BUILDING OF INFORMATION CENTERS IN THE PROSECUTOR’S OFFICE

Concept Paper
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1. Introduction

Pursuant to the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, the prosecutor’s office ensures the observance of the rule of law (Art. 127 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). In the performance of its powers, the prosecutor’s office is obligated to ensure the possibility for the citizens to exercise their constitutional right to receive information about any issues which are of a lawful interest to them if the information is not a state secret or another secret protected by law and does not infringe upon others’ right (Art. 41, para. 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria). The Judicial System Act develops further this constitutional principle and tasks the judicial bodies with the obligation to ensure openness, access and transparency in their work in the manner set out by law (Art. 5, para. 2 of the Judicial System Act).

From a purely practical point of view, information can be provided in a timely and adequate manner with the creation of information centers, information desks or information boards and these are some of the ways in which the citizens’ constitutional rights to receive information can be guaranteed and effective cooperation between the prosecutor’s office and the civil society can be ensured.

2. Purpose of the Concept Paper

This Concept Paper aims at developing and providing a unified model of building information centers in the prosecutor’s offices as part of the implementation of one of the priority areas laid down in the Prosecutor’s Office Development Strategy for the period 2007 – 2009 – openness and transparency in the extent permitted by law.

The Concept Paper contains specific practical ideas and a set of documents which will be a useful tool for the prosecutor’s offices and the staff working to set up an information center or expanding the services provided by it.

The experience related to the creation of such a Concept Paper for the courts has been used in the development of this Concept Paper as well as good practices from other countries.

3. Need for the creation of information centers

The building of information centers in the prosecutor’s offices where a set of services is provided to the public is one of the ways of ensuring openness and transparency in the work of the prosecutor’s office and improving the public trust and confidence in it. The services provided by the centers must meet the public’s expectations and, with a view to this, the people working in the centers must be well familiar with the work of the prosecutor’s office in detail. The public’s awareness and competence about their rights and obligations and about the real possibilities and functions of the prosecutor’s office are frequently limited. As a result, the members of the public sometimes fail to indicate the legally relevant facts which are essential to the respective cases which put them at the risk of not receiving the criminal and legal protection provided to them by law. In other cases, the public’s ideas and expectations far exceed the real lawful authority of the prosecutor which leads to the formation of unobjective negative public attitudes to the prosecutor’s office. The receipt of as
complete and competent information as possible from the information center will make things easier for the public, prevent or reduce to the minimum the unfavorable consequences resulting from insufficient legal knowledge, reduce the possibilities for the development of corruption practices and, in the long run, improve the satisfaction with the work of the prosecutor’s office and boost the public trust and confidence in it.

The creation of information centers will also have a positive impact on the work of prosecutors and administrative staff. The clerks from the registries and intake offices will have the necessary operational time to perform their duties in relation to the processing of cases and files in a quality manner because they will not have to perform the functions of provision of information which are not typical of their work. The cases in which the members of the public seek to contact a prosecutor in person will also be reduced significantly because a great part of the assistance they need will come from the information centers.

The Rules for the Organization and Work of the Administration of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria does not provide expressly for the possibility to create information centers. There is no obstacle, however, for the administrative manager of every prosecutor’s office, pursuant to Art. 5, para. 1 and 2 of the Judicial System Act and in performance of their power under Art. 140 of the Judicial System Act, to issue an order for the setting up of such a center. The order can also set out the functions of the information center in a general manner by indicating that it will provide information about:

- Powers of the respective prosecutor’s office and procedural manner for them to be exercised;
- Terms and procedure for access to cases and files;
- Location of the various registries and intake offices where a member of the public can exercise their right to refer matters to the prosecutor’s office;
- Prosecutor on duty and manner of contacting them;
- Other information related to the work of the prosecutor’s office.

The creation of information centers poses the question of availability of staff for them. The Concept Paper has a special section on the staff who will work in such centers.

4. Creation and location of an information center

The purpose of an information center is to provide sufficient and complete information to all members of the public, respectively the attorneys authorized by them, as a result of which, when information centers are built, there could be various options in view of the architectural specificities and possibilities of every prosecutor’s office:

- An information center in a separate room – it can offer the following:
  - All kinds of queries in relation to cases and files through the Unified Information System of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria;
  - Information about the offices in the building, powers of the respective prosecutor’s office and terms and deadline for their exercise;
  - Issuance of copies of prosecutor’s act to people who have a lawful ground to get acquainted with them;
Samples of forms which are filed frequently and information about the fees due (if any), etc.;

- An information center as a working place in a room where the registry/intake office of the respective prosecutor’s office is located;
- An information desk which has not been specially designated as an information center but provides services to the public;
- Information boards in the halls/lobbies of the prosecutor’s office or the registry/intake office which provide information about:
  - Location of the offices to which the members of the public have access;
  - Powers of the respective prosecutor’s office and terms and deadline for their exercise;
  - Prosecutor on duty and manner of contacting them;
  - Samples of forms which are filed frequently and information about the fees due (if any), etc.

