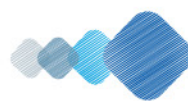


Rule of Law in View of EU Accession

Quarterly brief

January–March 2024



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This brief summarises the key developments in relation to the rule of law in view of EU accession in North Macedonia for the period January–March 2024. It includes **monitoring the fundamentals of EU accession, including key developments in the functioning of democratic institutions, public administration reform, and Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights.**

Key developments

- » A transitional government was formed on January 28, with the first ethnic Albanian Prime Minister;
- » Candidates for the upcoming presidential elections were announced in February. Seven of them managed to gather the requisite 10,000 signatures to enter the presidential race;
- » The SEC's composition was completed on February 28 with the election of the seventh member proposed by the European Alliance for Change;
- » Amendments to the Electoral Code were passed, allowing for the use of documents with the old state name for voting, streamlining voter registration processes, and setting higher signature quotas for independent candidates, a move that drew criticism and calls for a reversal from independents;
- » Various pre-election coalitions formed for parliamentary elections, with distinct agendas and leadership, setting the stage for a competitive electoral landscape;
- » The proposal for amendments to the Law on Restrictive Measures aimed at expanding grounds for imposing measures against blacklisted individuals was tabled, yet to be adopted by the Assembly;
- » Challenges persisted in transitioning national documents as per the Prespa Agreement, causing confusion and concern among citizens;
- » The announcement of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections in the Assembly raised concerns about the independence of the judicial authority, particularly regarding the application of the Electoral Code and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. While the Judicial Council decided to temporarily halt processes for selecting and assessing the accountability of court presidents and judges, the Council of Public Prosecutors did not take similar action. Additionally, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors received a complaint from the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption regarding ongoing exams for the admission of IX generation trainees, pointing to broader challenges within related institutions;
- » The Assembly's approval of amendments to six laws, affecting the salaries of over 1,000 elected and appointed officials, including high-ranking positions like the president, deputies, ministers, judges, and public prosecutors, has sparked objections from key judicial bodies and associations. These amendments halt further salary increases while maintaining the previous year's substantial raise, raising concerns about the financial independence of the judiciary and impacting various aspects of their roles and responsibilities;
- » Adopted in December 2023, the Judiciary Development Strategy for 2024–2028 saw the establishment of a Council to supervise its rollout, ensuring adherence to the Action Plan, monitoring priorities, and evaluating achievements;
- » The reinstatement of the previously dismissed president of the Judicial Council has spurred efforts to address EU peer review mission recommendations through the adoption of an action plan, accompanied by the resumption of projects previously halted by diplomatic missions;
- » North Macedonia was ranked 76th in the world with 42 index points at the latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index, with the adopted amendments to the Criminal Code in 2023 cited as harmful to the fight against corruption;
- » The mandate of the new composition of the SCPC comprising four auditors, two employees of the SCPC, and one judge began on February 8;
- » The Parliament adopted the Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Execution of Sanctions, intended to resolve the security problems in the prisons, to create a more secure environment in prisons, as well as general security in the state, which should be achieved by establishing a Prison Intelligence Unit and an Intervention Unit;
- » The Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services was adopted, thus abolishing the ban on state advertising in the media and introducing two new chapters on state campaigns at the state level and state campaigns on the local level, encompassing a total of 12 new articles regulating this issue;
- » In mid-March, the Parliament adopted the new Law on Justice for Children, which introduces and regulates restorative justice and specifically regulates the right to compensation of a child victim, among other aspects;
- » At the end of March, the Constitutional Court annulled the provision of the Law on Financial Support of Socially Vulnerable Categories of Citizens, entailing an obstacle for persons over 65 years of age to receive compensation due to disability;
- » Toward the end of March, the Basic Court in Negotino adopted the first judgment in the Macedonian court system establishing hate speech against LGBTI+ persons on social media.



List of Abbreviations

AA	Alliance for Albanians
AAVMS	Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
AJM	Association of Journalists of Macedonia
AJPP	Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors
BPPOPOCC	Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption
CPPD	Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
CPPRNM	Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia
CSO	Civil Society Organisations
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration
ECHR	European Court for Human Rights (ECHR)
ECtHR	European Court of Human Rights
EOM	Election Observation Mission
ERRC	European Roma Rights Centre
EU	European Union
GRECO	Group of States against Corruption
GROM	Citizen Option for Macedonia
IA	Intelligence Agency
ICT	Council for Coordination of Information and Communication Technology at Justice System Bodies
LGBTI+	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities
MEPSO	Electricity Transmission System Operator of North Macedonia
MISA	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
MOC	Macedonian Orthodox Church
MOI	Ministry of Interior
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
ODIHR	OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
ONA	National Liberation Army
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PDPA	Personal Data Protection Agency
PPO	Public Prosecutor's Office
RNM	Republic of North Macedonia
SEC	State Election Commission
SEMM	Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia
SCPC	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
SEC	State Election Commission
SSNM	Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers
UNICEF	The United Nations Children's Fund
VMRO–DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
ZNAM	For Our Macedonia



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Functioning of democratic institutions



Elections

The year began with anticipation of notable political changes in North Macedonia. The presidential and parliamentary elections agreed upon in December 2023 mark a milestone as the first to occur at the end of a regular term in 17 years. The last such parliamentary elections were held in 2006. These anticipated changes started on January 28 with the election of a new transitional–technical government by the Assembly in Skopje, which will remain in place until the elections scheduled for May 8.¹

The forthcoming presidential elections showcase a diverse array of candidates from different political entities. The Left’s nomination introduced a respected professor from Sts. Cyril and Methodius University,² while the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) selected their current Vice President and Minister of Foreign Affairs.³ The incumbent president was designated as the candidate from the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE) selected a law professor, member of the Assembly and former presidential contender from the 2019 elections.⁴ Additionally, smaller parties have put forward candidates with varying backgrounds and affiliations. These include the mayor of Kumanovo from the political party for Our Macedonia (ZNAM), the Karposh mayor and president of Citizen Option for Macedonia (GROM), a human rights advocate endorsed by the Bosniak Democratic Union, and a member of the right-wing party The Right. An independent candidacy by a university professor and infectious disease specialist adds further diversity to the electoral landscape.⁵

Amidst these nominations, the Alliance for Albanians (AA) faced internal discord concerning electoral strategy, particularly regarding potential coalitions with other political groups.⁶ This debate led to a split within the party, ultimately resulting in the selection of the AA leader as the presidential candidate for the European Alliance for Change.⁷ The party thus ended up fractured into two factions: one aligned with the Albanian opposition within the European Alliance for Change⁸ and the other with the European Front led by DUI.⁹

Despite the broad spectrum of proposed candidates, only seven gathered the required 10,000 signatures to enter the presidential race. These candidates represent ZNAM, DUI, European Alliance for Change, the Left, GROM, VMRO–DPMNE, and SDSM.¹⁰

- 1 Today, the 7th presidential and 11th parliamentary elections in independent Macedonia were announced (Денеска се распишуваат 7-те претседателски избори и 11-те парламентарни во независна Македонија); *Telma*, 12 February 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/14/deneska-se-raspishuvaat-7-te-pretседателски-izbori-i-11-te-parlamentarni-vo-nezavisna-makedonija/>.
- 2 ‘Biljana Vankovska is the presidential candidate of Levica (Билјана Ванковска е претседателски кандидат од Левица)’, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 7 February 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32809078.html>.
- 3 ‘Bujar Osmani will be the trump card of DUI in the elections for the president of Macedonia (Бужар Османи ќе биде адут на ДУИ на изборите за претседател на Македонија)’, *Telma*, 22 February 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/22/bujar-osmani-ke-bide-adut-na-dui-na-izborite-za-pretседатel-na-makedonija/>.
- 4 ‘Presidential elections: Pendarovski against Siljanovska for the second time, Stevce Jakimovski announced his candidacy, Bujar Osmani will run tomorrow on the list on which Vankovska is already waiting (Претседателски избори: Пендаровски против Силјановска по вторпат, Стевче Јакимовски објави кандидатура, Бужар Османи ќе истрча утре на листата на која веќе ги чека Ванковска)’, *Telma*, 21 February 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/21/pretседателски-izbori-pendarovski-protiv-siljanovska-po-vtorpat-stevche-jakimovski-objavi-kandidatura-bujar-osmani-ke-istrcha-utre-na-listata-na-koja-veke-gi-cheka-vankovska/>.
- 5 ‘Nobody wants to be left without a presidential candidate in double elections (Никој не сака да остане без претседателски кандидат на двојни избори)’, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 22 February 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/nikoj-ne-saka-da-ostane-bez-pretседатelски-kandidat-na-dvojni-izbori/>.
- 6 ‘Rift over elections widens in North Macedonia Albanian party’, *Balkan Insight*, 9 February 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/02/09/rift-over-elections-widens-in-north-macedonia-albanian-party/>.
- 7 ‘Arben Taravari is the presidential candidate of the Albanian opposition (Арбен Таравари е претседателскиот кандидат на албанската опозиција)’, *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 15 February 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32820748.html>.
- 8 ‘Taravari regarding the division in the Alliance for Albanians: We let the court decide (Таравари за поделбата во Алијанса за албанците: Оставивме судот да одлучи)’, *360 Stepeni*, 25 February 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/taravari-za-podelbata-vo-alijansa-za-albansite-ostavivme-sudot-da-odluchi/>.
- 9 ‘Ahmeti and Sela signed the coalition agreement for joint participation in the parliamentary elections (Ахмети и Села го потпишаа коалицискиот договор за заеднички настап на парламентарните избори)’, *360 Stepeni*, 30 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/ahmeti-i-sela-go-potpishaa-koalitsiskiот-dogovor-za-zaed-nichki-nastap-na-parlamentarnite-izbori/>.
- 10 ‘Seven candidates are officially entering the race for the president of Macedonia (Седум кандидати официјално влегуваат во трка за претседател на Македонија)’, *A1on*, 9 March 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/sedum-kandidati-oficijalno-vleguvaat-vo-trka-za-pretседатel-na-makedonija/>.

The State Election Commission (SEC) in North Macedonia saw developments in late February and early March. The Assembly approved the European Alliance for Change proposal for a new SEC member on February 28, completing the commission's composition after months of vacancy.¹¹ Shortly after, the SEC President proposed amending the Electoral Code to allow voting in the upcoming elections using old state name documents¹² in response to the chaos caused by the deadline set by the Prespa Agreement. The agreement stipulated that documents with the old state name would cease to be valid from February 12, leading to widespread confusion as many citizens had not yet completed the transition process for their documents. The Assembly passed the amendments, which also refined voter registration, removed restrictions based on expired documents, and clarified procedures for inclusion on electoral rolls for those turning 18 between election rounds.¹³ Additionally, the changes increased the signature quotas required for independent candidates' participation in elections, now requiring signatures from at least 1% of registered voters in their constituency.¹⁴ Independents criticised the changes, calling for their removal and highlighting difficulties in collecting signatures through SEC offices due to their limited availability in municipalities, which they argue remains an issue even after the amendments.¹⁵

In late March, parties in North Macedonia finalised their parliamentary candidate lists, and pre-election coalitions for the upcoming parliamentary elections began to take form. These coalitions include the "Coalition for European Future" led by SDSM, "Your Macedonia" led by VMRO-DPMNE, "Bravely for Macedonia" led by GROM, "European Front" led by DUI, and "It's Worth It" by the Albanian opposition, European Alliance for Change. ZNAM and the Left declared their independent participation in the parliamentary elections.¹⁶ Simultaneously, the State Election Commission (SEC) arranged the presidential candidates' ballot order through a random draw and confirmed the completion of the public

inspection of the electoral list. Additionally, it was announced that voters from the diaspora would exclusively participate in the upcoming presidential elections. This decision was made because the number of registered voters for parliamentary elections did not meet the required legal threshold.¹⁷

11 'The composition of the SEC is completed, Abdush Demiri was elected as a member of the Commission (Комплетиран составот на ДИК, избран Абдуш Демири за член на Комисијата), *24.Mk*, 28 February 2024, <https://24.mk/details/kompletiran-sostavot-na-dik-izbran-abdush-demiri-za-chlen-na-komisijata>.

