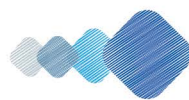


# Rule of Law in View of EU Accession

Quarterly brief

January–March 2025



European  
Policy  
Institute.  
Skopje



This project is funded by the European Union





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**Publisher:**

European Policy Institute - Skopje

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Skopje, 2025

This monitoring brief was prepared under the project Building bridges for a common future: Rule of law in view of EU accession, funded by the European Union. The contents of this Brief do not reflect the official opinions and positions of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed in this Brief lies entirely with the authors.



This brief summarises the key developments related to the rule of law in the context of North Macedonia's EU accession for the period January–March 2025. 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 new President of the Judicial Council was elected in early 2025, and the Council announced plans to introduce monthly caseload benchmarks for judges.
- » In March, the Assembly voted no confidence in five Judicial Council members over allegations of undermining judicial independence; the Prime Minister's threats of protest sparked EU warnings about political pressure on the judiciary.
- » The Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors certified 50 future judges and 47 prosecutors.
- » In January 2025, the Assembly adopted amendments to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification, and Confidential Services, and the Government adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2028.
- » The latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index marked a backsliding for North Macedonia, largely due to concerning developments in the judiciary over the past year and the impunity of individuals involved in high-level corruption.
- » In mid-February, a draft Law amending and supplementing the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest was published, intended to address the identified shortcomings of the current law that negatively impact the efficiency of the SCPC, while respecting established prohibitions and responsibilities.
- » The PPO is investigating the nightclub fire in Kochani, initially discovering several anomalies in the building that were possibly concealed by corrupt practices.
- » During this quarter, developments have occurred in the process of selecting new members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS); however, they have not been finalised due to a lack of consensus in the Assembly.
- » The new Rules of Procedure for the Work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) were adopted, and the Assembly issued a public call for the election of one new member to the CPPD.
- » The Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men adopted a new Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Parliament 2025–2027.



## List of Abbreviations

<b>AAVMS</b>	Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
<b>AJM</b>	Association of Journalists of Macedonia
<b>CPPD</b>	Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
<b>CSO</b>	Civil Society Organisations
<b>ECHR</b>	European Convention on Human Rights
<b>ECtHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>ENER</b>	Unique National Electronic Register of Regulations
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FRONTEX</b>	Human Rights Department of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency
<b>JSP</b>	Public Transportation Company
<b>LGBTI+</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities
<b>MDT</b>	Ministry of Digital Transformation
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NIS</b>	Network and Information Systems
<b>PAR</b>	Public Administration Reform
<b>PDPA</b>	Personal Data Protection Agency
<b>PPO</b>	Public Prosecutor's Office
<b>RAI</b>	Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative
<b>SEMM</b>	Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia
<b>SCPC</b>	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
<b>SIGMA</b>	Support for Improvement in Governance and Management
<b>SSNM</b>	Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers
<b>UNODC</b>	United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime



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# Functioning of democratic institutions





# Elections

In February, the Constitutional Court initiated proceedings to assess the constitutionality of Articles 17 and 18 of the recently adopted amendments to the Electoral Code. The provisions in question increase the threshold for collecting signatures required for independent candidates and electoral lists. Adopted on 7 March 2024, the amendments were intended to apply to the local elections scheduled for October 2025. The Court noted concerns regarding potential inconsistencies with fundamental democratic principles, including the rule of law, political pluralism, and equality before the law.<sup>1</sup>

# Assembly

On 10 January, the Assembly adopted a motion for interpellation against the Chairwoman of the Committee on Social Policy, Demography and Youth, with 61 votes in favour and 22 against. The motion, initiated by MPs from the political party Levica, alleged shortcomings in the Chairwoman's performance.<sup>2</sup> The Assembly concluded that the claims were substantiated, and the MP resigned shortly thereafter.<sup>3</sup> On 29 January, the Committee on Elections and Appointments endorsed a draft decision proposing seven candidates for membership in the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS).<sup>4</sup> The vote was scheduled for the 34<sup>th</sup> plenary session held on 12 February,<sup>5</sup> but did not proceed due to a lack of the required majority in the Assembly.<sup>6</sup>

On 18 March, in the aftermath of a deadly fire in a nightclub in Kochani that claimed over 50 lives, the Assembly suspended all scheduled activities for the following week in observance of national mourning.<sup>7</sup>