The information centers would ideally be located in the building where the prosecutor’s office they serve is housed to ensure speed and efficiency in providing information about cases and files. Several basic principles which the room designated for the information center must meet are to be taken into account when the information center is built:

- Easy access;
- Functionality;
- Safety;
- Aesthetics.

The information center must be in harmony with the appearance and building elements and spaces of the building as a whole. The space must be organized in a functional way to be convenient both for the members of the public who are looking for information and the people working in the center. Lighting, air ventilation, and ergonomic furniture must all be taken into consideration.

The provisions of the Integration of People with Disabilities Act must also be taken into account when the information center is built and the people with disabilities must be provided with an easy access to the information center by overcoming the respective architectural, transportation and communicative barriers.

The information centers should be close to the entrance of the respective judicial buildings and be visible immediately. The best location of the information center is on the ground/first floor next to the place where the members of the public get in to ensure that it is easily accessible as possible. If this is not possible, the information center can be located on the floor with the premises of the respective prosecutor’s office and close to the access points to it (staircase, elevator). In such cases, it is very important to post a sign immediately next to the entrance to the building in a visible place which tells the members of the public about the existence of the information center. The second necessary condition is to place directional signs which make it easier for the members of the public to find the information center. Yet, it must also be taken into account that the effectiveness of the information center will be reduced significantly if the members of the public have to read several directional signs to reach the center.
5. Equipment

The equipment of the information centers depends directly on the kind of information center to be created:

- The information centers which will have separate rooms and will offer the whole set of services to the general public and attorneys, including queries on cases, must have the respective office equipment with a computer configuration and access to the Unified Information System for every staff member who works there, a scanner, a printer, a copier. In addition, there must also be space (several spaces) which the member of the public can use to get acquainted with a case/file or fill in the necessary document; a computer they can use (observing the established rules), etc.;
- The information centers set up as a working place in the room of the registry/intake office must have a computer configuration and office equipment for the member of the staff who will work there;
- As for the information centers in the form of boards, no office and computer equipment will be needed but one may consider the possibility of placing electronic boards with the respective software which will give daily updated information about the prosecutor on duty, contact telephone number, etc.

6. Staff working in the information center

6.1. Availability of staff

The overall modernization of the work of the prosecutor’s office is an all-encompassing process with a view to achieving a high level of work efficiency, transparency and accessibility, provision of competent and quick service to the public, making their access to the prosecutor’s office easier and boosting the public trust and confidence in it. The building of an information center with certain characteristics would assist this process to an optimum degree.

To ensure the smooth functioning of the information center, it is necessary for it to have the right staff. Different options to ensure staff for the information centers of the prosecutor’s offices are given below in view of the available or expected resources. The optimum solution would be to appoint a separate staff member who will work in it and, hence, it is recommended that the first option proposed be applied.

**Option I:**

The information center is located with the registry office. There is a position for a registry clerk and a position for a judicial information clerk on the list of staff positions of the prosecutor’s office.

**Advantages:**

- Quick and quality service;
- Competent and ethical attitude to the visitors of the information center;
- It is easy for the public to find the place where they can obtain information, forms, etc. and file papers;
- The traffic of people is directed primarily to the information center which significantly
optimizes the work in the intake offices.

**Disadvantages:** none.

The continuous working hours of the information center will be achieved via cross training of the registry clerk and judicial information clerk.

**Option II:**
There is only a position for a registry clerk on the list of staff positions of the prosecutor’s office.

**Advantages:**
- Competent and ethical attitude to the visitors of the information center;
- It is easy for the public to find the place where they can obtain information, forms, etc. and file papers;
- The traffic of people is directed primarily to the information center which significantly optimizes the work in the intake offices.

**Disadvantages:**
- It is difficult to achieve services fast enough in view of the fact that the registry clerk will also be burdened with the duties of a judicial information clerk;
- The provision of continuous services during the working hours leads to a necessity for periodic filling in for the registry clerk. This can be done if the registry clerk is substituted for by the available intake clerks and a schedule must be prepared for them to use a one-hour break ensuring continuous working hours of the intake office and filling in for the person working in the information center.

