

MONITOR:

IMPLEMENTATION OF URGENT REFORM PRIORITIES

Period: 15-30.12.2015

Implementation of the Political Agreement

The dynamics of implementation of the Political Agreement has been impaired. There is growing tension among political parties who participate in the negotiations. Last meeting of the working groups was held on December 17th. Negotiations are expected to continue after the New Year's holidays, and a visit by the Commissioner Hahn in January 2016, has been announced.¹

Even in case if an agreement for the remaining issues is reached, there is a serious question whether they can create conditions for organizing fair early elections. Essentially, the Agreement is not being implemented "fully and constructively", as was also emphasized in the Conclusions of the General Affairs Council held on December 15th.²

Additionally, already agreed solutions are brought into question. The MP from VMRO-DPMNE, Antonio Miloshoski, has stated that his party "expresses serious reserve" regarding the action of the Special Public Prosecutor, Katica Janeva.³ Disagreements between ministers and their deputies from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM have intensified. The Minister of Labor and Social Policy from SDSM, pressed criminal charges against her predecessor, current additional Deputy Minister from VMRO-DPMNE, on grounds of abuse of office and malpractice.⁴ SDSM has logged a complaint to the Administrative Court against the former SEC composition, because of incompetence of this composition to officially decide on the dispute between the Finance Minister, and the additional Deputy Minister from SDSM.⁵

On the other hand, public debates and inter-institutional visits dedicated to implementation of the Urgent Priority Reforms are more frequent, however, lacking visible results.⁶

Rule of law and judiciary

Judiciary

The public prosecutor on pursuing criminal acts related to and arising from the contents of the illegal interception of communication, Katica Janeva, has asked for postponement of the main hearing in the case of "Puch", planned to be held on December 21. The explanation included the reason for this postponement being the need to fully examine the content of the evidence submitted to the Court, which were not included in the prosecutor's case that was

¹ Hanh sent a letter to the leaders – announcing a visit to discuss finished matters from the Przino Agreement. Nova TV. 22.12.2015 Available at: <http://novatv.mk/index.php?navig=8&cat=2&vest=26319>.

² Conclusions of the EU General Affairs Council, available at: <http://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-15356-2015-INIT/en/pdf>. Among other things, "The Council calls for its full and constructive implementation by all parties, according to the agreed timetable and objectives, in the interest of the country and its citizens. The Council stresses the importance of the April 2016 elections being conducted in a credible way. The Council repeats its call on all parties to honour their undertaking to implement the Urgent Reform Priorities, to address systemic rule of law issues including in relation to breaches of fundamental rights, judicial independence, media freedom, elections, corruption, politicisation of state institutions and state/party blurring and failures of oversight."

³ Janeva has grown into a classical instrument of Zoran Zaev. Website of VMRO-DPMNE. 25.12.2015 Available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/?p=28618>.

⁴ Remenski pressed criminal charges against Spasov. MIA. 28.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/134/132964460>.

⁵ A complaint has been logged against the illegal decision made by the former SEC composition. Website of SDSM. 22.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mId=55&agId=2&articleId=13224>.

⁶ On December 24, the National Council for Euro-integration held a public debate on "Urgent Priority Reforms for the Republic of Macedonia". More information available at: http://www.sobranie.mk/2014-002cea30-a5b8-435e-ad55-147ff64cbfa2-ns_article-javna-rasprava-za-itnite-reformski-prioriteti-za-republika-makedonija.nspk.

The Secretariat for European Affairs had working meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, the Ministry of Interior, the State Election Commission, the Ministry of Justice and the State Commission on Prevention of Corruption, within the framework of the initiative on institutional visits for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities.

More info available at: <http://www.sep.gov.mk/content/?ID=784#.VoLZUegrldU>; <http://www.sep.gov.mk/content/?ID=787#.VoLZT-grldU>; <http://www.sep.gov.mk/content/?ID=788#.VoLZTegrldU>; <http://www.sep.gov.mk/content/?ID=789#.VoLZSugrldU>; <http://www.sep.gov.mk/content/?ID=792#.VoLZS-grldU>.

submitted to them. The defendant, Zoran Zaev showed up at the planned hearing. The next hearing has been planned to be held on January 14, 2016.⁷

