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ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2019 EUROPEAN POLICY INSTITUTE - SKOPJE

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1. EXTERNAL CONTEXT

The year 2019 was “historic” year. In January the Parliament voted the change of the constitutional name of the country to Republic of North Macedonia, which came in to effect after the Greek Parliament ratified the Prespa Agreement. Following these events, Stevo Pendarovski, candidate backed by the Social Democrats and the Democratic Union for Integration, was elected President. The European Commission assessed good progress of North Macedonia in area the rule of law area, among other areas, and gave positive recommendation to the Council. On these premises, it was widely expected that the country’s path in the Euro-Atlantic Integration will be unblocked. The NATO Accession Protocol was signed early this year, but the European Council in October 2019 did not deliver the expected unanimous decision for opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia. With this, a decade of “No” to recommendations for opening accession negotiations was marked. This time the blockage was due to the French veto for not opening accession negotiations and not decoupling North Macedonia and Albania. The “historic mistake”, as labelled by the outgoing Council President, was followed by the French non-paper calling the European Commission to review the accession negotiation methodology. The proposal was largely debated in Macedonian and international community, but ultimately it made it in the European Commission as an initiative to develop a new enlargement methodology by the end of January 2020.

This turn of events has already taken its toll on the national political scene in various ways. Even though the public support to the EU future of the country remains high, the final outcome (could) raises concerns on how the narrative will be shaped in future by the political leaders in the country. The prime minister called for snap elections, exacerbating existing internal cleavages and divisions in the country as well as questioning the reform efforts of the region overall in regards to the EU accession. The elections are expected to take place in April 2020.

Above all, one can recall that the Council set out the path towards opening accession negotiations with North Macedonia in June 2018 depending (conditional) on the progress made in key areas: the judiciary, fight against corruption and organised crime, intelligence services and public administration. In August 2019, the “Extortion” scandal erupted leading to the now former Special Public Prosecutor being arrested. In hindsight, this development significantly undermined the years of anti-corruption drive in the country. The major political parties did not manage to agree on new law on the public prosecutor office by the end of the year. Even though the adoption of the new law on the public prosecutor’s office law was not made a formal criterion for starting accession negotiations, efforts have been made by certain EU member states such as France to link it, and the progress in this direction will have a crucial role in opening of accession negotiations.

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*)

EPI in July 2019 was awarded a **core institutional grant from CIVICA MOBILITAS programme** of the Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation. EPI was one of the 15 organizations that were awarded with institutional grant. This grant will facilitate EPIs activities towards further 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. The duration of the grant is in total 30 months.

With the support of the CIVICA grant specifically we have increased our engagement with our members and constituents and have worked on our organisational capacity strengthening. Additionally, we provide support to our core research work on EU accession and the online resources we provide to the expert public. We have used the support from CIVICA to complement our efforts in reaching out to academia and the expert public, as well as to other civil society organisations and networks. With the support of CIVICA we have strengthened our cooperation with the professional associations, such as the chamber of mediators and association of judges.

In order to strengthen the organisational work and to streamline the organisational consultation processes, the cooperation with the expert public and professional associations in the process of EU accession and the rule of law, we have reviewed and analysed the current practice of documenting these processes. In addition, we have set out the structure for guidelines for the conducting consultation processes. The guidelines will be further developed in the first quarter of 2020. This document will be a tool to be used as an appendix to the organization's project applications and monitoring of impact.

Moreover, we maintained a high level of media presence at the national, regional, EU and international level as a credible source on the EU accession of the Republic of North Macedonia. We have realised many meetings with national and international representatives on areas of our work and as part of plan for organisational mentoring of the donor, during 2019 we have held two one-day mentoring workshops.

A. ACCESSION MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

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

(European Commission; December 2019 - December 2022)

The WeBER Project has received financial support from the European Commission for its continuation for the next three years. EPI will continue the work towards reformed public administrations in the Western Balkans.

As in the previous one, the six organisations from the Western Balkans, members of the Think for Europe Network – TEN and with financial support from the European Commission, will continue their work towards further

empowering civil society organisations in the Western Balkans to engage in the design and implementation of public administration reform in line with the requirements in the EU accession process.

WeBER 2.0 design relies on the results of the first WeBER project and published PAR Monitor reports. WeBER 2.0 continues the intervention logic developed and proven effective in the first project. Namely, that the creation of regional and local pressure and demand for PAR compliant with EU requirements/principles is the best (and perhaps only) way to ensure long-term effectiveness of the EU's conditionality in this area and keep these reforms on track even beyond the point of achievement of EU membership by the WB countries.