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1 Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, U.No.186/2024, Skopje, 26.02.2025 (Уставен суд на Република Северна Македонија, Убр.186/2024 Скопје, 26.02.2025 година), 26 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3RdS9iq>

2 With 61 votes "in favor", the Parliament passed the interpellation for Ilire Dauti submitted by the Left Party (Со 61 глас „за“ Собранието ја изгласа интерпелацијата за Илире Даути што ја поднесе Левица), 10 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4lufkmA>

3 Ilire Dauti submitted her resignation to the Parliament (Илире Даути поднесе оставка до Собранието), 16 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/3E4FsDM>

4 MPs agree on a proposal for a new composition of the AAVMS (Пратениците усогласија предлог за нов состав на АВМУ), 29 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4idE4fL>

5 MPs will vote for new AAVMS members (Пратениците ќе гласаат за нови членови на АВМУ), 12 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3G37Re1>

6 Blockades and prolongation in the selection of a new AAVMS composition (Блокади и пролонгирање за избор на нов состав на АВМУ), 18 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/43MnnEX>

7 The Macedonian Assembly is canceling all activities planned for this week due to the tragedy that occurred in Kocani. (Македонското Собрание ги откажува сите активноти планирани за неделата поради трагедијата што се случи во Кочани), 18 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3RK7Spy>

# Governance

In early February, following a fatal traffic accident that triggered public outrage over judicial accountability,<sup>8</sup> the Prime Minister announced that the ruling majority would submit motions for interpellation against five members of the Judicial Council appointed by the Assembly.<sup>9</sup> The President of the Republic supported the initiative and called for their resignations.<sup>10</sup>

In parallel, the Government initiated the dismissal of the State Public Prosecutor, citing North Macedonia's decline in the 2024 Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index and concerns over the legality of a recent appointment within the prosecution service.<sup>11</sup> The Prosecutor rejected the accusations, asserting compliance with legal procedures and challenging the legal basis for his dismissal.<sup>12</sup> Despite the ongoing debate, the Government submitted the dismissal proposal to the Council of Public Prosecutors.<sup>13</sup> In March, the Prosecutor reiterated that the Government's submission lacked grounds for serious disciplinary misconduct.<sup>14</sup>

On 11 March, the Assembly passed a vote of no confidence in the five members of the Judicial Council, citing their role in undermining the independence and credibility of the judiciary. The vote effectively stripped them of legitimacy to continue exercising their functions.<sup>15</sup> The decision was met with criticism from the European Parliament's rapporteur for North Macedonia, who warned that political pressure on judicial institutions threatened the separation of powers and the rule of law.<sup>16</sup> Shortly thereafter, the Prime Minister publicly stated that if the Judicial Council members did not resign, he would lead protests demanding their removal.<sup>17</sup>

By the end of March, the Government announced the withdrawal of the dismissal procedure against the State Public Prosecutor, citing the need to allow prosecutors investigating the Kochani nightclub fire to conduct their work undisturbed.<sup>18</sup> A scheduled session of the Council of Public Prosecutors to discuss the matter was postponed due to a lack of quorum.<sup>19</sup>

8 Citizens demand justice for Frosina and accountability from institutions (Граѓани бараат правда за Фросина и одговорност од институциите), Radio Slobodna Evropa, 31 January 2025, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33298519.html>

9 The ruling MPs submitted an interpellation regarding the members of the Judicial Council elected by the Parliament (Пратениците од власта поднесоа интерпелација за членовите на Судскиот совет избрани од Собранието), 360 Stepeni, 7 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4ketVRT>

10 Siljanovska-Davkova also expects resignations from members of the Judicial Council: They were not elected to be court scandal masters, but to prevent scandals (И Сиљановска-Давкова очекува оставки од членовите на Судскиот совет: Не се избрани за да бидат судски скандал мајстор, туку за да оневозможуваат скандализирање) Libertas, 11 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42UWtzt>

11 The Government will dismiss the State Public Prosecutor Ljupco Kocevski (Владата ќе го разрешува државниот јавен обвинител Љупчо Коцевски), Nezavisen, 11 February 2025, <https://nezavisen.mk/vladata-kje-go-razreshuva-na-drzhavniot-javen-obvinitel-ljupcho-kocevski/>

