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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2020 EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE – SKOPJE

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1. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The global COVID 19 pandemic overshadowed all 2020 events. The social and economic disruption caused by the outbreak of COVID19 had the national and EU institutions focused on crisis response predominantly.

The Macedonian President declared and extended the state of emergency four times, allowing the technical government to manage the response to the pandemic. During the lockdown, North Macedonia derogated from the European Convention on Human Rights. The parliamentary elections, initially planned for April, took place in July. SDSM, DUI and BESA formed a coalition with two seats more than opposition parties while the left wing party Levica won seats for the first time.

While North Macedonia effectively became a NATO member in March, the October/December 2020 veto from Bulgaria was yet another blow for the country's EU accession path. Despite the support from the German presidency with the Council of the EU and all other member states, the start of the first EU accession talks based on the new enlargement methodology were indefinitely postponed.

In this context, the work of EPI was challenged on multiple levels. First, in terms of the COVID pandemic, we managed to adapt to the new circumstances including through working on distance, focusing on the wellbeing of our staff and shifting our work to online mode. While most of our engagements took place online, a few of them were in a combined format, including physical presence, respecting all of the COVID 19 protocols and measures. Second, the blockade of the EU accession talks once again significantly impacts the circumstances in which the organization will operate in the upcoming months and possibly years. Yet, we have managed to maintain our activities and focus, keeping in mind the changed context and its impact for the future.

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

CIVICA CORE INSTITUTIONAL GRANT

(Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, 01.07.2019 – 30.06.2022 *conditional upon evaluation*)

In mid-2020, the EPI's institutional grant from CIVICA MOBILITAS programme was extended for another year. This grant facilitates organisational development through advancing the links with its constituents, advancing the participation and inclusion of the CSOs and experts in the process of EU integration and the rule of law, and further advancing the monitoring and advocacy of the EU accession of North Macedonia.

With the support of this project we developed an organizational development plan that serves us to strengthen the organisational work, improve the collaboration with EPI's constituencies and develop existing and new products and services. We held a training on gender perspective in research and introduced annual research plan and calendar for 2021 and with that strengthened our research capacities and planning.

With the support of CIVICA we prepared our landmark national shadow report on judiciary and fundamental rights with input of more than 20 organisations. The report is prepared according to an established methodology which also includes verification by national institutions and continues to be a significant point of reference for the national institutions as well as international counterparts. The report provided us with an opportunity to continue our work as a coordinator of the Network 23 and to provide a structured CSO contribution for the entire chapter on judiciary and fundamental rights.

The grant has also allowed us where possible, our research activities to incorporate the impact of COVID 19 on policies. Specific research was produced on the derogations the country made in relation to the ECHR, as well as a specific overview as to the impact of COVID 19 on the Roma community in the country.

We established a permanent research group with the University of Shtip and the South-Eastern European University. Organizing conferences and holding regular meetings, we promoted the involvement of the constituents of the judiciary. We initiated and attended meetings on areas of our work with national and international representatives. The grant also assisted in the organization of and participation in numerous discussions in cooperation with European organizations and institutions were organised in 2020, focused on the European integration of WB region with a special focus on the German EU Presidency.

A. ACCESSION MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

WEBER - WESTERN BALKANS ENABLING PROJECT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY MONITORING OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION REFORM WEBER 2.0

(European Commission; December 2019 - December 2022)

The WeBER 2.0 design relies and builds upon the results of the first round of monitoring and the PAR Monitor reports 2017/2018. WeBER 2.0 continues to use the intervention logic that the best way to ensure long-term effectiveness of EU conditionality in the area of PAR is the creation of regional and local demand and advocacy for a public administration compliant with EU requirements/principles. The impact that WeBER 2.0 intends to create is an empowered civil society, equipped with knowledge, skills and tools to monitor PAR and hold their national and local governments accountable for the quality of their policies and services and the overall management of their administrations.

In the summer of 2020, EPI has signed a [Memorandum of Cooperation with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration](#) in order to successfully implement the WeBER Project and has regularly shared the results of the monitoring for feedback and further guidance. Moreover, EPI has regularly engaged in advocacy meetings and consultative processes with key stakeholders including the EU Delegation and DG NEAR and has taken part in consultative meetings with relevant CSOs in the light of the tenth meeting of the Special Group for PAR. At the initiative of the organization, a meeting was also held with the new Minister of Information Society and Administration in order to introduce him to the WEBER Project and to provide the continuity of the established cooperation with MISA.

Throughout 2020, relying on the methodology from the first cycle of the project, the research team of EPI has finalized the monitoring of PAR and has commenced writing the PAR National Monitor 2019/2020 which will be published and promoted in February 2021. Regional articles tackling different PAR priorities have been published throughout the year and in order to note the progress in terms of digitalization of the public administration, researchers from EPI created a blog entitled ["What is the digitalization of administrative services and is North Macedonia ready for the introduction of full e-services?"](#).

An open call was published for project proposals for the implementation of the Small Grants Program to support the monitoring of public administration reform at the local level. After an in-depth review of the applications, 5 civil society organizations were selected that in close cooperation with EPI will implement their projects during 2021.