EUROPEANISATION BEYOND THE PROCESS – TEN NETWORK

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

The project aims at improving the quality of communication on the EU enlargement in the broader framework of the forthcoming re-definition of the EU and its future, by strengthening the cooperation with the renowned think tanks across Europe. It also aims at promoting reconciliation of the Western Balkans (WB) countries and to contribute to the WB integration into EU. The approach of this project is to advocate for the WB as an entirety that has been going through numerous improvements in the democratic governance and rule of law structures, improvement of the economic governance process as well as ambitious reform agendas for public administration.

As part of the TEN Network building bridges activities we have had advocacy meetings and closed discussions in Berlin were organized together with the Aspen Institute, with relevant stakeholders in the German Bundestag and the Federal Ministry of foreign affairs. The aim and the timing of the meetings were to discuss the situation of the EU accession process and the revision of the accession methodology. For this purpose, we have prepared a [brief](#) providing input for the revision of the methodology, translated also in [French](#). TEN has also organized round tables and meetings in Finland, France, Netherlands and Italy.

EUROPEANISATION BEYOND THE PROCESS

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

With this project EPI intends to achieve the following objectives: first, in line with our organizational monitoring and evaluation efforts, to contribute to building a sustainable EU agenda at the national level and to building of new narratives of enlargement at the EU level. This objective links our work at the national and EU scene since the two have been largely developing in isolation one from the other. Second, we aim to solidify existing relationships and build new sustainable partnerships with EU based stakeholders on issues of rule of law, more specifically the political criteria for EU accession and judiciary and fundamental rights.

During 2019 we organized two reverse advocacy events with EU and regional based counterparts, and have organized one research trip to EU member state (covered by our TEN grant), one advocacy visit to France, fellowship at the Clingendael Institute, and an advocacy visit to Germany (partly covered by the TEN grant). With the partners from these three countries we have organized a reverse advocacy event dealing with the revisions of the EU accession methodology in Skopje. Our speakers and partners both included representatives from the Aspen Institute – Germany; Foundation Jean Jaures – France and the Clingendael Institute – The Netherlands. In terms of advancing the research quality of the organization we organized a training on qualitative thematic research, introduced and trained the staff for using software for referencing purposes and have held a staff retreat for the purposes of advancing monitoring and evaluation of the organization. In terms of advancing the EU knowledge of our staff, we organized a one-day staff training for EU policy making in the Netherlands with the fellow from the Clingendael

Institute, we have supported the researchers with mentorship from experts based at EU based organizations and we have also included mid-level staff in our advocacy efforts.

In relation to our communication activities, we have re-designed our website in order to improve our public visibility and have recorded a significant increase in our media appearances, both nationally, as well as at the regional and European level.

ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP ACTION

(NED - National Endowment for Democracy; October 2018 - September 2019)

This was the second deliberative poll organized in the Republic of North Macedonia, as a follow up to the successful implementation of the first event in 2017. We successfully organised the deliberative event with 125 citizens from all over the country present in person over the weekend 22-23rd of June in Skopje. The event was covered by two national TV stations – SITEL TV transmitted as episode of “Detector” show, which is the most viewed station in the country as well as TV 21 “Click plus” show as the most viewed station on the internet and operates in two languages (Macedonian and Albanian). With both of these TV stations we have ensured widest coverage both on TV which is still the primary means for information of the public, as well as on the internet and in both languages used in the country. Videos from the debate are included on the website of the University of Stanford Centre for Deliberative Democracy. The resume with the detailed results of the comparative analyses can be found at the following link: https://epi.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Summary_tekst_NED_26.09.2019.pdf

The project has also raised interest in other organizations that consider using the method in their own work and which have attended the deliberative event for observation purposes. These have included a regional highly relevant think tank organization the Belgrade Centre for Security Policy which sent an observer to the event. This year, we also had a post-doctoral researcher from the Technical University in Berlin joining our office for a week during the preparation and aftermath of the event to observe the process for research and possible replication purposes. The event was also observed by representatives from the British and Dutch Embassy in Skopje, and we have also enabled a meeting with the Political and Economic Chief of the US embassy in Skopje with the EPI and Stanford University project team representatives. At the press briefing for the media, where EPI presented the general results of the comparative analyses, as well as the importance of these types of debates and their impact on the general public, the journalists present expressed interest in covering future events of such premises in order to continue to promote important debates where citizens are included directly.