12 'The SEC proposes a transitional provision in the Electoral Code that will allow voting with the old valid documents (ДИК предлага преодна одредба во Изборниот законик со која ќе може да се гласа со старите важечки документи), *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 4 March 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32847280.html>.

13 'Voting will also take place with "invalid documents", the Parliament voted on amendments to the Electoral Code (Ќе се гласа и со „неважечки документи“, Собранието изгласа измени на Изборниот законик), *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 7 March 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32852021.html>.

14 'Amendments to the Electoral Code increased the quotas of citizen signatures for the participation of independent candidates in the elections (Измените на Изборниот законик ги зголемија квотите на граѓански потписи за учество на независни кандидати на изборите), *360 Stepeni*, 8 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/izmenite-na-izborniot-zakonik-gi-zgolemija-kvotite-na-graganski-potpisi-za-uchestvo-na-nezavisni-kandidati-na-izborite/>.

15 'Independent candidates with a reaction to the amendments to the Electoral Code: The parties blocked our participation in all subsequent elections by shortened procedure (Независните кандидати со реакција на измените на Изборниот законик: Партиите по скратена постапка го блокираа нашето учество на сите наредни избори), *360 Stepeni*, 11 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/nezavisnite-kandidati-so-reaktsija-na-izmenite-na-izborniot-zakonik-partiite-po-skratena-postapka-go-blokiraa-nasheto-uchestvo-na-site-naredni-izbori/>.

16 'Five pre-election coalitions have been defined less than a week before the start of the election campaign (Дефинирани пет предизборни коалиции на помалку од една недела до почетокот на изборната кампања), *Kanal 5*, 30 March 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/definirani-pet-predizborni-koalicii-na-pomalku-od-edna-nedela-do-pochetokot-na-izbornata-kampanja/a633006>.

17 'The SEC determined the order of the ballot for the upcoming presidential elections (ДИК го утврди редоследот на гласачкото ливче за претстојните претседателски избори), *Kanal 5*, 25 March 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/dik-go-utvr-di-redosledot-na-glasachkoto-livche-za-pretstojnite-pretседателски-izbori/a632166>.

Assembly

During its initial session of the year, the Parliamentary Channel Council in North Macedonia endorsed its Rules of Procedure, Annual Program, and 2024 Content Plan, along with the Financial and Investment Plan for the same year. The programming aims to achieve several objectives, including informing citizens about daily Assembly activities, presenting legislative drafts and enactments, and conducting interviews with Assembly leaders, MPs, and other elected representatives. Furthermore, during the six-month trial period mandated by the Election Code, the Parliamentary Channel will collaborate with Macedonian Radio Television to broadcast free political presentations by election candidates.¹⁸

The outgoing Assembly President, concluding his second term, held a protocol meeting with resident EU Member States' ambassadors and deputy ambassadors from the USA, UK, and the EU Delegation in Skopje. He presented a mandate report on his tenure as Assembly President in this meeting.¹⁹ Also, he shared this report in a final briefing with journalists²⁰ before stepping down on January 15 to assume the Prime Minister's role in the transitional government.²¹ His position was succeeded by an SDSM Assembly member.²²

On March 28, the Assembly commenced its final new session in this parliamentary composition,²³ during which it passed the declaration marking North Macedonia's fourth anniversary of NATO membership and the 75th anniversary of the Alliance's formation. The Assembly President emphasised that adopting the declaration reflects a commitment to contributing substantially to regional and global peace and stability.²⁴

18 'The Parliamentary Channel with a new program scheme: The Council adopted the acts for the start of the program (Собранискиот канал со нова програмска шема: Советот ги усвои актите за старт на програмата)', *Official Website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 11 January 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-sobraniskiot-kanal-so-nova-programaska-sema-sovetot-gi-usvoi-aktite-za-start-na-programata.nspх>.

19 'President Xhaferi presented the mandate report to the ambassadors of the EU member states, the United States, the United Kingdom and the EU Delegation (Претседателот Џафери го претстави мандатниот извештај пред амбасадорите на земјите членки на ЕУ, САД, Обединетото Кралство и Делегацијата на ЕУ)', *Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 23 January 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-pretседatelot-daferi-go-pretstavi-mandatniot-izvestaj-pred-ambasadorite-na-zemjite-clenki-na-eu-sad-obedinetoto-kralstvo-i-delegacijata-na-eu.nspх>.

20 'President Xhaferi presents the report for this mandate at the final press briefing (Претседателот Џафери го презентира извештајот за овој мандат на завршниот брифинг со новинарите)', *Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 24 January 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-pretседatelot-daferi-go-prezentira-izvestajot-za-ovoj-mandat-na-zavrzniot-brifing-so-novinarite.nspх>.

21 'Talat Xhaferi resigned from the presidency of the Parliament (Талат Џафери поднесе оставка од претседателската функција во Собранието)', *360 Stepeni*, 25 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/talat-dhaferi-podnese-ostavka-od-pretседatelskata-funktsija-vo-sobranieto/>.

22 'Jovan Mitreski assumed the position of president of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (Јован Митрески ја презеде функцијата претседател на Собранието на Република Северна Македонија)', *Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 26 January 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-jovan-mitreski-ja-prezede-funkcijata-pretседatel-na-sobranieto-na-republika-severna-makedonija.nspх>.

23 'In the Assembly, the last new session in this parliamentary composition (Во Собранието последна нова седница во овој парламентарен состав)', *Nova Makedonija*, 28 March 2024, <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/featured/vo-sobranieto-posledna-nova-sednica-vo-ovoj-parlamentaren-sostav/>.

24 'The Assembly adopted a declaration to mark four years of NATO membership (Собранието усвои декларација за одбележување четири години од членството во НАТО)', *Sloboden Pecat*, 28 March 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/sobranieto-usvoi-deklaracija-za-odbeležuvanje-chetiri-godini-od-chlenstvoto-vo-nato/>.

Governance

After the government announced in December its intention to introduce legislation permitting actions against individuals blacklisted by the United States, United Kingdom, and various international organisations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs proposed amendments to the Law on Restrictive Measures in January.²⁵ These amendments aim to include corruption and abuse of office as additional grounds for imposing such measures, thereby preventing blacklisted individuals from holding public office or participating in tenders. However, the amendments are currently awaiting approval in the Assembly.²⁶

The transitional government elected on January 28, after weeks of disagreement between the government and opposition, marks the third instance of such a government in the country's history. Despite assuming control of certain ministries and appointing several deputy ministers, the main opposition party declined to support the transitional government due to objections regarding the Parliamentary Speaker's elevation to the role of Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the transitional government was formed. The appointment of the former Parliamentary Speaker as Prime Minister marks a milestone, as he is the first individual of Albanian ethnicity to hold the position in North Macedonia's history.²⁷

Internal conflicts within the AA led to the dismissal of two ministers (the Minister of Health and the Minister of Information Society and Administration) who supported aligning with the Albanian opposition. The Prime Minister clarified that the decision was not based on their professional performance but rather on avoiding having two opposition entities within the technical government.²⁸

Significant challenges emerged in the transition of national documents to reflect the new state name before the February 12 deadline stipulated by the Prespa Agreement. Following the deadline, many citizens found themselves without updated documents, leading to confusion and concerns regarding potential fines and limited access to services.²⁹ The influx of renewal requests overwhelmed authorities, prompting the Ministry of Interior to establish special facilities to address the issue.³⁰

In January, the National Strategy for Youth Mental Health 2024-2026 was adopted,³¹ and in February, the National Development Strategy 2024-2044 was approved, outlining key priorities for economic, social, and environmental development.³²

25 'The Government harmonized the proposed amendments to the Law on Restrictive Measures and submitted them to the Parliament (Владата ги усогласила предлог-измените на Законот за рестриktivни мерки и ги доставила до Собранието)', *360 Stepeni*, 26 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/vladata-gi-usoglasila-predlog-izmenite-na-zakonot-za-restrktivni-merki-i-gi-dostavila-do-sobranieto/>.

26 'The Law on Restrictive Measures is "stuck" in the Parliament (Во Собранието „заглавен“ Законот за рестриktivни мерки)', *Kanal 5*, 27 March 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/vo-sobranieto-zaglavlen-zakonot-za-restrktivni-merki/a632531>.

27 'The Macedonian Assembly elected the transitional government (Македонското Собрание ја изгласа техничката влада)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 28 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/se-izbira-tehnicka-vlada-djaferi-veti-odgovornost-i-transparentnost-/32795100.html>.

28 'Fatmir Medžiti and Azir Aliu are no longer ministers, the Assembly voted for their dismissal (Фатмир Меџити и Азир Алиу веќе не се министри, Собранието гласаше за нивно разрешување)', *360 Stepeni*, 10 February 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/fatmir-medhiti-i-azir-aliu-veke-ne-se-ministri-sobranieto-glasashe-za-nivno-razreshuvane/>.

29 'Is it possible to extend the deadline for changing personal documents? (Можно ли е продолжување на рокот за промена на личните документи?)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 10 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/mozhno-li-e-prodolzhuvanje-na-rokot-za-promena-na-lichnite-dokumenti-/32768607.html>.

30 'The wait for new passports is longer than the legal 15 days (Се чека повеќе од законските 15 дена за новите пасоши)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 22 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/se-chema-povekje-od-zakonskite-15-dena-za-novite-pasoshi/32786717.html>.

31 'The Government adopted the National Strategy for Youth Mental Health 2024-2026 (Владата ја усвои Националната стратегија за ментално здравје на млади 2024 - 2026)', *Radio MOF*, 17 January 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/vladata-ja-usvoi-nacionalnata-strategija-za-mentalno-zdravje-na-mladi-2024-2026/>.

32 'The Government determined and adopted the text for the largest strategic document for the development of North Macedonia in the next 20 years, the National Development Strategy 2024-2044 (Владата го утврди и усвои текстот за најголемиот стратешки документ за развојот на Северна Македонија во следните 20 години, Националната Развојна Стратегија 2024- 2044)', *Official website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 27 February 2024, <https://vlada.mk/node/36094>.

In late February, amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were introduced, allowing state-funded media campaigns and overturning the ban on state-funded advertisements implemented in 2018. These changes raised concerns about media independence and integrity. Additionally, the amended law grants the Council of the Media Agency the authority to automatically extend licences to broadcasters, with exceptions for those repeatedly violating legal provisions or failing to report fairly during an election cycle.³³

Civil society

During the reporting period, the Council for Cooperation Between the Government and Civil Society remained inactive due to ongoing member boycotts.³⁴ Some voices within civil society called for accountability regarding document change concerns, highlighting citizens' legal rights to pursue legal action against the state for potential violations of their freedom of movement.³⁵

Civilian oversight of the security/ intelligence sector

At a panel discussion ahead of VMRO–DPMNE's presidential candidate convention on March 2, the party's Vice President made allegations against the Intelligence Agency, accusing it of unauthorised eavesdropping on party officials and circulating false reports. The Intelligence Agency swiftly denied these accusations, affirming its commitment to standard procedures concerning classified information. Furthermore, the Agency cautioned against politicising its name for electoral advantage and urged against spreading misinformation that could undermine public confidence in security and intelligence institutions.³⁶

33 'North Macedonia ends ban on state ads in private media', *Balkan Insight*, 29 February 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/02/29/north-macedonia-ends-ban-on-state-ads-in-private-media/>.

34 'European Alliance for Change: It should be investigated why Grubi awarded money to NGOs close to DUI (Европски сојуз за промени: Да се испита зошто Груби доделил пари на невладини организации блиски до ДУИ)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 28 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32795351.html>.

35 'Lawyers are already turning to the Constitutional Court for the protection of freedoms and rights - NGOs are calling for lawsuits against the state (Адвокати веќе се обраќаат до Уставен суд за заштита на слободите и правата - Невладини повикуваат на тужби против државата)', *Telma*, 14 February 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/14/advokati-veke-se-obrakat-do-ustaven-sud-za-zashtita-na-slobodite-i-pravata-nevladini-povikuvaat-na-tuzhbi-protiv-drzhavata/>.

36 'IA denies Nikoloski's claims that it eavesdropped on VMRO–DPMNE leadership (AP ги негира тврдењата на Николоски дека го прислушувала раководството на ВМРО–ДПМНЕ)', *360 Stepeni*, 5 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/ar-gi-negira-tvrdenata-na-nikoloski-deka-go-prislushuvala-rakovodstvoto-na-vmro-dpmne/>.