The public prosecutor office on pursuing criminal acts related to and arising from the contents of the illegal interception of communication (special public prosecutor office) announced on December 25 that several pre-investigative procedures were being conducted on cases regarding which true jurisdiction has been established. At the same time, SDSM was again requested to submit materials in their possession, stressing that some of the prosecutors have already been given clearance on working with classified information belonging to the category of "state secret". Regarding the previous request, SDSM refused to submit the materials until full conditions were provided for their protection, implying proper 24 hour security, which currently was lacking due to the failure to adopt the Law on Public Prosecutor's Service.⁸ Zoran Zaev handed over the wiretapped materials on December 30th to the special public prosecutor, including the materials related to the case called "Monstrum".⁹

The Criminal Council of the Department on Organised Crime and Corruption of the Basic Court Skopje 1 – Skopje, on grounds of a proposal for cancelling or replacing the measure of detention for the defendants Zoran Verushevski and Gjorgji Lazarevski, submitted by their defendants, following a positive opinion and a proposal by the Special Public Prosecutor, Katica Janeva¹⁰, decided to cancel the detention, replacing it with measures of caution such as prohibition to leave one's residence and temporary seizure of one's travel document.¹¹

At a session held on December 30th, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia adopted the **Law on public prosecution service of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Pursuing Criminal Acts Related to and Arising from the Contents of the Illegal Interception of Communication**, proposed by the Government in a shortened procedure.¹² The proposal was previously submitted on 21st December by a group of MPs from SDSM, NSDP, LDP and PDT, but was not put in the agenda because MPs from VMRO-DPMNE voted against this proposal explaining that this subject matter was already regulated by other legislation on public prosecutor's office, public prosecutor's service and administration, therefore the proposed law was being placed into a privileged position.¹³

The Government submitted a draft law on modifying and amending the Law on Salaries of Public Prosecutors and the Law on Salaries of Judges, to be voted in a short procedure.¹⁴ The proposed legislation includes additional bases for calculating bonuses to salaries.¹⁵ The amount and the method of defining bonuses are regulated by an act of the Judicial Council of the Republic of Macedonia and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of Macedonia respectively, following a consent given by the Finance Minister.

In her reaction, the **Special Public Prosecutor Janeva** stated that the provision authorizing the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of Macedonia to decide, following consent from the Finance Minister, on bonuses of public prosecutors in this office, breaches established principles of autonomy and financial independence. The Government

⁷ Monitoring activities of the 'All for Fair Trial' Coalition.

⁸ Press conferences: Currently the SPPO lacks conditions to protect the materials. Website of SDSM. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mld=55&agld=6&articleId=13189>.

⁹ SDSM handed over the materials to Special Public Prosecutor under Przhino Agreement. MIA. 30.12.2015. Available on: <http://www.mia.mk/en/Inside/RenderSingleNews/323/132968788>.

¹⁰ The SPPO has proposed cancelling detention for Verushevski. MIA. 25.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/380/132962131#>.

¹¹ Public Announcement. Website of the First Instance Court Skopje 1 Skopje. 29.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.osskopje1.mk/Novosti.aspx?novost=438>.

¹² Law on Special Public Prosecutors' Office in Parliament. MIA. 30.12.2015. Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/en/Inside/RenderSingleNews/401/132968209>.

Complete material available at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/sessiondetails.nspx?sessionDetailsId=514ae52a-f803-4ef7-9096-92fb31766def&date=30.12.2015>.

¹³ The Parliament has adopted several modifications and amendments to legislation referring to various fields. MIA. 21.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/381/132953583>.

¹⁴ Complete materials available at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/materialdetails.nspx?materialId=d22bc200-1622-4dd7-9428-a6893925c922> и <http://www.sobranie.mk/materialdetails.nspx?materialId=e274859b-52a8-4434-b9ba-3f28685dca8f>.

¹⁵ Article 1 of the draft law on modifying and amending the Law on Salaries of Judges foresees for two new articles (Articles 7-a and 7-b) to be added. The provision from 7-a introduces the right to a bonus in cases when a judge works longer than the prescribed working hours and works during holidays, which according to provisions of the existing legislation has not been regulated as a labour right given pursuant the law; provision 7-b introduces the right to a bonus to a salary for a judge working in special circumstances including high risk and confidentiality.

