

Citizens' deliberate: why and how in the EU?

Deliberative Polling® on the opportunities and challenges of Macedonia's EU accession

What is Deliberative Polling®?

Deliberative Polling is a unique form of political consultation that combines techniques of public opinion research and public deliberation to reveal what public opinion would be on a particular issue if citizens were given a chance to become more informed. The Deliberative Poll seeks to account for the preferences and opinions of citizens both before and after they have had an opportunity to arrive at considered judgements based on balanced information and discussions with fellow citizens.

Representative sample

Before

Before the deliberative event, a baseline survey was conducted with a nationally representative sample of 1200 citizens between November 1 and November 7, 2017. The sample included 67.4% Macedonians and 24.0% Albanians.

After

After the two day deliberative event on November 18/19, 2017, 150 participants were surveyed upon departure. The participants were invited to attend this two-day event after completing the baseline survey. The participants included 78.9% Macedonians and 10.6% Albanians.

The event

The two day event was held at hotel Continental Skopje. 150 citizens deliberated in 11 moderated small groups. They discussed the opportunities and challenges of Macedonia's EU accession in two areas: democracy and economy. The small groups also prepared and posed questions to panels during two moderated plenary sessions consisting of politicians and experts in the field. The plenary sessions were Q&A only, no speeches.

Results

The results are from the preference changes among those who participated in the before (baseline) and after deliberation surveys. The results show only the **extreme values for or against** a question.

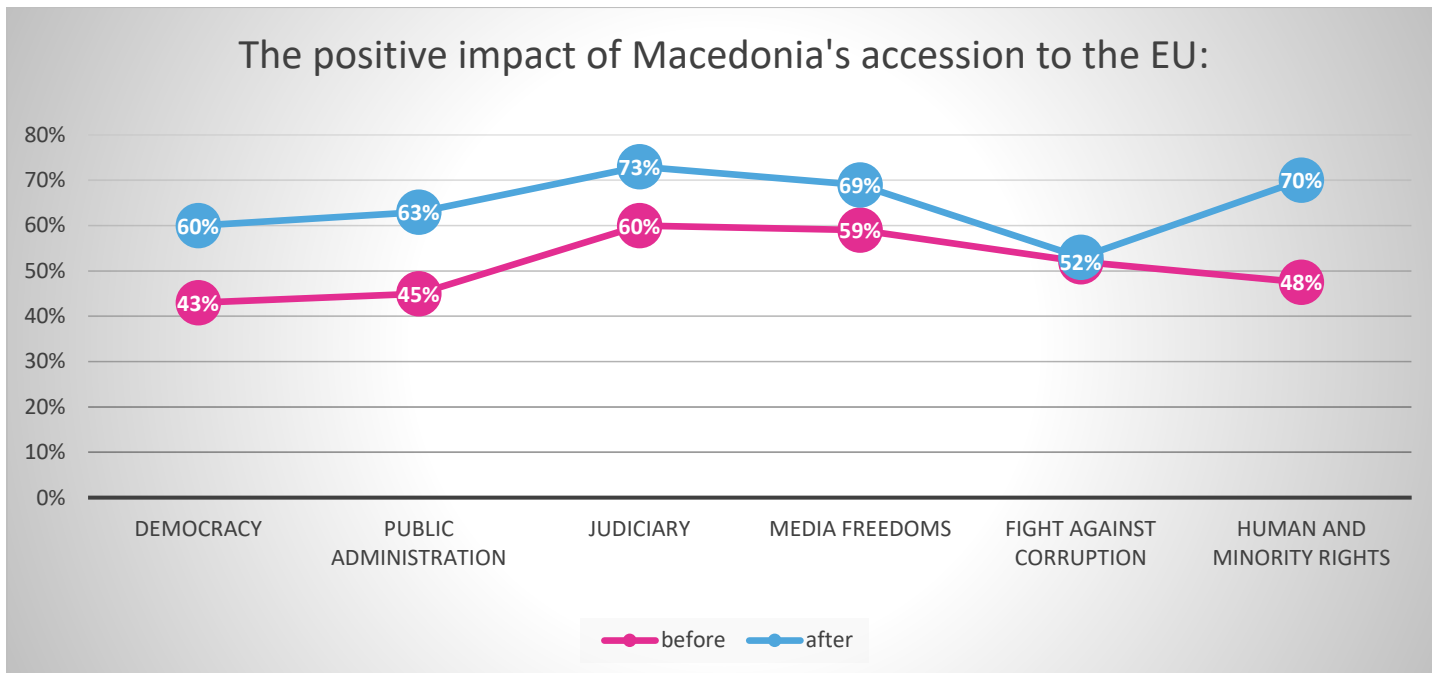
1. EU perceptions and views towards necessary reforms in the country

Question	Before	After	Comment
How strongly do you oppose or support the integration of Macedonia to the EU?	52.2% fully support the country integration in the EU	63.7% fully support the country integration in the EU	11.5% increased support after the debate
How much of the democratic requirements for EU accession do you think Macedonia fulfilled since 1991?	11.5% think Macedonia completely fulfilled the EU democratic requirement	5.3% think Macedonia completely fulfilled the EU democratic requirement	6.2% decreased support after the debate
What kind of reforms do you support? Led by the national government or by the civil society?	27.2% support national government led reforms 13.4% support civil society led reforms	19.4% support national government led reforms 20.6% support civil society led reforms	The citizens desire almost equal participation of the government and civil society in the reform process
In which areas are the reforms most urgent?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 68% - rule of law • 78% - judicial reform • 63.7% - media reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 75.3% - rule of law • 85.5% - judicial reform • 76.2% - media reform 	Over 70% find the rule of law, judicial and media reforms urgent