Public Administration Reform

In January, the Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA) established cooperation with seven universities in public administration, ICT, and media.³⁷ Despite media speculation about resignation prompted by legislative hurdles concerning digitalisation and public administration reforms,³⁸ the Minister did not step down, but he cited the SDSM and DUI coalition's blockades of the laws. Subsequently, four laws were published on the Assembly's website,³⁹ excluding the Law on Media.⁴⁰

After the transitional/technical government was elected on January 28, the Assembly appointed deputy ministers and additional deputy ministers, including an additional deputy minister in MISA.⁴¹ Subsequently, on February 13, two new ministers were elected, one overseeing MISA.⁴²

In late February, the Government assessed the quality index of institutions, including various bodies such as MISA, the Ministry of Health, and others. MISA initiated a new cycle of the "Methodology for Evaluating the Quality Index of Institutions", in line with the PAR Strategy 2023–2030 and the National Plan for Quality Management 2023–2025. Data collection was conducted through distributed questionnaires in the institutions. The Public Revenue Office demonstrated the highest quality of work. MISA plans to expand this evaluation annually to include additional institutions.⁴³

37 'MISA will cooperate with seven universities in the areas of public administration, ICT and media (МИОА ќе соработува со седум универзитети во областите јавна администрација, ИКТ и медиуми)', *Kanal 5*, 22 January 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/mioa-kje-sorabotuva-so-sedum-univerziteti-vo-oblastite-javna-administracija-ikt-i-mediumi/a622091>.

38 'Minister Azir Aliu about to resign? (Министерот Азир Алиу пред оставка?)', *Nezavisen Vesnik*, 23 January 2024, <https://nezavisen.mk/ministerot-azir-aliu-pred-ostavka/>.

39 Laws on administrative servants, public sector employees, security of networks and information systems, electronic management and electronic services, and professional development and training of administrative servants.

40 'Minister Azir Aliu does not resign from his post (Министерот Азир Алиу не поднесува оставка од функцијата)', *Kanal 5*, 23 January 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/ministerot-azir-aliu-ne-podnesuva-ostavka-od-funkcijata/a622336>.

41 'Additional deputy ministers in the technical government also elected (Избрани и дополнителните заменик-министри во техничката влада)', *360 Stepeni*, 28 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/izbrani-i-dopolnitelnite-zamenik-ministri-vo-tehnickata-vlada/>.

42 'The Assembly elected Ilir Demiri and Naim Bajrami as new ministers of health and information society and administration (Собранието ги избра Илир Демири и Наим Бајрами за нови министри за здравство и информатичко општество и администрација)', *Radio MOF*, 13 February 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/sobranieto-gi-izbra-ilir-demiri-i-naim-bajrami-za-novi-ministri-za-zdravstvo-i-informaticko-opshtestvo-i-administracija/>.

43 'Announcement of conducted research on quality index of institutions (Соопштение за спроведено истражување за индекс на квалитет на институциите)', *Official website of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration*, 5 March 2024, <https://mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/soopstenie-za-sprovedeno-istrazuvane-za-indeks-na-kvalitet-na-instituciite.nspх>.

Chapter 23



Functioning of the Judiciary

Strategic documents

To effectively oversee the implementation of the Judiciary Development Strategy for 2024–2028 and ensure adherence to the Action Plan, the government established a monitoring council on March 26, 2024. Chaired by the Minister of Justice, the council includes key figures such as the Ministers of Internal Affairs, Information Society and Administration, and Finance, the Deputy Prime Ministers for European Affairs and Good Governance, the State Prosecutor, the Presidents of the Supreme Court, Judicial Council, and Council of Public Prosecutors, as well as representatives from academia and civil society organisations.⁴⁴

Management bodies

Following the announcement of the upcoming presidential⁴⁵ and parliamentary⁴⁶ elections by the Assembly, the Judicial Council has opted to temporarily halt the processes for selecting and assessing the accountability of court presidents and judges, except in emergencies.⁴⁷ This pause complies with the Electoral Code and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, which restricts the commencement of new employment procedures or the termination of existing ones within state and public institutions during the electoral period, except in urgent cases.⁴⁸ This decision has prompted discussions about whether the judiciary, as an independent branch of government, should be subject to such restrictions. Unlike the Judicial Council, the Council of Public Prosecutors has not adopted a similar approach.

After the Administrative Court ruled the dismissal of the previous Judicial Council president illegal, the individual resumed the position on January 3, 2024, displacing the improperly appointed president.⁴⁹ In response to public concerns about the legality of actions taken during the tenure of the improperly appointed president, the Judicial Council asserted that these actions remain legally valid.⁵⁰ However, this assertion is contested by the civil sector and academia, who challenge the legality of the decisions

44 'The Government, at today's session, made a decision to establish a Council to monitor the implementation of the Development Sectoral Strategy for Justice (2024–2028)', *Official website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 26 March 2024, <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/vest/6691>.

45 'Delivery of the Decision on Announcing Elections for the President of the Republic of North Macedonia (Достава на Решение за распишување избори за претседател на Република Северна Македонија)', 14 February 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LgvXvn7-cx3IWbxLchxEZY0cjyKqYB/view>.

46 'Delivery of the Decision on Announcing Elections for Deputies/Members in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (Достава на Решение за распишување избори за пратеници во Собранието на Република Северна Македонија)', 14 February 2024, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1XP6jrSKDr-BVIDu-MAwCJqBGak88qbx2g/view>.

47 'Announcement from the 481st session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—13.03.2024 and continuation on 20.03.2024 (Соопштение од 481-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 13.03.2024 и продолжение на 20.03.2024 година)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/3Q-gOd0e>.

48 'Electoral Code—consolidated text (Изборниот законик - консолидиран текст)', *Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia/North Macedonia* No. 40/06, 87/2006, 127/06, 136/08, 155/08, 163/08, 44/11, 51/11, 142/12, 31/13, 34/13, 14/14, 30/14, 31/15, 196/15, 35/16, 97/16, 99/16, 136/16, 142/16, 57/17, 67/17, 125/17, 35/18, 99/18, 140/18, 208/18, 27/19, 98/19, 82/2017, 146/19, 42/20, 74/21, 215/21, 58/24.

49 'Announcement from the 471st EMERGENCY session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—03.01.2024 (Соопштение од 471-та ИТНА седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 03.01.2024 година)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/4aLIYz2>.

50 'Announcement (Соопштение)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 5 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3w7E9jH>.

made during that period.⁵¹ Meanwhile, diplomatic missions⁵² and other stakeholders⁵³ welcomed the court's decision, leading to the resumption of previously halted projects.⁵⁴

Following the recommendations from the European Union's peer review mission, the Judicial Council adopted an Action Plan on February 29, 2024.⁵⁵ This plan includes detailed timelines for completing tasks in line with the EU's suggestions. The first initiative under this plan was the beginning of developing a Communication Strategy for the Judicial Council and the Republic of North Macedonia courts for 2024–2028. Launched in March with backing from the EU Rule of Law project, the strategy is designed to improve the communication capabilities and media relations of both the Council and the courts.⁵⁶

During the reporting period, a member of the Judicial Council from the Bitola appellate area retired after fulfilling the requisite conditions.⁵⁷ Subsequently, a commission was formed to address this vacancy and a longstanding vacancy among the judges of the Supreme Court.⁵⁸ After two unsuccessful attempts, the commission was established following a third call for the latter position.⁵⁹ Additionally, the Council of Public Prosecutors saw the retirement of two members.⁶⁰ These vacancies were filled by electing new members from the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office (electoral seat 3)⁶¹ and the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia (electoral seat 5).⁶²

51 'Coalition "All for Fair Trials": All decisions of the Judicial Council from May 2023 until yesterday are null and void (Коалиција „Сите за правично судење“: Сите одлуки на Судскиот совет од мај 2023 година до вчера се ништовни)', *TV 24*, 4 January 2024, <https://24.mk/details/koalicija-site-za-pravichno-sudjenje-site-odluki-na-sudskiot-sovet-od-maj-2023-godina-do-vchera-se-nishtovni>.

52 'Ambassador Geer and President Dameva agreed on the importance of independence in the work of the Judicial Council (Амбасадорот Гир и претседателката Дамева се согласија за важноста на независноста во работењето на Судскиот совет)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 16 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3vUrYX7>; 'Meeting of American Ambassador Ageler with President Dameva (Средба на американската амбасадорка Агелер со претседателката Дамева)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 26 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/4b1fTOs>; 'President Vesna Dameva had a working visit with the Head of the OSCE Mission in Skopje, Ambassador Kilian Wahl (Претседателката Весна Дамева оствари работна посета со шефот на Мисијата на ОБСЕ во Скопје, амбасадорот Килијан Вал)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 27 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d145h4>.

53 'Dameva-Lloga meeting (Средба Дамева-Лора)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 18 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3QcVL49>; 'The Blueprint Group for Judicial Reforms welcomes the decision of the Administrative Court to annul the decision to dismiss the then President of the Judicial Council of the RNM (Блупринт групата за реформи во правосудството ја поздравува одлуката на Управниот суд за поништување на одлуката за разрешување од функција на тогашната претседателка на Судски совет на РСМ)', *Official website of the Blueprint Group for Judicial Reforms*, 16 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/49PNAst>.

54 'President Dameva's meeting with Ambassador Kop on the renewal of the MATRA project (Средба на претседателката Дамева со амбасадорот Коп за обновување на проектот МАТРА)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 6 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3JxklUi>.

55 'Announcement from the 480th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM –29.02.2024 (Соопштение од 480-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 29.02.2024 година)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/3UcMlqy>.

56 'Workshop for the development of the Communication Strategy of the Judicial Council and the Courts of the Republic of North Macedonia (2024–2028) (Работилница за изработка на Комуникациска стратегија на Судскиот совет и судовите на Република Северна Македонија (2024–2028))', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 19 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3vXJqj>.

57 'Announcement from the 476th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—31.01.2024 (Соопштение од 476-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 31.01.2024 година)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/3Uy5tk6>.

58 'Announcement from the 477th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—12.02.2024 (Соопштение од 477-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 12.02.2024 година)', *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/3WeuMZV>.

59 'Advertisement for the election of 1 (one) member of the ranks of judges from the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia and for the election of 1 (one) member of the ranks of judges from the Appellate Area of Bitola (Оглас за избор на 1 (еден) член од редот на судиите од Врховниот суд на Република Северна Македонија и за избор на 1 (еден) член од редот на судиите од апелационо подрачје Битола)', <https://bit.ly/3Jbgril>.

60 'Decision on Termination of Office of Member Fidanka Rajevska (Одлука за престанок на функција на член-Фиданка Рајевска)', *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 13 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3xOMUik>; 'Minutes of the 100th session of CPPRNM (Записник од 100 седница на СЈО РСМ)', *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 28 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3QfVhKo>.

61 'Announcement (Соопштение)', *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 26 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/44d4QzK>.

62 'Announcement of final results of conducted elections for members of CPPRNM (Соопштение за конечни резултати од спроведени избори за член на СЈО РСМ)', *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 22 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3Uxgh21>.

Independence and impartiality

On January 24, 2024, the new Council for the Coordination of Information and Communication Technology in Judicial Authorities (ICT Council) was established. This 13-member council includes, for the first time, a representative from the civil society sector—the Blueprint group for judicial reforms—and a representative from the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors. Members of the council are appointed for a two-year mandate.⁶³

The Judicial Council has announced initiating a public procurement procedure to equip its sessions with audio and video recording and live broadcasting capabilities to enhance transparency. Until this process is completed, all media are invited to follow and broadcast the sessions freely live without requiring compensation. This interim measure reflects the Council’s commitment to non-selective engagement and equal access for all media, emphasising that no exclusive media partnerships exist.⁶⁴

Accountability

On January 17, 2024, the Judicial Council, by a vote of seven to four, decided to terminate the disciplinary proceedings against the President of the Supreme Court that had been initiated by a council member.⁶⁵

Professionalism and competence

The Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors have established the number of vacancies for judges and public prosecutors for the tenth generation of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (AJPP) trainees. They have designated 162 judicial positions⁶⁶ and 30 public prosecutor positions.⁶⁷ This allocation was based on previous analyses and the anticipated retirement dates of judges and prosecutors over the next three years. These decisions have been formally submitted to the AJPP.⁶⁸

During the reporting period, the Judicial Council appointed one Gostivar Appellate Court and two Shtip Appellate Court judges⁶⁹ designated for criminal and civil cases, respectively.⁷⁰ Additionally, nine jurors were selected for the Vinica Basic Court,⁷¹ with four more appointed to the Skopje Basic Criminal Court and the Gevgelija Basic Court.⁷²

Simultaneously, the Council of Public Prosecutors appointed two public prosecutors to the High Public Prosecutor’s Office Skopje.⁷³ Furthermore, it issued calls for applications for two more public prosecutor

63 ‘The new composition for the ICT Council in the judiciary has been formed (Формиран новиот состав за Советот на ИКТ во правосудството)’, *Official website of the Ministry of Justice*, 25 January 2024, <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/vest/6654>.