Article 1 of the draft law on modifying and amending the Law on Salaries of Public Prosecutors prescribes that the salary coefficient for a public prosecutor managing a department within the public prosecutor's office is 0.2. The amendments to Article 6 of this law, even out the coefficient on increase of salary of a public prosecutor working at a department in the public prosecutor's office and the coefficient for increase of salary of a judge who presides over a department or a section in the Court. Analogue to Article 1 of the draft law on modifying and amending the Law on Salaries of Judges, Article 2 introduces two new articles (6-a and 6-b) prescribing same bonuses with reference to salaries of public prosecutors. Article 3 proposes a fee for being on call duty. According to the explanation, the primary goal is strengthening the independence of judges and the autonomy of public prosecutors.

then submitted a modified draft-law prescribing that the amount and the method of defining the bonuses shall be regulated by an act from a public prosecutor who is the head of a public prosecutor's office. Analogue to this, this type of power is also foreseen for the public prosecutor who manages the Public Prosecutor's Office for Pursuing Organised Crime and Corruption.

Amendments have been also proposed regarding the Law on the **Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors**, in the section on criteria for enrolment into inception training.¹⁶ It has been planned for expert associates who have passed the bar exam with an average mark of over 7.00, and have been working in the judiciary or the public prosecutor's office at least 5 years, to be enrolled for inception training at the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, but only as candidates for public prosecutors.¹⁷

All proposed laws were adopted on Parliamentary session held on 30 December.¹⁸

Basic Public Prosecution Office Skopje, processing a case on alleged counterfeiting personal identity documents, announced the discovery of a secret workshop where documents were counterfeited, and the arrest of three individuals, but there were indications for involvement of other persons and for other criminal acts committed.¹⁹

After the initial check on 22 personal identity cards which are found to be illegally issued²⁰, **Minister of Interior, Oliver Spasovski**, stated that during the investigation another 424 cases of unlawful issuance of identity cards to persons who appear as voters in the voters list.²¹

The public has been fed with different information and interpretations by the parties VMRO-DPMNE²² and SDSM²³ on the involvement of the 'other party' in this affair, creating confusion and room for speculations. At a session held on 30 December, the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia accepted the Draft-decision to form an inquiry commission on "Factory of forging identity cards, passports and other documents" submitted by a group of MPs from VMRO-DPMNE, DUI and DPA.²⁴

The Judiciary Council of the Republic of Macedonia, on a session held on December 24, passed a decision for appointing a president of the First Instance Court Struga and 34 lay judges at the First Instance Court Skopje 1 Skopje. Being the only candidate from the ranks of retired university professors, Professor Simeon Gelevski was appointed a member of the Council on determining facts and initiating a procedure to determine responsibility of a judge.²⁵ The composition of this body has not yet been complete with a member from the ranks of professors from communities which are not a majority, since none of the applicants for candidates met the requirements. Sasho Pocevski, from the ranks of retired lawyers, was appointed a president at a consultative session of this body.²⁶

On December 21, the **European Commission for Democracy through Law (the Venice Commission)** announced its opinion on legislation referring to disciplinary responsibility and evaluation of judges, more specifically

¹⁶ Complete materials available at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/materialdetails.nsp?materialId=7741c21f-b641-46b1-bde6-6e2f659f6c78>.

¹⁷ According to the explanation, these amendments were driven from the need for strengthening the independence and the autonomy of the public prosecutor's office, as well as for increasing professional, expert and high quality pursuit of a public prosecutor's duty, leading to overcoming the problem of the pressing need for filling vacant job positions in public prosecutors offices allowing for further successful implementation of the Law on Criminal Procedure.

¹⁸ Parliament adopts changes in laws covering judges and prosecutors. MIA. 30.12.2015. Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/en/Inside/RenderSingleNews/401/132968249>.

¹⁹ A secret workshop discovered for counterfeiting personal identity documents. Website of PPORM. 19.12.2015 Available at: <http://jorm.gov.mk/?cat=4>.

²⁰ Press conference of Minister Spasovski: Persons without residence were issued personal IDs and were on the Voters List. Website of Mol. 23.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mvr.gov.mk/vest/1143>.

²¹ Illegal identity cards of Pustec residents with addresses on building owned by the Republic of Macedonia. Website of Mol. 30.12.2015 Mr. Available on: <http://www.mvr.gov.mk/vest/1186>.

²² Zaev caught again in crime up to his chin. Website of VMRO-DPMNE. 22.12.2015 Available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/?p=28596>. VMRO-DPMNE parliamentary group proposes an inquiry commission to be established for the ID factory of SDSM. Website of VMRO-DPMNE. 28.12.2015 Available at: <http://vmro-dpmne.org.mk/?p=28631>.