ACTED - ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP ACTION FOR ENSURED DEMOCRACY

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

The project **Active citizenship action for ensured democracy** aims to further foster citizens’ participation in developing and advancing the country’s democratic and reform processes. The project is foreseen as a follow up of the completed NED project (above). Building on the findings of the previous project, and through more in-depth examination of factors that impede or facilitate democratic consolidation, ACTED aims to enable citizens to further elaborate their stances on specific topics and contribute to strengthening the country’s reform processes. Additionally, the activities and the goals are set to enable the citizens’ inclusive participation through the envisaged *Policy Dialogue* events that open the opportunity for the citizens to discuss their views, thoughts and proposals the direction that the country should take for advancing the current situation.

The topics for the further research and deliberation were identified from the final results of the poll of the ongoing NED project. We analysed the stances of the citizens on democratic institutions and efforts towards equality for all, which have changed after the national poll, and the stances that have not changed at all after the deliberative event. After identification of the topics for researches by citizens, EPI published a call for research which will later on serve as basis for *Policy Dialogue* events to discuss the citizens' stances with the relevant national authorities, expert community and academia. This will contribute to further advancing the debates and processes of civic participation.

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

(Western Balkans Fund; May 2019 – January 2020)

The project anticipates 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. It gathers three organizations, European Policy Institute (EPI), 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.

A kick-off event was organised in Skopje on the 17th of June, 2019, at the EU Info Centre. Three policy briefs were drafted by the three organizations, summarizing the current situation in all three countries, highlighting the challenges posed by 2019 events in the EU and analysing the way the narrative is being reflected in the respected societies as well as in the EU. The brief also contains the relevant policy recommendations to mitigate the risks to the integration process of the countries. A presentation and consultation event was organized on the 14th of November in Belgrade to discuss the first findings of the policy briefs as well the aftermath of the October meeting of the EU Council and its impact on the accession and integration process of North Macedonia, Albania and Serbia. The final conference is scheduled in in Tirana, Albania and will be organized on 22nd of January, to discuss the final findings of the policy briefs and the effects of the European events, such as the introduction of the new enlargement methodology and the French veto.

ANALYSIS OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION COUNTRY REPORT FOR 2019

EPI continuously monitors the EU accession process through the annual analysis of the EC country report, as well as the regional analysis of all Western Balkans reports. In the reporting period, the issue was of additional importance due to the upcoming decisions to start accession negotiations. This year's report was all in the spirit of the Prespa Agreement, which dominated throughout the enlargement package. This was a recognition of the difficult political decisions and the clear determination of the country on the road to the EU.

As evidenced in the independent evaluation conducted of EPIs work upon EPIs request, the stakeholders recognize the analysis as a valid source of evaluation and targeted recommendations. Moreover, these reports, including the 2019 one, have been used by MPs to reflect the level of progress of North Macedonia with EU standards on the sessions of the National Council for European Integration of the Parliament.

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 main objective of the project is to contribute to the restoration of citizens' trust in the Macedonian judicial sector through significant involvement of civil society in substantive reforms. Such objectives will be achieved through the following three specific objectives: 1. Ensuring structured monitoring and free contribution by civil society in the implementation of the Judicial Sector Reform Strategy; 2. Strengthening the capacities of civic organizations and alienating the judicial sector to participate in the judicial reform process through the exchange of experience, including the transfer of EU best practices; 3. Supporting and promoting substantive dialogue for judicial sector reform among civic organizations, involve foreign parties and citizens through public policy advocacy.

During the reporting period, a plan for monitoring and evaluating judicial reforms was prepared. Based on this plan the project team compiles data for the preparation of the first semi-annual report on the results of the follow-up to the Judicial Reform Strategy. An upgrade of the MERC to monitor the reform of the judiciary was made, a methodology for strategic anticipation, monitoring and evaluation of judicial reforms was prepared, two workshops and one policy dialogue were held. The public policy document is closed from the dialogue and the key recommendations are prepared and shared with all the key pages seized. In December, a survey of court users began.

In December 2019, the MERC site was upgraded. For the greater use of this tool by other CSO's and judicial institutions, a new webpage has been added to the website, a page showing the status of implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2017-2022. In addition, in order to increase the visibility of donors contributing to the maintenance and upgrading of this site, a new section for the logo of donors (supporters) was set up in the footer of the site.

