

The Agency for the Protection of Personal Data of the Republic of Croatia and the Republic of North Macedonia and the German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation in Skopje, on October 7, organized the final conference where the results of the Twinning project "Providing support in the implementation of a modernized legislative framework for the protection of personal data" were presented. Director Zdravko Vukić, deputy director and project manager Igor Vulje, manager of the third component of the project Anamarija Mladinić, permanent project advisor Sanja Silaj Zeman and experts of the Agency also participated in the final conference. The conference was also attended by the Speaker of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia Talat Xhaferi and the Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia in North Macedonia Nives Tiganj and other high-ranking guests.

Namely, since June 2021, the Personal Data Protection Agency has been implementing an EU project worth 700,000 euros, in cooperation with partners from the German Foundation for International Legal Cooperation (IRZ) and the Central Agency for Financing and Contracting (SAFU). The goal of the project was to improve the protection of fundamental rights and the national system for the protection of personal data in the Republic of North Macedonia, in accordance with the standards of EU legislation, and to improve the work of the Agency for the Protection of Personal Data of the Republic of North Macedonia.

In his opening address, the Director of the Agency, Zdravko Vukić, thanked everyone who was part of the project and expressed his satisfaction with the achieved results. "With this project, we enabled the implementation of the new Personal Data Protection Act, strengthened the capacities of the Agency for Personal Data Protection and improved the public's awareness of the rights and obligations arising from the new personal data protection framework. The ultimate goal we strive for is the effective protection of the fundamental right of the citizens of North Macedonia - the right to the protection of personal data. It is important to point out that in our digital age the right to protect personal data is more important than ever," said director Vukić and pointed out that North Macedonia and Croatia are two friendly countries that share close historical and cultural ties and foster excellent relations. "These ties have been strengthened by the continuous support of the Republic of Croatia for the accession of North Macedonia to the European Union. I am especially happy that in July this year we witnessed a historic moment - the beginning of accession negotiations for North Macedonia. We will continue to support you on your European journey," he concluded.

The joint effort of AZOP experts and partners achieved impressive results, thus fulfilling the purpose of the project itself - facilitating the implementation of the Personal Data Protection Act through the development of standard operating procedures,

guidelines and holding educational activities for the Agency's employees in North Macedonia and through the development of guidelines, guides and educational materials and holding educational activities that will facilitate compliance with the Personal Data Protection Act for managers and processors. Thus, a total of 155 documents (instructions, guidelines, standard operating procedures, regulations, templates, etc.) were created in 67 professional missions, and 13 data protection trainings were held for more than 2,500 data processing managers.

Likewise, the project also included raising the level of awareness of the importance of personal data protection as a fundamental right among the general public, with special emphasis on children and young people; informing citizens about their rights related to the protection of personal data and encouraging citizens to use their rights. To this end, guides and brochures have been developed that cover a wide range of topics, from the rights of respondents to online fraud.

"Projects like this make me optimistic about the future of data protection. We urgently need to step up efforts in terms of implementing data protection laws, which can only happen through close cooperation between countries. I believe that the project we are completing today will significantly contribute to such a culture of cooperation," said European Data Protection Supervisor Wojciech Wiewiórowski.

The final conference was closed with a panel discussion on the topic "Data security", in which personal data protection experts from the Republic of Croatia, North Macedonia and Germany took part.