EUROPEANISATION BEYOND THE PROCESS – EPI GRANT

(OSIFE, Building Bridges Initiative, EPI; January 2019- January 2021)

The OSIFE grant traditionally assists us in reaching out to audiences in EU member states, including Brussels and also helps us to advance our organizational development. With its support we participated at major events in view of the revisions of the enlargement methodology with representatives of various EU member states and participated at numerous events related to EU enlargement, rule of law and related topics. We organised several advocacy events with German counterparts, advocacy events specifically focused on border management during the COVID-19 pandemic and participated in discussions on the new enlargement methodology and the accession process of the Western Balkans in Brussels as well as other EU capitals. We also conducted research on the impact of the COVID 19 crisis on the policy areas relevant to our work and published a policy brief on the implications of the Bulgarian conditions for the EU accession talks with North Macedonia. The latter was the subject of significant expert and media interest both at the national and EU level. In December 2020, we published a follow up of this product dealing

with the implications of possible new compromises with Bulgaria and a joint advocacy reaction with IDSCS and Eurothink directed towards the EU member states.

In cooperation with a EU based researchers we continued researching North Macedonia's role and its cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency and foreign border guards during the migrant/refugee crisis in Europe, also in view of the impact of the COVID 19 crisis.

In terms of advancing the EU knowledge of our staff, we organized a one-day communication training, supported mentorship from experts based at EU based organizations for our researchers included mid-level staff in our advocacy efforts. We developed a new communication strategy that will improve our communication with our stakeholders. This grant assisted EPI in maintaining a high level of media appearances nationally, as well as at the regional and European level.

EUROPEANISATION BEYOND THE PROCESS – TEN NETWORK

(OSIFE Building Bridges Initiative, TEN Network; January 2019 – January 2021)

The OSIFE support to the TEN Network is complementary to our organizational grant and assists the network in reaching out to the audiences in Brussels and the EU member states.

During 2020 TEN organised one scoping mission to Demark and three advocacy events to Germany and Brussels. The meetings with the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Danish think-tanks helped to better understand the Danish official position towards EU enlargement policy and the arguments behind their scepticism. With support from Rasmussen Global and local media, TEN made efforts to influence public opinion in Denmark with and an [op-ed](#) (republished in [English](#)) and interview in Danish media.

The advocacy events that took place in 2020 served to provide inputs to politicians and policy makers on how to reinvigorate the EU membership perspective of the region and use existing and new instruments to strengthen EU–Western Balkans relations. A [public discussion at the European Parliament](#) was held in February, and virtual closed door round table and private meetings were held (with support from the Aspen Institute) in June and November 2020. TEN's inputs on these events were partly based on policy briefs published in 2019 and 2020.

In the light of the EC's Economic and Investment Plan for the Western Balkans, TEN organised [online public debate with EC representative](#) to stress the need for rule of law conditionality in the context of the EU's economic development assistance.

The grant was also an opportunity for advancing our skills on various topics including public performance and advocacy as well as communication and networking.

ACTED - ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP ACTION FOR ENSURED DEMOCRACY

(NED - National Endowment for Democracy; October 2019 – September 2020)

The activities of this project revolved around enabling the inclusive citizens' participation through the envisaged *Policy Dialogue* events. These were foreseen as an opportunity for the citizens to discuss their views, thoughts and proposals on the direction that the country should take for advancing the current situation.

For this purpose, in 2020 EPI supported the preparation of six research papers on the following topics: balanced regional development; the role of trade unions in protecting worker's rights; oversight of Parliament in fighting corruption in public institutions; and the independence of the judiciary. The topics of the research projects were identified on the basis of the discussions of the public that participated in our deliberative polling event in the middle of 2019 in cooperation with the University of Stanford.

EPI successfully **organized and held the thematic focus groups** with representatives from academia, CSOs and relevant institutions. The participants at these discussions were prominent professors from the Law Faculty at the state university "Ss. Cyril and Methodius" in Skopje, experts from various prominent CSOs in the country, experts from economic chambers and centres for regional development.

EPI also successfully **organized and held the policy dialogue events** during September 2020. In the policy dialogue events, the researchers presented the final results of the research papers. Just like the thematic focus groups, the

policy dialogue events were also held via ZOOM, except one event, which we organized to be held with physical presence. The face to face event was organized respecting the measures and protocols of the Ministry of Health for protection against COVID-19. We were able to also reach out to students from the Faculties of Economy from both the state university and from the South East European University. Even though the events were held on ZOOM, with provided translation in Albanian and English when necessary, the events were also livestreamed on our social media platform Facebook.

The topics tackled with the researches and the policy dialogue events brought cooperation with new stakeholders such as the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia and the Bureau for regional development.

In March 2020, EPI prepared and submitted [a contribution](#) to the public consultation on the *draft Principles of Good Practice for Deliberative Processes for Public Decision-making*, prepared by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. EPI shared its own experience with organizing and implementing two deliberative polling projects the past 3 years, one supported by NED, as well as gave comments and suggestions to the text itself, based on our experience and lessons learned. These principles were presented to the OECD's Public Governance Committee (PGC) and Working Party on Open Government (WPOG), as part of the report ["Catching the Deliberative Wave: Innovative Citizen Participation and New Democratic Institutions"](#).

