

PROTOCOL

OF

**THE SECOND SESSION OF THE JOINT INTERGOVERNMENTAL COMMISSION,
SET UP UNDER ARTICLE 12 OF THE TREATY OF FRIENDSHIP, GOODNEIGHBORLY
RELATIONS AND COOPERATION BETWEEN THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA AND THE
REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA,**

HELD ON 17 JULY 2022

Noting the development of friendly relations between states based on respect for the principles of equality and the right of peoples to self-determination,

Convinced of the need to strengthen security, stability and cooperation in South-Eastern Europe in the spirit of shared Euro-Atlantic values,

Stressing the need to overcome outstanding bilateral issues, restore confidence and strictly implement without further delay the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation signed in 2017,

The two countries reviewed the implementation of this Agreement, adopted measures to improve bilateral cooperation and overcome issues arising in the implementation of the Agreement, with the following

AGENDA:

1. Review of what has been achieved in the implementation of the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia for the period from 10 June 2019 to 30 June 2022 in the part of sectorial cooperation.
2. Adoption of the Annual Reports on the work of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.
3. Adoption of guidelines for actions to implement the Treaty of Friendship, Good-Neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia for the next period.
4. Signing of the Minutes of the second meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission.

ON THE FIRST ITEM OF THE AGENDA:

Overview of political dialogue and activities:

At the President level:

- 26-27 May 2021 – joint visit of President Rumen Radev and President Stevo Pendarovski to Rome, on the occasion of May 24 and paying tribute to the work of the holy brothers Cyril and Methodius in Rome.

At the level of the Prime Minister:

- 5 July 2019 , meeting of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Boyko Borisov, with the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Zoran Zaev, within the framework of the Western Balkans Summit;

- 1 August 2019, Skopje, Doyran - visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Boyko Borisov, to the Republic of North Macedonia;

- 10 November 2020, Sofia - visit to Sofia of the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Zoran Zaev, within the framework of the Summit of the Berlin Process;

- 17 June 2021 – visit to Sofia of a delegation led by the Prime Minister of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Zoran Zaev;

- 18 January 2022 - visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria Mr. Kiril Petkov to the Republic of North Macedonia;

- 25 January 2022 - second joint meeting between the governments of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia;

At the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs:

- 28 June 2019 – visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Nikola Dimitrov, to Sofia, as a special guest at the 40th meeting of the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Member States of the Organization for Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC), at the invitation of the Bulgarian Presidency of the Organization;

- 15 August 2019 – visit of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Ekaterina Zaharieva, to Strumica and Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia;

- 9 March 2020 – visit of the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Ekaterina Zaharieva, to the city of Skopje, within the framework of events organized under the joint chairmanship of the Berlin Process of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia;

- 9 October 2020 - visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia Mr. Bujar Osmani to the Republic of Bulgaria;

- 2 November 2020 - working meeting between the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Ekaterina Zaharieva, and of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Bujar Osmani, in Berlin, Federal Republic of Germany;
- 10 November 2020 - visit to the Republic of Bulgaria of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia Mr. Bujar Osmani within the framework of a meeting of the Ministers of Foreign Affairs on the Berlin Process;
- 15 November 2021 – meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Svetlan Stoev, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Buyar Osmani, within the framework of the informal EU- SEECP meeting, in Brussels;
- 17 June 2021 - meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Svetlan Stoev, with the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Buyar Osmani, within the framework of the final forum of Turkey's rotating presidency of the South-East European Cooperation Process (SEECP), in Antalya.
- 18 January 2022 - visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Teodora Genchovska, to Skopje within the framework of the visit of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Kiril Petkov, to the Republic of North Macedonia;
- 24 January 2022 – visit of a delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, led by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Buyar Osmani, to the Republic of Bulgaria;
- 4 February 2022 - visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ms. Teodora Genchovska, to the city of Skopje and holding a joint celebration with the Minister of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia, Ms. Bisera Kostadinovska-Stojchevska, on the 150th anniversary of the birth of Gotse Delchev;
- 16 May 2022 – meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Teodora Genchovska, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Bujar Osmani in Brussels;
- 4-5 June 2022 – visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Teodora Genchovska, to the Republic of North Macedonia to hold the fifth meeting of the expert teams of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs of the two countries;
- 10 June 2022 – meeting of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria, Ms. Teodora Genchovska, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Bujar Osmani, in Thessaloniki, within the framework of SEECP;

At the level of Speaker of Parliament:

- 11 February 2020 - the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mrs. Tsveta Karayancheva, attended the ratification ceremony of the Protocol for the Accession of the Republic of North Macedonia to NATO;
- 29 March 2022 – meeting of the Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Nikola Minchev, with the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, Talat Jaferi, within the framework of the Conference of Speakers of Parliaments from the European Union, held in Slovenia.

Overview of sectoral cooperation

Contracts, memoranda, protocols signed until January 2022.

- July 23 2019, Ohrid - Protocol signed between the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of combating human trafficking;
- 20 August 2019 - Memorandum of Cooperation signed between the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia to improve the policy for cross-border cooperation and local self-government and strengthen the institutional capacity of the Ministry of Local Self-Government for the implementation of European policies and projects;
- 20 September 2019, Protocol signed between the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of North Macedonia in connection with providing training for MI-17 and MI-24 within 2019;
- 2 October 2019, Skopje - Agreement signed between the Food Chain Risk Assessment Centre of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Food and Veterinary Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia for cooperation in the field of food safety and veterinary policy.

Interdepartmental working groups level

I. WG1 - Interdepartmental working group on economy, trade and innovation

On 25 January 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency (BSMEPA) of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Agency for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship of the Republic of North Macedonia. On the basis of the signed memorandum and taking into account the usefulness for the development of bilateral economic relations, the Bulgarian side proposes to organize a business forum, together with the partners from the Ministry of Economy and the Agency for the Promotion of Entrepreneurship of the Republic of North Macedonia, specifying promising economic sectors, such as ICT, food industry, pharmaceuticals, etc.

