PERMANENT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE REPUBLIC OF BULGARIA
TO THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Ref. ID-02-240

Strasbourg, 9 August 2019

Dear Mr. Gruden,

Following the latest alert with regard to Bulgaria, submitted to the Platform to Promote the Protection of Journalism and Safety of Journalists, please allow me to provide some information about the response and the actions taken by the Bulgarian authorities.

Case of Mr Atanas Chobanov and Mr Asen Yordanov

On 5 of June 2019 the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation received a signal from the Civic Movement "Boets" on "alleged crimes: fictitious transactions, illegal profiting, tax fraud, tax and financial crimes, concealing illegal income, tax system manipulations, data fraud before State authority, committed by Atanas Chobanov and Asen Yordanov", to which the Supreme Prosecutor's Office of Cassation formed a file.

The National Police Directorate and the Territorial Directorate of the National Revenue Agency (NRA) have been entrusted to conduct investigations on the file.

Another signal was received on 18 of June 2019 from P. Bluskov, editor-in-chief of the "Trud" newspaper, along with publications on conducted journalistic investigation on the circumstances of the acquisition of real estate by Atanas Chobanov and Asen Yordanov.

To date, the National Police Directorate has carried out an investigation where explanations have been taken, the commercial register has been checked, and copies of notary deeds and other relevant documents have been attached.

The case is still pending, as investigation by the Territorial Directorate of the NRA is ongoing.

Case of Mr. Cvetanov and Mr. Stefanov

This case involves an accident with a journalist team from the television channel "TV 999" sent to broadcast civil protests in Gabrovo. This team includes Veselin Cvetanov, reporter, and Daniel Stefanov, operator.

According to the information received form the competent national authorities no signal was received at the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Gabrovo, nor at the District Prosecutor Office concerning the incident in question. The journalists from the television channel "TV 999" Mr. Cvetanov and Mr. Stefanov have not submitted a complaint either.

Case of Mr. Hristo Geshov

Mr. Hristo Geshov is a protected witness in pre-trial proceedings of the Sofia Specialized Prosecutor's Office and as such, he has been provided with 24 h security protection which is

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being carried out by police officers of the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in the town of Tcherven Briag.

On 14 of May 2019, the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Tcherven Briag received a written alert from Mr. Geshov's mother, Tatiana Todorova, which stated that he has been missing since around noontime the same day. The mother stated that she was worried about the safety and health of her son because publications in local and national media outlets, which contained sensitive information about him, as well as information diminishing his public image. As a result, Hristo Geshov has been declared to be missing and subject to nationwide search.

On 15 of May 2019 at 8:05 a.m. on road E-79, police officers from the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Montana stopped and searched a vehicle that had been conducted by the missing Hristo Geshov. Upon ID-checking it has been established that he was subject to nationwide search. The police officers escorted him to the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Montana. While he was there, Mr. Geshov submitted a handwritten declaration, by means of which he expressed his desire to be guarded by the Ministry of the Interior, because he was afraid for his life and health due to the nature of his job as an investigative journalist, as well as his status of a protected witness.

During his stay in the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Montana, Mr. Geshov refused to give further information about his whereabouts after he was declared missing. Later on, he was escorted to the District Department of the Ministry of Interior in Tcherven Briag by the police officers.

Police officers from the Regional Department of the Ministry of Interior in Pleven, responsible for the search operations of missing persons had talks with Mr. Geshov. During the conversation, Mr. Geshov stated that on 14 of May 2019 he received a call from an unknown man who proposed that they meet in the city of Vidin. The main topic of the conversation Mr. Geshov had with the persons that showed at the meeting was Geshov's journalistic investigation with regard to "Water supply company in the town of Troyan", which has been published in "Zov News" in February 2019.

On 17 of May 2019 during the talks with the police officers, Mr. Geshov stated that he has no personal requests towards the persons he met. He did not want to be further interrogated about what had happened (in Vidin) and refused the initiation of any investigative proceedings on the issue. He shared with the police agents that he attended the place of the meeting according to his own will and that he had the intentions of travelling to Germany, where he was invited to work as a journalist for the NGO "Reporters without Borders"

Mr. Hristo Geshov made the comment according to which he was satisfied with the work of the Ministry of the Interior, the actions undertaken by the police officers, as well as the measures provided with regards to his life and personal safety.

Case of Ms Zornica Akmanowa

Pre-trial proceedings were initiated under art. 330, para (2), in relation to para (1) of the Criminal Code, following an alert received on 5 October 2017, around 2:20 a.m., to report a burning car in front of a building. The case has been supervised by the Regional Prosecutor Office in Plovdiv and numerous investigative actions have been carried out.

The pre-trial proceedings were suspended by a decree of the supervising Prosecutor on 18 of June 2018 due to failure of finding the perpetrator. The case has been referred back to the

Criminal Police Department at the Regional Department of the Ministry of Interior in Plovdiv in order to continue the investigation against the unknown perpetrator.

Case of Mr Mr. Stoyan Tonchev

In addition to the information provided concerning the case of Mr. Stoyan Tonchev we would like to point out that with Ruling № 1/14.01.2019 of the District Court of the town of Pomorie regarding criminal proceedings of general nature № 524/2017 the two defendants were found innocent and acquitted of their charges.

The Court decision was contested within the statutory period by the supervising Prosecutor in the Regional Court of Burgas, in accordance with art. 318, para (1), first proposition and para (2) of the Criminal Procedure Code

I would like to request your kind assistance in forwarding the above information to the relevant partner organisations and in keeping me informed about their position and reaction.

I stand ready to update you on the future developments.

Looking forward to our future cooperation, I remain at your disposal for any further clarifications.

Sincerely yours,

K. Todorova

Katya TODOROVA

Ambassador

Mr. Matjaž GRUDEN
Director
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