64 ‘Announcement (Соопштение)’, *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 13 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3w6GtqS>.

65 ‘Announcement from the 473rd session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—17.01.2024 (Соопштение од 473-та седница на Судски совет на РСМ - 17.01.2024 година)’, *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/4ban4nB>.

66 ‘Announcement from the 482nd session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—27.03.2024 (Соопштение од 482-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 27.03.2024 година)’, *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/4b2yuyi>.

67 ‘Minutes of the 97th session of CPPRNM (Записник од 97 седница на СЈО РСМ)’, *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 28 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UhnKAR>.

68 ‘Announcement from the 482nd session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—27.03.2024 (Соопштение од 482-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 27.03.2024 година); ‘Minutes of the 97th session of CPPRNM (Записник од 97 седница на СЈО РСМ)’.

69 ‘Announcement from the 477th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—12.02.2024 (Соопштение од 477-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 12.02.2024 година)’.
70 ‘Announcement from the 478th emergency session of the Judicial Council of the RNM 02/13/2024 (Соопштение од 478-та итна седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ 13.02.2024 година)’, *Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, <https://bit.ly/3QnkXF5>.

71 ‘Announcement from the 473rd session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—17.01.2024 (Соопштение од 473-та седница на Судски совет на РСМ - 17.01.2024 година)’.
72 ‘Announcement from the 480th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM—29.02.2024 (Соопштение од 480-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 29.02.2024 година)’.
73 ‘Decision on the Selection of Public Prosecutors in the Higher Public Prosecutor’s Office Skopje (Одлука за избор на јавни обвинители во Вишото јавно обвинителство Скопје)’, *Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 13 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3waFtlw>.

positions at the same office, as well as two positions each at the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption in Skopje.⁷⁴

After the Council of Public Prosecutors rejected the request for reconsideration of the decision to reject the documentation related to the announcement for the appointment of the public prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia from the candidate of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office,⁷⁵ the Assembly proceeded to select the sole nominated candidate on February 13 2024.⁷⁶

Quality of justice

Due to the lengthy public procurement process for maintaining software used in administering exams within state institutions by the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, coupled with a Government directive mandating institutions to conduct electronic exams on paper with an electronic reader, AJPP has implemented several measures to facilitate a seamless transition.⁷⁷ These measures include proposing amendments to the Law on the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, updating the Academy's Statute, and adopting a new Rulebook to revise entrance exam rules, aligning them with amended legislation.⁷⁸ Subsequently, the Management Board directed the Admissions Committee to develop a new timetable for the upcoming phases of the entrance exam, with the new qualification test date announced once finalised.⁷⁹

The new timetable's adoption led to a complaint from VMRO–DPMNE to the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), alleging violations of the Electoral Code and the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, which prohibit new employment procedures and dismissals in public and state institutions from the announcement of elections, mandating a suspension of ongoing procedures.⁸⁰

In response, the AJPP cited a similar instance during the 2017 elections involving the admission of the VI generation trainees, where it was determined that there were no violations as the matters were deemed urgent. This decision was further validated by the State Labor Inspectorate following a special inspection. Additionally, the AJPP highlighted that the admission of a new generation is a complex process that takes over a year, and according to the new schedule, the earliest an employment contract with the Academy would be concluded is September 2024, demonstrating compliance with legal standards.⁸¹

74 'Announcement for the election of public prosecutors (Орнас за избор на јавни обвинители)' (Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia), 13 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/4ddDmhh>.

75 'The Council of Public Prosecutors unanimously rejected Fatime Fetai's request to review the decision to reject her candidacy for state public prosecutor (Советот на јавни обвинители едногласно го отфрли барањето на Фатиме Фетаи за преиспитување на одлуката за отфрлање на нејзината кандидатура за државен јавен обвинител)', *A1 On*, 11 January 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/sovetot-na-jo-ednoglasno-go-otfrli-baranjeto-na-fatime-fetai-za-preispituvanje-na-odlukata-za-otfrlanje-na-nejzinata-kandidatura-za-drzhaven-javen-obvinitel/>.

76 'Љупчо Косевски is the new state public prosecutor (Љупчо Коцевски е нов државен јавен обвинител)', *Makfax News Agency*, 13 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UAVOZW>.

77 'Notice from the Admissions Committee on the Course of the Admissions Exam and on the Determined New Timetable for the Further Part of the Admissions Exam (Известување од Приемната комисија за текот на Приемниот испит и за утврдена нова временска динамика за понатамошниот дел од Приемниот испит)', *Official Website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"*, 18 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UdGkd3>.

78 Ibid.

79 'Schedule for taking the qualification test (Распоред за полагање на квалификацискиот тест)', *Official website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"*, 29 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d8cjUR>.

80 'VMRO–DPMNE submitted a complaint to the SCPC against the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors for violation of the Election Code (ВМРО–ДПМНЕ поднесе пријава до ДКСК против Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители за прекршување на Изборниот законик)', *A1 On*, 21 March 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/vmro-dpmne-podnese-prijava-do-dsk-protiv-akademijata-za-sudii-i-javni-obviniteli-za-prekrshuvanje-na-izborniot-zakonik/>.

81 'Announcement regarding a complaint filed against the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev" to the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption for violation of the Electoral Code (Соопштение во врска со поднесена пријава против Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители „Павел Шатов“ до Државната Комисија за спречување на корупција за прекршување на Изборниот законик)', *Official website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "Pavel Shatev"*, 21 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3w7SP1Y>.

Efficiency

On February 8, 2024, following the withdrawal of the nomination of the former Public Prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia as a new constitutional judge,⁸² the ruling party nominated a new candidate who was subsequently elected.⁸³ With this appointment, the last vacant seat was filled, completing the composition of the Constitutional Court.

On 28 February 2024, the Constitutional Court ruled to abolish the legal requirement to declare nationality on the birth, marriage, and death certificates, effectively removing the “nationality” column from the Law on Civil Registry. The Court found that mandating this information contradicts the constitutional principle of free expression of nationality. The relevant constitutional article not only allows individuals to declare their nationality freely but also grants the right to withhold or change this declaration—a flexibility that the repealed provisions did not accommodate.⁸⁴

On February 29, 2024, the Assembly approved amendments to six laws, fixing salary coefficients for about 1,060 elected and appointed officials including the president, deputies, ministers, judges, and public prosecutors.⁸⁵ These amendments halt any further salary increases while maintaining the previous year’s 78 percent raise.⁸⁶ The changes were met with opposition from the Judicial Council,⁸⁷ the Council of Public Prosecutors,⁸⁸ the Association of Judges⁸⁹ and Association of Public Prosecutors⁹⁰, who argue that the amendments compromise the financial independence of the judiciary, adversely affecting decision-making, hiring practices, and the payment of salary supplements. Consequently, they have filed initiatives to the Constitutional Court to evaluate the constitutionality and legality of these amendments, particularly those affecting the salary laws for judges, Judicial Council members, Council of Public Prosecutors members, and public prosecutors.⁹¹ Subsequently, on March 19, 2024, the Government also approved a reduction in the salary coefficients for officials it appoints, ensuring alignment with the Law on the Salary and other Compensation for Elected and Appointed Officials.⁹²

82 ‘The proposal to elect Ljubomir Joveski as a constitutional judge was withdrawn (Повлечен предлогот Љубомир Јовески да биде избран за уставен судија), *360 Stepeni*, 24 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/joveski-iznenaduvachki-i-vulgarno-e-toa-shto-predlogot-za-ustaven-sudija-e-povlechen-bez-da-se-navedat-osnovnite-prichini/>.

83 ‘Ana Pavlovska-Daneva was elected as a constitutional judge—the composition of the Constitutional Court is complete (Ана Павловска-Данева избрана за уставен судија—комплетирани е составот на Уставниот суд, *Telma TV*, 8 February 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/02/08/ana-pavlovska-daneva-izbrana-za-ustaven-sudija-kompletiran-e-sostavot-na-ustavniot-sud/>.

84 ‘The “nationality” section in three articles of the Law on Civil Registry has been abolished (Укинат делот „националност“ во три члена од Законот за матична евиденција), *Official website of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 28 February 2024, <https://ustavensud.mk/?p=25759>.

85 ‘The Package of Laws on the Salaries of Elected and Appointed Persons Was Passed (Изгласани пакетот закони за платите на избраните и именуваните лица), *Biznisvesti.Mk*, 29 February 2024, <https://biznisvesti.mk/izglasani-paketot-zakoni-za-platite-na-izbranite-i-imenuvanite-liitsa/>.

86 Ibid.

87 ‘Announcement (Соопштение), *Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 28 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/49UBjvX>.

88 ‘Announcement (Соопштение), *Official Website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 19 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UxdpCg>.

89 ‘Announcement to the Public Regarding the Proposal for the Law on Amendments to the Law on the Salaries of Judges in a Short Procedure (Соопштение на јавноста во врска со Предлог на Законот за изменување на Законот за платите на судиите по скратена постапка), *Official Website of the Association of Judges of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 28 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/49WdCU2>.

90 ‘The Association of Public Prosecutors Reacts to the Announced Changes in the Law on Salaries (Здружението на јавни обвинители реагира по најавените законски измени за платите), *A1 On*, 28 February 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/zdruzenieto-na-javni-obviniteli-reagira-po-najavenite-zakonski-izmeni-za-platite/>.

91 ‘Announcement (Соопштение), *Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 6 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/4bcPltE>; ‘Initiative to Assess Constitutionality and Legality (Иницијатива за оценување на уставноста и законитоста), *Official Website of the Association of Judges of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 7 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d8Ghbn>.

92 ‘From the 11th Government Session: Decision to Reduce the Salary Coefficients of Officials Appointed by the Government; Conclusion in the Direction of Realizing the Right to Vote of Citizens with Expired Personal Documents (Од 11. владина седница: Одлука за намалување на коефициентите на платите на функционерите кои ги именува Владата; Заклучок во насока на реализација на правото на глас на граѓани со истечени лични документи), *Official Website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia*, 19 March 2024, <https://vlada.mk/node/36224>.

Fight Against Corruption

The latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked North Macedonia 76th in the world with 42 index points, compared to 85th last year with 40 index points. Such a ranking shows progress despite worrisome developments⁹³ that were unveiled during the past year.⁹⁴

According to the National Integrity System Assessment 2023, prepared and published by Transparency International Macedonia, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), together with the State Audit Office and the Ombudsperson, has the best results for integrity, accountability, responsibility, and preparedness to fight corruption.⁹⁵ The SCPC is one of the pillars comprising this integrity system and is designated as the second on the list of 15 pillars. At the same time, the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) is the lowest-rated pillar.⁹⁶

In the second addendum to the Second Report on North Macedonia, the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) assessed that out of 19 recommendations related to the prevention of corruption among MPs, judges, and prosecutors, 14 have been implemented to a satisfactory extent, four recommendations have been partially implemented, and only one recommendation has not been implemented by the country.⁹⁷

State Commission for Prevention of Corruption

Toward the end of the mandate of the current composition of the SCPC, they reported opening 5,283 cases during their term, including 2,872 on corruption, 888 on conflicts of interest, 144 on electoral process prohibitions, and 1,379 on property status inspections. They issued 898 payment orders for law violations, collecting about 8 million euros in fines for the state budget.⁹⁸ However, despite initiating 56 criminal proceedings, no indictments were filed due to inaction by other institutions.⁹⁹ They concluded their term by meeting with CSO representatives to discuss their achievements and the challenges they faced during their work.¹⁰⁰

The new SCPC, comprising four auditors, two SCPC employees, and one judge,¹⁰¹ started on 8 February. They began their work by discussing ongoing activities and challenges with the previous members,¹⁰² held their

93 Such events include the undemocratically adopted amendments to the Criminal Code which reduce penalties for abuse of office for personal gain and shortened deadlines for initiating proceedings for suspected corruption case, as well as politically motivated appointments and dismissals of judicial officials.

