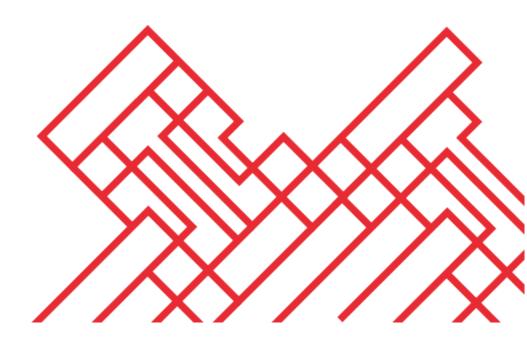# Recommendations for safe work and reorganization of the working processes in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia
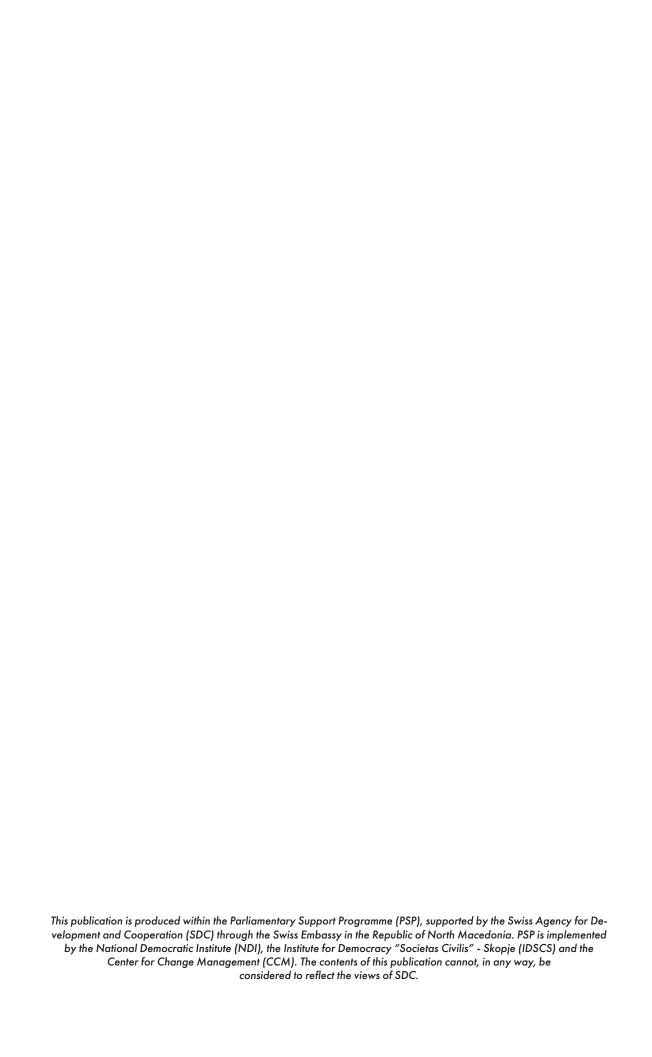
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july 2020

For the purposes of cooperation and support of the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), the Parliament Support Programme), after the meeting held with the Secretary General of the Assembly, Cvetanka Ivanova, on 6 July 2020, submits a proposal of recommendations for safe work and reorganization of the working processes in the Parliament. Since the Parliament has already developed partly its own internal protocols and procedures, we would like to point out that this document can serve as a resource base for the Parliament from which you can define rules, directions, and recommendations in order to adapt the working processes in the Parliament to the newly created conditions.

Organization of the work in the Parliament in conditions of pandemic
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Under the conditions of a global pandemic, the functioning of the states depends exclusively on their skills for efficient management, rapid reorganization, and dealing with all challenges that the newly created situation imposes.

The crisis caused by COVID-19 inevitably brought a new reality in the functioning of the institutions and the organization of their working processes, especially the Parliament and the state administration bodies. The new challenges we face during the pandemic require changes in the present working models and creating a dynamic working environment, through the use of digital technologies and remote working, which will provide the unimpeded implementation of the basic functions and fulfilling the activities under the jurisdiction of the institutions.