FOSTERING POLITICAL PLURALISM AND DEMOCRATIC VALUES

(NED - National Endowment for Democracy; October 2020 – September 2022)

Our work on supporting citizen engagement and deliberation is to continue until late 2022, with the support of the National Endowment for Democracy. Through public debates on key issues of national interest, EPI will foster informed discussion, independent and critical thinking, and political pluralism among citizens. Citizens, experts, and policymakers from across the political and ethnic spectrum will participate.

EUROPEAN INTEGRATION OF THE WESTERN BALKANS: MAKING A REALISTIC PERSPECTIVE OUT OF A SHIFTING TARGET

[\(Western Balkans Fund; May 2019 – January 2020\)](#)

The project focused on the difficulties of the 2019 events such as Brexit and European elections posed for the enlargement process which is already at the backstage for many EU decision makers. In this project, EPI partnered with the Albanian Institute for International Studies and the European Movement – Serbia, with experience in EU integration research, with the goal to both nourish a positive debate about integration and most importantly to advocate jointly as a region. The majority of activities of the project were implemented during 2019. The final conference of the project was held in Tirana, on the 22nd of January 2020. In the final conference the [final findings of the three policy papers](#) were presented and the effects of the European events, such as the introduction of the new enlargement methodology and the French veto, were discussed in detail with representatives from CSOs, ministries and embassies in Albania. The final report with all three policy papers was published at the end of January. The final conference was widely covered by various media outlets in Albania.

ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION COUNTRY REPORT FOR 2020

EPI prepared its regular analysis of the EC country report for 2020, adapting its approach in accordance with the new methodology for enlargement. This year, the analysis was presented in clusters in order to contribute to the adequate consideration of the approach and accordingly, to the policy coordination in line with the new methodology for enlargement. The analysis is carried with the established in house methodology which we are using for several consecutive years nationally and regionally. The independent evaluation on EPIs work, conducted upon EPIs request, found that stakeholders recognize the analysis as a valid source of evaluation and targeted recommendations. The analysis was distributed to partners in the EU institutions, the embassies of EU member states in North Macedonia, as well as to the local ministries, our partners from other NGOs and the people in our newsletter list. The analysis and its recommendations were also presented at a closed workshop with high level workshop with the Secretariat for European Affairs.

Our analysis was referenced in TV shows, had numerous mentions in the news and interviews.

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; December 2018 – June 2021)

The objective of this project is to contribute to the restoration of citizens' trust in the Macedonian judicial sector through significant involvement of civil society in substantive reforms.

During 2020, we organized the second policy dialogue "[Vetting – an imposed or feasible option for the Republic of North Macedonia](#)" on 6 of March 2020 in Hotel Arka. The event attended by more than 60 participants provided an in-depth discussion on the nature and consequences of the vetting process, in view of the European standards of the judiciary and experiences in the region.

Furthermore, the first monitoring [report on the results of implementation of the 2017 – 2022 Strategy for reform of Judicial Sector](#) was prepared and published. The report comprises the achievement of the results in 2019 and 2018. This Report is based on the plan for monitoring the implementation and assessment of the results of the 2017-2022 Strategy for Reform of the Judicial Sector, using citizen-oriented indicators, i.e. indicators facilitating the assessment of the interaction of citizens with the justice system institutions, as well as the degree of attainment of strategic goals, guidelines, measures and activities envisaged under the Strategy. The report was presented on the [first regional open debate](#) that was held on 30 July 2020 and consulted with the state advisers in the Ministry of Justice during meetings held in August 2020. In this way, we continued our practice of consulting our products with the target groups and final beneficiaries.

By March 2020 the first annual surveys of court users' satisfaction with court performance was conducted. The survey includes the view of the citizens, court administration, judges and attorneys and Public prosecutors. Draft report on the results was prepared and presented on the second regional open debate "[How credible is the judicial sector?](#)" that was held on October 2020 in person and via the platform ZOOM with participation of representatives of key judicial institutions. The preparations for implementation of the second annual survey are ongoing. [The third regional open debate](#) was organized on 30 October in order to commemorate [The European Day of Justice](#). At this event, the benefits of mediation were presented as an alternative method of resolving disputes and the strengthening of the concept of mediation in our country was discussed with representatives of chamber of mediators, mediators and relevant institutions.

In September 2020 an expert for preparation of methodology for assessment of the quality and uniformity of court decisions was elected and prepared by the end of November. The methodology was peer-reviewed and will further serve for the preparation of three reports on the uniformity and quality of court decisions in the areas of civil, criminal and misdemeanour law.

"FOR JUSTICE" - MONITORING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE JUDICIARY REFORM STRATEGY 2019 – 2020

(Blueprint group; FOSM - Foundation Open Society Macedonia; June 2019 – February 2020)