During the meeting of the Working Group held on 1 February 2022 in the city of Skopje, the following implementation measures were discussed:

1. Carrying out analysis-research for pooling of funds;
2. Developing a model of mixed loans through development banks and developing a model of mixed capital through various funds;
3. Harmonization in the economy for activities of mutual interest;
4. Study of the possibilities for consolidation of programmes for the development of rural areas;
5. Development of a mechanism for transparency of investments and protection of the rights of investors on both sides;
6. Conclusion of a memorandum of cooperation between the Fund for the Management of Financial Instruments in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Fund for Innovation and Technological Development of the Republic of North Macedonia;
7. Conclusion of a memorandum of cooperation between the ministries of finance of the two countries with special regard to the part of public procurement in order to develop mechanisms for standardizing the procedures.

The following topics of mutual interest have been identified:

- **Subgroup "Technical assistance on harmonization of legal and regulatory norms of the EU and trade with non-EU countries"** with the following topics:

- **Subgroup "Exchange of experience in the field of public procurement";**
- **Subgroup "Innovations and Tools".**

Agreement in principle was reached on the following:

- Bulgaria to present a list of investment companies in order to discuss the reduction of administrative barriers to business;
- Provision of technical assistance for policy harmonization in certain areas and exchange of good practices;
- Organization of cluster forums, mixed trade and investment programmes, participation of chambers;
- The possibility of signing the following memoranda was discussed:
 - Memorandum of cooperation in the field of combating cross-border fraud;
 - Memorandum of cooperation in the field of standardization;
 - Memorandum on cooperation in the field of accreditation;
 - Memorandum on cooperation in the field of metrology;
 - Memorandum of cooperation in the field of market supervision and consumer protection;

- Memorandum on cooperation in the field of innovation between the National Innovation Fund of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Fund for Innovation and the Innovation and Technological Development Fund (ITDF) of the Republic of North Macedonia;

In the field of economic cooperation:

The following topics were discussed:

- Exchange of good practices and technical assistance for the main areas of economic policy related to industrial policy, smart specialization, as well as in the field of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), including measures, implementation and participation in EU programmes;
- Sharing experience in the field of harmonization of national legislation with the European one in the field of the non-banking financial sector, entrepreneurship and industrial policy;
- Support for Chapter 20 (Enterprises and Industrial Policy);
- Promoting opportunities for cooperation between chambers, faculties and businesses for joint application under European programmes and funds (more effective use of the opportunities offered by the EU Single Market Programme), HORIZON Europe, etc.
- Exchange of experience and technical assistance (TAIEX) regarding the creation of measures and activities for the development of entrepreneurship and the competitiveness of SMEs, engaging experts from the Republic of Bulgaria in the field of coordinating business and branch policies in Chapter 20;
- Preparation for holding the Second Session of the Intergovernmental Commission for Economic Cooperation;
- Identification of priority sectors for development and continuity of priority sectors for development;
- Ensuring protection of businesses and investors on both sides;
- Directing strategic investments from both sides in the field of infrastructure, education, telecommunications, media, banking sector, etc.;
- Exchange of information on the SME support model, as well as on the business infrastructure to support SMEs (business centres, incubators, technology centres, etc.);
- Exchange of good practices and technical assistance on the main pillars of economic policy related to industrial policy (including green and digital transformation of the business sector).

In the field of agriculture:

On 25 January 2022, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Ministry of Agriculture of

the Republic of Bulgaria for cooperation in the field of agriculture, agricultural sciences, rural areas and forestry.

During the first meeting of the WG, the Bulgarian side proposed to the partners from the Republic of North Macedonia to provide expert assistance through the training of experts in these areas. Exchange of experience in the implementation of state policy in the field of food quality and safety, animal health, plant health and border control.

The possibilities were discussed for the Ministries of Agriculture to create a joint working group at the expert level, where experience will be exchanged and cooperation established in the following areas:

- Implementation of pre-accession aid instruments in the EU;
- Agricultural sciences;
- Forestry and hunting;
- Production, bioproduction and biotechnology in agriculture and animal husbandry;
- Transnational cooperation in rural areas.

In the field of finance

- Provision of technical assistance for the preparation of an analysis of the degree of compliance of national legislation with the decisions of the Court of Justice of the European Union in the field of free movement of capital (Chapter 3.04 Free movement of capital) and preparation of a road map with activities and deadlines for implementation of EU rules on free movement of capital;
- Providing technical assistance for harmonizing national legislation with Regulation 1233/2011 and sharing experience and good practices from the activities of the Bulgarian Development Bank;
- Preparation for the conclusion of a Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of combating cross-border fraud in order to create a Joint Working Group for combating cross-border fraud, taking into account the system of integrated border management;
- Further deepening of cooperation and the exchange of supervisory information between the Financial Supervision Commission of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Securities and Exchange Commission of the Republic of North Macedonia, based on the Memorandum signed in 2004 on mutual assistance and exchange of information on matters of the securities supervision between the two bodies;
- Further deepening of cooperation and exchange of supervisory information between the Commission for Financial Supervision of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Insurance Supervision Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia within the framework of the Memorandum on mutual assistance and exchange of information on insurance supervision issues between the two bodies;
- The Financial Supervision Commission of the Republic of Bulgaria and the competent authorities of the Republic of North Macedonia to hold a discussion on specific areas in which the IFC can help to harmonize the national legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia with the achievements of European law, as well as by considering different options for implementation of such support.

II. WG 2 – Interdepartmental working group on infrastructure, transport, connectivity

Within the infrastructure and regional policy sector, the following progress was achieved in the priority areas identified in January 2022:

Preparation of the cross-border cooperation programme between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia 2021-2027, co-financed by the European Regional Development Fund and the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance.

At an online meeting on 11 March 2022, the Joint Working Group (JWG) for programme development between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia approved the final version of the INTERREG VI-A IPP Bulgaria North Macedonia 2021-2027 programme. The JWG gave a mandate to the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works (MRDPW) of the Republic of Bulgaria in its capacity as a Managing Authority to submit the programme to the European Commission and conduct negotiations until its approval.

The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria has approved the content of the Interreg VI-A IPP Bulgaria - North Macedonia 2021-2027 programme and the commitments of the Republic of Bulgaria to ensure national public co-financing in the amount of 15%. The government also mandated the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development and Public Works to sign a letter of support for the programme. In connection with the submission of the programme to the European Commission, a letter of support for the programme was provided by the Minister of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Creation of conditions for the implementation of the strategic infrastructure project "Construction of a new border crossing between the municipalities of Strumyani and Berovo", intended for financing under the cross-border cooperation programme between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia 2021 - 2027.