94 'CPI 2023 for Eastern Europe and Central Asia: Autocracy and weak justice systems enable widespread corruption (ИПК 2023 за Источна Европа и Централна Азија: Автократијата и слабите правосудни системи овозможуваат широко распространета корупција)', *Official website of Transparency International - Macedonia* (blog), 30 January 2024, <https://transparency.mk/2024/01/30/ipk-2023-za-istocna-evropa-i-centralna-aziya-d1%98a-avtokratiya-d1%98ata-i-slabite-pravosudni-sistemi-ovozmozhuvaat-shiroko-rasprostraneta-korupcija-d1%98a/>.

95 Slagjana Taseva et al., 'National Integrity System Assessment 2023 (Процена на Националниот систем за интегритет 2023)' (Transparency International Macedonia, 17 November 2023), <https://transparency.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/national.integrity.system.assessment.2023-4.pdf>.

96 'State Audit Office, Anti-Corruption and Ombudsperson have the best scores for integrity, the weakest is the Prosecutor's Office, courts, and law enforcement services (Ревизија, Антикорупциска и Омбудсман со најдобри резултати за интегритет, најслаби обвинителството, судовите и службите за спроведување на законите)', Nova TV, 12 January 2024, <https://novatv.mk/revizija-antikorupciska-i-ombudsmann-so-najdobri-rezultati-za-integritet-najslabi-obvinitelstvoto-sudovite-i-sluzhbite-za-sproveduvane-na-zakonite/>.

97 'GRECO is still waiting for the Macedonian authorities to abolish the position of the Minister of Justice in the Judicial Council (ГРЕКО сè уште чека македонските власти да ја укинат функцијата на министерот за правда во Судскиот совет)', 360 Stepeni, 12 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/greko-se-ushte-cheka-makedonskite-vlasti-da-ja-ukinat-funkcijata-na-ministerot-za-pravda-vo-sudskiot-sovet/>.

98 'Five years of the mandate of the SCPC: The court proceedings against the officials are a legacy for the future anti-corruptionists (Пет години мандат на ДКСК: Судските разрешници против функционерите аманет за идните антикорупционери)', Sloboden Pecat, 31 January 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/https-www-slobodenpecat-mk-pet-godini-mandat-na-dskk-sudskite-razreshnici-protiv-funkcionerite-amanet-na-antikorupcionerite/>.

99 'In five years there has been no epilogue from any anti-corruption initiative (За пет години нема епилог од ниту една иницијатива на Антикорупциската)', Radio MOF, 1 February 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/za-pet-godini-nema-epilog-od-nitu-edna-inicijativa-na-antikorupciskata/>.

100 'Meeting with representatives of non-governmental organisations (Средба со претставниците на невладините организации)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (blog), 2 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3PVuO4E>.

101 'Auditors, civil servants and a judge—the members of the new composition of the Anti-Corruption Commission have been determined (Ревизори, службеници и судија – утврдени членовите на новиот состав на Антикорупциска комисија)', Radio MOF, 29 November 2023, <https://www.radiomof.mk/revizori-sluzhbenici-i-sudijka-utvrdeni-chlenovite-na-noviot-sostav-na-antikorupciska-komisija/?fbclid=IwAR2dKaTrpoBFuaXyE6OtzQCF2pbQTSUyXOV0Gd7aE4Ent5LfnFpSI-qY0Zl>.

102 'The mandate of the new composition of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption has begun (Започна мандатот на новиот состав на Државната комисија за спречување на корупцијата)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 8 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/43RYxkQ>.

first session,¹⁰³ and announced measures for fair elections, such as monitoring and reporting illegalities.¹⁰⁴ They also held numerous meetings with the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia,¹⁰⁵ civil society,¹⁰⁶ and the upcoming Election Observation Mission (EOM) of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR),¹⁰⁷ aiming to combat corruption and election irregularities.¹⁰⁸

Additionally, they launched a new electronic system for asset statements through <https://imotnasostojba.dskk.mk/>¹⁰⁹. They invited all current elected and appointed persons who were obliged to submit statements of interest to do so on the new form.¹¹⁰

The SCPC also signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Financial Police Office to advance mutual cooperation through timely, immediate, and mutual communication. This will ensure the exchange of essential data and information and the preparation of joint projects to advance inter-institutional cooperation.¹¹¹

The Public Prosecutor's Office

At the beginning of the year, M-NAV—Macedonian Air Navigation Service Provider, at Skopje International Airport faced turmoil. Hiring without any competition announcement, favouring political connections, and a subsequent strike led by air traffic controllers occurred. Political interference escalated, and an incident of breaching security barriers and an assault on the controllers occurred,¹¹² prompting threats of a no-fly strike.¹¹³ The government took urgent action, including dismissing M-NAV directors.¹¹⁴ The Prime Minister stated that M-NAV had become a family company, listing examples of nepotism and cronyism¹¹⁵ and hence, stated that Eurocontrol and domestic state institutions should address these issues more seriously,¹¹⁶ and at the same time, he announced an inspection of the Labor

103 'First (constitutive) session of the SCPC (Прва (конститутивна) седница на ДКСК)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 15 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/4cONhdc>.

104 'Announcement (Известување)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 16 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/43RZsBO>.

105 'Meeting with the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia (Средба со Јавниот обвинител на Република Северна Македонија)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 13 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/49uVv4W>.

106 'Meeting with representatives of the civil society sector organisations members of the Platform for Fight against Corruption (Средба со претставници на граѓанскиот сектор – членки на Платформата за борба против корупцијата)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 13 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/49rntkh>.

107 'Meeting with Gillian Stirk, Head of the Upcoming Election Observation Mission (EOM) of the OSCE—Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) (Средба со Циљан Стирк, шеф на Мисијата за набљудување на претстојните избори (EOM) на ОБСЕ – Канцеларија за демократски институции и човекови права (ОДИХР))', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 28 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d266tA>.

108 'Working meeting with the Public Prosecutor's Office regarding the activities for monitoring the election process (Работна средба со Јавното обвинителство во врска со активностите за следење на изборниот процес)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 21 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3vSL8fK>.

109 'From 01.01.2024, the new electronic system for submitting a statement of property status and interests will be in operation. (Од 01.01.2024 ќе биде во функција новиот електронски систем за поднесување на изјава за имотна состојба и интереси)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption*, 28 December 2023, <https://bit.ly/3O727Rl>.

110 'Public call (Јавен повик)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 1 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/43Wd8fl>.

111 'A Memorandum of cooperation was signed between the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption and the Financial Police Office (Потпишан меморандум за соработка помеѓу Државната комисија за спречување на корупција и Управата за финансиска полиција)', *Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption* (blog), 26 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3VZBH8S>.

112 "'We are navigating and in the corridor, there are arguments and fights—and how was the air traffic not in danger?!' Air traffic controllers witness the Neziri gang's intrusion („Ние навигираме, а во ходникот викотници и тепачки - и како не бил загрозен авиосообраќајот?!" Контролори на летање сведочат за упадот на бандата на Незири)', *Plusinfo.Mk*, 9 January 2024, <https://plusinfo.mk/nie-navigirame-a-vo-hodnikot-vikotnici-i-tepachki-i-kako-ne-bil-zagrozen-aviosobra-a-ot-kontrolori-na-leta-e-svedochat-za-upadot-na-bandata-na-neziri/>.

113 'Someone won't fly—the directors or the airplanes (Некој нема да лета - директорите или авионите)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 9 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/nekoj-nema-da-leta---direktorite-ili-avionite-/32767014.html>.

114 'Directors in M-NAV were unanimously dismissed, new director is Ilir Memedi (Едногласно разрешени директорите во М-НАВ, нов извршен Илир Мемеди)', *Kanal 5*, 9 January 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/kanal-5-doznava-ednoglasno-razresheni-direktorite-vo-m-nav-nov-izvrshen-ilir-memedi/a620178>.

115 'The ministers deny that they influenced the employment at M-NAV (Министрите негираат дека влијаеле при вработувањата во М-НАВ)', *Deutsche Welle*, 17 January 2024, https://www.dw.com/mk/ministrite-negiraat-nepotizam-damkata-za-vrabotuvanata-vo-mnav-ostanuva/a-68007644?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss.

116 'Kovacevski: M-NAV has become a family company, we need to deal with it more seriously (Ковачевски: М-НАВ станала семејна фирма, треба посериозно да се позанимаваме со неа)', *Nezavisen.Mk*, 9 January 2024, <https://nezavisen.mk/kovachevski-m-nav-stanala-semejna-firma-treba-poseriozno-da-se-pozanimavame-so-nea/>.

Inspectorate.¹¹⁷ The EU Delegation urged investigations into cronyism allegations and the violence against personnel working at M-NAV.¹¹⁸ Subsequently, new directors of M-NAV were appointed,¹¹⁹ and the Civil Aviation Agency performed extraordinary supervision of M-NAV, revealing a series of severe violations and non-compliance with legal provisions in the area of security and imposing 11 mandatory measures for M-NAV, as well as misdemeanour orders and sanctions for the legal entity and individuals.¹²⁰ Pursuant to the investigation of the PPO, the court imposed either house arrest or prison custody for the perpetrators of the violent intrusion in M-NAV, and they were all arrested.¹²¹

Regarding the investigation into the agreement for construction of corridors 8 and 10-d concluded with “Bechtel and Enka”, the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (BPPOPOCC) has announced that over the past ten months, extensive documentation had been collected, several persons had been summoned for questioning, and cooperation with the State Audit Office has been ongoing. However, the investigation has yet to yield a final result. The BPPOPOCC states that this is due to the scale of the case and their limited resources. Currently, only one investigator is assigned to the case out of a total of 20 in the institution.¹²²

Following a lengthy investigation, the BPPOPOCC filed an indictment against the Mayor of Struga for purchasing a luxury car at the expense of the Municipality of Struga. He is accused of Abuse of Official Position and Authority under Article 353, paragraph 4 of the Criminal Code, which stipulates a prison sentence of one to five years if convicted.¹²³ The Basic Criminal Court Skopje declared that

the jurisdiction lies with the court where the crime was committed. Hence, it redirected the case to the Basic Court in Struga.¹²⁴

In the “Titanik” case, the Appellate Court Skopje granted a conditional discharge for the former minister of transport and communications, who will be released in June. On the other hand, the court did not adopt such a decision in this case regarding the former head of the former Security and Counterintelligence Directorate. Still, it upheld his appeal and returned the case for retrial before the Basic Criminal Court Skopje.¹²⁵

In the “Trezor” case, the former head of the Security and Counterintelligence Directorate was accused of misuse of funds from the state budget to purchase electronic communication equipment

117 “The Labor Inspectorate will inspect the unions in M-NAV: “That company is a family company, Tasevski’s brother works there, his father worked there” (Трудова ќе ги проверува синдикатите во М-НАВ: „Таа фирма е семејна, брат му на Тасевски работи таму, татко му работел таму“), A1 On, 10 January 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/trudova-kje-gi-proveruva-sindikatite-vo-m-nav-taa-firma-e-semejna-brat-mu-na-tasevski-raboti-tamu-tatko-mu-rabotel-tamu/>.

118 “EU Delegation: We expect state authorities to investigate allegations of cronyism in employment at M-NAV (Делегација на ЕУ: Очекуваме државните власти да ги истражат наводите за кронизам во вработувања во М-НАВ)”, 360 Stepeni, 9 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/delegatsija-na-eu-ochekuvame-drzhavnite-vlasti-da-gi-istrzhat-navodite-za-kronizam-vo-vrabortuvana-vo-m-nav/>.

119 “M-NAV has a new management - Milan Korac, President of the Management Board (М-НАВ има ново раководство – Милан Кораќ претседател на Управниот одбор)”, Mkd.Mk, 26 January 2024, <https://mkd.mk/m-nav-ima-novo-rakovodstvo-milan-korac-pretседател-na-upravniot-odbor/>.