²³ It's late for Gruevski, no escape from responsibility for crime. Website of SDSM. 22.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mId=55&agId=2&articleId=13236>.

Zaev: Gruevski is directing again, the mafia is in the Government. Website of SDSM. Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mId=55&agId=6&articleId=13231>.

Gruevski and Jankuloska in the scandal of issuing and printing personal identity cards. Website of SDSM. 23.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mId=55&agId=2&articleId=13251>.

²⁴ Parliament forms Inquiry Committee to investigate the forgery scandal. MIA. 30.12.2015. Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/en/Inside/RenderSingleNews/382/132968564>.

²⁵ On grounds of summarized voting results, the Commission established within the framework of the Judicial Council of RM determined that 502 out of 573 judges registered in the Judicial Election Register voted at the elections held. Out of the total number of judges who voted, the candidate Simeon Gelevski received 435 votes, out of which 67 were invalid. Announcement. Website of JCRM. 29.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.ssrn.mk/Novosti.aspx?novost=379>.

²⁶ Monitoring activities of the Human Rights Institute.

regarding the 2015 proposed amendments referring to the Law on the Courts, the Law of the Judicial Council of RM, as well as the already adopted Law on a Council for Determining Facts and Initiating a Procedure to Determine the Responsibility of a Judge. The Commission considers problematic the situation with the initiative on amending the Constitution and with the fact that legislation and corresponding texts were passed and adopted by the ruling coalition while major opposition parties were absent from the Parliament. It has been noted that such important reforms in regular circumstances must receive the widest possible political support, otherwise there is a risk of the public to see them (reasonably or not) as an attempt of the ruling majority to set up newly established bodies to use for controlling the judiciary.²⁷

The Commission has noted that the established **Council for Determining Facts and Initiating a Procedure to Determine the Responsibility of a Judge** is a radical change compared to the previous institutional structure. According to Article 105 of the Constitution, the Judicial Council is the body that “decides about the disciplinary responsibility of judges”. The Venice Commission has stressed that it is not in a position to evaluate the constitutionality of this new body, since this was a task of the Macedonian Constitutional Court. Yet, the opinion given was not in favour of establishing a separate body for disciplinary responsibility, and so it has been proposed that functions of the Council for Determining Facts and Initiating a Procedure to Determine the Responsibility of a Judge should be returned to the Judicial Council, so that members of the Judiciary Council who would be involved in the initial stage of initiating a disciplinary procedure would be prevented from participation in deciding upon disciplinary responsibility.

In addition, it has been stated that a certain lack of coherency may be found in the constitutional reforms started in 2014 and legislation amendments from 2015. The Commission considers these reforms should be approached systematically, both at constitutional as well as at legislative level.²⁸

On December 10, the **European Court of Human Rights** passed a judgment in the case *Asllani v. RM*²⁹, finding that the Republic of Macedonia was responsible for violating Article 3 of the European Convention on Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms – prohibition of torture, inhumane or degrading treatment or punishment.

On December 23, the **Commission on European Affairs at the Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia**, held a public debate on *How to have European Judiciary?*, where representatives from the civil society were invited to participate, including members of Network 23.³⁰

After the consultative meeting, organized by the Ministry of Justice, on *Draft-Strategy on Reforms in the Judicial Sector*, the drafters asked the stakeholders to contribute to the final text of the proposal. Institute of Human Rights (IHR), an organization-member of the Network 23, prepared comments and remarks on the *Draft-strategy*, generally and individually on separate chapters.³¹

Interception of communications

The work of the **Wiretapping Scandal Inquiry Commission** remains blocked due to disagreements among its members. The only item on the agenda they agreed upon was to establish two working groups to visit institutions and companies who might have information about the wiretapping scandal.³² No information is available whether visits planned for the period 22-24 December were completed (one working group was to visit institutions and companies who are in possession of technical equipment that might be used for wiretapping, including the mobile operators; the other group was to visit courts and prosecutors' offices).

²⁷ Monitoring activities of the Human Rights Institute.

²⁸ OPINION ON THE LAWS ON THE DISCIPLINARY LIABILITY AND EVALUATION OF JUDGES OF “THE FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA” Adopted by the Venice Commission at its 105th Plenary Session (Venice, 18-19 December 2015), Strasbourg, 21 December 2015 Opinion No. 825 / 2015.