NETWORK 23 - NETWORKING FOR IMPACT (NETWIT 23)

(Funded by the Royal Norwegian Embassy in Belgrade and the Balkan Trust for Democracy; May 2018 – May 2019)

The project was 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 overall objective of the project was to contribute to enhancing the impact of civil society in the development of policies in the area of Chapter 23 - Justice and Fundamental Rights, in the context of European integration.

The shadow report on Chapter 23 for the period June 2018 to March 2019 was prepared and in April 17, 2019, a dialogue was held on "Chapter 23 Reforms". The report represents a meaningful, substantial contribution of the representatives of relevant state, judicial institutions and civic organizations in the finalization of this document, with their notes, views, and comments embedded in the shadow report.

The Strategic Workshop for Network 23 took place from 5 to 6 July 2019, following the publication of the report of the European Commission for the Republic of North Macedonia. The purpose of this workshop was to prepare the Network 23 in order to have an increased impact in the next stages of the pre-accession process, and to strengthen the capacities of civic organizations to contribute effectively to the pre-accession process. This workshop was

attended by representatives of Network 23 and representatives of state institutions. A total of 18 participants participated in this workshop, of which 10 were representatives of Network 23.

Supporting the effective reintegration of Roma returnees in the Western Balkans

(World Bank; February 2019 – May 2019)

This consultancy service was funded by the World Bank Programme “Supporting the Effective Reintegration of Roma Returnees in the Western Balkans”. It represents a follow-up to the Phase I of the World Bank programme where EPI mapped the vulnerabilities of the returnees based on the readmission agreements. Within the Phase II, EPI developed a strategic document, which provides recommendations for a Strategy for admission and reintegration of returnees under readmission agreements. The document is based on previous analyses conducted by EPI and interviews conducted with representatives from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Interior and Health and the Minister without portfolio in charge of implementation of the Roma Strategy. The strategic document was disseminated to the relevant institutions and is expected to be taken into account when developing the planned revision of the Government’s Strategy for Admission and Reintegration of Returnees in 2020.

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

(FOSM - Foundation Open Society Macedonia; 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](#).

During the reporting period, a quarterly report on the follow-up to the Judicial Reform Strategy was prepared and presented at a press conference. We organized two briefings with media. An analysis was prepared for the implementation of the Justice Sector Reform Strategy (2017-2022) for the period 2018/2019, which was presented at its final inauguration on June 28, 2019 at Hotel Holiday In.

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

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

The overall aim of this project is to increase influence of civil society organizations on the process of implementation of the Strategy for Reform of the Judicial Sector (2017 - 2022) and strengthening of the independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Moreover, the project has aim to evaluate the implementation of the Strategy in terms of respecting the timeframe set out in the Action Plan, the transparency of the process, as well as the level of stakeholder and civil society involvement. Namely, EPI is one of the 6 participating organisations in this project, in charge of monitoring the implementation of the Law on the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors and the Law on Courts. The network of participating organisations (Blueprint Group) in this project created a paper consisted of comments to the proposed amendments to the Law on Public Prosecution. The text integrates the expert opinions on the group and contributes to the public debate on the proposed amendments and to the quality of the law as the end-result. On the 12th of September, 2019 a press-briefing was organized to present the paper and the opinions on the current status of the Special Public Prosecution. Meanwhile, EPI’s representative prepared quarterly reports for

the status of the implementation of the Law on Courts and the Law on the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors. Also, a thematic analysis was prepared on the work of the Academy for Judges and Public prosecutors and the state of election of new judges and their merit assessment. In the meantime, the Centre for Legal Research and Analysis (a member of the Blueprint group) drafted a policy paper on the Opportunity for Vetting Process in the Judiciary and Public Prosecutor's Office, and the text was improved by contribution from other representatives of the Blueprint group. This document should also be published in January after the donor approves it. In addition, Blueprint is working on a thematic analysis of the capacities of the Public Prosecutor's Office in the country where EPI contributes with regard to the spatial capacities of the PPO and in February it is envisaged that the Blueprint group create a public policy document on the work and results of the Public Prosecutor's Office.