On 14, April 2022, the first official meeting of the Mixed Expert Commission was held in the city of Sofia to determine the parameters of the Strumyani-Berovo border crossing, as a basis for technical design. At the first meeting, the Internal Rules for the work of the Joint Expert Commission were proposed for discussion and adoption. The principled positions of the two countries regarding the relevance of the intergovernmental agreement from 1999 on the opening of a new international road border checkpoint between the two countries were presented and discussed.

3. Implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia dated August 20, 2019.

On 10 February 2022, the first official meeting was held in the city of Sofia on the Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia from 20 August

2019. As the main discussion in the "Regional policy" panel good practices in the development and implementation of policies for regional development in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, related to capacity building at the regional level and the decentralization of management were discussed. At the meeting, the experience of the Republic of Bulgaria for bridge financing of European projects of municipalities from the "FLAG" fund and for the protection of the financial interests of the EU through the systems for the administration of irregularities was presented. Based on the agreements of the meeting, the following initiatives were taken:

In the period 31 March - 1 April 2022, the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works and the National Association of Municipalities in the Republic of Bulgaria (NAMRB) jointly organized a forum of municipalities from the cross-border region Bulgaria - North Macedonia with the aim of creating conditions for closer interaction and preparation of joint projects, exchange of experience and knowledge for fuller inclusion in the cross-border cooperation programme. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Bulgaria Kiril Petkov, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Regional Development and Public Works Grozdan Karadzhev, the Minister of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia Goran Milevski and 26 mayors of municipalities from the Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil regions and North-East, East and South-East planning regions took part in the event. Within the framework of the forum, the results achieved under the current programme between Bulgaria and North Macedonia 2014-2020 were presented, as well as the priorities and opportunities for financing municipal projects under the new programme for the period 2021-2027.

In the process of development, an analysis was conducted of the possibilities of the "FLAG" Fund at the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Works to serve as a model for partners from the Republic of North Macedonia to provide bridge financing for municipal projects, including the transfer of know-how and/or the provision of loan funds for municipalities from the Republic of North Macedonia, which participate in projects under the future programme Bulgaria-North Macedonia 2021-2027.

Cooperation in the field of transport

From the beginning of 2022 until now, in the field of transport, the following actions have been taken and the following results have been achieved:

On January 18, 2022, a meeting was held in the city of Skopje between the Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Nikolay Sabev, and the Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of North Macedonia, Mr. Blagoi Bochvarski. During the meeting, an agreement was reached to open the Sofia-Skopje air line and the possibilities for accelerated development of the railway and road infrastructure in the route of Corridor 8 were discussed.

Within the framework of the first meeting of the Interdepartmental Working Group "Infrastructure, Transport and Connectivity" between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North

Macedonia on 25 January 2022, the Ministers of Transport and Communications of the two countries outlined the following priority directions for joint work in the field of transport:

- accelerated actions on the realization of the railway line Sofia-Skopje;
- implementation of activities for joint expert assistance for the design of the railway connection and the tunnel between the railway infrastructures of the two countries;
- undertaking joint actions by the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania before the offices of the European Commission for the inclusion of the connection Sofia - Skopje - Tirana - Durres in the route of the proposed new corridor "Western Balkans";
- opening of a direct air line Sofia-Skopje.

The following documents were signed within the said meeting:

- Memorandum of understanding for the development of the railway connection Sofia-Skopje between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia;
- Joint statement in the field of road and air transport between the Ministers of Transport of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.

On 10 February 2022, the second meeting of the Interdepartmental Working Group for cooperation with the Republic of North Macedonia in the fields of infrastructure, transport and connectivity was held in Sofia. During the meeting, the following topics were discussed:

- first flight on the Sofia – Skopje air line;
- discussion of the results of the meeting of the Joint Commission on International Road Transport between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia;
- approval of a draft letter from the Ministers of Transport of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania with a request for a meeting with the European Commission regarding the inclusion of the connection Sofia - Skopje - Tirana - Durres in the route of the proposed new corridor "Western Balkans" in the context of the revision of the Regulation on Union guidelines for the development of the Trans-European transport network;

In fulfilment of the joint statement signed on 25 January 2022, a meeting of the Joint Commission on International Road Transport between Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia was held on 10 February 2022 in the city of Sofia. During the meeting, the annual quota of permits for road transport of goods to and from third countries was discussed, as well as issues related to the transport of passengers, for which a Protocol was signed.

On 11 February 2022, in fulfilment of the agreements reached, the first opening flight on the Sofia-Skopje air line took place.

On 4 March 2022, in fulfilment of the agreements reached, the Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of Bulgaria, Mr. Nikolay Sabev, sent a letter to the Ministers of Transport of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania for consideration and approval of a draft of a joint letter to the European Commissioners Adina Valyan and Oliver Varheli with a request for the inclusion of the Skopje-Durres railway line in the main network and the entire Skopje-Durres railway line in the Western Balkans European transport corridor.

On 7 March 2022, in Kyustendil, a meeting of the general directors of the National Railway Infrastructure Company of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Railways of the Republic of North Macedonia – Infrastructure, was held on issues of the railway route Sofia - Skopje.

On 14 March 2022 an additional letter was sent to the Ministers of Transport of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania, requesting the provision of information on the transport infrastructure construction activities planned to be carried out in the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania until 2030, as well as a proposal was made to hold a joint meeting with the European Commissioner for Transport, Ms. Adina Valyan, and the Commissioner for Neighbourliness and Enlargement, Mr. Oliver Varhey, in Brussels, in mid or late April 2022.

On 14 March 2022 a letter was sent to the Minister of Transport and Communications of the Republic of North Macedonia with a request to provide slots that would contribute to the maximum extent for the development of the air line.

In addition, more work is to be done to continue the activities for the construction of the missing cross-border connection and modernization of the sections of the Sofia-Skopje route by 2030.

Cooperation in the field of communications:

On 25 January 2022 between the Minister of Transport and Communications and the Minister of Electronic Government of the Republic of Bulgaria, on the one hand, and the Minister of Information Society and Administration of the Republic of North Macedonia, a Joint Statement was signed between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, with which both countries unite around the desire to reduce the international tariffs between themselves for the benefit of the citizens of the two countries, by mutually assisting each other to sign a bilateral agreement to be ratified by the parliaments of the two countries, in order for the mobile operators in both countries to make the necessary efforts to reduce the prices of wholesale for call termination, which lead to high prices for mobile calls, SMS and data roaming, until reaching the limit levels in the European Union.