²⁹ The judgment is available at: [.](http://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#{)

³⁰ Public debate on *How to have European Judiciary?*. Website of the Parliament of RM. 23.12.2015 Available at: http://www.sobranie.mk/2014-002cea30-a5b8-435e-ad55-147ff64cbfa2-ns_article-javna-rasprava-na-tema-kako-do-evropsko-sudstvo.nspix.

³¹ Comments and remarks on the *Draft-Strategy on Reforms in the Judicial Sector 2016-2020* year, prepared by the Institute for Human Rights. Website of the IHR. 28.12.2015. Available on: <http://www.ihr.org.mk/mk/pocetna/242-2016-2020.html>.

³² Continuation of session no.4 of the Inquiry Commission dealing with the wiretapping scandal: establishing working groups to visit institutions related to the work of the Commission, according to the Work Plan of the Inquiry Commission dealing with the wiretapping scandal. Website of the Parliament of RM. 16.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sobranie.mk/sessiondetailsrabortni.nspix?sessionDetailsId=f375b1cc-4c34-4773-93ff-1b61338c4fa&date=16.12.2015>.

Working groups of the Wiretapping Inquiry Commission visit institutions and companies. MIA. 16.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/381/132946598#>.

The Commission on issues related to electing and appointing, proposed Ivan Ivanov, an MP from the ranks of VMRO-DPMNE, as a member of the Inquiry Commission dealing with the wiretapping scandal, to replace Silvana Boneva whose parliamentary mandate ceased following her becoming a member of the SEC.³³

The session planned for December 17 was to include the hearing of the former Finance Minister, Zoran Stavreski. The witness showed up, but the session was not held. The Inquiry Commission President, Petre Shilegov, decided to stop the session because of the request for Stavreski to testify behind closed doors, explaining that the session will be continued once the witnesses decide to speak publicly.³⁴ Shilegov at the later press conference released the questions intended for the witness.³⁵

Parliamentary commissions overseeing intelligence services³⁶ failed to hold a session within the reporting period.

Electoral reform

Following the adoption of a Rulebook on defining the method and the procedure for election of a Secretary General of SEC³⁷, on December 24 the Commission published a call for applications for this position.³⁸ Candidates for Secretary General should be, among other things, administrative servants in the category employed heads and must not be members of bodies in political parties. The SEC Secretary General would head the information department whose powers include maintenance of the Voters List. Fourteen candidates applied and the selection session was scheduled for December 30th.³⁹

Violeta Duma, a SEC member from SDSM, was dismissed on December 30, after spending only 12 days in this position, for she met the requirements for regular retirement age. A public call will be published for applications to fill her position as SEC member from SDSM.⁴⁰

SEC activities, primarily regarding maintain and updating the Voters List, should start following the appointment of a Secretary General and of a member from the ranks of SDSM, as well as hiring technical personnel and purchasing appropriate equipment. It remains unclear if this body should succeed to respond to challenges, taking into account its increased powers according to the Electoral Code.

Depoliticisation of the public administration

At the final conference on the occasion of closing the twinning project “Support of Civil Service and Public Administration Reform”, the **Minister of Information Society and Administration, Marta Arsovska Tomovska**, stressed that one of the goals of this project was to provide recommendations to design a register of the population that would generate precise information for all individuals living on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, as well for all who live outside of its borders. This register would be used as grounds both for efficient public service provision, as well as for drafting voters lists, census and demographical statistics, i.e. “if data is of high quality, the population register could replace the census”.⁴¹

Disagreements at the **Ministry of Information Society and Administration** continued. The additional Deputy Minister from SDSM, Aleksandar Kiracovski, stated that the transitional and final provisions of the Law on Administrative Servants fail to state that evaluation in the first year is a pilot project, i.e. it clearly prescribed that only procedures

³³ Ivanov replaces Boneva in the Wiretapping Inquiry Commission. MIA 16.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/381/132946681>.

³⁴ Stavreski came but was not heard by the Inquiry Commission. MIA. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/50/132949114>

³⁵ Shilegov: This is what Stavreski is afraid of to answer before the public. Website of SDSM. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mld=55&agld=6&articleId=13185>.

³⁶ The Oversight Commission for monitoring the work of the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate and the Intelligence Agency, as well as the Oversight Commission for monitoring the application of the special investigation measure of interception of communication by the Interior Ministry, the Financial Police, the Customs Administration and the Defence Ministry.