120 “Inspection: 11 mandatory security recommendations in M-NAV (Надзор: 11 задолжителни препораки за безбедноста во М-НАВ)”, Deutsche Welle, 25 January 2024, https://www.dw.com/mk/vonreden-nadzor-seriozni-propusti-i-preksuvana-na-procedurite-za-bezbednost-vo-mnav/a-68069754?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss.

121 “All the suspects for the intrusion in M-NAV were arrested, one person received prison custody (Уапсени сите осомничени за упадот во М-НАВ, едно лице доби затворски притвор)”, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 18 January 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32782370.html>.

122 “We are working on the case for the supervision of “Bechtel and Enka”—with one investigator and a pile of documents (Се работи на предметот за надзорот над „Бехтел и Енка“ – Со еден истражител, а куп документи)”, 360 Stepeni, 1 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/se-raboti-na-predmetot-za-nadzorot-nad-behtel-i-enka-so-eden-istrzhitel-a-kup-dokumenti/>.

123 “BPPOPOCC after a longlasting investigation, filed an indictment against Ramiz Merko for the purchase of the luxury “Audi” (ОЈО ГОКК по долга истрага поднесе обвинение против Рамиз Мерко за набавката на луксузното „ауди“), 360 Stepeni, 1 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/ojo-gokk-po-dolga-istraga-podnese-obvinenie-protiv-ramiz-merko-za-nabavkata-na-luksuznoto-audi/>.

124 “The Basic Court Skopje declared itself incompetent for the accusation against Ramiz Merko, the case was forwarded to the court in Struga (Скопскиот суд се прогласи за ненадлежен за обвинението против Рамиз Мерко, предметот е препратен до судот во Струга)”, 360 Stepeni, 6 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/skopskiot-sud-se-proglasi-za-nenadlezhen-za-obvinenieto-protiv-ramiz-merko-predmetot-e-prepraten-do-sudot-vo-struga/>.

125 “Appellate Court: Janakieski will be released in June, and the Criminal Court will decide on Mijalkov’s conditional discharge (Апелација: Јанакиески во јуни излегува на слобода, а за условен отпуст на Мијалков ќе одлучува Кривичен суд)”, 360 Stepeni, 12 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/apelatsija-janakieski-vo-juni-izleguva-na-sloboda-a-za-usloven-otrust-na-mijalkov-ke-odluchuva-krivichen/>.

for the institution's needs. The court decided to acquit him because the public prosecutor did not prove beyond reasonable doubt that he and the other accused persons committed the crime for which they were accused.¹²⁶

Legal Framework

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has proposed amendments to the Law on Restrictive Measures to include legal acts from the United States and the United Kingdom as grounds for imposing such measures in North Macedonia. This initiative aims to broaden the scope of restrictive measures and tools available, adding corruption and abuse of official duty alongside terrorism and weapon proliferation.¹²⁷ The proposal follows an increase in the inclusion of former or current public officials, including a former special public prosecutor and the current Mayor of the Municipality of Karposh and their families on the US "blacklist."¹²⁸

To combat corruption at border checkpoints, the National Council for Implementation of the National Strategy for Border Integrated Management has suggested amending the Law on Border Police. This amendment would introduce polygraph testing for border control officers as an anti-corruption measure. An independent institution would conduct the testing, and failing the test would result in immediate dismissal, followed by further investigation by the PPO.¹²⁹

126 'Mijalkov, Grujovski, and Jakimovski received an acquittal in the "Trezor" case (Мијалков, Грујовски и Јакимовски добија ослободителна пресуда во случајот „Трезор“); 360 Stepeni, 22 February 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mijalkov-grujovski-i-jakimovski-dobija-osloboditelna-presuda-vo-slucajot-trezor/>.

127 'The US "blacklist" will become the basis for sanctions in the country as well (Американската „црна листа“ ќе стане основ за санкции и во земјава); 360 Stepeni, 11 January 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/amerikanskata-tsrna-lista-ke-stane-osnov-za-sanktsii-i-vo-zemjava/>.

128 'Katica Janeva and Stevco Jakimovski placed on the "blacklist" of the USA (Катица Јанева и Стевчо Јакимовски ставени на „црната листа“ на САД); 360 Stepeni, 18 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/katitsa-janeva-i-stevcho-jakimovski-staveni-na-tsrnata-lista-na-sad/>.

129 'Polygraphic testing of border control officers is proposed as a measure in the fight against corruption (Се предлага полиграфско тестирање на граничните службеници како мерка во борбата против корупцијата); 360 Stepeni, 6 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/se-predlaga-poligrafsko-testirane-na-granichnite-sluzhbenitsite-kako-merka-vo-borbata-protiv-koruptsijata/>.

Fundamental Rights

Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a judgment on January 16 in the case of Peshov and Ristovski v. North Macedonia. The case revolved around concerns regarding inadequate reasoning in the national courts' decisions ordering the pre-trial detention of the applicants and certain procedural flaws in related proceedings. These legal actions stemmed from two sets of criminal proceedings relating to an incident on April 27, 2017, when a group of protesters entered the Parliament building.¹³⁰ The ECtHR ruled that there has been a violation of Article 5, paragraphs 3 and 4 of the ECHR concerning both applicants. As a result, the court ordered the country to pay 750 euros to each applicant for non-pecuniary damage. Additionally, the country was instructed to pay 2,940 euros to the applicants to cover costs and expenses related to the proceedings.¹³¹

On the same date, the ECtHR issued a judgment in the case of Vasilevski v. North Macedonia regarding the lack of adversarial process in proceedings concerning the applicant's pre-trial detention, pursuant to criminal proceedings concerning the same incident on 27 April 2017. The ECtHR decided that there had been a violation of Article 5, paragraph 4 of the ECHR and ordered the country to pay 800 euros for non-pecuniary damage and 400 euros with respect to costs and expenses to the applicant.¹³²

On 6 February, the ECtHR issued a judgment in the case of Zhezhovski v. North Macedonia regarding arbitrariness of the domestic courts' decisions in proceedings for counter-enforcement, in violation of Article 6 of the European Convention for Human Rights (ECHR). The ECtHR decided that there had been a violation of Article 6, paragraph 1 of the ECHR and ordered the country to pay 3,600 euros for non-pecuniary damage and 1,220 euros for costs and expenses to the applicant.¹³³

On 20 February, the ECtHR issued a judgment in the case of Iljaz v. North Macedonia regarding the failure of the domestic authorities to investigate allegations of physical assault and threats made to the applicant by a private individual. The ECtHR decided that there had been a violation of the procedural aspect of Article 3 of the ECHR and ordered the country to pay the applicant 3,000 euros for non-pecuniary damage and 1,220 euros for costs and expenses.¹³⁴

130 'Ristovski and Peshov were unjustifiably detained, the European Court of Human Rights decided (Ристовски и Пешов биле неоправдано држени во притвор, одлучи Европскиот суд за човекови права); *Sloboden Pечат*, 16 January 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/ristovski-i-peshov-bile-neopravdano-drzheni-vo-pritvor-odluchi-evropskiot-sud-za-chovekovi-prava/>.

131 ECtHR, 'Case of Peshov and Ristovski v. North Macedonia (Случај Пешов и Ристовски против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 18678/18 и 19821/20))', 16 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3UdVlIm>.

132 ECtHR, 'Case of Vasilevski v. North Macedonia (Случај Василевски против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 27509/18))', 16 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3xwMUDX>.

133 ECtHR, 'Case of Zhezhovski v. North Macedonia (Случај Жежовски против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 52572/18))', 6 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3vMgBAq>.

134 ECtHR, 'Case of Iljaz v. North Macedonia (Случај Илџаз против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 53040/19))', 20 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/3jgwfHc>.

The Ombudsperson

During its 149th session, Parliament opted not to review or adopt amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson due to lack of translation. This decision leaves the institution without a defined 'status', affecting its international obligations and reputation and impeding its increased involvement in international organisations.¹³⁵

Following the Ombudsperson's previous concerns¹³⁶ about citizens' obligation to obtain new personal documents displaying the name "Republic of North Macedonia" from the Ministry of Interior (Moi), which imposes a significant financial burden,¹³⁷ the institution has continued to receive complaints regarding the process's organisation and citizens' inability to obtain such documents. Teams from the Ombudsperson's office went out on the field and assisted citizens in urgent need of their personal documents to retrieve them from the Moi. Consequently, the institution instructed the Moi to enhance the organisation of the process for issuing personal documents.¹³⁸

Prison and Detention facilities

In mid-January, the Ministry of Justice announced that the draft law amending and supplementing the Law on Execution of Sanctions was placed at a parliamentary session.¹³⁹ These amendments are intended to resolve the security problems in the prisons, create a more secure prison environment, and provide general security in the state, which should be achieved by establishing a Prison Intelligence Unit and an Intervention Unit. In addition, the amendments prescribe establishing a video surveillance system and using body cameras in prisons, which should reduce corruption in such facilities.¹⁴⁰ Parliament adopted such amendments toward the end of March.¹⁴¹

As part of the coordinated actions in the prison facilities across the country, a search was conducted in the prison in Prilep by police officers from the Department for Illegal Drug and Weapons Trade within the Department for Internal Affairs in Prilep in coordination with colleagues from the Department for Suppression of Organized and Serious Crime at the Bureau for Public Security. The search revealed that convicts possessed drugs, digital scales, and money, which the police officers confiscated.¹⁴²

135 'The Ombudsperson has a strong reaction to the Parliament because it did not adopt the amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson (Омбудсманот со остра реакција до Собранието затоа што не ги донесе измените на Законот за Народниот правобранител); 360 Stepeni, 29 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/ombudsmanot-so-otra-reakcija-do-sobranieto-zatoa-shto-ne-gi-donese-izmenite-na-zakonot-za-narodniot-pravobranitel/>.

136 'Ziberi: The Government should once again consider the possibility of covering the costs of issuing personal identity cards (Зибери: Владата уште еднаш да ја разгледа можноста за покривање на трошоците за личните карти); 360 Stepeni, 24 August 2023, <https://360stepeni.mk/ziberi-vladata-ushte-ednash-da-ja-razgleda-mozhnosta-za-pokrivane-na-troshotsite-za-lichnite-karti/>.

137 'After February 12, all personal documents with the name of Republic of Macedonia will not be valid (По 12-ти февруари, сите лични документи со Република Македонија, нема да важат); Slobodnaevropa.Mk, 21 July 2023, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/po-12-ti-fevruari-site-lichni-dokumenti-so-republika-makedonija-nema-da-vazhat-/32511795.html>.

138 'The Ombudsperson helped citizens to find the prepared personal documents in the Ministry of Interior—they were set aside (Народниот правобранител им помогнал на граѓани да ги најдат готовите лични документи во МВР – биле ставени настрана); 360 Stepeni, 1 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/narodniot-pravobranitel-im-pomognal-na-gragani-da-gi-najdat-gotovite-lichni-dokumenti-vo-mvr-bile-staveni-nastrana/>.

139 'Draft Law amending and supplementing the Law on Execution of Sanctions at a parliamentary session (Предлог законот за изменување и дополнување на Законот за извршување на санкциите на собраниска седница); Official website of the Ministry of Justice (blog), 15 January 2024, <https://pravda.gov.mk/vest/6651>.

140 'Police body cameras for less bribery in prisons, prison intelligence for more security (Камери на телата на полицајците за помалку мито во затворите, затворско разузнавање за поголема безбедност); Sloboden Pecat, 25 January 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/kameri-na-telata-na-policajcite-za-pomalku-mito-vo-zatvorite-zatvorsko-razuznavanje-za-pogolema-bezbednost/>.

141 'Law amending and supplementing the Law on Execution of Sanctions (Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за извршување на санкциите); Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 74/2024 § (n.d.).

142 'Marijuana, digital scales, and money found during a search in Prilep prison (Маријуана, дигитални ваги и пари пронајдени при претрес во прилепскиот затвор); 360 Stepeni, 3 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/marihuana-digitalni-vagi-i-pari-pronajdeni-pri-pretres-vo-prilepskiot-zatvor/>.