In February 2022, meetings were held with the Bulgarian telecommunications operators for a preliminary discussion of the possibilities for reducing roaming prices with the Republic of North Macedonia.

On 10 February 2022, a meeting was held with representatives of the Electronic Communications Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia, with a view to determining future steps to implement the agreements

on the reduction of roaming price by making maximum use of the opportunities provided for in the Memorandum of Understanding for the reduction of international tariffs for roaming for telecommunications services, signed on 23 November 2017 in Strumica. As a result of the meeting between the two countries, the following steps were agreed:

- conducting meetings of the policy-making body with the regulator and with the operators at the national level in the Republic of Bulgaria and in the Republic of North Macedonia;
- holding meetings (virtual or in person) between the ministries, regulators and operators of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia in order to discuss the options for harmonizing the wholesale prices in accordance with the European roaming market, in accordance with the wholesale prices applied in the EU;
- informing the EC about the actions taken to reduce roaming prices;
- amendment, based on the results achieved, of the Memorandum of Understanding on the reduction of international roaming tariffs for telecommunications services, signed on 23 November 2017 in Strumica as a mechanism for achieving lower prices for end users.

After the meeting on 10 February 2022, several meetings were held at the level of regulators on both sides, discussing the signing of a bilateral memorandum outlining the process of reducing roaming prices over time with specific monthly prices.

Cooperation in the field of energy:

Within the reporting period, three meetings of the Interdepartmental Working Group for Cooperation with the Republic of North Macedonia "Infrastructure, Transport and Connectivity" were held in the Energy sector.

Among the topics of the meeting, held on 25 January 2022, in the city of Sofia, were joint projects to increase the energy security of both countries.

In the Energy sector, the Bulgarian side presented information on the fulfilment of the commitments made regarding the implementation of joint projects contributing to the increase of energy security, diversification of sources and routes for the supply of natural gas, construction of energy intersystem connectivity and liberalization of the electricity market in the South-East region of Europe. The two sides confirmed the existence of an active dialogue between Bulgartransgaz EAD and National Energy Resources AD, Skopje (NER AD), in connection with the feasibility study for a second gas interconnector, in fulfilment of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, the Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in the field of natural gas between the Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Economy of the Republic of North Macedonia, and the Agreement between the gas transmission operators of the two countries. Apart from NER AD, Bulgartransgaz EAD

is also in cooperation with the operator of the gas transmission system of North Macedonia GA-MA EAD, in connection with the draft agreement for interconnection.

At the meeting of the Infrastructure, Transport and Connectivity Interdepartmental Working Group, held on 10 February 2022, topics were presented and discussed related to the possibilities for diversification of natural gas supplies for the Republic of North Macedonia, the unification of the electricity markets "day forward" between the two countries, the introduction of the European Regulation CACM (Capacity Allocation and Congestion Management) into the legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia, the rules for trading in electricity, as well as questions regarding the preparation and the introduction of amendments to the procedures of the SDAC (Single Day- Ahead Coupling).

Technically, the Republic of Bulgaria can supply natural gas to the Republic of North Macedonia via the only existing link Kyustendil - Zhidilovo. At the moment, there is no signed Interconnection Agreement between the two countries. The reason is that a transformation is underway following the unification of the two companies from the Republic of North Macedonia - NER and GA-MA, dealing with the transmission of natural gas. Only after the merger of the two companies will an Agreement be signed with Bulgartransgaz EAD, which will ensure the transfer of additional quantities of natural gas from the Republic of Bulgaria to the Republic of North Macedonia and will contribute to greater utilization of the existing technical capacity.

Bulgartransgaz EAD is in the process of implementing a project to expand and double the capacity of the Chiren underground gas storage facility (Chiren Gas Storage Facility). The project is expected to be completed in the last quarter of 2024, and from 01.01.2025 the facility will be put into operation. The successful completion of the project to increase the capacity of the gas storage in Chiren will also have a significant impact on the development of natural gas markets in the Republic of North Macedonia, as companies there will be able to benefit from price fluctuations during the summer and winter periods, and this will lead to an increase in their competitiveness.

"Bulgartransgaz" EAD, through its subsidiary company - Gas Hub Balkan EAD, operates a natural gas trading platform, which offers a variety of products - short-term (within the day, "day ahead", weekend and weekly) and long-term. In order to balance and increase the liquidity of the system, the future operator of the gas transmission network of the Republic of North Macedonia will have to introduce these products. In this regard, our country offers its partners from the Republic of North Macedonia an exchange of experience and good practices accumulated during the operation of the platform.

On 25 March 2022, the third meeting of the interdepartmental working group "Infrastructure, transport and connectivity", part "Energy", was held in the city of Skopje.

The main topic of the meeting was the discussion of cooperation in the field of natural gas - more specifically, intersystem gas connectivity and the current status of the Petrich-Strumica interconnector project. The two countries noted that the implementation of large-scale infrastructural gas projects in the region of Southeast Europe, including the expansion of the Chiren gas processing plant and the liquefied natural gas terminal near the city of Alexandroupolis, will lead to ensuring competitive prices on the

natural gas market, higher supply security and diversification of sources and routes. The possibility of signing a legally binding document: "Road map for the development of cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia in the field of natural gas" was also discussed.

The document includes:

- Refinement of the minimum input pressure in the gas transmission system of RNM, in order to increase the capacity of (IP) Kyustendil/Zhidilovo;
- Conclusion of an Agreement for interconnection of gas transmission networks in (IP) Kyustendil/Zhidilovo;
- Long-term reservation by the Republic of North Macedonia of storage capacity (up to 250 million cubic meters) in the Chiren WWTP, within the additional capacity during its expansion;
- Conducting a binding market test and long-term reservation by the Republic of North Macedonia of transmission capacity through the Republic of Bulgaria - Republic of North Macedonia interconnector;
- Transposition to the maximum extent into the legislation of the Republic of North Macedonia of the EU regulatory framework in the gas sector;
- Integration of the natural gas markets in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia (as the first phase - on the principle of the Satellite Market).

