s offices the Programme is implemented jointly in at least one school.

In the Concept a larger number of exemplary topics are proposed - 11, with the choice of them being preserved, as well as an individual approach in their presentation, when choosing and preparing a topic for conducting a simulation process according to the age of the pupils.

Three of the topics included in the Pilot Program dropped out – “Major Branches of Law” “Material and Procedural Law. Particularities of the Civil, Criminal and Administrative Process” and “Access to Information on the work the Judiciary - Internet Sites, Information on Judicial Acts, e-Justice”. They were replaced by the recommended topics “Drug use prevention programme.

Offenses committed by drug addicts”, “Domestic violence against minors and protection measures and victims’ rights”, “Trafficking of human beings”, “Children and cybercrime”, “Lawsuits with participation of children and the children’s rights in these procedures which can offer them support and protection”, “Teaching measures for children with anti-social manifestations, ways and places for their implementation” and “Hooligan behavior among minors and consequences. Child abuse”. Some of the existing topics were supplemented by information on: “Status of magistrates”, “How can we defend our rights through judicial institutions. Types of judicial services. Access to justice. How to prevent ourselves from becoming a victim of crime”.

At the beginning of September 2015, letters were sent to the administrative heads of the courts and the Chief Prosecutor sent letters to the administrative heads of the relevant prosecutor’s offices informing them about the continuation of the Educational Programme and about the possibility of participating in it. Within the set deadline before the beginning of the school year, the information on the appointed tutors and lecturers was summarized by the judiciary authorities in appellate regions, the difficulties in coordinating the Programme with the RIE as well as programmes developed with the specific lectures and persons who will represent them.

At the beginning of the school year, the SJC provided the judiciary authorities having right to participate in the Educational Programme lists of the schools offered by the MES and the RIE experts who would coordinate the Program. At a later stage, specific schedules and dates were provided for conducting the lecture course and for the events scheduled in the Programme.

At the annual meeting in October 2015 of the persons in charge with the PR in the judiciary authorities a Model of information campaign to promote the educational Programme was presented which due to the great interest was given to the participants in the Programme.

At the meeting of the 43rd National Assembly held on 20.05.2016, under parliamentary oversight by Mrs. Meglena Kuneva - Deputy Prime Minister for Coordination of European Policies and Institutional Affairs and Minister of Education and Science, reported the Educational Program as best Practice and one of the three main directions on which the Ministry of Education and Science works to form legal culture among pupils as citizens of the Republic of Bulgaria. In response to a question from the MPs on the implementation of general legal education in secondary education, the Minister of Education explained that 2014 the MES and the SJC concluded a Cooperation Agreement in which judges, prosecutors and investigators conducted classes in school and organized visits for pupils to the court and the prosecutor’s office. The Ministry is open and welcomes proposals for initiatives that help to achieve the goal set in the pre-school and school education Act: “Acquiring of competence to understand and apply the principles of democracy and the law-abiding state, human rights and freedom, active and responsible Civil participation”.

After the end of the school year 2015/2016, an annual analysis was prepared for the implementation of the Educational Programme, which summarized “the best practices”.

During the school year 2015/2016 the Programme was held in more than 140 schools in the country, which number is five times higher than the previous year. The judiciary authorities expressed their desire for participation are 187, including 24 district courts, 16 administrative courts, 64 regional courts, 24 district prosecutor’s offices, the Sofia City Prosecutor’s Office and 58 regional prosecutor’s offices.

Participants in the Educational Programme have expressed a positive assessment of its usefulness, and many of them express a strong desire to continue working in this direction. The Programme has received a wide public response as the judiciary authorities have realized wholly or partially proposed information campaign. Good communication and coordination have been carried out with regard to judicial institutions, working in places jointly with the Child Protection Departments or with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Educational visits to the courts were carried out, discussions and quizzes were held and additional topics were presented in response to the interest shown by the pupils. The Concept of the Program has allowed maximum flexible and adaptive approach by using a wide range of audiovisual, media and print media.

Pupils were interested in topics related to the prevention against drug use and crimes committed by drug addicts and minors; practical aspects of the justice system and specific cases; the participation of children in court processes and their rights; the legal consequences of violence of pupils, the use of drugs and their offering to friends; rights and obligations of minors, prevention and institutions that protect young people; lawsuits with participation of minors and criminal responsibility before the age of adulthood; prevention against trafficking of human beings - how to look for support and protection, who are the authorities that can provide them, concrete examples of jurisprudence related to “living life”; hooligan behaviour among minors and consequences, children, and computer/cyber crimes.

The following activities are among the best practices: successful combination of the initiative Open Day with finalization of the Educational Programme, conducting of briefings and press conferences at the beginning and end of the Programme, presenting the Programme through the Internet sites of the judiciary authorities and their Facebook pages, making and distributing information materials - posters, brochures, presentations, simulation processes, role plays and discussions, organizing of quizzes, tests, inquiries, essay competitions and children’s drawings; presence in real lawsuits of civil, criminal and administrative cases with a subject appropriate to the age and interest of the children; providing of free copies of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, conducting information tours in the court buildings with visits to court rooms, registry and registrar’s offices, judges’ offices, places of detainees; the

organization and work of the court has been presented; it has been demonstrated the formation of civil cases, the distribution of the cases entered through the centralized system for random distribution of the cases, video conferencing with other authorities of the judiciary and the cases of its implementation; the pupils were provided with court cases and judicial acts related to the subjects of the lecture course. Inquiries were conducted to establish the outcome and the effect of the joint work, to identify the interest in the presented topics, the acquired knowledge and the accessibility of the language. Video clips and episodes from the informational broadcast “Third Power from inside” (During the implementation of the project “Strengthening the capacity of the SJC for better management of communication processes and more transparency in the activity of the Judiciary system” funded by OPAC, 10 television films with duration of 10 minutes were produced which present the main aspects of the structure, activity, the powers of the SJC and the judiciary, the independence of the judiciary, as well as issues related to children’s justice, e-justice, counteraction to the corruption, access to justice, magistrates’ professions, the specificity of the different types of justice and transparency in the work of the judiciary.)