The Blueprint group in March 2020 prepared a public [policy document](#) that refers to the resources and capacities available to the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Republic of North Macedonia. Later, in April 2020, the group prepared a [quality analysis of the reforms related to the election and dismissals of judges](#). This document elaborates the reformed course of the judicial career from the conditions and the procedure for admission to the initial training of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, the conditions and the procedure for electing a judge in the basic and administrative courts, conditions and procedure for electing a judge in a higher court and presidents of courts, grounds and procedure for determining disciplinary responsibility until termination and dismissal from the judicial office. The Blueprint group in 2020 prepared an [Opinion and Legal Analysis regarding the repeal of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination](#). On this matter, the Blueprint in a joint effort with other networks of CSOs prepared a [Declaration for prioritized adoption of the Law on Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination](#). The declaration calls upon the political parties participating in the parliamentary elections to support the declaration for priority adoption of the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination by the future

parliamentary composition. This document was signed by 17 political parties and the law was adopted in October 2020. In September 2020, representatives of the Blueprint Group met with the Minister of Justice, to establish points of cooperation between civil society organizations and the ministry regarding judicial reform. In November 2020, the Blueprint group also prepared an [Analysis of the decrees with legal force](#) that were continuously adopted by the technical Government during the state of emergency in 2020. This document analyses the constitutionality, proportionality and adequacy of the decrees, while assessing their impact on legal certainty in the country during the state of emergency. The Blueprint Group is currently working on a "Commentary on the Negotiation Framework with a Special Emphasis on the Judiciary", a "Methodology for Monitoring Judicial Reform during the Negotiations with the EU" and a "Proposal for CSOs' Participation in the Negotiations with the European Union".

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE PARLIAMENT – BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS THAT MAKE A DIFFERENCE

(NDI – National Democratic Institute; February 2019 – August 2021)

With the support of NDI, EPI initiated [the first public debate on regulating the status of returnees in the Republic of North Macedonia](#) held in the Parliament in January 2020 with adopted conclusions. The discussion was attended by senior representatives of the following institutions: Minister without portfolio in charge of implementing the Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma, Department of Border Affairs and Migration of the Ministry of Interior, Department of Migration, Integration of Refugees and Foreigners and Humanitarian Aid of the Ministry for Labor and Social Policy. Even though it was envisaged that additional advocacy meetings with MPs were to take place, due to the announced early parliamentary elections, the Assembly was dissolved.

RESEARCH FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Since 2018 EPI is the partner from North Macedonia to the European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) to conduct research on issues of its competence. During 2020 we continued to provide input to Migration and Asylum Bulletin, Equal access to criminal justice for all victims of crimes against the person, Anti-Muslim hatred database, FRA Fundamental Rights Report and the Charter of Fundamental rights. Additionally, during 2020 we provided input for deliverables dealing with the Guardianship systems for unaccompanied children and Legal environment and space for CSOs in supporting fundamental rights.

In 2020, in addition to the research activities for FRA we also co-organised with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs the first promotional event for the Fundamental Rights Report of the Agency for North Macedonia.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S NETWORK ON EQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

(Human European Consultancy; January 2019 – December 2020)

The annual reports for the harmonisation of the national legislation with the EU equality directives on [non-discrimination](#) and on [gender equality](#) for the period 01 January – 31 December 2019 were published. The annual reports for the period 01 January – 31 December 2020 were drafted, peer reviewed and approved by the European Commission, and await publication. Contributions to the website of the network towards monitoring the most important [legal developments](#) were regularly made. The European Commission's [annual legal seminar](#) on equality legislation took place online (03 December 2020). Almost 200 representatives of the European Commission, EU Member State governments, equality bodies, EU CSOs, academics and members of the network itself got together to discuss various current topics, such as gendered impact of COVID-19, algorithmic discrimination, sexual orientation outside the labour market, indirect sex discrimination in employment and so on.

The [aim of the network](#) is to 'provide the Commission with independent advice on all the grounds of discrimination covered by the equality directives'. The network provides 'regular overview of state of affairs regarding the transposition of EU equality and non-discrimination law on a country by country basis in the annual country reports and comparative analyses, whereas more recent reporting can be found in the legal developments section of the website and the key developments section of the bi-annual European Equality Law Review. Topical issues are addressed in article in the Equality Law Review and thematic reports that are published on the website and presented and discussed during the annual legal seminar. The overall operation of the network is governed by Human European Consultancy, the School of Law of Utrecht University and the Migration Policy Group.'

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES

(Civil Rights Defenders – Human Rights Defenders; June – November 2020)

We continued the cooperation with the Civil Rights Defenders on systematic monitoring and analysis of the effectiveness of national human rights institutions. In 2019 we developed the monitoring methodology, including a monitoring matrix, completed the data collection in the three countries - Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia, and wrote and published one comparative and three national reports on the situation in 2018. In 2020, we worked with national researchers from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo in order to include these countries in the research as well. We trained the national researchers and supervised the process of data collection, analysis and writing. We also expanded and updated the comparative report the findings from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo. The national reports and the comparative report will be published in 2021.

MEDIATE, DO NOT HESITATE

(Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Skopje; September 2020 – August 2022)

In September 2020, EPI started with the implementation of the project „Mediate, do not hesitate!” together with the partner organizations [the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"](#), [the Chamber of Mediators of the Republic of North Macedonia](#) and [the Mediators Federation Netherlands](#). The objective of the project is to assess and support the use of mediation in North Macedonia and builds up on our previous work on mediation in 2013.

The first [promotional conference](#) titled “The benefits of mediation as an alternative way of resolving disputes” whose aim was to present the activities and results to be achieved within the project, was held in December 2020, online via ZOOM platform with participation of key institutions involved in mediation and related reforms, including the Minister of Justice. In December a two-day training on finances and communications was conducted for the members of the Chamber of Mediators. Twenty-one mediators, not including the trainers, participated on the training. The lectures were held by trainers from the Mediators Federation Netherlands the Chamber of Mediators in North Macedonia, trainer from the lines of mediators, and professor from the Faculty of Law at the University of Tetovo, Training certificates were issued to all participants.