"Bulgartransgaz" EAD maintains communication with NER AD regarding the construction of a new interconnector between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia. For the development of this project, the two companies have signed a Cooperation Agreement, according to which an option with the Petrich-Strumica route must be considered. The expediency of connecting the Petrich-Strumica interconnector with the expanding gas transmission system of the Republic of North Macedonia, for example in the Negotino area, is not in doubt, but the technical and investment decisions are entirely within the powers of the Macedonian side.

"Bulgartransgaz" EAD has conducted a preliminary study for a second interconnector on the Petrich-Strumica route. The implementation of the project depends on the presence of market interest on the part of the users of the networks of the two gas transmission operators.

WG3 – Interdepartmental working group "European cooperation - green transition and digital transformation, rule of law"

After the founding meeting of the Working Groups, held on January 25, 2022 during a joint meeting of the governments of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia, the second and third meetings of the group took place respectively on **10 March 2022 (in Sofia) and on 4 April 2022 (in Skopje)**.

During the two meetings, the following bilateral documents were signed:

- Memorandum of understanding regarding cooperation in the postal sphere between Bulgarian Posts EAD and Post of Northern Macedonia AD;
- Two-year programme for the period 2022-2023 between the Ministry of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia for the implementation of the current bilateral Agreement on cooperation in the field of environment and water;
- Electronic Declaration of cooperation in the field of electronic authentication services and electronic identification.

During the third meeting of the working group, Deputy Minister - President of the Republic of Bulgaria for Climate Policies and Minister of Environment and Water, Mr. Borislav Sandov announced the start of the project "Strengthening the institutional and administrative capacity for negotiations under Chapter 27 "Environmental environment" of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia and its regional structures in the EU accession process". The project was developed by the Ministry of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria and is aimed at improving dialogue and cooperation with the Republic of North Macedonia. Financing is provided under the Bulgarian Official Development Assistance.

Annual Programme of the Working Group "European Cooperation - Green Transition and Digital Transformation, Rule of Law"

In the course of the second and third meeting of Working Group III, joint activities and initiatives were identified and initiated, according to the individual directions within the scope of the Working Group "European cooperation - green transition and digital transformation, rule of law". These activities were included in the draft Annual Programme of the Working Group "European Cooperation - Green Transition and Digital Transformation, Rule of Law".

The work programme covers the period until the end of 2022. The draft programme envisages the following joint activities.

Effective management

1. "Europe of my dreams" - competition in writing for children

The competition aims for children from both sides of the border to share their thoughts about what the world and the EU should be like, what kind of future they dream of for their countries. The best letters will be awarded with a family holiday in top destinations in the other country – i.e. the winners from the Republic of Bulgaria will go to Lake Ohrid, and those from the Republic of North Macedonia - to Golden Sands.

2. Exchange of best practices in relation to the implementation of the Operational Programme "Good Governance"

3. Holding a joint leadership Academy between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia and bilateral forums for the exchange of experience in public administration

The two countries will organize joint forums in the field of various reforms in public administration (administrative service, e-governance, transparency, anti-corruption policies, etc.). It is planned that the bilateral forums will be held in Sofia and Skopje.

Participants in the Academy will be experts from the administrations of the two countries. The first edition will be held in the Republic of Bulgaria, Burgas district. The second edition will be held in the Republic of North Macedonia. The Academy will include 15 representatives from the state administration of the two countries. Each institution will have to cover the costs of participating in the programme – transport, hotel accommodation and travel expenses. The programme will be formed based on the proposals of the Institute of Public Administration of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, Republic of North Macedonia, and will include lecturers/facilitators from both countries.

4. Exchange and development of civil society between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia

The activities in this area are aimed at increasing the knowledge and know-how of representatives of the central government and civil society organizations regarding the existing mechanism, procedures and funding to support civil society and civil pluralism in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia. The two countries are working to create a joint fund to support the cooperation of civil society organizations in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.

Green transition, environmental protection

1. "Strengthening the institutional and administrative capacity for negotiations under Chapter 27 "Environment" of the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia and its regional structures in the EU accession process".

2. Implementation of the Agreement between the Ministry of Environment and Water of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning of the Republic of North Macedonia on cooperation in the field of environmental and water protection.

The first meeting of the Joint Commission for cooperation in the field of environment and water is to be held in Sofia, the agenda of which is in the process of preparation.

Digital transformation and e-governance

1. Electronic Declaration on cooperation in the field of electronic authentication services and electronic identification - signed during the third meeting of the Working Group in Skopje on 4 April 2022.

2. Creation of a Joint Working Group - according to Art. 2 of the Declaration on Cooperation.

The aim is to exchange good practices between the main bodies of state power in the field of strategic planning of electronic trust services and electronic identification, programming, management and implementation of programmes in accordance with the European Union external aid toolkit, which aim to upgrade administrative capacities in the partner institutions.

In the course of its work, the Working Group on the Declaration will explore the possibility of concluding an agreement aimed at settling relations regarding the mutual recognition of electronic trust services provided by trust service providers in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia.

3. Analysis of cross-border electronic services.
4. Cooperation between the National Computer Security Incident Response Team and that of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Rule of law

The work in this area between the bodies of state power in the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia aims to exchange best practices in relation to the improvement of higher legal education, judicial reform, anti-corruption legislation and the regulatory framework regarding the confiscation of illegally acquired property, regulation of lobbying.

It is planned to jointly work on:

1. Real judicial reform

At the moment, both the authorities in the Republic of Bulgaria and the authorities in the Republic of North Macedonia are establishing the urgent need for serious and decisive action regarding judicial reform. One of the important highlights of this reform is the quality of capital in legal institutions, which depends, first of all, on the quality of legal education.

2. Fight against corruption and confiscation of illegally acquired property

In the light of the reforms of the legislation planned in the Republic of Bulgaria, aimed at the fight against corruption and the forfeiture of illegally acquired assets, it is necessary to look for more practical and applicable solutions. In this regard, the exchange of experience with the partners from the Republic of North Macedonia will be extremely important. For its part, the Republic of Bulgaria will share its experience in the implementation of the current legislation, problem areas and ideas for improving the framework.