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

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

EPI, within the framework of NDI's Civil Society and Parliament Program - Building Partnerships that Make a Difference, has begun implementing partnership building activities with MPs in Parliament to hold committee and oversight hearings and adopt legislative solutions to the issue related to the issue of returnees. EPI will hold committee hearing with the Standing Inquiry Committee for Protection of Civil Freedoms and Rights. In this regard, some legislative solutions will be considered to assist in the process of facilitating the admission and reintegration of returnees under readmission agreements. As part of the hearing, we invited key representatives from the institutions concerned such as the Delegation of the European Union in the country, the Minister without portfolio in charge of implementation of the Strategy for Improving the Situation of Roma, the Ministry of Interior - Head of Unit for Foreigners and Readmission at the Department of Border Affairs and Migration, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - Head of Unit for Migration, Integration of Refugees and Foreigners and Humanitarian Aid, and one representative from EPI. The hearing will be held on 24th of January. As part of this program, NDI will also enhance EPI's capacities in advocacy skills, communication skills, data visualization and other techniques needed for successful implementation of this project through training sessions.

RESEARCH FOR THE EUROPEAN UNION AGENCY FOR FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS

Since 2018 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 centre 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.

In the course of 2019 for the first North Macedonia was included in the Fundamental Rights Report and the implementation of the Charter on Fundamental Rights. We have also provided input on Anti-Muslim Hatred and Legal Aid in Return Procedures, in this regard, with experts we have provided input on each of the areas. We have continued to provide input on Migration and Asylum bulletin.

EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S NETWORK ON EQUALITY AND DISCRIMINATION

(Human European Consultancy; January 2019 – December 2019)

In this period, the audit round and final text of the report on non-discrimination legislation in Macedonia was closed, which has already been approved by the European Commission and awaiting publication. Also the audit round and final text of the report on gender equality legislation in Macedonia was closed, which has already been approved by the European Commission and is awaiting publication. The participation on a panel on religion and clothing and discrimination at the European Commission's annual conference on equality legislation was agreed (November, Brussels). The panel agreed in November is also about intersectional issues of religion and gender. One of the reports is fully focused on gender equality in legislation

EPI participated at the Annual Legal Seminar of the European Commission on Equality Law (29.11.2019, Brussels). Also, EPI chaired the panel 'Religious ethos in employment and access to goods and services' at this annual seminar.

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES

(Civil Rights Defenders; August 2019 – November 2019)

In this reporting period data collection in the three countries - Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia was completed along with measurement using the matrix. In addition, the writing up of the research findings for the three countries in one report per country and one report with comparative findings (four reports in total) was finished.

The research findings were presented at a public event - regional conference on human rights defenders in Western Balkans and the printed copies of the reports were distributed to the stakeholders. The findings were published on the websites of CRD and EPI and on social media accounts, including the full texts of the reports.

Regarding the gender aspect, the methodology contained indicators for collecting data on dealing with gender discrimination by the two relevant national human rights institutions - the Ombudsperson and the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (today called Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination). The report on North Macedonia found that even though the CRPD and the Ombudsperson have competences regarding gender equality as per the Goods and Services Directive and the Recast Directive, the gender equality mandate is not visible and is not given appropriate treatment at all. Thus, even though gender equality competences have been formally awarded, there is no independent institution dealing with gender equality in practice. The report on North Macedonia recommended that a solution for the obfuscation of the gender equality mandate has to be sought out, and an independent institution, existing or new, has to undertake fully, seriously and visibly the competences regarding gender equality, as per the EU Directives.

EVALUATING EFFECTIVENESS OF INDEPENDENT NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS BODIES

(Civil Rights Defenders – Human Rights Defenders; August 2019 – November 2019)

Six reports (one for each of the Western Balkans countries) were finalised. The presentation of the research findings was at a public event - regional conference on human rights defenders in Western Balkans. The printed copies of the reports were distributed among stakeholders. Also, the publications of the findings can be found on the websites of CRD, EPI and the regional partners, and on social media accounts, including the full texts of the reports.

In terms of gender aspect, the research had a particular focus on women human rights defenders. This was reflected in the choice of team members, the methodology, the data collection and analysis tools, and the structure and final

texts of the six reports, including by containing separate parts on findings from a gender perspective and particular recommendations stemming from these findings.