During the time of crisis, the work of the Assembly is even more important in the direction of continuing the essential functions of the legislative government: representation, adopting laws, reallocation of resources for dealing with the crisis, as well as the increased supervision of the government activities. The Parliament must be prepared to quickly adapt to innovative approaches with timely and simple solutions that would improve and successfully organize its work.

The recommendations are given in order to provide guidelines for improved electronic working (eworking) through transparent and inclusive legislation. The recommendations are based on developing a flexible and mobile manner of work and digital e-working practice by promoting the overall transition of the employees' work to digital

platforms, which would provide improved speed, precision, safety/security, privacy, mobility and sustainability of the institution. These proposed solutions should create a flexible and common working environment contributing to rationalization of the working processes through improving communication, coordination and efficiency of the personnel, with facilitated access to the necessary data. PSP takes into consideration the experiences of the more advanced parliaments and their growing orientation towards smart and mobile job positions. The COVID-19 pandemic only adds to the urgency to follow and further develop a digital transition plan, which emphasizes the flexible and mobile job positions, distance communication and cooperation, and provides unhindered work of all institutional functions.

In this sense, it is of great importance that the Parliament continues to function effectively, to provide parliamentary participation in the management during crisis, as an essential element in guarding the democratic practice and the institutions, and as soon as possible to adapt to continued virtual or remote work, with flexible management models, reorganization of work structure and strategies, and using advanced technologies in order to secure balanced and efficient working processes.

The aim of this document is to provide recommendations and directions that the Parliament is supposed to undertake in order to continue with its effective work and productivity in the conditions of a pandemic.

The document gives the following guidance:

1. Coordinative body/working group for implementing the measures for protection and precaution against COVID-19.

2. Raising the awareness of the employees and the Members of Parliament (MPs) about the seriousness of the crisis, regularly providing information about the situation in our country and in the region/the world, regularly providing information about the recommendations by the relevant authorities (for example, the health authorities), preparation of a guidebook with directions on dealing with and preferred behavior during a crisis;

3. Improving the working processes of the parliamentary service;

4. Remote work/e-work;

5. Performance of the heads of sector in the parliamentary service;

6. Performance of the employees in the parliamentary service;

7. Functioning of committee and plenary sessions;

8. Method of voting in the Parliament;

9. Communication with the media, the public, and civic organizations.

1. Coordinative body/ working group for implementing the measures for protection and precaution from covid-19
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Forming a coordinative body/working group for managing and implementation of the measures for protection and precaution from COVID-19. This body/group would be tasked to review questions that require urgency in managing the COVID-19 crisis. The body/group would also be responsible for regular (weekly) coordination and giving directions for acting in regard to all activities that are undertaken to sustain a safe working environment for the MPs and the parliamentary servants. The coordinative body/ working group would be composed of the President of Parliament and one MP from each MP group.

The expert support of this body would be provided by heads of department/unit or representatives of the crucial departments who have a role in implementing the measures of protection and precaution from the COVID-19 crisis, and under the leadership of the Secretary General of the Assembly or the Deputy Secretary General.

It is important that the group is comprised of both technical/expert level (composed by the employees in the Service whose aim is care for consistent implementation of the measures) and political level employees (composed of MPs whose are responsible for effective communication and coordination with other responsible institutions during the

implementation of the measures, providing quick reactions, recommendations and policies aimed at protection from the COVID-19 virus). Regular supervision of the executive government in this area, as well as in any other area, remains the constitutional jurisdiction of the Parliament and in accordance with that, it is implemented whenever there is initiative of the MPs.

2. Raising the awareness and access to information of the employees and MPs
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• It is recommended that the Department for Public Information and Public Relations:

- follows and sends press releases on a weekly basis (email and SMS) to all employees and MPs in the Parliament in order to inform them about and raise their awareness of the changes in the situation with the crisis/pandemic in our country, as well as in the region and in the world;

- follows the recommendations of the health authorities and informs regularly about the recommendations as provided by the North Macedonia Ministry of Health and the World Health Organization, and necessary steps to be undertaken for precaution and protection of the employees (for example: wearing protection masks, regular hand washing, keeping distance, avoiding direct physical contact, coughing and sneezing into a flexed elbow, using disinfectants, tissues, etc.) or what needs to be limited (for example, ban on traveling abroad, cancelling visits of delegations, cancelling group visits to the Parliament building, fourteen days of isolation in case of contact with an infected person, etc.)