C. EU ACQUIS AND SECTORAL POLICIES

MAKE FUTURE TOGETHER: EU AND THE WESTERN BALKANS FROM THE YOUTH PERSPECTIVE

(Europe for Citizens – March 2020 – August 2021)

The project “Make Future Together: EU and the Western Balkans from the Youth Perspective” directly contributes to inclusive and participatory policy making at the EU level. In view of upcoming Conference Future of Europe, the project allows WB and EU citizens to share their views on how to address transnational issues of common interest. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, the project start was postponed for September and afterwards the majority of the planned activities were held online.

EPI held its first online youth discussions where participants discussed in groups and vote in plenary sessions on the top positive and negative sides from using the internet, particularly digital platforms, and agreed on policy recommendations that in their view would improve the online experience for its users. On the International day of human Rights, EPI held a panel discussion with youth representatives and experts from the EU delegation, the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and CSOs from North Macedonia and Estonia where they discussed policy recommendations. The [panel discussion video](#) was made available on Facebook and has reached 1.6 thousand views. Same format events were held in each WB country following methodology developed by European Policy Centre Brussels. National reports from the discussions will be prepared and disseminated to relevant stakeholders and a regional report will be presented EU stakeholders in Brussels in the following year.

In the reporting year, EPI with project partners developed an online platform that is intended to survey youth, aged 16 to 25 and to stimulate discussion regarding topics relevant for the Future of Europe, among which internet

freedoms, issues regarding the environment and rule of law will be featured. The website content was translated in the official languages of the WB countries and its launch is scheduled for early 2021.

"CLEAR IT UP" CAMPAIGN FOR PROTECTION AND EFFICIENT INSPECTION SUPERVISION OF NATURAL RESOURCES

(Institute of Communication Studies/British Embassy, October 2020 – December 2021)

EPI joined the ["Clear it Up"](#) Advocacy and Lobbying Alliance of 43 civil society organizations, faculties and media outlets lead by Institute of Communication Studies. Through joint and individual activities, the campaign will focus on raising public awareness on sustainable water management and more efficient inspections against the overexploitation of natural resources and increase the impact in the process of adopting or amending environmental laws and policies.

In the reporting period, one staff member was trained on [ecological Advocacy and Lobbying](#). In the coming year, EPI will organise and participate in public discussions, publish policy insights and organize a citizens' consultation on pressing environmental issues environment.

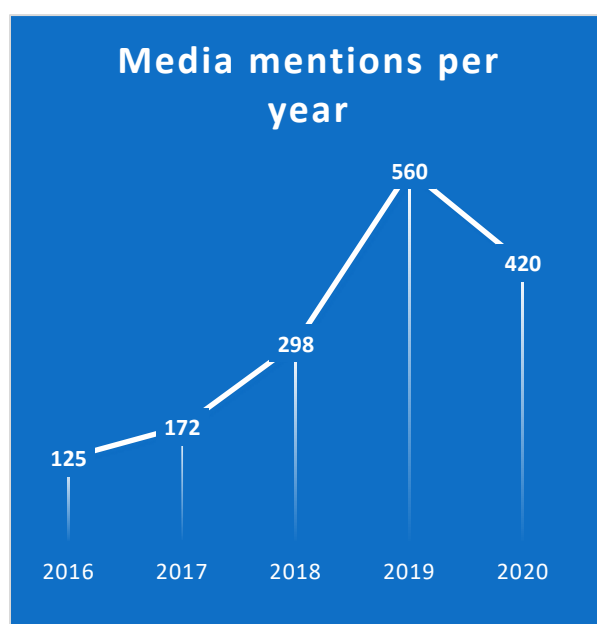
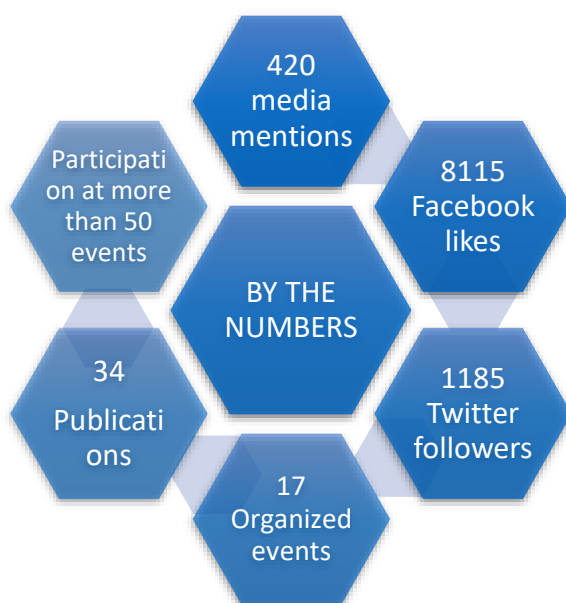
SOUTHEAST EUROPE – COVID-19 BULLETIN SERIES

(Centre for European Policy Studies – May 2020 – June 2020)

On invitation by the Centre for European Policy Studies, EPI served as an independent rapporteur for their Southeastern Europe Covid-19 Bulletins. Each bulletin provided fortnightly updates and comparative summaries for the Western Balkans and Turkey on the development of the pandemic, government imposed restrictions and unwinding strategies in Southeastern Europe countries, and a central theme for each bulletin ([Domestic medical situation and social responses](#), [Exit strategies and economic recovery](#), [International Chessboard](#), [Pandemic politics](#)).

3. COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

A. MEDIA PRESENCE



Even though the main topic of 2020 was the coronavirus and the dealing with the pandemic, EPI continued to be present in the media in the country and internationally concerning the EU accession process of North Macedonia and the Western Balkans, the reforms conducted, and those needed on the road to the EU membership. This year we had more than 420 media mentions with the main focus being the EU and the Bulgarian demands for starting

the accession negotiations. More than half of the media mentions were statements and interviews given by the EPI's team, 32 were on our prepared analysis, more than a 100 were reports covering our events and 18 were news articles about our publications.

The conference "The benefits of mediation as an alternative way of resolving disputes", held on 15th of December as part of our project "Mediate, do not hesitate", was the event with the highest media coverage, even though it was held online via the platform Zoom, with more than 40 media mentions.

EPI grew its presence in the social media and we activated our [LinkedIn page](#), while we continued the growth of our [Facebook page](#) as well. There we have more than 8115 likes, compared to 7650 at the start of the year. Our [Twitter](#) profile has almost 1200 followers while 640 people follow us on [Instagram](#).

B. ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

The advocacy activities revolved mostly around the national reform processes on the areas of rule of law, including both judiciary and fundamental rights, as well as justice, freedom and security. As this was a period in which the revisions of the enlargement methodology were proposed and adopted, coupled with the decision on North Macedonia and Albania to start the accession negotiations but also the conditions posed by Bulgaria, our advocacy efforts were channelled in this direction.

In terms of the member states, we worked with France, as the country proposing new methodology, Germany for its presidency with the Council, Netherlands for its hard attitude towards Albania and issue of decoupling both countries and Denmark. While most of the collaborations have been with established partners from EU based think tanks, we have also established a new partnership with Greek counterparts (University of Macedonia as well as the Hanns Seidel Foundation) for developing activities for the monitoring of the implementation of the Prespa agreement.

In view of outreach with member states we aimed at keeping the enlargement topic on the agenda in partnership with EU based think tanks. We prepared continuous assessments on various topics related as to the impact of the COVID 19 on North Macedonia for a publication of the Centre for European Policy Studies in Brussels.

In the view of challenges of COVID 19, as to rule of law matters, we supported work on assessing the cooperation with Frontex in view of the challenges of COVID 19 [Tackling the Migrant Crisis in the Republic of North Macedonia](#), building up on previous work on this topics. Additionally, we focused on the Roma population regarding the right to education, the right to health, the right to work, freedom of movement, the basic conditions for exercising the rights and freedoms and activities of donors and NGOs during the state of emergency. We issued recommendations in the following document [Challenges facing Roma during the crisis caused by COVID-19](#).

EPI also conducted consulting services for La Strada, preparing Shadow Reports for Chapters 19 and Chapter 24 with a focus on migrants. The reports analysed the situation in the country in terms of analysis of the implementation of laws, documents, strategies regarding migrants for the period October 2019 - September 2020.

EPI has continued to influence the PAR agenda and the CSO engagement in this area by advancing evidence-based monitoring of PAR in line with EU requirements. In addition to strengthening CSO-government dialogue at the regional, national, and local levels through the WeBER Platform, EPI is also improving CSOs' capacities to engage in PAR discussions, ensuring their constructive relationships with the institutions. In order to establish meaningful cooperation and successful implementation of the WeBER project, EPI has signed a [Memorandum of Cooperation](#) with the Ministry of Information Society and Administration. EPI's work in the area of PAR has continued to be recognized by international stakeholders - at the invitation of the EU Delegation and the Directorate-General for Enlargement, EPI participated in the consultations for the meeting of the Special Public Administration Group.

C. PARTICIPATION AT CONFERENCES & OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS

The face to face conferences and events took a backseat in 2020, with most of them being held online in the second part of the year. Our team participated at more than 50 events organized by CSOs from North Macedonia and whole of Europe. These included landmark conferences and events on the European accession of the Western Balkans

organised by the German presidency, as well as key forums such as the Belgrade security forum where we spoke on the closing panel.

We have also adapted to the “new normal” and moved our events and conferences online. This year we held 17 events with more than 450 participants and many more following us online. One of the bigger events that we organized this year is the regional open debate “How credible is the judicial sector?” on 14th of October. This was a combined event with the panellists and part of the participants present at the Holiday Inn Hotel in Skopje, while the other followed us through the Zoom platform. Another combined event was “Addressing freedom of expression online: Common challenge for the EU and North Macedonia”, where more than 25 young people discussed the opportunities and the challenges enabled and created by the social media. Part of the panel for this even was at the Europe House in Skopje, while the other part and the participant followed us via Zoom and Facebook.

Our biggest event with physical presence was the policy dialog “Vetting – an imposed or feasible option for the Republic of North Macedonia” held on 6th of March in Hotel Arka, with more than 55 participants. The speakers at the conference, including Dr Ledi Bianku - former judge of the European Court for Human Rights from Albania, Dr Bosa Nenadić - former Chairman of the Constitutional Court of Serbia, Dr Mirjana Lazarova Trajkovska - former judge of the European Court for Human Rights, Tatjana Vasic Bozadziewa - State Counselor at the Ministry of Justice, Vladimir Georgiev - Member of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption and Dr. Denis Preshova, Research/teaching assistant at Faculty of Law in Skopje, discussed the need for a vetting process for judges and prosecutors. This event also gained a sizable media attention with more than 30 media articles.