**Option III:**
The information center is not located with the registry office. There is a position for a judicial information clerk on the list of staff positions of the prosecutor’s office.

**Advantages:**
- Quick and quality service;
- Competent and ethical attitude to the visitors of the information center;
- It is easy for the public to find the place where they can obtain information, forms, etc.;
- The traffic of people is directed partly to the information center which significantly optimizes the work in the intake offices.

**Disadvantages:**
- The members of the public need to go to one more office;
- To ensure continuous services for the public in the information center, it is necessary to prepare a schedule for substitution of the judicial information clerk by the intake clerks taking into account the requirement for continuous working hours of the intake office.

**Option IV:**
The information center is not located with the registry office. There is no position for a judicial information clerk on the list of staff positions of the prosecutor’s office.

**Advantages:**
- It is easy for the public to find the place where they can obtain information, forms, etc.;
- The traffic of people is directed partly to the information center which significantly optimizes the work in the intake offices.
Disadvantages:

- A person from the existing positions of intake clerks must be designated who will be assigned the duties of a judicial information clerk which would additionally burden the other intake clerks. In addition to this, they will need to abide by a schedule for substitution for the above person. All this must be taken into account together with the fact that the functions of the registry office will be performed again by the intake clerks in the respective prosecutor’s office during the lawful breaks;
- The members of the public need to go to one more office.

To ensure continuous service to the public in the information center, it is necessary to prepare a schedule taking into account all of the above.

Provisional option:

If the information center provides services to the members of the public who need the services of more than instance (court or prosecutor’s office), the clerks of these instances could fill in for one another when necessary.

In view of the above, it must be concluded that, to achieve the goals set by the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria for itself to improve the public trust and confidence, transparency, speed and efficiency, it is necessary to improve the available facilities, make a technological optimization, improve the qualification of the existing staff and increase the number of staff (if necessary). The latter depends directly on the quality and speed of the work of the prosecutor’s offices.

6.2. Training of a clerk working in the information center

The clerk working in the information center is usually the first person the general public meet. They address their questions first to this person and expect cooperation. That is why the clerk must be well prepared and know where the various intake offices and rooms and the office of the prosecutor on duty are and also the location of the court rooms, schedule of hearings on criminal cases of general nature, the various procedures and activities performed by the prosecutor’s office. The clerk must be familiar and work with the Unified Information System to be able to respond to queries of the members of the public through it.

The work of the information center clerk presupposes contact with people all day long which mean that their communicative skills and customer service skills are of utmost importance. It is possible to create a training module combining a number of elements of already existing trainings for clerks – for example, Customer Service, Stress Management, and Introduction to the Work of the Prosecutor’s Office. Consideration should also be given to the training of clerks who will provide services if the information center clerk is absent from work for one reason or another. It is suitable, for example, for the registry clerk to be familiar with the functions of an information center clerk (doing it the other way round may also be useful).

7. Services offered by the information center

7.1. Provide information about the movement of cases and files

The clerk in the information center must have access to the Unified Information System of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria from their work place and the necessary rights
to make queries about the movement of cases and files. This will prevent the members of the public having to go to the intake office and take away time from other clerks.

**7.2. Information about the prosecutor on duty**

There must be a board in the information center which shows the name of the prosecutor on duty on the respective day, contact telephone number and office where they are available. It is also appropriate to prepare a brochure with information about when members of the public can request assistance from the prosecutor on duty.

**7.3. Provide standard documents (requests, forms) and help to fill them in**

The development of standard forms and samples and providing them to the public in the information center would make things significantly easier not only for the public but also for the intake clerks. The samples must take into account the specificities of the procedures in the respective prosecutor’s office. To make things easier, it would be good for the forms to have instructions about how they are to be filled in.

The public’s access to the forms can be provided as follows:
- The sample forms are offered in the information center as a hard copy in a place accessible to everyone;
- The sample forms are posted on the web page of the prosecutor’s office. In this way, the public will have easy access to the documents;
- Both of the above.

The clerk must give instructions to the public about filling in the printed sample forms. It will be good if there is a board with examples of filled-in requests in the information center.

After a document is filled in, it is filed with the registry office or the respective intake office. To optimize the customer service, the most appropriate option for this must be found. It is not acceptable if a member of the public fills in a document in the information center and is then sent to the intake office on the last floor to file the document and get an incoming number. It would be good if the registry office is located in the same room with the information center. The possibility for issuance of an incoming number from different work places must also be explored (as it is in Veliko Tarnovo DC for example).

