JANUARY, 2019

ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2018 EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE - SKOPJE

EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE - SKOPJE Antonie Grubisic 2/2, 1000 Skopje

CONTENTS

L.		External context	2
2.		Programme activities	2
	a.	Accession monitoring and advocacy	2
		WeBER - Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform	2
		Benchmarking for EU reform - how effective? BENCHER January 2017- march 2018	3
		Effects of SAP instruments on WB6 European Integrations and Regional Cooperation	3
		National Democratic Debate - Fostering Successful Democratic Transition in Macedonia	2
	b.	Democracy and rule of law	2
		Partnership Justitia: Regaining Citizens' Trust"	2
		Network 23 +	5
		Network 23 - Networking for Impact (NETWIT 23)	e
		Application of RIA to the Law on courts	6
		Civic Debate on NATO	7
		Joint Action for Urgent Reforms in the Judiciary	7
		Fostering sustainable reintegration of Roma returnees in Macedonia	8
		Supporting the effective reintegration of Roma returnees in the Western Balkans	8
		"FOR JUSTICE" - joint action for monitoring the judicial reforms and advocacy for their implementation	9
		EPI - selected as a research partner of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights	9
	c.	EU acquis and sectorial policies	9
		Engaging the private sector in entrepreneurship education	9
		(CIPE; July 2018 – July 2019)	10
3.		Communication & advocacy	10
	a.	Media presence	10
	b.	Advocacy activities	11
	_	Participation at conferences & other important events	13

1. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

Many interwoven actions on the internal and international landscape took place in 2018. Firstly, it was marked by historic Prespa Agreement with Greece, a referendum on the name change and initiation of Constitutional changes followed by attempts of the SDMS-DUI coalition government to negotiate with VMRO to reach the required votes. Through this the Government managed to bring NATO closer to Macedonia. On another note, the resolution of bilateral disputes brought merely a recommendation for a date for opening of accession negations, but under the lenses of EC remained the numerous judicial cases on accountability for the 27 of April 2017 event that culminated with the escape of the former prime minister Gruevski to Hungary and acquired asylum, the implementation of URP which showed no major shifts towards raising quality of justice while at the same time attempts to build one society for all remained brittle after the adoption of the law on languages. The judiciary, (anti)corruption, PAR, and intelligence service remained on the reform agenda through Plan18 enabling swifter preparation for the launching of the technical part of the long awaited screening by the EU. The preparedness of the administration for this effort is strongest on the time-element (sitting on the EU bench for many years) however not necessarily acquiring the capacity over the years.

With all focus, and rightfully after 27 years of blockage by Greece, on the Prespa agreement, the Government should be well prepared for its implementation and obligations arising from it. While doing so it's important not to allow the rest of the reforms to be overshadowed thus shying away from "shallow reforming" we have been criticized in the past.

2. PROGRAMME ACTIVITIES

The work of EPI is clustered in the following program areas: A: Accession monitoring and advocacy B. Democracy and rule of law and C. EU acquis and sectorial policies

A. ACCESSION MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

WEBER - WESTERN BALKANS ENABLING PROJECT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY MONITORING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM

(European Union and co-financed by the Kingdom of the Netherlands; December 2015- December 2018)

In December 2018 the three-year project Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform the relevance was finalized. The overall goal of WeBER was to increase participation and capacity of civil society organizations and media in the Western Balkans to advocate for and influence the design and implementation of public administration reform (PAR).

During the 2018 the focus was on the monitoring of six SIGMA principles (selected indicators) through combination of desk work, focus groups with CSO representatives and former public administration candidates, as well as numerous interviews with institution representatives, CSO representatives and experts. In order to ensure the objectivity of the findings, three surveys were conducted with a sample of 1039 citizens; 294 civil servants and 74

CSO representatives. In parallel with the monitoring, EPI has engaged with numerous stakeholders to present the ongoing issues and findings. Moreover, throughout the whole monitoring, the findings were communicated with representatives of the adequate ministries for fact checking to ensure the real picture of the state of affairs is captured.

The monitoring resulted in a <u>regional monitoring publication</u> where the scores, best and worst practices of the countries across the different indicators can be found. More specifically, the national findings are also captured in a <u>national publication</u> and a <u>thematic policy brief</u>. The findings were firstly presented in front of the national working groups (composed of CSO representatives and institution representatives) established with the project, whilst the regional monitoring publication was presented in Belgrade where the first two-day regional Public administration reform conference was held. In December 2018, the national PAR monitor was also presented in front of a wide national audience and a diverse panel which included the Minister for Information and State Administration.