- publishes the precautionary measures on the bulletin boards or other visible places (and online through virtual platforms available to those who are working remotely) in order to inform all employees, MPs and visitors to the Parliament;

- makes e-brochures with information about the general recommendations for prevention and with measures for personal hygiene and protection. The e-brochures will be sent to the employees and MPs, and will also be presented on the screens in the working halls before the beginning of sessions and during breaks;

- directs the Parliament security to join the adherence to the precautionary measures and remind all visitors in the building at the entrance to use disinfectant, and let in only those who wear protective face masks.

• In accordance with guidelines set by the Governmental Crises Group , it is recommended that the Department for Administrative Operations:

- purchases and regularly provides disinfectants for the hands at all entrances of the building, disinfectants for personal use by all employees/or at various locations in the building, especially in front of the halls where the commission meetings take place, and in front of the plenary hall;

- publishes the precautionary and hygiene measures in the bathrooms, kitchens, buffets, the parliament restaurant and the Club of MPs;

- introduces rules for more frequent cleaning and disinfection of the floors, hallways, staircase railings, door knobs, windows, microphones, etc.

3. Improving the working processes of the parliament service
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- The Parliament management and employees should show awareness of the pandemic's impact, and make efforts to fully reorganize their work and the implementation of the tasks under the conditions of a crisis. They should adapt to the ongoing adaptive environment with a focus on finishing the majority of tasks while working remote/working from home and with electronic means in order to avoid gatherings in groups at the institution.

- Because of the reorganization of work with a smaller number of employees present in the offices and remote working of the majority of employees, all heads of department/unit should assess the working processes according to the following criteria:

  - Are the documents necessary for the working process accessible outside of the office?

  - Can the process take place electronically?

  - Can the process be redesigned so that it can take place electronically?

  - What adaptations are needed in order for the whole process to take place electronically?

  - Is the process linked with process/es in other institutions and how can it be electronically redesigned?

  - Are resources and processes accommodating for individuals with disabilities or who require special accommodations?

  - What resources are required to ensure effective coordination between offices, or between MPs/staff and offices of the institution that they must connect with to conduct normal business?

- According to the assessment of the processes, they should be differentiated into:

  - processes that can be fully completed from home via electronic means so that the work is not impeded,

  - processes that can be carried out partly via electronic means (so that they can be advanced), but in final stages require physical submissions

  - processes that are necessarily carried out in the offices with physical presence of the employees (so that they are reduced to a minimum).

- Each head should compose a list that would be distributed to his/her employees, with a description of the working processes that can be fully carried out while working remotely, i.e. via electronic means, processes that must necessarily be implemented from the office, and processes that can partly be carried out while working remotely (possible with directions to improve parts of the activities for electronic implementation of the process).

- On the basis of the assessment, the head should organize the work of his/her employees in groups (from home, with rotation and/or presence in the office with full adherence to the precautionary measures recommended by the relevant authorities).

4. Remote working / working from home
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- The Parliament should provide ICT support to the MPs, heads, and all employees in order for them to carry out their working tasks unhindered while working remotely/ working from home.

- It is recommended that the Parliament introduces an efficient document management system (DMS) in order to organize the work and the processes of the employees through an active use of the system, and remote access.

- The employees should check and carry out the tasks received through an electronic document management system, or directly from their managers, in accordance with the given deadlines, regardless of whether the received document is digitalized or original.

- The Information Technology (ICT) Department should propose procedures and policies to protect information security and should use resources and tools in order to facilitate safe remote working, for example: VPN (Virtual Private Network) connection, multi-factor authentication to access digital systems, firewalls, antivirus software, limitations on installing unsafe applications, encryption of data, and laptop and mobile devices.

- The Information Technology Department should train the employees to use the resources and tools for basic information safety during remote working, such as: creating strong passwords, using safe Wi-Fi networks, using antivirus software, etc.

- If employees use Wi-Fi networks when working remote, they should use safe Wi-Fi networks and access them with strong passwords. Public Wi-Fi networks should not be used for remote working.