ANNEX I – LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

1. 30.1.2020 - European Integration of the Western Balkans: Making a Realistic Perspective out of a Shifting Target
<https://bit.ly/3cg7CLt> [en]
2. 25.2.2020 - EPI in 2019
- <https://bit.ly/39rymai> [en]
3. 23.3.2020 - Analysis of the capacities and resources of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the Republic of Northern Macedonia
- <https://bit.ly/36m4AI9> [mk]
4. 24.3.2020 - Infographic: North Macedonia – Preparedness for EU membership in 2019 compared to other Western Balkan countries
- <https://bit.ly/2YjKio7> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/2NEAMcZ> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/2KUlj6u> [sq]
5. 13.4.2020 - On shaky ground: Human Rights and COVID-19 in North Macedonia after the derogation from the European Convention on Human Rights
- <https://bit.ly/3iW2opg> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/39pTyxl> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/3iTfqUR> [sq]
6. 14.4.2020 - Youth decision making participation: How far have we come?
- <https://bit.ly/3iW1bPi> [en]
7. 16.4.2020 - Analysis on the quality of the reforms regarding appointment, appointment in higher courts and dismissal of judges
- <https://bit.ly/3iUBCxj> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/3a8vXAl> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/2MuuZGn> [sq]
8. 08.05.2020 - Southeast Europe – COVID-19 Bulletin No 1
- <https://epi.org.mk/post/15139> [en]
9. 22.5.2020 - Challenges facing Roma during the crisis caused by COVID-19
- <https://bit.ly/2MBdVyl> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/3ojRhba> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/3acuW3W> [rmn]
10. 25.05.2020 - Southeast Europe – COVID-19 Bulletin No 2
- <https://epi.org.mk/post/15110> [en]
11. 26.5.2020 - Shadow Report on Chapter 23 for the period between April 2019 and March 2020
- <https://bit.ly/3a8Vl92> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/2Yp6Y6p> [mk]
12. 03.06.2020 - EU – North Macedonia accession negotiations: the implications of the Bulgarian conditions
- <https://bit.ly/3t5bwgo> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/3t5GapK> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/2NKdvGL> [sq]
13. 08.06.2020 - Opening governments in times of lockdown
- <https://bit.ly/3chtjec> [en]
14. 08.06.2020 - Southeast Europe – COVID-19 Bulletin No 3
- <https://epi.org.mk/post/15092> [en]
15. 19.06.2020 - Southeast Europe – COVID-19 Bulletin No 4
- <https://epi.org.mk/post/16086> [en]
16. 03.07.2020 - The Western Balkans and the COVID-19: Effects on good governance, rule of law and civil society
- <https://bit.ly/2NDtpCx> [en]
17. 07.09.2020 - How to encourage the Parliament to increase oversight of the fight against corruption in public institutions?

- <https://bit.ly/3aaLy2j> [mk]
- 18. 07.09.2020 - How can we “clean” the judiciary and have independent judges?
- <https://bit.ly/3ablvCL> [mk]
- 19. 11.09.2020 - Infosheet: How to encourage the Parliament to increase oversight of the fight against corruption in public institutions?
- <https://bit.ly/2M1Wur9> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/2YjaShb> [sq]
- 20. 11.09.2020 - Discussion report: How can we “clean” the judiciary and have independent judges?
- <https://bit.ly/2NDtLsR> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/3r3UIEJ> [sq]
- 21. 18.09.2020 - How to strengthen the role of trade unions in protecting workers' rights?
- <https://bit.ly/36kuRjU> [mk]
- 22. 18.09.2020 – ASSOCIATION, CONFUSION OR ABUSE - The role of trade unions in the protection of workers
- <https://bit.ly/3cd22ts> [mk]
- 23. 22.09.2020 - Infosheet: The role of trade unions in protecting workers' rights
- <https://bit.ly/3iU0xBz> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/3oo1jb5> [sq]
- 24. 23.09.2020 - Balanced regional development in the Republic of North Macedonia: Causes of unevenness and positive examples of development
- <https://bit.ly/2Muk27V> [mk]
- 25. 23.09.2020 - Balanced regional development as a lifeline for depopulation of the Republic of Northern Macedonia
- <https://bit.ly/3qYn2YT> [mk]
- 26. 24.09.2020 - (Infosheet) Balanced regional development: Causes of unevenness and opportunity for improvement
- <https://bit.ly/3sYR3tH> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/36m2aTD> [sq]
- 27. 21.10.2020 - Country report Republic of North Macedonia: Non-discrimination
- <https://bit.ly/3a8xt5v> [en]
- 28. 21.10.2020 - Country report Republic of North Macedonia: gender equality
- <https://bit.ly/3pvuAIG> [en]
- 29. 22.10.2020 - Vetting in the Judiciary: From Extraordinary Measure to Extraordinary Problems
- <https://bit.ly/3t0vZCW> [mk]
- 30. 22.10.2020 - EC 2020 Report: Case for launching negotiations strengthened
- <https://bit.ly/3ad4Jbl> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/36hJzlc> [mk]
- 31. 05.11.2020 - 2019 report on the results of the implementation of the 2017-2022 strategy for reform of the judicial sector
- <https://bit.ly/2Mul6sg> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/39nD3la> [mk]
- 32. 16.11.2020 - All of you will betray the EU tonight! Speak now or remain silent
- <https://bit.ly/2M1XGL9> [en]
- <https://bit.ly/3chv1ME> [mk]
- <https://bit.ly/39n2UuF> [sq]
- 33. 18.11.2020 - Analysis of decrees with legal force
- <https://bit.ly/3ck5KBI> [mk]
- 34. 02.12.2020 - On the possible consequences of possible new "compromises" with Bulgaria
- <https://bit.ly/2Me4e9t> [mk]