Apart from the monitoring, EPI designed of the grant scheme for re-granting for 30 organizations throughout the region (all six Western Balkan Countries) which resulted in 33 grants in all WB countries. The grants implementation has successfully finished with all of the grantees delivering insightful publications.

BENCHMARKING FOR EU REFORM - HOW EFFECTIVE? BENCHER JANUARY 2017- MARCH 2018

(funded by EFB and co-financed by OSF)

The aim of "Benchmarking for EU reform - how effective? BENCHER" was to explore the effectiveness of the EU benchmarking mechanism for the Western Balkans and contribute to improving the benchmarking mechanism as an impetus for EU related reforms in the Western Balkan countries.

The project also contributed to sharing and transfer of knowledge and experience between the countries and improvement of regional cooperation of think tanks working on EU integration, taking into account that partners from all the countries of the region participated in the Project. The Project resulted on assessment of effectiveness of the benchmarking mechanism and analysis of the EC Reports (regional and 6 national studies, for Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Macedonia) followed by country events, regional event and country meetings with national institutions in charge of the EU coordination process. In addition advocacy meetings with representatives of selected EU Institutions, EU Member States and representatives of EU delegations in each country took place.

EFFECTS OF SAP INSTRUMENTS ON WB6 EUROPEAN INTEGRATIONS AND REGIONAL COOPERATION

(Foundation Open Society Institute and The Federal Republic of Germany September 2017 – December 2018)

The overall goal of the project was to contribute to the European integration perspectives of the WB and to foster instruments for more effective enlargement of the EU as well as internal democratization and economic development of the WB. In addition, to contribute to better and fact based discussion in public discourse on effects of European integration in WB through providing in depth analyses of effect of SAA in, Serbia, Albania and Macedonia and of CEFTA in all member states based on sound, facts based research. Additional objectives include fostering regional cooperation and strengthening effectiveness of

the "Berlin process". Moreover, <u>recommendations</u> are provided to the EU and to the WB for improvement of the EU enlargement tools such as CEFTA and SAA.

NATIONAL DEMOCRATIC DEBATE - FOSTERING SUCCESSFUL DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION IN MACEDONIA

NED (National Endowement for Democracy; October 2018 – September 2019)

The project aims to increase the involvement of the general public with national stakeholders in a national democratic debate that will open a pan-national dialogue on the needed mechanisms for an effective democratic transition. At the same time, it will make an attempt to increase the involvement of all stakeholders in the country's democratization process through a representative sample in an innovative public debate through deliberative polling on the future of the country; to provide support on determining citizens' perceptions and opinions on national priorities and their potential for change through informed deliberation and to raise awareness of all stakeholders in the process for the importance of public, inclusive and objective discussion on the state and direction of democracy in the country.

The activities of the project, in order to reach its specific objectives, consist of conducting a desk analysis covering existing research on public opinion of the state of democracy in Macedonia; to develop a concept of deliberative poll with the support of the Center for deliberative democracy at Stanford University; to prepare a questionnaire for an initial, national poll; to prepare briefing materials; to press brief in the media and finally to organize a deliberative polling event.

For the period of September 2018 to December 2018 the following activities were implemented: a draft desk analysis for the state of democracy in Macedonia was completed, which will serve as a basis for development of the questionnaire with the polling agency and to identify the key issues for the debate. Next, the agency for conducting the national survey was chosen. The agency Rating DOO was chosen to conduct the national survey. Finally, discussion meetings with several experts were held in order to prepare a questionnaire and informative materials for the deliberative polling event. The National Democratic Debate is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy.

B. DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

PARTNERSHIP JUSTITIA: REGAINING CITIZENS' TRUST"

(Central Financing and Contracting Department Ministry of Finance - Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA II) 2014, Duration: 21.12.2018 – 20.06.2021)

The overall objective Is to contribute to regaining citizens' trust in the justice sector by meaningful civil society involvement in substantive reforms. This will be achieved through providing structured monitoring and comprehensive input to the implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy by civil society; enhancing the capacities of CSOs and justice sector stakeholders for participation in judicial reform processes by exchange of know-

how, including transfer of EU best practices and promoting meaningful dialogue between CSOs, justice sector stakeholders and citizens on justice sector reforms through public policy advocacy.