- It is recommended that meetings are held through electronically accessible tools (for example, Microsoft Teams/Skype, ZOOM, CISCO Webex, Meet, etc.) between employees and especially with external associates (including both remote working and working in the office in order to avoid large gatherings in the office).

- When using electronic communication means, employees should respect the measures of protection of official data, be careful with the stated data and recording of meetings, and they should respect additional directions from the heads.

- Employees who work remotely should transfer the necessary databases to shared electronic folders provided by the institution to continue their work safely and with set rules by the institution on the level of access of the employees.

- Communication systems in accordance with the Law on Classified Information are used for remote work when classified information is exchanged.

- Employees should follow the plan of archive signs, as well as the direction from the heads when saving databases in shared folders.

- The Information Technology Department should establish procedures for regular making incremental and full backup copies of data within the electronic shared folders.

5. Performance of the heads in the parliament service

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- The head of the department in coordination with the head of the unit should prepare a proposal to adequately organize work and employees by facilitating work from the office and remote working/working from home in order to secure continuity and productivity of work and achieving desired results.

- Each head of department/unit should inform the employees of their obligations during remote working (which are equal to the work in the office) with regards to working hours, availability, platforms for holding on-line meetings, the modalities for cooperation with the other institutions, informing about the work and responsibility.

- In accordance with the recommendations of relevant authorities (the health authorities), the head should design a system of (equal) rotation of employees who will work remotely or in the offices. The aim is to reduce the probability for large gatherings during the workday.

- The heads should provide conditions for the work of the employees in accordance with the adopted protocols by the Government of RNM, in addition to guidance presented by the World Health Organization, especially the Protocol for organization of the working meetings, training, courses and seminars and the Protocol for preventive measures for all working positions to prevent the spread of COVID-19 (https://vlada. mk/protokoli-koronavirus).

- During remote working and working from the office, the heads of departments/unit should provide clear division of the tasks and responsibilities in smaller teams and/or for each employee individually He or she should also follow the weekly activities and performance, as well as organizing regular brief online meetings with the employees to follow the realized activities and tasks.

- The department heads should submit lists of employees who work remotely to the Human Resources Department on a weekly basis in order to keep a record for equitable rotation of the employees who work remotely. The department heads should use the electronic tools that they have at their disposal and should work according to the internal organization of the processes.

- When remote working, it is recommended that thematic groups are established among part of the employees that would communicate with each other through the electronic communication tools.

- The heads of department/unit should hold regular online meetings with their employees, and provide explicit guidance on the platform by which employees will be expected to meet, at least once a week and if necessary more often, where all employees will be present.

- The heads themselves should have meetings on the managerial level at least once a week in order to improve the coordination, sharing of information, and improving the working processes.

6. Performance of the employees in the parliament service

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- The employees have the obligation to participate in and respect the reorganizations made by the heads for remote working and from the office and carry out their tasks with the utmost responsibility in order to provide continuity and productivity in the work and achieving results.

- When working in the office, all employees are obliged to respect the recommendations and measures published by the Department for Public Information and Public Relations in order to protect themselves and others present in the Parliament (wearing protective masks, washing hands regularly, keeping distance, avoiding direct physical contact, coughing and sneezing into a flexed elbow, using disinfectants, tissues, etc.)

- The employees have the same obligations when working remotely as when working in the office, should be available (at the official email addresses and cell phone numbers) during the regular working hours (and when timely informed, if there is a need, they should be available even after working hours and/or during the weekend) for performing the working tasks, consultations, meetings, etc. and they should act according to the requests in the messages and calls.

- Employees who work remotely are responsible for their work performance and the quality of their results just as when working in the office.

- Employees are obliged to discuss their achieved results and the challenges they encounter with their line managers directly or during the regular online meetings.