2. How much would Macedonia's EU accession help in the following scenarios

2.1. Democracy

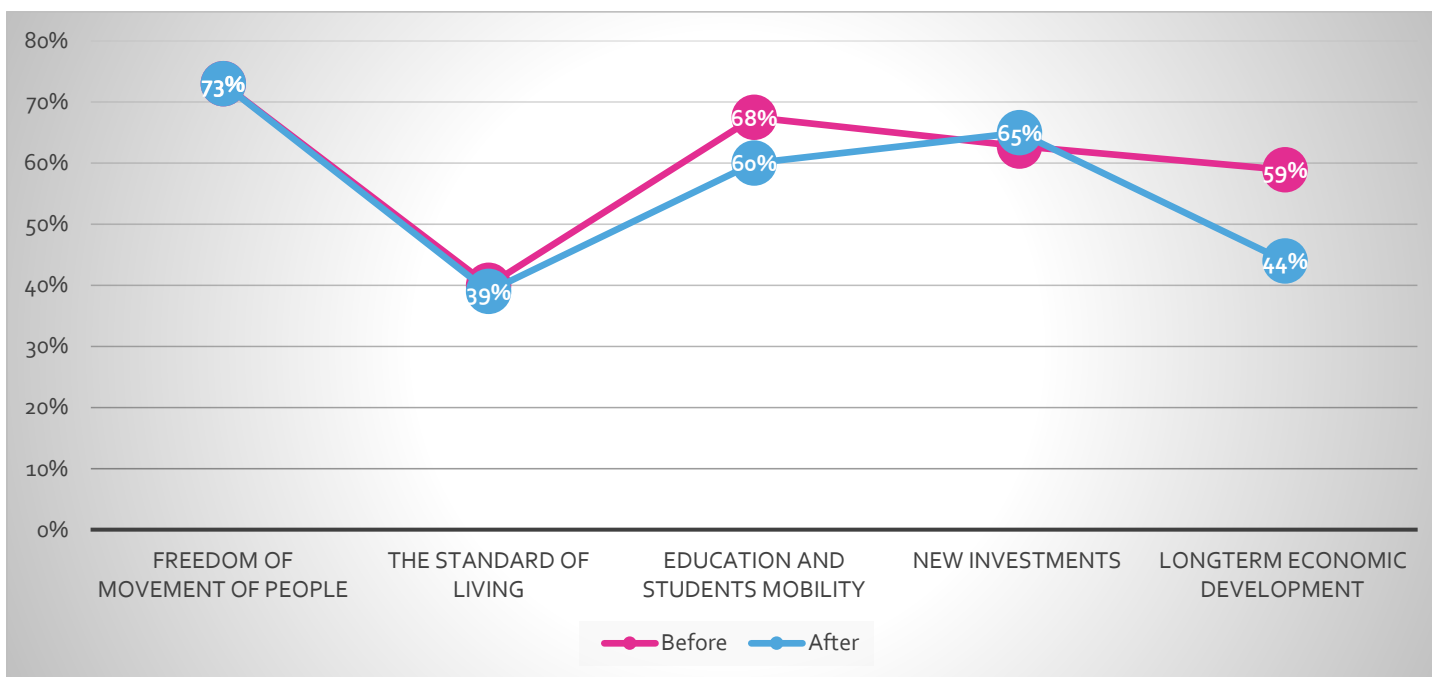
If Macedonia joins the EU, the following areas related to the democracy will be **greatly improved**:



A large number of citizens deems the EU membership essential for substantial democratization of the country

2.2 Economy

If Macedonia joins the EU, the following areas related to the economy will be **greatly improved**:



44% of the citizens deem the EU membership will improve the long-term economic development of the country. 39% find the EU membership very important for the improvement of the standard of living.

3. Macedonia's EU membership and the name dispute

Answer	Before	After
Strongly disagree with the EU integration of the country due to fear from the national identity change	30%	19,6%
Do not support the EU integration due to insisting on the name change	29,8%	28,8%
Deem the solution of the name issue essential for the EU integration	35%	46%
Completely disagree that Macedonia should change the constitutional name to become an EU member	31.4%	32.9%
Strongly support the constitutional name change if the name Macedonians and the Macedonian language are guaranteed	28.1%	40,9%

The name and identity issues strongly affect citizens' perceptions for the country EU membership. 19,6% strongly disagree due to the fear of national identity change. Yet, if the name Macedonians and the Macedonian language are guaranteed, 41% of the citizens would accept change of the constitutional name.

Conclusions

The **change in citizens' perceptions is evident** following the national EU debate. A large part of them finds the country EU membership very important, especially in the realms of democratic and economic reforms. On the other hand, a very small number of citizens find that Macedonia completely fulfills the democratic criteria for EU membership. A majority of them support urgent reforms in rule of law, judiciary, public administration, and media. Evident are also positive expectations from the economic reforms as well as country's joining the EU economic area.

The name is a bitter question seriously affecting the EU perceptions. Still a significant percentage of citizens would accept a constitutional name change if the name Macedonians and the Macedonian language are guaranteed.

Citizens' inclusion in the EU integration debates **seriously affects their critical perception** of the process. The **effect is an enlarged support** for the country EU membership. Deliberative events of this kind enlarge the public's readiness for facing the opportunities and challenges of Macedonia's EU accession. It is indisputable that European integration has an impact on many spheres of public policy and on the lives of citizens - hence the need for inclusive and continuous democratic debate with all stakeholders in this process.