National and local CSOs from existing networks/platforms and the IPA 2 mechanism for civil society organizations on central and local level dealing with the judiciary are key target groups and shall provide resources for data collection as well as deliberation. Also, grass-root and watch-dog CSOs operating at local level will be engaged on judicial performance and perceptions on local level. The key justice sector institutions, i.e. the Ministry of Justice, the courts and public prosecution networks, the Academy for judges and public prosecutors and the Council on monitoring of the Strategy on the reform of the justice sector will be also involved in the action. For parts of the proposed research and monitoring, law students from the Law faculties in the country will be engaged. The action has been designed based on consultations with the Ministry of Justice, professional associations of judges, public prosecutors and court clerks, as well as the National Council on monitoring of the reform of the judiciary. Their need for an independent, unbiased and CSOs based monitoring and support in implementation of reforms is at the core of this project.

NETWORK 23 +

(EU Delegation, Civil society Facility, January 2016- June 2018)

This Action has further supported the expansion and capacity growth of the Network 23, as a key network of CSOs active in the areas of judiciary, anti-corruption and fundamental rights in the Republic of Macedonia. Through the successfully delivered Project results, the Network provided a structured input in embedding of rule of law principles in the Republic of Macedonia.

Network 23 has enhanced its cooperation with the AJRM. Judges – as representatives of their Association or individually have increasingly participated and contributed to the activities and impact of the Network 23+. The judges increasingly recognise the Network as a partner for reform. The Network 23 also has enhanced cooperation with the AJPP. The Network was asked and provided input for the program of trainings of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors.

The cooperation with the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia increased during 2018. Network 23 participated in public debates - meeting of the Committee on Political System and Inter – Ethnic Relations on the amendments of the Law on Courts, meetings of the Committee on European Issues on the Urgent Reform Priorities and Foreign Policy Committee).

The second Shadow Report on Chapter 23 for the period May 2016 – January 2018 was published in March 2018 (https://bit.ly/2wEXkya (MKD); https://bit.ly/2wEXkya (MKD); https://bit.ly/2wLQDeG (ALB); https://bit.ly/2MM3cjX (ENG) and the Network contributed to participatory policy making also through the two expert workshops and the two policy dialogues held in 2018.

The impact of this project was re-confirmed through the Conference "Chapter 23: Pandora's Box or a key for good governance" that was organised on 5th of June 2018. The final conference brought together all parties involved in the project. High representatives from the Government, ministries, Parliament, JCRM, judicial community, prosecutors, attorneys, independent bodies and CSOs participated on the conference. The Prime Minister of the Republic of Macedonia, the Deputy Prime Minister in charge of European Affairs, the Minister of Justice and the Mayor of Centar municipality gave introductory speeches. The Prime Minister Mr. Zoran Zaev emphasised the importance of the Network 23 in view of the EU accession negotiation process. The grantees presented the key findings of their policy products, also the main findings of the Shadow Report were presented. Representatives from

Associates also attended the conference. The interest of the media was high - 70 media articles were delivered. Policy brief with policy options of the discussion was produced and disseminated to all relevant stakeholders and through social media.

NETWORK 23 - NETWORKING FOR IMPACT (NETWIT 23)

<u>Funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Belgrade and the Balkan Trust for Democracy</u>, <u>duration: May 2017 – May 2018</u>

The project is envisaged partly as co-financing to the current EU funded project "Network 23+" and partly as its follow-up, thus multiplying the effects of previous interventions. It supports the sustainability to the Network 23 as an already recognised leading CSO platform in this area, both by the public and by stakeholders.

The Action contributed to the adaptation of the already networked civil society in Macedonia to the changed political environment allowing for dialogue with the institutions within a renewed and evolving europeanisation agenda.

As some co-financed activities, a <u>Shadow report on Chapter 23</u> was prepared and widely disseminated, two policy dialogues were held and Conference "Chapter 23: Pandora's Box or a key for good governance" was organised on 5th of June 2018 (as mentioned above – Network 23+ project). Meetings with stakeholders were continuously held in 2018.

On December 2018, a workshop for including CSOs in accession negotiations with the EU was held in the Radika Hotel in Mavrovo. The workshop was focused on Chapter 23 and aimed to introduce to the members of Network 23 the process of EU accession negotiations and raise the capacities of civic organizations for engagement in the negotiation process, as well as in the discussion on the selection of an appropriate model of consultations / involvement of civil society organizations in the accession negotiations.