In September 2016, the Commission of Legal and Institutional Affairs (CLIA) at the SJC Plenum adopted a report to acquaint with the implementation of the Educational Programme, the updated concept for its implementation as well as the draft Agreement with the MES. By decision of CLIA letters were sent to the participants from the judiciary authorities asking for information on the need to drop out or include new topics in the Concept, the realized best practices and suggestions to improve the Programme, a reference for magistrates and court officers willing to take part in school year 2016/2017. Organizational actions were taken to hold a meeting with the management of the MES to discuss the results from the Programme, the Cooperation Agreement and the Concept for the continuation of the Programme.

By decision of the SJC Plenum, Minutes No. 34/29.090.2016, the Educational Programme was extended, based on the motion of the MES in order to achieve stability in the implementation of the Programme, the duration of the Agreement signed between the two institutions is five years. The Agreement envisages that in the school year 2018/2019 the Programme to be conducted in the Philosophy classes for the IX and/or X grade instead of in the Ethics and Law classes.

The SJC Plenum decided that the participation of magistrates and court officers in the Educational Programme should be reflected in the preparation of their appraisal assessments, given their voluntary and free of charge participation in it.

In connection with the increasing interest in the Programme and the participation of an increasing number of magistrates, in October 2017, for the first time, the SJC organized a meeting with the mentors and lecturers of the judiciary authorities, participants in the Educational Programme.

Representatives of the MES also participated in the meeting. Experiences and “the best practices” in the implementation of the Programme, personal experience and impressions from lecturers and mentors, innovative approaches have been shared. It was discussed the possibility of summarizing the sources and the auxiliary materials, as well as their distribution among the participants; provision of financial resources for educational activities under the Programme, issuance of uniform certificates for pupils and centralized provision of information materials.

A project was presented for conducting of information campaign of the Educational Programme which was subsequently implemented.

During the school year 2016/2017, according to data provided by the MES, 11 622 pupils from 84 cities were covered by the Educational Programme. It involves 156 judiciary authorities in partnership with 132 schools. The total number of participants in the Programme is 484 people, including 422 magistrates and 62 officers. The prepared by names summarized reference was submitted to the MES, the judiciary authorities as well as to the commissions on the appraisal and competitions to the Judicial and Prosecutor’s Colleges of the SJC.

By decision of Committee on legal and institutional matters (CLIM) a project was approved for issuance of certificate for participation in the Educational Programme which was distributed in electronic form to all judiciary authorities for printing and delivering to the pupils.

By decision of the SJC Plenum, financial resources amounting to 200 BGN were provided for 98 administrative, district and regional courts for a prize fund in the form of books, encyclopaedias, flash memories. Funding for educational materials and conduction of initiatives by the administrative, district and regional courts were also provided, in accordance with requests approved by Committee on legal and institutional matters.

The Committee approved the content of two information brochures “Signalization about crime perpetration and the citizen’s rights as witnesses” and “Structure and functions of the Judiciary” which were provided to the judiciary authorities – participants in the Programme in order to be distributed among pupils.

Within the framework of the Educational Programme, the SJC provided 12,000 copies of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria which were distributed free of charge among 11 622 pupils covered by the Programme.

Each student has received a certificate of participation in the Program during the school year 2015/2016. The draft of the Certificates has been unified and approved by a decision of the Committee on legal and institutional matters, and after that was sent to the judicial bodies in electronic version.

In October 2017, the Supreme Judicial Council of the Republic of Bulgaria received the special mention of the jury Crystal Scales of Justice

competition of the Council of Europe. The annual European award is awarded for innovative practices contributing to the efficiency and quality of justice.

The Supreme Judicial Council participated in the competition with a project proposal presenting the Educational Program and was among the four nominees for the prize chosen among 37 proposals from 18 countries and two international organizations. The nominations were determined by an international jury composed by prominent legal professionals.

In the school year 2017/2018, a total of 187 judicial bodies declared willingness to participate in the Program, out of which 109 courts (23 district courts, including the Plovdiv Military Court, 65 regional and 21 administrative courts) and 78 prosecutor's offices (26 district, among which the Sofia City Prosecutors' Office, and 52 regional), and 113 judicial authorities have informed that they will work together.

The Program covers 176 schools, previously determined by the relevant Regional Education Offices. The lectures course will take place within the subject "ethics and law" in the X grade, during the second term of study, as well as the subject "Class Hour" for high school students from the 8th to the 12th grade.

The involvement of the bodies of the judiciary and their direct participation in the increasing of the legal culture of young people, their acquaintance with the law and the characteristics of the judiciary authorities is among the main measures set in the Communication Strategy of the judiciary authorities 2014-2020, adopted by decision of the SJC, Minutes No. 10/05.03.2015. The specific activities, which are in line with the areas of independence, accountability, transparency, dialogue and effectiveness of the judiciary authorities, reform and efficiency of the judicial system it is indicated "Strengthening and extending the scope of the model of the Pilot Educational Programme of the SJC "Open Courts and Prosecutor's offices" among pupils in order to increase their awareness of the structure, functions and importance of the judiciary in the Republic of Bulgaria. In the Action Plan for the implementation of the Communication Strategy of the judiciary authorities as a long-term goal it is set "Increasing the legal culture of society and knowledge of the role and functions of the separate bodies of the judiciary" and one of the implementation activities envisages "conducting of educational campaigns".