**7.4. Help with some activities in the prosecutor’s office**

The information center clerk gives information about the judicial procedures but this information does not have the nature of legal advice, for example:
- Direct the public to the respective information brochures the information center has available;
- Direct the members of the public to the respective registry or intake office depending on where and what document they need to file or obtain;
- Give information about the movement of cases and files;
- Give information about the court hearings with the participation of a prosecutor on the day and tell the public the way to room where they are held;
- Give information about the fees due (in the cases set out in Tariff No. 1) and where the sums must be credited;
• Direct the members of the public to the prosecutor on duty indicating their office hours and the location of the office in the building.

7.5. Provide information about the fees collected by the prosecutor’s office

There is only one fee in the prosecutor’s office: for issuance of various certificates and copies – BGN 2 for the first page and BGN 1 for every following page.

7.6. Available brochures and posters

The availability of information brochures and posters describing, in accessible language, the various prosecutor’s office procedures, the steps to obtain different documents, the state fees due, etc. will make things significantly easier for the people who come to the information center.

In view of the large volume of information to be offered to the public’s attention in the information center, it is important that it be well organized in the space so that the members of the public can quickly and easily find their way. If the room allows it, it might be good to have different sections with clear and directing signs, for example:

• **Information about the structure of the judiciary** where the public can find information about the functions of the various courts, prosecutor’s offices, investigation services and the police in criminal proceedings; instances of the proceedings; judicial region covered by the prosecutor’s office served by the respective information center, etc.;

• **Rights and obligations of the public** in their different capacity in the criminal proceedings, rights and obligations when a summons writ is received, filing of complaints with the prosecutor’s office, etc.;

• **Contact information – telephone directories**;

• **Signals and suggestions**;

• **Vacant positions** – provide information about any vacant positions and the selection procedure;

• **Projects on which the prosecutor’s office is working on and information about its partner organizations**.

7.7. Availability of a suggestions and complaints box

In a place visible and accessible to the public in the information center, there must be a signals and suggestions box and, on the box or immediately next to it, a description of the procedure for opening the box and summarizing the signals. It is important for the public to know that if a signal submitted indicates contact information, they will receive an official response from the institution.

It would be good to indicate alternative means of making suggestions as well - e-mail address, fax, working hours with the public of the administrative manager.

On a comparative note, the experience of the courts so far shows that the complaints and suggestions box is used rarely. Usually, the public file their complaints directly with the administrative manager or use other legal mechanisms to express their opinion and dissatisfaction. The boxes are used if there is a questionnaire the members of the public can
fill in. It should be considered whether it will be good to develop brochures to popularize the suggestions and complaints boxes.

7.8. Conduct periodic surveys with the public

The information center is a good option of conducting surveys with the general public and attorneys on various topics which relate to the administrative service. This is also another way in which the institution can get information about the problems the public have in their contacts with the prosecutor’s office, respectively a reason for the management to take the necessary measures to resolve the problems.

It is also possible for the information center to handle all questionnaires conducted by the Supreme Judicial Council, the National Institute of Justice or a judicial body.

7.9. A notice board for a more specialized audience

A notice board can be placed which will provide updated information to more specialized addressees – for example, the legal community. The board can be used to post messages which do not concern prosecutors only but a wider circle of legal practitioners – messages from the Association of Prosecutors, Union of Judges in Bulgaria, Union of Jurists in Bulgaria, Bar Council, National Association of Clerks in the Prosecutor’s Office, etc.

7.10. Create and maintain a web page

The creation of a web page is an extremely efficient and adequate manner of popularization of the work of every prosecutor’s office. From it the public can easily, without having to go to the court building, get information about:

- Location of the prosecutor's office and contact information – address, telephone, fax, e-mail;
- Structure of the judiciary, structure of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, functions of the bodies which take part in criminal procedure, region covered by the respective prosecutor’s office, instances which are higher lower;
- Organizational structure of the prosecutor’s office, information about the management of the specific prosecutor’s office and contact information;
- Links to the websites of the other prosecutor’s offices in the appellate region and to the website of the Prosecutor’s Office of the Republic of Bulgaria and other organizations and institutions which concern the work of the prosecutor’s office; for example – the respective court, local bar council, local police directorate, etc.;
- Information about the payment of state fees due as a wire transfer (accounts of the prosecutor’s office, bank in the building or closest to the court building);
- Schedule of court hearings with the participation of a prosecutor;
- Publication of information about cases and files of public interest (taking into account the legislative restrictions for the scope of information given), results from checks, etc.;
- Information to popularize the prosecutor’s office;
- Statistical information about the work of the prosecutor’s office;
- The services the public can get in the information center of the prosecutor’s office;
• Creation of a virtual information center where the public can have access to all the information provided in the information center in the prosecutor’s office;
• Vacant positions, competitions announced and mechanisms for them, sample application forms, resumes, possible publishing of the names of those who have won a competition;
• Forms and sample requests.