APPLICATION OF RIA TO THE LAW ON COURTS

Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" and the Center for Economic Analysis within the project "Regulatory Impact Assessment in the Shadow: Fostering evidence-based policy making in Macedonia" (Delegation of the European Union) duration January 2018 – December 2018).

The aim of this project is to enhance the application of the regulatory impact assessment (RIA) of the laws arising from the judiciary reform in Macedonia - Recognize the usefulness of the RIA tool in the decision-making process and to improve the quality of the decision-making process based on evidence and research.

Within this project the analysis <u>"Regulatory impact assessment (RIA) on the law on courts" was produced</u>. For preparation of this analysis quantitative and qualitative methods of research were used, as well as primary and secondary data. European Commission Country Reports from 2009 until 2018, Reports of the Reinhard Priebe expert group and Urgent Reform Priorities, Recommendations of the Venice Commission, GRECO's recommendations for the Republic of Macedonia and the soft measures of the Council of Europe were reviewed. Field research (four focus groups and seven interviews) was conducted. The participants in the field research were legal practitioners including judges, presidents of the courts, representatives of the Ministry of Justice, court administration representatives and experts, CSOs representatives. The focus groups were conducted in each appellate area. The draft analysis was sent to the Ministry of Justice for the preparation of the amendments of the Law on courts. The recommendations and conclusions from the analysis are integral part of the proposed amendments to the Law on courts that are in Parliamentary procedure during the preparation of this report.

The <u>final conference was held on 11 December 2018 in Public Room – Skopje</u>. The Analysis "Regulatory impact assessment on the Law on Courts" was presented and discussed during the conference. Speaking at the event were the EPI Director, Dr. Simonida Kacarska, Minister of Justice, prof. Dr. Renata Deskoska, President of the Association of Judges and Judge in the Supreme Court of the Republic of Macedonia, Dr. Xhemali Saiti and Ivana Najdoska, Programme Director at the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" - Skopje (IDSCS). The findings from the working version of the Analysis were presented by EPI's researcher, Iva Conevska. This event was attended by a high judiciary experts and practitioners including judges, the Director of the AJPP and members of the Judicial Council.

CIVIC DEBATE ON NATO

(Ministry of Defence of the Republic of Macedonia, August 2018 – December 2018)

The project was motivated as a response to the lack of a evidence based public debate based of the country's integration process in the North Atlantic Alliance. Namely, despite the fact that Macedonia strives for NATO membership, there is a real need to discuss the benefits and challenges of the process, which are not yet known to the citizens. In a vacuum of quality debate that would involve the public, experts and institutions relevant to this topic, the public is often subject to manipulation with various fake information. The project "Civic Debate on NATO" was funded by the Ministry of Defence with an aim to contribute to the country's process related to the NATO accession. For that purpose, EPI through this project aimed to provide a bridge exchange of information between the public and the institutions relevant for NATO-related integration processes, including the expert public. Therefore, the activities for achieving this included conducting researches on the potential benefits of NATO's membership and presenting the results to a final conference. Having in mind this, EPI defined the criteria and opened a call for researchers that will provide their expertise on the pros or cons on NATO's membership. A total of 21 applications were received and the EPI's Evaluation Committee successfully chose 2 external researchers that were relevant for their area of expertise. As such, 2 analyses were envisaged, one in the area of security and defence and one in the area of the potential economic benefits of NATO membership. EPI's researcher closely oversaw the activities of the chosen external researchers and contributed to their improvement. After the pre-final versions were submitted, they were subject to an anonymous review which greatly contributed to improving their quality. The results were presented at a final conference organised by EPI. Guest speakers of this event were the Minister of Defence, experts per each area: economy and security/defence and the researchers themselves. The event gathered 32 guests from the Embassies, NATO Liaison Office, the Assembly, the Government, relevant ministries and representatives from national and international NGOs. The event was reported by 14 different media entities which also included the key findings of the research documents. Overall, the project generated a solid impact through the debates based on facts and the transfer of regional experiences which resulted in increased public's knowledge on the Alliance and its benefits. At the same time the project insured increased visibility of the Ministry of Defence and the Army as key elements in ensuring the integrity and inviolability of borders and collective security.

JOINT ACTION FOR URGENT REFORMS IN THE JUDICIARY

FOOM (July 2017 - June 2018)

The overall goal of the project was to enhance the transparency, accountability and professionalism of the judicial bodies. The project was designed to provide structured monitoring of the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities in the area of judiciary. EPI monitored two priorities related to the training of judges and prosecutors and the publication of court rulings. During 2018 two monitoring briefs (Second monitoring report, third monitoring report) for the status of the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities in the area of judiciary were prepared

and presented on a press conferences. The <u>final analysis</u> covers the whole monitoring period and it was prepared in May 2018 and presented on the final conference that was held on 6th June 2018.