- Employees who require special accommodations, require care as it relates to a disability, illness, or other circumstance, or who are at increased risk -- either individually or as related to the care of family members and dependents -- must be granted permission to work remotely, and be provided with the necessary flexibility to both accommodate their at-home care obligations and maintain adequate working obligations and requests. As per Government Crises Group this guidelines applies to: people who are chronically ill, the parents of children who are aged ten 10 or younger less or actively go to the fourth grade, the pregnant women, the single parents, the parents of children with disabilities who use day care facilities daily centers, the persons who require accompaniment, the persons in wheelchairs, or have and the persons with moderate or severe serious intellectual disability, with adequately established conditions for remote working and with greater flexibility, should work remotely and be available during the working hours to respond to the obligations and requests as which are imposed by the working processes, in accordance with guidance provided by the health authorities in the country.

7. Functioning of the legislative, supervisory and representational role of the Parliament

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- Checking the acts and their possible changes/revisions in order to enable remote working at commission and plenary sessions; to enable the progress of the parliamentary work through full use of electronic means, especially in circumstances of state of emergency and martial law, epidemics, natural disasters, earthquakes or terrorist attacks, disabling the functioning of the Parliamentary building, which prevent the MPs from being physically present in the Parliament.

- Options should be provided for holding the committee meetings and plenary sessions remotely with the help of video conference (with available translation) and the use of electronic means.

- Options should be provided for combined (hybrid) holding of committee meetings and plenary sessions where some MPs are present in the hall, respecting social distancing, while the others are connected via electronic means for remote working.

- Translation should be provided for all committee and plenary sessions regardless of whether they are held in physical halls, fully or through the use of electronic means or in a combined (hybrid) way.

- In the case of holding committee meetings in the premises of the Parliament, the number of those present should be limited. The precautionary measures should be strictly followed, in accordance with the recommendations of health authorities;

- In the case of holding plenary sessions in the premises of Parliament, the number of MPs should be limited, in agreement with all MP groups about the choice of MPs and number of MPs in the room with equitable and reciprocal selection. Social distancing and all precaution measures recommended by the health authorities should be respected; for all other MPs, video-connection to join the session should be provided;

- To limit the incessant holding of committee meetings and plenary sessions in such a way that the recommendations for obligatory breaks at certain intervals would be respected; sufficient time between the sessions should be provided so that the hall can be disinfected after each session;

- The committee sessions should be planned and scheduled in advance for each month with specific dates and times;

- When holding public discussions and monitoring discussions (discussions on MP questions), the committees should act according to the above proposed ways or through electronic means. During these discussions, the MPs can ask

written questions to the government, ministries and government representatives, and receive electronic written answers.

- Options and software functionality should be provided so that citizens can propose laws and petitions digitally, as well as ask individual questions or give comments to the MPs during public discussions and during monitoring discussion.

- Precautionary measures should be taken by MPs when they are performing their representational role by, i.e. the protection measures should be adequately applied in relation to the activities that the MPs undertake outside the Parliament, in their contact with citizens, in consultations with nongovernmental organizations, unions and associations of citizens, and in cooperation with international organizations. The measures should be clearly stated in the premises of the MP groups.

- The MPs should be actively engaged with their constituencies to raise awareness of and improve knowledge about the measures to reduce the spread of the illness and the measures that can be undertaken to decrease the detrimental consequences of the pandemic. MPs should also work to provide channels for constituents to adequately access their representatives in order to air concerns and communicate priorities.

- The MPs that have activities outside of the Parliament, that is, in contact with citizens, consultations with non-governmental organizations, unions, in cooperation with international organizations etc. should respect the proposed measures of health authorities for prevention and protection from COVID-19.

- MPs should also make arrangements to engage in safe contact with other offices and staff of parliament if meetings are conducted outside of the institution.

- The Parliament services should provide training to MPs about the processes and tools that will be used for remote working and about the methods of voting in Parliament (regulated in the following section).

8. Methods of voting in Parliament

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- To change/revise the Rulebook and introduce an option for full electronic voting in the Parliament. To implement a technical solution enabling safe and secure electronic voting, for example by using digital signatures.

- To provide unhindered implementation of the MP function by enabling access to and teaching the MPs about the e-Parliament system in the overall legislative process, without their presence in the Parliament.

- The Parliament sessions should be carried out through video-connection with MPs joining remotely after electronic verification of the identity of each member;

- E-voting should include use of email, electronic tools, and software in order to enable remote voting under the conditions of a pandemic and the absence of MPs;

- The committee and plenary sessions should be organized through video-connection and the MPs can vote through email or SMS.