C. EU ACQUIS AND SECTORIAL POLICIES

ENGAGING THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION

(CIPE – Centre for International Private Enterprise; July 2018 – July 2019)

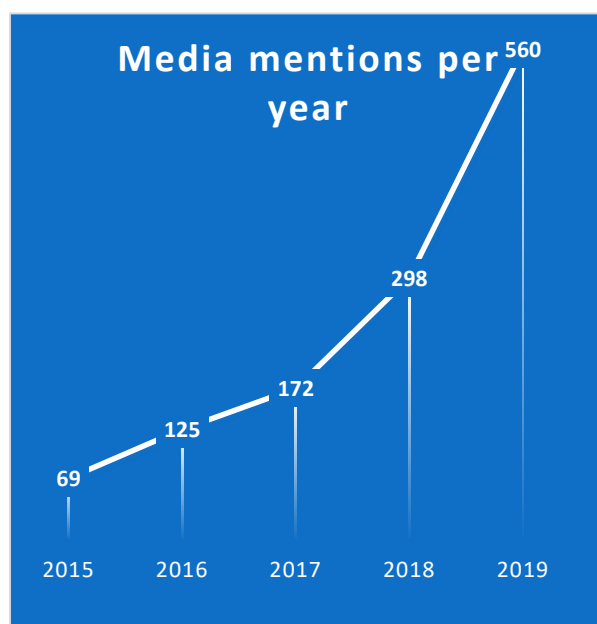
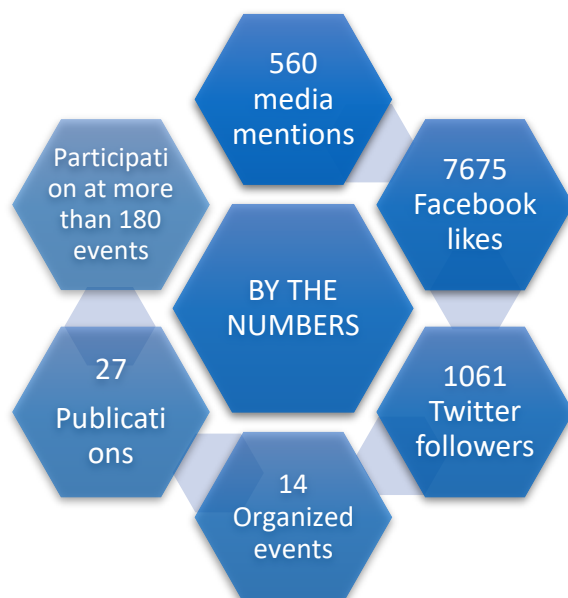
The project aim was to engage the private sector in entrepreneurship education for youth in Macedonia. As a partner in the project, EPI was analysed the opportunities and barriers for entrepreneurship and employment in private sector for young Macedonians. The focus of the research was on private sector employment and entrepreneurial opportunities, including financing of new businesses. For the purposes of the research, interviews and focus group were organised.

Prior to finalizing the analysis, the draft analysis for opportunities and barrier for youth employment and entrepreneurship in the private sector in North Macedonia was presented at a panel discussion on the 12th of June 2019. Key stakeholders in the country, including institution representatives; representatives from the private sector; academia; international organizations and youth organizations attended the event. More than 40 participants attended the panel discussion, while several media also attended and widely shared the information and findings that were presented. In order to contribute to raising public awareness on the project activities, EPI has disseminated the study to all identified stakeholders map. EPI received very positive feedback for the study and as is involved in the drafting and design of various policies and strategies, the study will also be used for the ongoing participation in relation to the drafting of the new Youth Strategy, where some of the findings have been already used.

Upon the finalisation of the study, EPI conducted advocacy meetings with key stakeholders in the country that endorsed the study's recommendations and have proposed additional ideas for collaboration and improvement of youth employment and entrepreneurship in the country.

3. COMMUNICATION & ADVOCACY

A. MEDIA PRESENCE



In 2019, EPI has made appearance in 560 media articles¹, which continues our constant progress and strengthens the recognition that the Macedonian and the international public has of our team members and researchers as experts concerning the EU accession process of North Macedonia and the reforms conducted and those needed on the road to the EU membership. 54 of the media mentions that we had in 2019 were articles published in international media outlets, with most notable being El Pais, NY Times, Euronews, Financial Times, Voice of America, PBS. Of the 560 media articles, almost half were statements and interviews given by the EPI's team, 190 were news articles covering our events, 16 media mentions were academic blogs, 67 of the media mentions were news articles about our reports, and 19 were debates in which our researchers participated.