FOSTERING SUSTAINABLE REINTEGRATION OF ROMA RETURNEES IN MACEDONIA

RIO (January 2017 - April 2018)

The project mapped the existing services and measures for reintegration on local and central level combining the existing Government programs in the most critical areas, health protection, housing, employment, social protection and education and the Program for support for reintegration of returnees. For better implementation of the project, a call for Local Associates was designed and published where five associates in the proposed municipalities, Shuto Orizari, Tetovo, Bitola, Kumanovo and Delcevo were selected in order to serve as a link between the returnees and local institutions. The associates have mapped over 50 families in the five municipalities and have selected 5 persons from the most vulnerable families from each municipality. The selected persons have started attending vocational trainings tailored according to their needs. A study of reintegration of Roma returnees in Macedonia has been completed on the basis of extensive interviewing and focus groups. The team of experts additionally delivered a Manual for Returnees on how to exercise their rights in the area of acquiring personal documents, social protection, education employment, housing and healthcare. The Manual attracted great attention having reached 15.740 people on social media and was shared among Roma individuals working in the public institutions and NGOs. Drafts of both documents were discussed at a round table held on 10th of November in front of a broad audience of stakeholders, among them the Minister without Portfolio for the implementation of the National Strategy for the improvement of the situation of Roma, the Deputy Ombudsman, representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, the Director of the Directorate for Development and Promotion of Education of the languages of the minorities, representatives from local employment agencies, representatives from schools and representatives from Roma civic organizations and from the Roma Information Centres (RIC). Additionally, the Roma fellow developed policy proposal on registration of the returnees. The products developed within the project are published and electronically disseminated to all the involved stakeholders and afterwards, advocacy meetings are planned to take place within the first month of 2018. On the 04.04.2018 EPI organized the final event/conference of the project. With the issue on Migration of the Roma after the visa liberalization placed on the agenda as a general topic, 32 guests from different institutions (Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and NGOs were registered as participants. The event included speakers such as representatives from the Edge Hill University, Liverpool, European Roma Rights Centre, Macedonian Young Lawyers Association, experts on reintegration and also, EPI's fellow presented his research on the challenges of the Roma in the visa-free regime.

Supporting the effective reintegration of Roma returnees in the Western Balkans

World Bank (February 2018 – May 2018)

This consultancy service funded by the World Bank was within their Programme "Supporting the Effective Reintegration of Roma Returnees in the Western Balkans". This short but effective service had an aim to conduct vulnerability mapping of returnees in order to understand better the reintegration process-related vulnerabilities and how these are tied to or are exacerbated by the returnees' positioning along the following suspect axes of (in)equality: sex, ethnicity, age, level of formal education, and place of current residence. The qualitative research was conducted in February and April 2018 as part of a larger conducted research following a data collection methodology devised by the World Bank. EPI conducted 9 interviews with targeted stakeholders (representatives of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Roma Ministry without Portfolio and national and international NGOs), 4 focus groups and 3 interviews were conducted with returnees from Roma and Albanian

ethnicity who live in the cities Tetovo, Prilep, Kumanovo and the villages Tearce, Vaksince and Lipkovo. In addition, validation workshops were organized in the World Bank office in Skopje where representatives of Roma NGOs and representatives of relevant institutions were invited. These workshops served as a basis to discuss the results and findings of the research, to gather recommendations for future plans and activities and to finalize the Vulnerability Mapping Report. Within the time-period of the project, EPI's representatives were invited by the Minister of Labor and Social Policy to discuss the recommendations and results of the researches related to returnees. After the meeting, the Minister provided EPI with an **official letter of support** to establish a mechanism/body for coordination/communication between the returnees' relevant representatives of the institutions such as Ministry of Interior, Health and Labor and Social Policy.

"FOR JUSTICE" - JOINT ACTION FOR MONITORING THE JUDICIAL REFORMS AND ADVOCACY FOR THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

FOOM (July 2018 - June 2019)

The overall goal of the project is to increase the influence of civil society organizations on the process of implementation of the Strategy for reform of the judicial sector (2017-2022) and strengthening the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Within this project EPI monitored the measures in the Strategy related with the Academy of judges and public prosecutors and the Law on courts which resulted in publishing of monitoring briefs/reports.