³⁷ The Rulebook on defining the method and the procedure for election of a Secretary General of the State Election Commission is available on the website of the SEC: <http://www.sec.mk/index.php?lang=mk>.

³⁸ Public call for election of Secretary General of the State Election Commission.

³⁹ Since this report is being published, there was no information whether the SEC General Secretary is elected.

⁴⁰ A new SEC member to be elected replacing Violeta Duma. MIA. 29.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/282/132966397#>.

⁴¹ The project was financed by the European Union through the Instrument for pre-accession assistance (IPA) in the duration of 12 months. Final conference on the occasion of closing the twinning project financed by EU. Website of MISA. 16.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mio.gov.mk/?q=node/4098>.

already initiated will be completed according to the old law on civil servants, and having in mind that the evaluation for 2015 began in September this year, 7 months following the new law and its application. Kiracovski kept his position that by introducing this type of legal solutions, the goal of the government is to put pressure and to intimidate members of the administration⁴², and announced that MPs from the ranks of the opposition will submit a draft-law on postponing the application of the evaluation system by 2017.⁴³ A reaction came again from the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, claiming that legal solutions have been adopted in accordance with the merit system, for the purpose of establishing an efficient system of public service and improving the services.⁴⁴

Minister of interior, Oliver Spasovski, on December 30th announced that due to serious shortcomings, changed five Heads of ministry departments in several cities are changed, as well as the Head of the SVR Skopje. The reason is his failure to act in cases of attacks on journalists and the police intrusion on UKIM during the blockade of the Rectorate by the representatives of the Students Plenum and youth organization "Dawn".⁴⁵

Media

Negotiations for media reforms are frozen. At a meeting held on December 17, the facilitator Vanhoutte asked the political parties to submit specific proposals for reforms in the media sector, primarily from the aspect of their influence over upcoming elections.⁴⁶

Media organisations remained loud in their demands to be included in the negotiations and for changing the treatment of reporter teams covering the process. **The Independent Journalists' Union of Macedonia (SNNM)** reacted to the continuous and repeated ignoring treatment journalists have been receiving.⁴⁷ Representatives of this Union have stressed that this treatment by politics only demonstrates the degree it appreciates its citizens and their right to be informed, since it was not just a treatment received by journalists and the media, but also by the public in general. Therefore, SNNM has demanded from all politicians and institutions to provide elementary conditions for journalist teams to be able to work, reminding all that they will strongly raise their voice before the national and international public against this treatment of media workers.

The President of the Journalists' Association of Macedonia (ZNM), Naser Selmani, has stated that ruling parties were to blame for the blocked negotiations, stressing that the media became an exceptionally significant instrument they rule with; therefore without media depoliticisation there would be no conditions for fair election. He also stressed that the draft-law proposed by the facilitator Vanhoutte, includes proposals from all stakeholders; however, VMRO-DPMNE has been putting pressure on Vanhoutte to give up his main and key points. According to Selmani, strong international pressure is essential for systemic changes in the media sector.⁴⁸

⁴² Press conferences; Kiracovski: Gruevski is retreating. Website of SDSM. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.sdsm.org.mk/default.aspx?mId=55&agId=6&articleId=13184>.

⁴³ Kiracovski is asking for postponement of the evaluation system for the administration. MIA. 29.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mia.mk/mk/Inside/RenderSingleNews/381/132966659#>.

⁴⁴ Reaction of the MISA. Website of MISA. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.mio.gov.mk/?q=node/4110>.

⁴⁵ Changed Head of SVR Skopje: The reason is intrusion on UKIM and attacks on journalists. Nova TV. 30.12.2015. Available at: <http://novatv.mk/index.php?navig=8&cat=2&vest=26460>.

⁴⁶ Vanhoutte asked for specific media proposals from the parties. Telma. 17.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.telma.com.mk/vesti/vanhaute-pobara-konkretni-predlozi-od-partiite-za-mediumskata-sfera>.

⁴⁷ Reaction to the treatment of reporters teams covering the negotiations. Website of SNNM. 16.12.2015 Available at: <http://ssnm.org.mk/reaktsija-na-tretmanot-na-novinarskite-ekipi-shto-gi-sledat-pregovorite/>.

⁴⁸ Selmani – The government wants to have elections with deceived citizens. Radio Free Europe. 27.12.2015 Available at: <http://www.makdenes.org/content/article/27448845.html>.