The policy dialogue "Implementation of the Judicial Reform Strategy 2017-2022", held on 11th of December as a part of our project "Partnership Justitia: Regaining Citizens' Trust" was the event that was covered the most in the media with more than 60 media mentions.

EPI's [Facebook page](#) indicates a steady growth and now has 7,675 likes, compared to 7,100 at the start of 2019. On Twitter, the [@epi_mk](#) account indicates an improved interaction, and now has 1,061 followers. During 2019 we opened an [Instagram profile](#), where we have 509 followers.

¹ All the media mentions can be found on our website: <https://epi.org.mk/in-the-media-2?lang=en>

B. ADVOCACY ACTIVITIES

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

Regarding the internal context, the meetings were related to advancing the rule of law and unlocking the accession perspective in the country through firstly, the Shadow report on chapter 23 with contribution of the members 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, the Netherlands and France).

In 2019 we have improved our outreach to the public by also building partnerships and joint statements with other civil society organisations/platforms at the national level as well as the region and the EU. These have included joint statements and reactions concerning the judiciary, anti-discrimination policies, public administration as well as the overall process of EU accession of the country.

EPI has also contributed to the debates on the way forward of EU accession deadlock/impasse, exploring the options and presenting relevant arguments for the EU future of North Macedonia the effect of the October 2019 non decision and the discussions for the new proposed revised methodology by France, giving floor to developed and much needed debates between CSOs, EU member states and national institutions.

On private sector employment and entrepreneurial opportunities EPI has also conducted advocacy meetings with representatives from the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia – with the Prime Ministers Cabinet and with the Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister in Charge of Economic Affairs; the Ministries in charge of implementing youth policies; the Economic Chambers;, professors from Universities; the Fund for Innovations and Technological Development; the Regional Youth Cooperation Office; the Agency for youth and Sports and the Bureau for Development of Education.

As per the regional segment, the meetings and round tables in The Netherlands, France, Germany, Italy and Finland have been directed towards exchanging views on the EU membership perspective of the Western Balkans, achievements and the road ahead; discussing the initiative to involve the Western Balkans in the debates pertinent to the future of the EU; etc. Our approach has been to advocate not for the plain EU accession but rather for the WB as an entirety and about the region's progress and challenges in the areas of democratic governance and rule of law, improvement of the economic governance processes as well as reforms of public administrations.

C. PARTICIPATION AT CONFERENCES & OTHER IMPORTANT EVENTS



During 2019 we were present at 180 events all across Europe. We were present at 6 events in Belgrade, 4 events in Brussels, 3 in Pristina, 3 in Tirana, 2 events in Berlin, 2 events in Poznan and events in Athens, Bucharest, Dubrovnik, Geneva, Ljubljana, Paris, Prague, Sarajevo, Strasbourg, The Hague, Vienna and at one event in the UN headquarters in New York. We were present at most events linked to the EU accession of the region

In 2019 we organized 14 events with around 600 total participants. Our most notable event this year was the [National Democratic Debate](#) held on 22nd and 23rd of June 2019. The deliberative polling was held for the second time in North Macedonia in cooperation with Stanford University from the USA. 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 considerate judgments based on balanced information and discussion with fellow citizens. At the final event in June, around 125 citizens from throughout the country debated the national institutions and the topic of equality.

Our second most visited event with 85 attendees was the final conference of the project “Network 23 – Networking for impact (NETWIT 23)” held on 23rd of May 2019 titled “[CHAPTER 23: Taking out or putting wind in our sails?](#)”. At this conference our speakers, including the minister of justice, Renata Deskoska, the head of the technical negotiating team, Bojan Maricic, the chairman of the National European Integration Council, Nikola Poposki and Aleksandar Jovanovski from the Macedonian Helsinki Committee for Human Rights discussed How far are we on the

road to the EU by meeting the benchmarks in Chapter 23? At the second session, Xhemali Saiti, Supreme court judge and President of the Association of Judges, Frosina Tasevska, Head of Department for European Union at the Ministry of Justice, Vladimir Gjorgiev, member of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption and Zoran Bilbiloski from the office of the Ombudsman discussed the reform processes in the area of judiciary, fight against corruption and fundamental rights.

Last, we continued our traditional cooperation with the International Center for European Training (CIFE) and the Austro-French Centre for Rapprochement in Europe (CFA/ÖFZ) that we have established for the last five years. With their support, in February 2019 we organized the Roundtable and Debate- The Western Balkans in the European Union: Good neighbors today, good members tomorrow. Among the participants at the round-table were the Austrian ambassador in North Macedonia, Renate Kobler, and the French ambassador, Christian Thimonier, as well as representatives from regional and EU based think tanks.