EPI - SELECTED AS A RESEARCH PARTNER OF THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

The European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) has chosen the European Policy Institute - Skopje (EPI) as its partner from Macedonia to conduct research on issues of its competence. FRA is one of the decentralized agencies of the European Union and is the center of expertise for fundamental rights of the European Union. The purpose of this agency is to provide expert support and advice to the institutions of the European Union and the Member States in order to ensure the protection of the fundamental rights of all persons living in the EU. Some of the main topics covered by the Agency are gender and gender equality, LGBTIQ, Roma, persons with disabilities, racism and intolerance, hate crimes, information society privacy and data protection, asylum and migration, access to justice and child rights.

With this, EPI is becoming part of the FRANET - multidisciplinary research network of the Agency that exists since 2011, which includes one research partner or consortium from each member state of the European Union, which has expanded this year in Macedonia. FRANET produces thematic studies, reports and brief notices on various issues related to fundamental rights.

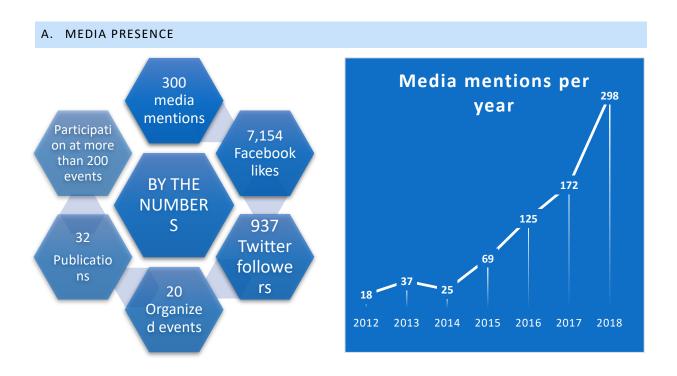
c. EU acquis and sectorial policies

(CIPE; July 2018 - July 2019)

The project aims to engage the private sector in entrepreneurship education for youth in Macedonia. As a partner in the project, EPI is analyzing the opportunities and barriers for entrepreneurship and employment in private sector for young Macedonians. The research focuses on private sector employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, including financing of new businesses. The results will be recorded in an analysis propose necessary policy reforms, which will include recommendations focused on strengthening the entrepreneurship ecosystem to provide new opportunities for youth private sector employment and entrepreneurship.

In the first months of the project, the methodology and the stakeholders map were developed. The comprehensive stakeholder's map is covering the international community, public sector entities, and the private sector based upon which, further research activities will be conducted. The methodology that has been developed has been consulted with an in-house expert and is comprised of an interview guide.

3. COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY



During 2018, EPI has made appearance in around 300 media articles. Of the nearly 300 media articles, 202 were news articles about our events, 65 were statements and interviews given by the EPI's team, 4 media mentions were academic blogs and 7 were debates in which our researchers participated. Our team members and researches are recognized as experts concerning the EU accession process of Macedonia and the reforms conducted and needed on the road to the EU membership.

The final conference of the project "Network 23+" under the title "Chapter 23: Pandora's box or a key for good governance?" was the event that was covered the most in the media with more than 70 media mentions.

EPI's <u>Facebook page</u> indicates a steady growth and now has 7,154 likes, compared to 6,800 at the start of 2018. On Twitter, the @epi_mk account indicates an improved interaction, and now has 937 followers, compared to 722 the previous year.

B. ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

Advocacy activities revolved on a) internal context b) regional/external context.

Regarding the first, the meetings were related to advancing the rule of law in the country through the findings of the Network 23 (targeted national and EU institutions), but also joint actions of EPI with partner NGOs at MS to advocate for meaningful reforms (focus on Germany).



As per the regional segment, the meetings were directed toward improvement of benchmarking mechanisms of the EU, its transformative power and reinstating the sticks and carrot system. The advocacy was on the level of EU institutions (Brussels) and MS (Netherlands).



C. PARTICIPATION AT CONFERENCES & OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS



During 2018 we participated or hosted more than 200 events. We were present at 13 events in Brussels, 9 in Berlin, 7 in Belgrade, 3 in Belfast, 2 in Podgorica. Also our staff members were actively participating in events in London, Oxford, Bath, Bristol, Florence, Milano, Garmisch Partenkirchen, Braunschweig, the Hague, Leiden, Paris, Belgrade, Sarajevo, Danilovgrad, Tirana, Bucharest, Budapest and at one event in New York.