Personal Data Protection

On European Data Protection Day (28 January), serious shortcomings in this area were highlighted. These include the understaffing and shortage of experts at the Personal Data Protection Agency (PDPA), with 25% of employees leaving the agency in the past five years to pursue higher salaries in the private sector. Additionally, there is a lack of legislation addressing the abuse of personal data as a criminal act, underscoring the need to strengthen the judiciary and prosecution offices. Furthermore, there is a pressing need to ensure the protection of children and young people in the modern technological landscape.¹⁴³

In mid-February, there was a violation of personal data protection rights of the citizens of North Macedonia under the Law on Protection of Personal Data. The Decision on the Payment of Funds from the 2024 Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia was published in the 'Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia' no. 39/2024. This decision was based on final rulings from the ECtHR, which stipulated that awarded amounts should be disbursed to applicants from the Republic of North Macedonia. The decision contains lists of 519 citizens, along with their first and last names, social security numbers, and bank account numbers, to whom payments should be made.¹⁴⁴ The PDPA determined that the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia violated several provisions of the Law on Personal Data Protection, including Article 9 paragraph (1) items 1, 2, 3, and 6, Article 10 and Article 83 paragraph (6), by publishing such sensitive data. As a result, the PDPA ordered the Government to revise its decision to remove the citizens' personal data.¹⁴⁵

Considering the recent cyber attacks in certain public entities,¹⁴⁶ the State Election Commission (SEC) has confirmed that continuous work is being performed to protect voter data and to ensure protection from such attacks on the eve of the upcoming presidential and parliamentary elections. Namely, they stated that an ICT strategy with an action plan has been adopted, and an inter-institutional coordinating body for ICT and dealing with security challenges has been established, which is constantly coordinated on all issues related to data security and protection against cyber attacks.¹⁴⁷

143 'Geer: There is a lack of expertise, the capacities of the Personal Data Protection Agency must be increased (Гир: Недостига експертиза, капацитетите на Агенцијата за заштита на личните податоци мора да се зголемат)', *Meta.Mk*, 26 January 2024, <https://meta.mk/gir-nedostiga-ekspertiza-kapacitetite-na-agencijata-za-zashtita-na-lichnite-podatoci-mora-da-se-zgolemat/>.

144 'Published lists of personal data (Објавени списоци со лични податоци)', *Akademik*, 15 February 2024, <https://akademik.mk/objaveni-spisotsi-so-lichni-podatotsi/>.

145 'The Personal Data Protection Agency ascertains a violation of the provisions of the Law on Personal Data Protection by the Government (Агенцијата за заштита на личните податоци констатира прекршување на одредбите од Законот за заштита на личните податоци од страна на Владата)', *Official website of the Personal Data Protection Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia* (blog), 16 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/43N9jc3>.

146 'MEPSO is facing a cyber attack, the company assures that the network and electricity supply are not threatened (МЕПСО се соочува со кибернапад, од компанијата уверуваат дека мрежата и снабдувањето со струја не се загрозени)', *360 Stepeni*, 7 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mepso-se-soochuva-so-kibernetnapad-od-kompanijata-uveruvaat-deka-mrezhata-i-snabduvaneto-so-struja-ne-se-zagrozeni/>.

147 'SEC: We are constantly working on protecting voters' personal data, but also on protection against hacker attacks (ДИК: Постојано работиме на заштита на личните податоци на избирачите, но и на заштита од хакерски напади)', *360 Stepeni*, 13 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dik-postojano-rabotime-na-zashtita-na-lichnite-podatotsi-na-izbirachite-no-i-na-zashtita-od-hakerski-napadi/>.

Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

In the latter half of March, another incident of religious object desecration occurred in Tetovo,¹⁴⁸ following a similar event in Popova Shapka towards the end of 2023.¹⁴⁹ Unknown individuals placed an Albanian flag on the dome of Saint Athanasius' church, which was promptly reported to local authorities by the church board. Subsequently, the police removed the flag¹⁵⁰ and launched an investigation to identify the perpetrators.¹⁵¹ Unfortunately, such incidents persisted, and later, in March, unidentified persons vandalised the windows of the same church, resulting in significant material damage.¹⁵²

Freedom of Expression

Several journalistic associations opposed the Government's attempt to reintroduce state advertising in the media before the upcoming elections, citing it as a threat to media independence and democratic processes.¹⁵³ Despite this, amendments to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were enacted in early March,¹⁵⁴ lifting the ban on state advertising and introducing new provisions for state-level and local-level campaigns.¹⁵⁵

Additionally, journalistic associations urged for swift amendments to the Law on Media to prevent the misuse of public funds by phantom online media during elections. They called for a registry of online media receiving state funding for political advertisements. However, proposed amendments from December 2023 have not yet been adopted due to a lack of political will.¹⁵⁶

Concerns about journalistic freedom arose when an editor and owner of an online religion portal faced a church court summons for critical articles about the church's operations.¹⁵⁷ This prompted solidarity from the Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM).¹⁵⁸ The Independent Union of Journalists and

Media Workers (SSNM) criticised the summons as an attempt to influence journalism and called for the protection of freedom of expression.¹⁵⁹

148 'Albanian flag on the dome of St. Athanasius church on Tetovo Kale: An UCK flag was placed nearby, the church board reported the desecration of a religious building (Албанско знаме на куполата на црквата „Свети Атанасиј“ во тетовско кале: Во близина било поставено и знаме на УЧК, црковниот одбор пријавил сквернавање на верски објект)', *Faktor*, 21 March 2024, <https://faktor.mk/albansko-zname-na-kupolata-na-crkvata-sveti-atanasij-vo-tetovsko-kale-vo-blizina-bilo-postavено-i-zname-na-uchk-crkovniot-odbor-prijavil-skvernavanje-na-verski-objekt>.

149 'The MOC flag was taken down from the temple of Popova Shapka, and the flag of Albania was placed (Симнато знаме на МПЦ од храмот на Попова Шапка и ставено знамето на Албанија)', *Emagazin*, 29 November 2023, <https://bit.ly/3PV1BHI>.

150 'The police removed the flags of Albania and ONA from the monastery courtyard of the Tetovo fortress (Полицијата ги отстрани знамињата на Албанија и на ОНА од манастирскиот двор на тетовското кале)', *Antropol*, 21 March 2024, <https://antropol.mk/2024/03/21/policija-zname-albanija/>.

151 'The police are searching for the perpetrators who placed an Albanian flag on the church St. Athanasius in Tetovo (Полицијата трага по сторителите што поставија знаме на Албанија на црквата „Свети Атанасиј“ во Тетово)', *360 Stepeni*, 21 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/politsijata-traga-po-storitelite-shto-postavija-zname-na-albanija-na-crkvata-sveti-atanasij-vo-tetovo/>.

152 'Unknown perpetrators broke the windows of the St. Athanasius' monastery on Tetovo Kale (Непознати сторители ги искршиле прозорците на манастирот „Свети Атанасиј“ на тетовското кале)', *360 Stepeni*, 30 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/непознати-litsa-gi-iskrshile-prozortsite-na-manastiro-t-sveti-atanasij-na-tetovskoto-kale/>.

153 'Political consensus on media corruption through abuse of the European flag in the Parliament (Политички консензус за медиумска корупција преку злоупотреба на европско знаменце во Собранието)', *Znm.Org.Mk*, 24 February 2024, <https://bit.ly/43LfayB>.

154 'Law amending and supplementing the Law on Audio and Audio Visual Media Services (Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за аудио и аудиовизуелни медиумски услуги)', *Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 55/2024 § (n.d.)*.

155 'State advertisements are returning to private media, the Parliament lifted the ban (Државните реклами се враќаат во приватните медиуми, Собранието ја укина забраната)', *360 Stepeni*, 29 February 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/drzhavnite-reklami-se-vrakaat-vo-privatnite-mediumi-sobraniето-ja-ukina-zabranata/>.

156 'ZNM, SSNM and SEMM: Paid political advertising may still be subject to party-media corruption or abuse (ЗНМ, ССНМ и СЕММ: Платеното политичко рекламирање и понатаму може да биде предмет на партиско-медиумска корупција или злоупотреба)', *360 Stepeni*, 8 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/znm-ssnm-i-semm-plate-noto-politichko-reklamirane-i-ponatamu-mozhe-da-bide-predmet-na-partisko-mediumska-koruptsija-ili-zloupotreba/>.

157 'A church court wants to try a journalist (Црковен суд сака да му суди на новинар)', *Expres.Mk*, 27 January 2024, <https://www.expres.mk/crkoven-sud-saka-da-mu-sudi-na-novinar/>.

158 'AJM stands in solidarity with the journalistic freedom of Marjan Nikolovski and calls for a transparent dialogue with the MOC-OA (ЗНМ се солидаризира со новинарската слобода на Марјан Николовски и повикува на транспарентен дијалог со МПЦ-ОА)', *Znm.Org.Mk*, 26 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/43LdkxB>.

159 'SSNM: MOC-OA not to create a parallel court system for journalists (ССНМ: МПЦ-ОА да не создава паралелен судски систем за новинарите)', *Radio MOF*, 26 January 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/ssnm-mpc-oa-da-ne-sozdava-paralelen-sudski-sistem-za-novinarite/>.

In a separate incident in late March, a journalist was physically attacked while investigating an executor's work.¹⁶⁰ Both the AJM¹⁶¹ and SSNM¹⁶² condemned the attack, emphasising that assaulting a journalist is a criminal act and requesting disciplinary action from the Chamber of Executors. The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) also condemned the attack, especially since it was committed by a legal practitioner.¹⁶³ The PPO Kichevo initiated appropriate measures in response.¹⁶⁴

Rights of the Child

In mid-March, Parliament adopted the new Law on Justice for Children, which introduces and regulates restorative justice and specifically regulates the right to compensation of a child victim, among other aspects.¹⁶⁵ The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) welcomed the adoption of the new law, stating that the key improvements introduced aim to reiterate the principle of the child's best interest in all decisions regarding children who come into contact with the justice system. It deepens the approach of restorative justice, emphasising the right of the child to be heard, as well as the approach to rehabilitation and reintegration as a desired outcome.¹⁶⁶

On the eve of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential elections in the country, the representative of UNICEF in North Macedonia sent an open letter to the leaders of the political parties, stating that they have the opportunity to put children, youth, and families at the centre of their election programs. She noted that since ratifying the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the country has made significant progress in advancing the rights of children and adolescents. However, there is still room for improvement, especially since children comprise 20% of the resident population in the country.¹⁶⁷

160 'Journalist Furkan Saliu was attacked (Нападнат новинарот Фуркан Салиу)', *Skopje Info*, 21 March 2024, <https://skopjeinfo.mk/napadnat-novinarot-furkan-saliu>.

161 'The journalist Furkan Saliu was physically attacked by an executor in Kichevo - AJM with a strong condemnation of the incident (Новинарот Фуркан Салиу физички нападнат од извршителка во Кичево - ЗНМ со остра осуда за инцидентот)', 360 Stepeni, 21 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/novinarot-furkan-saliu-fizichki-napadnat-od-izvrshitelka-vo-kichevo-znm-so-ostra-osuda-za-incidentot/>.

162 'SSNM is outraged by the attack on journalists in Kichevo, but welcomes the quick reaction of the Public Prosecutor's Office (ССНМ е огорчен за нападот врз новинарите во Кичево, но со поздрав за брзата реакција на обвинителството)', Radio MOF, 22 March 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/ssnm-e-ogorchen-za-napadot-vrz-novinarite-vo-kichevo-no-so-pozdrav-za-brzata-reakcija-na-obvinitelstvoto/>.

163 'AAVMS condemned the attack on journalist Saliu (АВМУ со осуда за нападот на новинарот Салиу)', 360 Stepeni, 22 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/avmu-so-osuda-za-napadot-na-novinarot-saliu/>.

164 Ibid.

165 'Law on Justice for Children (Закон за правда за децата)', Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 66/24 § (n.d.).

166 'UNICEF: New Law on Justice for Children promises to further advance children's rights to justice and protection (УНИЦЕФ: Новиот Закон за правда за деца ветува дополнително унапредување на детските права на правда и заштита)', Radio MOF, 25 March 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/unicef-noviot-zakon-za-pravda-za-deca-vetuva-dopolnitelno-unapreduvanje-na-detskite-prava-na-pravda-i-zashtita/>.