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2. 15.1.2019 - WB accountability of public administration [infographic]
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4. 15.1.2019 - Western Balkan PAR Monitor for 2017/2018
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5. 22.1.2019 - National PAR Monitor Macedonia 2017-2018
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ANNEX II

Events organized by EPI in 2019					
Date	Event	Nr. Of attendees	Agenda	Lists of participants	
25.2.2019	The Western Balkans in the European Union - Good neighbours today, good members tomorrow?	39 attendees	Agenda	List 1	List 2
17.4.2019	Policy dialog "Reforms in Chapter 23"	45 attendees	Agenda	List	Media list
23.5.2019	Chapter 23: Taking out or putting wind in our sails?	78 attendees	Agenda	List	
11.6.2019	Opportunities and barriers for youth entrepreneurship and employment in the private sector in North Macedonia	53 attendees	Agenda	List	
17.6.2019	Kick-off Event: EU integration of the Western Balkans	24 attendees	Agenda	List 1	List 2
22/23.6.2019	National Democratic Debate	122 attendees	Agenda		
05-06/07/2019	Strategic workshop "Possible contribution of Network 23 to the EU accession"	20 attendees	Agenda	List	
03/09/2019	Focus group for discussion of the draft plan for monitoring and evaluating of the selected results from the Judicial Reform Strategy	12 attendees	/	List	
25/10/2019	Mediation and business - The business grows if the dispute is resolved quickly	25 attendees	Agenda	List 1	List 2
4-6/11/2019	Workshop "Methodology for Strategic Forecasting and Monitoring and Evaluation"	21 attendees	Agenda	List	

28-30/11/2019	Transfer of best practices and peer-exchange from accession countries	20 attendees	Agenda	List	
03/12/2019	EU accession: no pass to an impasse?	27 attendees	Agenda	List 1	
11/12/2019	Policy dialog "Implementation of the Judicial Reform Strategy 2017-2022"	54 attendees	Agenda	List 1	List 2

Selected Events where we have participated as speakers			
Date	Event	Location	Agenda
07.2.2019	"Building Stronger States in the Western Balkans and South Eastern Europe: Strengthening the Rule of Law, Human Rights and Minority Protection"	Pristina	Agenda
21.2.2019	CEPS Ideas Lab 2019	Brussels	Agenda
10.4.2019	Back to the future? How the EU can regain relevance in the Western Balkans?	Brussels	Agenda
12.4.2019	Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe	Strasbourg	Agenda
27.4.2019	Balkan Trafik Festival	Brussels	Agenda
28.5.2019	How to better respond to European aspirations of the young generation in the Western Balkans?	Bucharest	Agenda
01/07/2019	"Buckle up! The Western Balkans start joining the EU by 2025? Or not?"	Athens	Agenda
03-04/07/2019	Western Balkans Summit in Poznan	Poznan	Agenda
04-09/09/2019	Vucko 2018 – The European project on the Western Balkans	Sarajevo/Jahorina	Agenda
03/10/2019	Conference "Towards the concept of a shared society and interculturalism"	Skopje	Agenda
04/10/2019	High Level Regional Conference "It's all about Justice"	Tirana	Agenda
23/10/2019	The international conference "Albanian Foreign Policy and the focus on Bilateral Relations"	Tirana	Agenda
24/10/2019	Roundtable "Resolving the Enlargement Deadlock: Between Rule of Law Deficiencies in the WB6 and the EU's Absorption Capacity"	Berlin	Agenda
08/11/2019	EU Enlargement to Western Balkans: How to Overcome the Deadlock?	Prague	Agenda
14/11/2019	European integration of the WB: making a realistic perspective out of a shifting target	Belgrade	Agenda

18/11/2019	I Choose Europe: What's next after October 2019? Challenges for North Macedonia's European path	Skopje	Agenda
29/11/2019	Western Balkan Think Tank Meeting	Skopje	Agenda
29/11/2019	Annual legal seminar on non-discrimination and gender equality	Brussels	Agenda
2-3/12/2019	Defending European Values in the Accession Process	Skopje	Agenda
13/12/2019	Bringing the Balkans back to the EU fore	Belgrade	Agenda