3. Regulation of lobbying activities

Cooperation in the field of postal services

In the context of the actions undertaken by the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria to deepen the cooperation with the Republic of North Macedonia in various spheres of the economy, Bulgarian Posts EAD, in its capacity as an operator with the obligation to provide the universal postal service on the territory of the country, initiated talks with representatives of Post of Northern Macedonia AD. As a result, during the Second Meeting of the Working Group "European Cooperation - Green Transition and Digital Transformation, Rule of Law", a "Memorandum of Understanding on Postal Cooperation" was signed between the two national postal operators.

The two postal administrations will form working groups to study the possibilities of cooperation in the field of development of international postal services and electronic commerce, as well as the possibilities of implementing joint projects within the framework of cross-border cooperation programmes, the pre-accession funds of the European Union, intended for Republic of North Macedonia, Universal Postal Union Service Quality Fund and others.

Bulgarian Posts EAD and Post of Northern Macedonia AD agreed to provide mutual support regarding participation in international organizations in the postal sphere and to exchange good practices and know-how for the development of innovative services.

RG4 - Interdepartmental Working Group on Tourism, Culture, Science and Education, Youth and Sports

At the joint meeting of WG 4 held on 22 March 2022, in Sofia, several bilateral agreements were signed, which are a prerequisite for the development and expansion of interstate relations in various areas.

1. Programme between the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for cooperation in the field of education and science for the period 2022 - 2025:

The programme updates the legal basis for cooperation in the field of education and science, according to the new trends, opportunities and needs of both countries. It is possible to grant scholarships for full and part-time studies to students, specialists, doctoral students. The signing of direct agreements between higher education institutions aimed at stimulating student mobility, academic exchange, as well as researchers, the implementation of joint projects in specialties of mutual interest and other activities, as well as cooperation within the Erasmus+ programmes and Horizon Europe. Researchers from the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia from all fields of humanities, social and natural sciences are given the opportunity to conduct joint research with leading research groups in universities and scientific organizations under the guidance of their hosts.

2. Programme for cooperation in the field of culture between the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Ministry of Culture of the Republic of North Macedonia for the period 2022-2025:

The programme includes new proposals and idea projects for partnership to expand and diversify the spectrum of bilateral cultural cooperation. At the same time, it is more comprehensive in terms of areas of activity and contains more specific parameters. The possibilities for cooperation in the field of performing and visual arts, museums, cultural heritage, book publishing and book distribution, librarianship, film art and intangible cultural heritage are regulated. The programme also creates a favourable framework for deepening cooperation in the field of cultural and creative industries, as well as internationally - at the level of participation in the programmes of the Council of Europe, the European Union, etc., in the field of culture and preservation of cultural heritage. The document provides an opportunity to activate the development of cooperation between the Cultural and Information Centre of the Republic of Bulgaria in Skopje and the Cultural and Information Centre of the Republic of North Macedonia in Sofia.

3. Memorandum of Understanding between the Ministry of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Agency for Youth and Sports of the Republic of North Macedonia for cooperation in the field of youth and sports:

The goal of both sides is to strengthen the close relations between the two countries by promoting cooperation in the development of youth and sports on the principle of reciprocity, mutual understanding and benefit. The Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia will organize programmes for youth exchange and promotion of volunteer projects. Work will also be done on the presentation of joint projects to international institutions. In the field of sports, the Memorandum concerns the exchange of experience between coaches, experts, specialists and researchers. Cooperation between the sports organizations of the two countries will also be encouraged. The text also concerns cooperation in the fight against doping in sports, as well as the facilitation of relations between federations, clubs and all interested parties through the organization of sports events. In addition, ideas for the modernization of the sports infrastructure will be exchanged.

The activities in the Memorandum will be financed under the Erasmus+ Programme. To date, both countries have successfully implemented a number of youth projects involving students and teachers from both the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia. Action plan events will be held, two in each of the countries. A schedule has been made for 2022 when all these activities will take place.

Cooperation in the field of tourism:

The text of the Memorandum of Cooperation in the field of tourism has been prepared and can be signed in a short time;

Initiative to organize tourist tours for tourists from third countries and prepare a general programme for tour operators;

Consideration of an initiative to open the Ohrid-Burgas and Ohrid-Varna airline lines.

Cooperation in the field of defence:

The two countries have significantly increased the intensity of cooperation in the field of defence, as a result of the acceptance of the Republic of North Macedonia as a full member of NATO in 2020. In this context, the main emphasis of the bilateral defence cooperation is the joint activity within the framework of the Alliance. The Ministries of Defence and Armed Forces of the two countries have traditionally had good relations and constructive political-military dialogue both within NATO and on a bilateral basis.

The main priorities of the bilateral military cooperation are related to the conduct of training, exercises and joint exercises of the armies of the two countries within the framework of NATO and with the partner countries. Every year, the two defence ministries sign annual plans for military cooperation. The signed bilateral plan for 2022 focuses on cooperation in human resources management, training of military personnel from the Republic of North Macedonia in Bulgaria, exchange of experience in building a reserve in the Armed Forces, meetings at the expert level, exchange of experience with visits by the military-police forces and the armies of the two countries, as well as the exchange of retired servicemen.

Prospective areas for deepening and developing defence cooperation include, but are not limited to: training of military doctors for the needs of the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of North Macedonia; language training and testing; participation in regional defence initiatives; protection, maintenance and restoration of the Bulgarian military monuments and military memorials on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia; principled support and readiness to carry out, on the part of the Republic of Bulgaria, an airspace protection operation according to the procedures and within the framework of the NATO Integrated System; participation in NATO and EU projects related to Military Mobility, including the construction of transport infrastructure along Corridor 8; strengthening military cooperation in the context of the new Alliance adaptation solutions in terms of deterrence and defence capacity building with a focus on the Eastern Flank of the Alliance; participation of the Republic of North Macedonia in the multinational NATO battlegroup formed in Bulgaria and, last but not least, the fight against hybrid threats, cyber security, and crisis management.