- Party representatives present in the plenary hall should be limited in a mutual agreement with the MP groups, according to a set percentage from the MPs to secure physical distance of the MPs when holding plenary session in a hall with greater capacity for sitting Others can participate through new technologies, video-connection, access to e-Parliament, and technical possibilities for electronic voting.

9. Relations with media, the public, the civic organizations

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- The Department for Public Information and Public Relations should take on a more proactive role and regularly inform the public through the Parliament website, as well as through social media channels on the activities that take place in the Parliament, on the manner of work of the service and the MPs, as well as holding the sessions, committee meetings and voting of the MPs. Special focus should be given to provide information on the conclusions from the Parliament committee and plenary sessions and the topics in the agenda.

- To provide a separate location for media activities, where secure access would be provided to the media to follow press conferences and hold interviews under special conditions and security recommendations. To clean and disinfect the room after each meeting, and to limit the number of media representatives depending on the size of the hall, in order to avoid large group gatherings. Everyone present in the room should respect the precautionary measures recommended by the health authorities.

- To limit the presence of media representatives/ journalists/citizens in the committee and plenary sessions, and to provide an option for interested audiences to join via a video-connection so that they follow the sessions without possibility for interaction with the MPs. The opportunity given by the Parliament Rulebook for the presence of the public in the galleries to follow the work of the parliament and the committee sessions should be limited during the pandemic.

- The Parliamentary channel should provide live videos of the parliamentary sessions. The Parliament sessions (of the committees and the plenary ones) should go live on Facebook, YouTube.

- To provide opportunity for the MPs and representatives of the assembly services to join interactive and virtual classes about the Parliament on social media channels such as YouTube, Facebook, etc.

- To provide opportunity for the citizens to ask live questions to the Parliament through Viber or WhatsApp about certain legal measures in the procedure, etc.

- To post educational info-graphics on social media channels such as Twitter and Facebook, about the daily and weekly activities of the Assembly.

- To prepare informative videos/webinars about the work of the Parliament and virtual description of the processes as part of the educational side of the Parliament, accompanied by the existing virtual tours, et.

How can PSP help in reorganizing the work of the Parliament

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1. Support of the process of application/revision of the acts regulating the work of the Parliament in order to adapt the work of the Parliament to remote working.

2. Provide expertise in revising and creating internal acts relating to good practices in human resource management.

3. Support the process of establishing a more predictable legal agenda by introducing a Parliamentary calendar.

4. Provide expertise in revising the legislation connected to the Parliamentary channel and organizing political dialogues to find an adequate solution.

5. Purchasing laptops for the Parliament services in order to create a dynamic working environment and flexible and mobile ways of working (part of the digital transition).

6. Updating e-Parliament in the direction of digital transition of the processes and online work of the services and the MPs (part of the digital transition); providing IT security advice in the use and implementation of secure systems, servers, and software for the institution and individual MPs/offices.

7. Updating the Parliament website to improve its accessibility of information to the public (part of the digital transition).

8. Procurement of Document Management System (DMS) in order to digitalize the working processes.

9. Procurement of equipment for the Parliament TV studio and assistance in creating a program scheme and production (part of the digital transition).

10. Providing financial resources to individuals who should be engaged to work at the Parliament TV studio (in accordance with 33333333333the Agreement for Financial Support and part of the digital transition).

11. Portal for open data in order to increase the transparency of the Parliament and its work (part of the digital transition) [1]

12. Procurement of electronic signatures for MPs and certain persons from the service (after the example of the persons who work in public procurements and part of the digital transition).

13. Procurement of Software for financial, material work and human resource management connected to a module for electronic recording of the working hours and following the contracts for public procurement (part of the digital transition)[2]

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[1] paragraphs 5-11 are covered by the Public Procurement Plan for 2020, in accordance with the Agreement for Financial Contribution within PSP, except for paragraph 10, which is covered with the Agreement for Financial Contribution.
[2] This software is at the request of the Parliament, and PSP agreed to purchase it from its own financial resources.

Recommendations for safe work and reorganization of the working processes in the Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia

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