The best thing for the website of the respective prosecutor’s office is for it to be maintained by the system administrator with the assistance of the prosecutor’s spokesperson. If the updating of the website is assigned to the clerk in the information center, they must attend the respective training.

It is recommended that a mechanism of the website update with individual steps be developed – for example, the kind of information and materials to be posted, who writes the materials, who approves them, who updates the page and how frequently, etc.

8. Continuous working hours

In an ideal situation, information centers will be staffed by two people to ensure that they will be open throughout the working day. In smaller prosecutor’s offices, if there are not enough staff positions, these duties could be assigned to a registry clerk.

If the prosecutor’s office does not have a staff position, the work in the information center could be assigned to clerks who can be trained for this purpose and periodically work there and fill in for one another. In this way, the center can work continuously throughout the day.

9. Presentation of the information center

This section of the Concept Paper lists activities that can be planned and implemented for the presentation of the information center.

• Official opening with a press conference. The reporters must be the first visitors of the information center and have an opportunity to see and check for themselves every source of information.


At a special press conference – through the media, give the public information about the initiatives of the prosecutor’s office and the activities it is planning in relation to surveys and analyses, improvement of the communication channels, and counteracting and elimination of corruption and increase in transparency.

• Entering into a Public Contract with the media to control the work of the information center which will ensure greater transparency in the work of the prosecutor’s office and easy access to information services. The information
center must work under the direct supervision of the spokesperson of the respective prosecutor’s office and provide the media with current press releases prepared by the spokesperson. If the information center is located in a separate room, it is good for the spokesperson to hold the press conferences and press briefs with reporters there. The contract must also provide for the commitments of the media to the information center which will ensure civil control over the work of the prosecutor’s office.

- Written plan of media coverage of the information center and the work of the prosecutor’s office:
  - Electronic and print media;
  - Sections corresponding to the specificity of the media;
  - Genres – reportage, questionnaires, interviews, correspondence, articles.

The work of the prosecutor’s office must be discussed in a language more understandable and accessible to the people.

The plan must contain consecutive steps to accumulate information about the work of the information center and various journalistic genres can be used in the different media.

- Organization of Open Door Days in the prosecutor’s office.

The organization of Open Door Days would be in the context of the policy the prosecutor’s office pursues of openness and transparency in its work.

To apply this mechanism in an effective way, discussions can be held during such days with representatives of the local community, reporters, NGOs, young people, etc. It will be good to clarify the powers of the prosecutor’s office, discuss problems related to child and youth crime, drug addictions and other topics of interest in the respective region. This will help more members of the public improve their legal knowledge, get acquainted with the institution and have greater trust and confidence in it. This will also have a greater preventive effect in the respective region.

The development of this practice allows for cooperation with other government institutions – municipality, regional government, police and NGOs.

- Presentation of other institutions and organizations that concern the work of the prosecutor’s office.

These can include:
  - Investigation service;
  - Police;
  - Bar Council;
  - Association of Experts;
  - An NGO working with the prosecutor’s office on a specific project.
10. Indicators about the work of the information center

Different mechanisms must be applied to evaluate the work of the information center.

- It is possible to develop surveys with questions about the efficiency of the center in order to assess whether there is a reduction in the flow of people to the intake offices and registries, etc.;
- Another possible indicator is the number of people visiting the center (for example, note the number of people who have contacted the center for assistance in the space of 3 weeks);
- Information about the work of the information center may also be given by the intake office – for example, they may provide feedback and say to what extent there has been a reduction in the number of people coming to the intake office to obtain information;
- It is possible to organize a meeting with attorneys to discuss the work of the center;
- The local media could also help receive feedback from the public – for example, by conducting surveys with the public;
- Any mechanism which will allow one to determine the effectiveness of the center must be used.

11. Logo

The information centers must be indicated with a unified logo so that it will be recognizable by the members of the public regardless of which prosecutor’s office in the country they are in. It is proposed that the logo of the information centers of the prosecutor’s office be the following:

![Logo Image]

12. Materials

This Concept Paper is appended with materials that can be used in the creation of an information center.