167 'UNICEF sent a letter to party leaders: Elections are an opportunity to make policies for youth and children (УНИЦЕФ со писмо до лидерите на партиите: Изборите се можност да се изработат политики за младите и децата)', Radio MOF, 26 March 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/unicef-so-pismo-do-liderite-na-partiite-izborite-se-mozhnost-da-se-izrobotat-politiki-za-mladite-i-decata/>.

Vulnerable Groups and the Principle of Non-discrimination

In March, the Constitutional Court annulled a provision in the Law on Financial Support for Socially Vulnerable Categories of Citizens. This provision stipulated compensation for disability only for individuals aged 26 to 65, thus creating unequal treatment. The Court's decision removed the maximum age limit for receiving disability compensation.¹⁶⁸

At the beginning of the year, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) established its Code of Ethics to guide the ethical conduct of its members and employees. This code aims to set ethical standards and practices that will guide the behaviour and decision-making of members and employees in exercising the CPPD's powers arising from the Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination and its Rules of Procedure.¹⁶⁹

Reports surfaced that the Government planned to relocate the CPPD without providing new premises.¹⁷⁰ After consultations, the CPPD announced the annulment of this decision, thus allowing it to remain in its current location.¹⁷¹

In late 2023, the CPPD identified instances of direct discrimination by the Council of Public Prosecutors against a public prosecutor based on her personal characteristics and social status and recommended against such practices in the future, demanding a public apology.¹⁷² The former Council President filed a lawsuit against the CPPD before the Administrative Court.¹⁷³ At the same time, current Council members expressed negative views about the CPPD during sessions, drawing concern from the Coalition All For Fair Trials¹⁷⁴ and the Network for Protection against Discrimination.¹⁷⁵

The CPPD urged action on past recommendations regarding discrimination in voting processes,¹⁷⁶ announced intensified monitoring of hate speech and called for a fair and democratic pre-election campaign.¹⁷⁷

168 'Persons with disabilities over the age of 65 will be able to receive compensation, the Constitutional Court decided (Лицата со попреченост над 65 години ќе можат да добиваат надоместок, одлучи Уставен)', *360 Stepeni*, 29 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/litsata-so-poprechenost-nad-65-godini-ke-mozhat-da-dobivaat-nadomestok-odluchi-ustaven/>.

169 'Code of Ethics of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Етички кодекс на Комисијата за спречување и заштита од дискриминација)', Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 2/24 § (n.d.).

170 'The Anti-Discrimination Commission discriminated: They were evicted out of the premises by a decision of the Government (Дискриминирана Комисија за антидискриминација: Ги исфрлиле од просториите со одлука на Влада)', Republika, 19 January 2024, <https://republika.mk/vesti/makedonija/diskriminirana-komisija-za-antidiskriminatsija-gi-isfrtile-od-prostoriite-so-odluka-na-vlada/>.

171 'Announcement for the public (Соопштение за јавноста)', *Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination* (blog), 20 January 2024, <https://bit.ly/3vBSnIT>.

172 'The Council of Public Prosecutors severely discriminated against prosecutor Lence Ristoska, they should publicly apologize, the Anti-Discrimination Commission determined (Советот на јавни обвинители тешко ја дискриминира обвинителката Ленче Ристоска, треба јавно да и се извини, утврди Антидискриминациската комисија)', *Sakam da kazam*, 14 December 2023, <https://bit.ly/3u2l6Wv>.

173 'Lenche Ristoska did not receive an apology for discrimination during promotion, the ex-president of the Council of Public Prosecutors will sue the Anti-Discrimination Commission (Ленче Ристоска не доби извинување за дискриминацијата при унапредување, експретседателот на Советот на јавни обвинители ќе ја тужи Антидискриминациската комисија)', *Sdk.Mk*, 13 January 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/lenche-ristoska-ne-dobi-izvinuvane-za-diskriminatsijata-pri-unapreduvane-ekspretsdatelot-na-sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli-ke-ja-tuzhi-antidiskriminatsiskata-komisija/>.

174 'At their session, the Council of Public Prosecutors insulted and degraded the CPPD for the opinion that Jolevski should apologize to Lenche Ristoska (Советот на јавни обвинители на седница ја навредувал и деградира КСЗД за мислењето Јолевски да и се извини на Ленче Ристоска)', *Fokus*, 12 January 2024, <https://fokus.mk/sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli-na-sednitsa-ja-navreduval-i-degradiral-kszd-za-misleneto-jolevski-da-i-se-izvini-na-lenche-ristoska/>.

175 'Network for Protection against Discrimination: The Council of Public Prosecutors to apologize for the insults to the CPPD and to undertake measures against gender discrimination (Мрежа за заштита од дискриминација: Советот на јавни обвинители да се извини за навредите кон КСЗД и да преземе мерки против родова дискриминација)', *Radio MOF*, 17 January 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/mreza-za-zashtita-od-diskriminacija-sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli-da-se-izvini-za-navredite-kon-kszd-i-da-prezeme-merki-protiv-rodova-diskriminacija/>.

176 'The CPPD warns that certain categories of citizens may be prevented from voting (КСЗД предупредува оти на одредени категории граѓани може да им биде попречено правото на глас)', *360 Stepeni*, 12 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/kszd-predupreduva-oti-na-odredeni-kategorii-na-gragani-mozhe-da-im-bide-poprecheno-pravoto-na-glas/>.

177 'To fulfill the recommendations of the Commission for smooth voting of all persons. We will monitor disturbing speech! – Press conference of the CPPD (Да се исполнат препораките од Комисијата за непречено гласање на сите лица. Ќе вршиме мониторинг на вознемирувачки говор! – Прес конференција на КСЗД)', *Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination* (blog), 12 March 2024, <https://bit.ly/3VUZn4K>.

Gender

In the second half of February, the Ministry of Justice adopted the Annual Operational Plan for 2024 to implement the Second National Action Plan of the Republic of North Macedonia for implementation of the UN Resolution 13/25—Women, peace and security (2020–2025). It foresees activities for the efficient and effective realisation of the set aims of the Law on Payment of Monetary Compensation to Victims of Violent Crimes, prevention of violence against women, and capacity building for the practical application of the provisions of the Istanbul Convention through the training of judges and public prosecutors.¹⁷⁸

On the occasion of International Women’s Day (8 March), a march under the slogan ‘Red line: Women’s rights are not negotiable’ was organised in Skopje.¹⁷⁹ During this event, the participants made eight demands, or red lines, referring to pending issues, such as women’s unrestricted access to safe and legal medical abortion in every municipality, equal wages for men and women, as well as the actions of institutions responsible for prevention and protection against gender-based violence. In addition, they demanded equal representation of women in positions of power both in public institutions and in the private sector. They addressed the status of female workers in culture and access to paid maternity leave and sick leave for female farmers.¹⁸⁰

Hate speech

Ahead of the upcoming parliamentary and presidential election campaign, the Platform for Gender Equality called upon political parties and their supporters to refrain from insults and spreading hate speech. Based on the experience of previous election cycles, which were marked by strong hate speech, and taking into consideration that there are already sexist and chauvinistic attacks on women in this cycle, the Platform condemns the hate speech that is intensifying as the elections approach and appeals for responsible and civilised behaviour.¹⁸¹

178 ‘The Ministry of Justice adopted the Annual Operational Plan for 2024 for Implementation of the Second National Action Plan of the Republic of North Macedonia for the Implementation of the UN Resolution 13/25, Women, Peace and Security (2020-2025). (Министерството за правда го донесе Годишниот оперативен план за 2024 година за имплементација на Вториот национален акциски план на РСМ за имплементација на Резолуцијата на ООН 13/25 „Жени, мир и безбедност (2020-2025).“), *Official website of the Ministry of Justice* (blog), 22 February 2024, <https://pravda.gov.mk/vest/6676>.

179 ‘March on the 8 March under the slogan “Red line: Women’s rights are not negotiable” (Марш за 8 март под слоганот „Црвена линија: Правата на жените не се за преговарање“), Radio MOF, 5 March 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/marsh-za-8-mart-pod-sloganot-crvena-linija-pravata-na-zhenite-ne-se-za-pregovaranje/>.

180 ‘Women’s rights are not negotiable, stated the participants of the march on the 8 March (Правата на жените не се за преговарање, порачаа учесниците на маршот по повод 8 март), 360 Stepeni, 8 March 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/pravata-na-zhenite-ne-se-za-pregovarane-porachaa-uchesnitsite-na-marshot-povod-8-mart/>.

181 ‘Reaction: The Platform for Gender Equality strongly condemns hate speech in the pre-election period (Реакција: Платформата за родова еднаквост најостро го осудува говорот на омраза во предизборниот период), Official website of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of Macedonia (blog), 29 February 2024, <https://mhc.org.mk/news/reakcija-platformata-za-rodova-ednakvost-najostro-go-osuduva-govorot-na-omraza-vo-predizborniot-period/>.

LGBTI+

At the end of March, the Basic Court in Negotino issued a landmark decision in North Macedonia, marking the first judgment against hate speech targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and intersex (LGBTI+) individuals on social media. The defendant made two hateful comments on Facebook, inciting violence against the LGBTI+ community. As a result, the court sentenced the defendant to a one-year conditional prison term for spreading racist and xenophobic material through a computer system, as per Article 394-d paragraph 1 of the Criminal Code.¹⁸²

On the occasion of the International Day of Transgender Visibility, the transgender community and their supporters organised a march in Skopje under the theme ‘Marching Bravely—5 Years of Visibility.’ Participants reiterated the importance of passing the draft Law on Civil Registry, which would enable transgender individuals to change their gender designation on official documents through a transparent process. They also highlighted concerns about the rise of anti-gender movements.¹⁸³

Roma

A recent case has highlighted ongoing discrimination against the Roma community in North Macedonia. In Skopje, a Roma woman filed a complaint with the CPPD after being evicted from her apartment just one day after moving in. The landlord cited protests from neighbours due to her Roma ethnicity as the reason for eviction. The CPPD confirmed direct intersectional discrimination based on gender, race, belonging to a marginalised group, ethnicity, and family status in housing and access to services. They advised the landlord to avoid such discriminatory actions in the future.¹⁸⁴

In another instance, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) filed a complaint against a primary school in Prilep for segregating Roma students.¹⁸⁵ The CPPD found indirect and ongoing discrimination and recommended the school cease forming classes based on ethnicity. They also urged the Municipality of Prilep to promote desegregation measures. Additional recommendations included increasing pedagogical support in schools, enhancing cooperation between local authorities and civil society, and implementing fair enrollment criteria across different regions by the Ministry of Education and Science.¹⁸⁶

182 ‘First judgment in Macedonia for hate speech against LGBTI+ persons on social media (Прва пресуда во Македонија за говор на омраза кон ЛГБТИ+ лицата на социјалните мрежи)’, Radio MOF, 29 March 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/prva-presuda-vo-makedonija-za-govor-na-omraza-kon-lgbti-licata-na-socijalnite-mrezhi/>.

183 “‘Trans persons are a vulnerable group, not a danger’ („Транс-лицата се ранлива група, а не опасност“), Prizma.Mk, 29 March 2024, <https://prizma.mk/translitsata-se-ranлива-grupa-a-ne-opasnost/>.

184 ‘The owner of an apartment in Vlae evicted the tenant one day after she moved in, the neighbors complained that she was Roma (Сопственик на стан во Влае ја избркал кирациката еден ден откако се вселила, соседите му се пожалиле дека била Ромка)’, Sdk.Mk, 15 January 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/neraskazhani-prikazni/sopstvenik-na-stan-ja-izbrkal-kiradhikata-eden-den-otkako-se-vselila-sosedite-mu-se-pozhalile-deka-bila-romka/>.

185 ‘North Macedonian equality body finds discrimination & segregation of Roma in Prilep school’, Official website of the European Roma Rights Centre- ERRC (blog), 1 February 2024, <https://www.errc.org/press-releases/north-macedonian-equality-body-finds-discrimination--segregation-of-roma-in-prilep-school>.

186 ‘ERRC: Prilep primary school discriminated against Roma students, the CPPD determined (ЕЦПР: Прилепско основно училиште дискриминираше ученици Роми, утврди КСЗД)’, Radio MOF, 1 February 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/ecpr-prilepsko-osnovno-uchilishte-diskriminiralo-uchenici-romi-utvr-di-kszd/>.