Cooperation in the field of health care:

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Construction of an early intervention centre for children with autism in the city of Tetovo", financed under the Official Development Assistance Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Reconstruction and equipment of the First Day Centre for youth and adults with autism in the Republic of North Macedonia, with the non-profit association "My Small World"", financed under the Official Development Assistance Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Joint conference of paediatricians and children's pulmonologists from the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Bulgaria on the topic "Treatment, prophylaxis and prevention of Covid19 in children"". The participation of both ministries of health is foreseen. The project was financed under the Official Development Assistance Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Training of psychologists to assess the cognitive and behavioural status of children and youth". The project is intended for additional qualification of psychologists in schools in the Republic of North Macedonia to deal with the consequences of Covid19. The project is financed by the Official Development Assistance programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Software to support the daily health monitoring of patients with type 2 diabetes". The project is intended for family doctors and endocrinologists in the Republic of North Macedonia. The project was financed under the Official Development Assistance Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Rental of a clinical audiometer for the needs of the Institute for Rehabilitation of Hearing, Speech and Voice" - Skopje Multidisciplinary Hospital. The project is intended for family doctors and endocrinologists in the Republic of North Macedonia. The project was financed under the Official Development Assistance Programme of the Republic of Bulgaria;

Support from the Republic of North Macedonia for the project "Increasing the capacity of mammography screening". Rental of the first mobile digital mammograph for the needs of the Ministry of Health of the Republic of North Macedonia. The project is intended for family doctors and endocrinologists in the Republic of North Macedonia. The project is financed by the Official Development Assistance programme of the Republic of Bulgaria.

ON THE SECOND ITEM OF THE AGENDA:

The governments of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of North Macedonia accept the reports of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues (hereinafter referred to as "the Commission") for the period 2019-2022 with the following remarks:

1. During the reporting period, the Commission held 13 meetings. The annual reports of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues for the entire reporting period are attached to this Protocol. The work of the Commission is assessed as falling below the expectations set by the Minutes of the meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission from 2019 under Art. 12 of the 2017 Agreement.

2. Both countries encourage the Commission to activate its activities and achieve clear results, in accordance with Art. 8 paragraph 2 of the 2017 Agreement.

The two governments reaffirm their support for the Commission, committing to create a favourable environment for its work, to encourage it to work to increase efficiency and achieve concrete results based on rigorously scientific debate and with the aim of presenting facts and events of the common history, which connects the two countries and their peoples, in the educational systems of both countries.

In its work, the Commission shall adhere to the provisions of Art. 8, item 2 of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, namely "... to contribute to the objective, based on authentic and evidence-based historical sources, scientific interpretation of historical events". In accordance with the applicable provisions of the 2017 Treaty, the work of the Commission cannot be unilaterally terminated.

The two countries, through the competent ministries and local self-government bodies, within a period of up to two years, shall include all already agreed results of the Commission's work in accordance with Art. 8 para. 2 of the Agreement in the curricula, textbooks and relevant teaching materials, with the same results being taken into account and the content of the inscriptions on monuments, signs, information materials in museums and other objects with educational and cultural significance, as well as the relevant information in public domain electronic data sets.

The two countries will comply with the recommendations of the Commission, within a period of no longer than two years after their approval by the Joint Commission under Art. 12, the methodological guidelines, textbooks and other relevant educational materials, in accordance with Art. 8 paragraph 2 of the Agreement.

The originals of the relevant historical sources and literary texts should be accessible, used and presented by the relevant educational institutions during their study.

All future results of the Commission's work will be published jointly by both countries within six months of the adoption of the agreed texts by the Joint Intergovernmental Commission under Article 12 of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, but if this is not done within the specified period, each party will have the right to publish them independently.

ON THE THIRD ITEM OF THE AGENDA:

In accordance with the 2017 Agreement and the mutual interest in strengthening good-neighbourly and partnership relations, the two countries are committed to implementing the following measures and activities:

The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria declares its readiness to agree to the holding of the first Intergovernmental Conference of the EU with the Republic of North Macedonia with the understanding that the next Intergovernmental Conference to complete the opening phase of membership negotiations

will be held as soon as the Republic of North Macedonia includes in its Constitution those of its citizens who live on the territory of this country and are part of other peoples, such as the Bulgarian people.

I. Measures to be taken before the intergovernmental conference to conclude the opening phase of the negotiations for the membership of the Republic of North Macedonia in the European Union

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia agrees that the next Intergovernmental Conference with the EU to close the opening phase of the negotiations for the membership of the Republic of North Macedonia in the EU will take place after the entry into force of the amendments to the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia to include those of its citizens who live on the territory of this country and are part of other peoples, such as the Bulgarian people, according to internal procedures, including through a constitutional law for their implementation.

The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria declares its readiness immediately after the adoption of the conclusions of the Council, according to the final proposal of the French Presidency, to lift its reservations on the draft FRONTEX Agreement between the EU and the Republic of North Macedonia.

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, in accordance with Art. 11 para. 5 of the Treaty, reaffirms the commitment that nothing in its constitution can and should not be interpreted as representing or ever will represent a basis for interference in the internal affairs of the Republic of Bulgaria in order to protect the status and rights of non-citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia.

The two countries shall exchange, in accordance with Article 12 of the Programme between the Government of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia for cooperation in the field of education and science, copies of all methodological guidelines, textbooks, teaching aids and other relevant educational materials in the educational programme of the two countries.

Hate speech

The countries confirm their commitment to take action against hate speech and designate the Ministries of Foreign Affairs as contact institutions and to inform the competent institutions in the joint identification of such cases in inscriptions on public buildings and monuments, texts in textbooks and curriculum, as well as in public space.

The countries shall establish, without delay, the appropriate procedure and specific steps to take prompt and effective action upon the identification of such cases.

The two countries will take effective measures to prevent malicious propaganda by institutions and agencies and discourage activities by private entities aimed at inciting violence, hatred or other similar actions that would harm their relations.

Rehabilitation of the victims of repressions of the communist period

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, in accordance with the "Declaration of Apology to the Victims of the Repressions of the Regime in the Period 1945-1990", adopted in 2006 by the

Assembly of the then Republic of Macedonia and in the spirit of the European Parliament's Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism since 2009, to reaffirm that it condemns and apologizes for the injustices and repressions committed in the past, directly or indirectly, by the Yugoslav communist authorities against citizens based on their ethno-political self-determination, incl. regarding the Bulgarians.

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia declared that it will create the necessary comprehensive legal framework for the full opening of the archives of the repressive apparatus of the former communist-era state security services, including police, civilian and military intelligence and counterintelligence in the period 1945-1991. This comprehensive legal framework will create clear opportunities for free, unrestricted and timely access, research, right of use, publication and institutional storage and preservation of relevant documents.

Bulgaria declares that it has already provided and will continue to provide access to the archives of the repressive apparatus of the former state security services from the communist period, thereby creating clear opportunities for free, unrestricted and timely access, research, right of use, publication and institutional storage and protection of relevant documents.