ANNEX II - EVENTS

Selected events organized by EPI in 2020			
Date	Event	Nr. Of attendees	Agenda
06/03/2020	Policy dialogue "Vetting – an imposed or feasible option for the Republic of North Macedonia"	56	Agenda
30/06/2020	In spotlight of COVID 19: Frontex, border protection and information exchange	17	Agenda
09/07/2020	"Presentation of the Fundamental Rights Report 2020: Evaluation of human rights standards in North Macedonia through the prism of the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, in anticipation of the opening of EU accession negotiations	/	Link
09/07/2020	Focus group on democratic institutions	8	/
22/07/2020	Meeting of the National Working Group on Public Administration Reform	12	Agenda
23/07/2020	Focus group for balanced regional development	8	/
30/07/2020	Regional Open Debate - Discussion on the first - draft report from the monitoring of the Judicial Reform Strategy 2017 - 2022	31	Agenda
06/08/2020	Focus group on the role of trade unions in the protection of workers' rights	3	/
14/09/2020	Policy Dialogue for Democratic Institutions	18	Agenda
25/09/2020	The role of trade unions in the protection of workers	26	Agenda
	rights		
29/09/2020	Balanced regional development: Causes of inequality and opportunity for improvement	29	Agenda
05/10/2020	The Macedonian – Bulgarian relationship and EU accession: is there a breakthrough formula?	/	Agenda
14/10/2020	How credible is the judicial sector?	44	Agenda
30/10/2020	Debate on the occasion of the European Day of Justice: “The benefits of mediation as an alternative way of resolving disputes”	21	Agenda
06/11/2020	The Western Balkans regional economic cooperation: Charting a way forward?	32	Agenda
03/12/2020	Do we hear each other through the screen? Young people online	30	/
10/12/2020	Addressing freedom of expression online: Common challenge for the EU and North Macedonia	26	Agenda
15/12/2020	Benefits of mediation as an alternative way of resolving disputes	31	Agenda

Selected events where we participated as speakers		
Date	Event	Link
13/01/2020	Towards a new strategy for the Balkans: Another paper exercise?"	http://bit.ly/2YoAnxn
22/01/2020	"European Integration of the Western Balkans: Making a realistic perspective out of a shifting target"	http://bit.ly/3acwXn6
19/02/2020	"EU and the Western Balkans: Seizing the Momentum"	http://bit.ly/36hc88Y
19/02/2020	"EU enlargement quo vadis? Prospects for the Western Balkans"	http://bit.ly/36gCHL9
09/03/2020	Western Balkans - Think tank forum	https://bit.ly/36iHhsD
23/04/2020	EU Enlargement expert meeting	-
14/05/2020	Why the Balkans Matter: The Future of the Region in the Age of the Virus	http://bit.ly/3iTHuaE
12/06/2020	COVID-19 AND SEE6 REFORMS How COVID-19 pandemic has tested the resilience of SEE6 institutions and the progress of reforms?	https://bit.ly/3ordALS
29/06/2020	WeBER platform meeting	
09/07/2020	Global Peace Index 2020 Presentation	http://bit.ly/3iVBMVz
03/09/2020	North Macedonia After The Elections – A Clear Path To Accession Negotiations?	https://bit.ly/3j4OFN7
07/09/2020	"Growing together or moving apart?"	http://bit.ly/3cjw6U4
10/09/2020	Regional Cooperation - From "Mini-Schengen" to the New Accession Block	http://bit.ly/3om2doN
23/09/2020	The Youth and Europe	http://bit.ly/36kwWfl
13/10/2020	Closing the economic gap between the Western Balkans and the EU – what role for rule of law conditionality	http://bit.ly/3cia3gF
27/10/2020	North Macedonia and the EU: The red lines before the red carpet	http://bit.ly/2MxtbfW
27/10/2020	Belgrade Security Forum: Future of Europe and the Western Balkans	https://bit.ly/3cvybwD
04/11/2020	Common Regional Market for the Western Balkans: a road to a genuinely integrated region	http://bit.ly/2YpuX5a
11/11/2020	South East European Legal Days (SEELD 2.0)	https://bit.ly/3or6RSv
24/11/2020	After the Euro 2021, the challenge called the European Union	http://bit.ly/39qQu41
27/11/2020	Western Balkans in 2020: EU Enlargement in Turbulent Times	https://bit.ly/2L1u9Re
11/12/2020	On the path towards the EU: Effective and transparent administration in service for citizens	http://bit.ly/36gDeg7