The topic of history

Upon signing this Protocol, the countries will publish, within a period of one month, on the websites of the two governments all the results and recommendations of the work of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Issues to date.

Pursuant to Art. 8 para. 3 of the Treaty, the two countries agree to jointly celebrate in 2022 and 2023 all common historical events and persons that have already been agreed upon by the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Matters. If there is political will, the two countries will also celebrate other common historical events and persons.

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia will prepare and present a sample lesson for the 7th grade of the educational programme of the Republic of North Macedonia on the subject of King Samuel, in accordance with the recommendations of the Commission and in accordance with Art. 8 paragraph 2 of the Agreement.

The Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission on Historical and Educational Matters will develop and implement a work plan that envisages holding between 8 and 10 meetings per year.

II. Measures to be taken after the intergovernmental conference to conclude the opening phase of the negotiations for the membership of the Republic of North Macedonia in the European Union

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia by the beginning of the 2023-2024 school year shall change the content of the 7th grade geography textbook in relation to unfounded ethnic/territorial claims.

The two countries agreed, upon identification of other cases of unfounded ethnic/territorial claims in textbooks and teaching aids, to withdraw them from their educational programmes and change their content.

The two countries will consistently inform each other of any changes to the content of all textbooks, teaching aids and methodological guidelines in their educational programme and will provide copies of new editions.

Hate speech

The two countries shall continue to exchange through diplomatic channels between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs information on hate speech manifestations identified in inscriptions and signs on public buildings and monuments, texts in textbooks and teaching materials, as well as in public space in the territory of the other country and inform within a reasonable period of the actions taken by the relevant country to remove without delay the identified cases of hate speech in the public space.

Both countries shall ensure that public funding of new books, documentaries and magazines, films and other artistic production, cultural monuments and celebrations will be carried out in the spirit of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation, and in this context any entity funded from the state, will confirm in an explicit and binding statement that it will monitor with the necessary attention the issue of not allowing any forms of hate speech and failure to comply with this obligation will constitute grounds for suspension and recovery by the subject of the granted state funding.

The two countries will take effective measures to prevent malicious propaganda by institutions and agencies and discourage activities by private entities aimed at inciting violence, hatred or other similar actions that would harm their relations.

Rehabilitation of the victims of repressions of the communist period

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, within a period of up to one year, to create the necessary comprehensive legal framework for the full opening of the archives of the repressive apparatus of the former state security services from the communist period, including police, civilian and military intelligence and counterintelligence in the period 1945-1991. This comprehensive legal framework will create clear opportunities for free, unrestricted and timely access, research, right of use, publication and institutional storage and preservation of relevant documents.

The Government of the Republic of Bulgaria shall share its experience in this field, including regarding the creation of a specialized centralized archive, based on the legislation in the field adopted by the country in 2006. Bulgaria will continue to provide access to the archives of the repressive apparatus of the former state security services from the communist period, thereby continuing to create clear opportunities for free, unrestricted and timely access, research, right of use, publication and institutional storage and preservation of relevant documents.

The topic of history

Both countries to adhere to the texts approved by the Joint Intergovernmental Commission under Art. 12 as a basis for organizing, jointly or individually, celebrations, as well as to adhere to them in public speeches and statements regarding general historical events and persons for whom the celebrations in question are being organized.

The two countries, through the competent institutions, shall prepare and present sample-lessons based on the recommendations of the Commission, on which the Commission has reached agreement, to be attached to the Minutes of the next meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission under Art. 12 of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and cooperation and in the future to be included in the curricula, textbooks and relevant teaching materials, and the same recommendations should be taken into account and the content of inscriptions on monuments, signs, information materials in museums and other objects with educational and cultural significance, as well as relevant information in publicly owned electronic data sets, should be brought in line with them.

Both countries will encourage the Commission to complete the review of the Middle Ages period within one year of the signature of this Protocol.

At the next meeting of the Joint Commission under Art. 12 of the Treaty, both countries shall approve the Commission's recommendations for the entire period during the Middle Ages.

Pursuant to item 3, para. 3 of the Minutes of the first meeting of the Joint Intergovernmental Commission of 2019, the governments of the two countries shall encourage the Commission to prepare and propose to the two governments recommendations for joint commemoration of common historical events and personalities, within one year from the signing of this Protocol.

The two countries shall align, not later than the academic year 2024-2025, where necessary, all history textbooks in the curriculum so that they reflect the results of the Commission's work achieved so far, in accordance with Art. 8 para. 2 of the Agreement.

Both sides shall continue to support and encourage the work of the Commission, committing to continue harmonizing relevant textbooks and curricula, in accordance with the results of the Commission's work, approved by both governments.

Both countries support and encourage the Commission to complete work on all periods of the common history that connects the two countries and their peoples, in accordance with Art. 8 paragraph 2 of the Treaty, with the aim of fully implementing these recommendations in the educational programmes until the membership of North Macedonia in the European Union.

The Republic of North Macedonia will take measures to ensure effective access to equal rights, protection from discrimination and protection of the culture and identity of the Bulgarian community in the Republic of North Macedonia:

- Achieving sustainable results in the prevention and reaction against manifestations of hate speech towards Bulgarians in the Republic of North Macedonia in the public space in the Republic of North Macedonia;
- Achieving sustainable results in the prevention, investigation and prosecution of hate crimes, hate speech and discrimination against Bulgarians in the Republic of North Macedonia;
- Undertaking effective measures to raise awareness of institutional human rights mechanisms and increase the trust of Bulgarians in the Republic of North Macedonia towards these mechanisms and national institutions;
- Achieving sustainable results to guarantee the free exercise of the rights of Bulgarians in the Republic of North Macedonia for free expression, protection and development of the identity and specific characteristics of their community, as well as for free use of the symbols of their community;

By signing this Protocol, Bulgaria confirms that it will agree to accept the final proposal of the French Presidency of the Council of the EU from 30 June 2022 to adopt the Negotiating Framework and hold the Intergovernmental Conferences to open and close the opening phase of the negotiations for the accession of the Republic of North Macedonia to the EU.

Signed in Sofia on 17 July 2022 in two original copies, each in the official languages of the countries – Bulgarian language, according to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria and Macedonian language, according to the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, as well as both texts have equal force.