12 Statement by the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia (Изјава на Јавниот обвинител на Република Северна Македонија), Public Prosecutor Office of North Macedonia, 11 February 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/izjava-na-javniot-obvinitel-na-republika-severna-makedonija-2/>

13 The Government adopted the proposal to dismiss State Prosecutor Kocevski (Владата го усвои предлогот за разрешување на државниот обвинител Коцевски), Sloboden Pечат, 25 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/vladata-go-usvoi-predlogot-za-razreshuvanje-na-drzhavniot-obvinitel-kocevski/>

14 The proposal for dismissal does not contain grounds for a serious disciplinary violation, says Kocevski (Во предлогот за разрешување нема основ за тешка дисциплинска повреда – вели Коцевски), Sloboden Pечат, 7 March 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/vo-predlogot-za-razreshuvanje-nema-osnov-za-teshka-disciplinska-povreda-veli-kocevski/>

15 Parliament: Vote of no confidence in five members of the Judicial Council (Собрание: Изгласана недоверба за пет членови на Судски совет), DW News, 11 March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/mk/sobranieto-izglasa-nedoverba-za-petmina-clenovi-na-sudskiot-sovet-se-bara-i-nivna-ostavka/a-71889407>

16 Weitz reacts to "pressure from the government coalition on members of the Judicial Council" (Вајц реагира за „притисок од владината коалиција кон членовите на Судскиот совет“), Radio Slobodna Evropa, 13 March 2025, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33346960.html>

17 Mickoski threatened protests if the "five branded" members of the Judicial Council do not step down from their positions (Мицкоски се закани со протести ако „петтемина жигосани“ од Судскиот совет не се повлечат од функциите), Sloboden Pечат, 13 March 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/mickoski-se-zakani-so-protesti-ako-pettemina-zhigosani-od-sudskiot-sovet-ne-se-povlechat-od-funkciite/>

18 The Government will terminate the procedure for Kocevski's dismissal regardless of the opinion of the Council of Public Prosecutors. (Владата ќе ја прекине постапката за разрешување на Коцевски независно од мислењето од Советот на јавни обвинители), 360 Stepeni, 26 March, 2025, <https://360stepeni.mk/vladata-ke-ja-prekine-postapkata-za-razreshuvane-na-kotsevski-nezavisno-od-misleneto-od-sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli/>

19 The Prosecutors' Council lacks a quorum for Kocevski's dismissal (Советот на обвинители снеса кворум за разрешувањето на Коцевски), Sloboden Pечат, 26 March 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/sovetot-na-obvinители-snema-kvorum-za-razreshuvanjeto-na-kocevski/>



In relation to the same incident, the Mayor of Kochani submitted his resignation following the tragedy that resulted in 59 deaths and over 150 injuries.<sup>20</sup> In connection with the same tragedy, the Minister of Transport stated that 427 licenses of construction companies found to be in breach of regulations were revoked.<sup>21</sup> In the meantime, the Basic Court Kochani ordered 30-day detention for 13 people over the 'Puls' nightclub fire, including the former minister for economy.<sup>22</sup> The two former mayors of Kochani and the former director of the State Market Inspectorate were placed under house arrest, replacing their initial detention orders.<sup>23</sup>

## Civil Society

On 20 January, the Government launched a public call for the selection of 14 members and deputy members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society, targeting representatives from associations and foundations.<sup>24</sup> On 5 February, an additional call was issued for civil society organisations representing persons with disabilities to join the National Coordinating Body for the Implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.<sup>25</sup>

Following the initial call, 18 applications were submitted.<sup>26</sup> On 6 March, the Government published the list of the 14 appointed members of the Council.<sup>27</sup> On the same day, it launched a new call to fill the positions of member and deputy member in the field of protection of marginalised persons within the Council.<sup>28</sup>

On 14 March, the Working Group for the Development of the Government Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2025–2028 held its inaugural meeting.<sup>29</sup> By the end of the month, the Government had received two applications for the open positions in the field of protection of marginalised persons.<sup>30</sup>

20 The Mayor of Kochani, Ljupco Papazov, has submitted an irrevocable resignation from office following the horrific fire at the Pulse discotheque, which killed 59 people and injured 155. (Градоначалникот на Кочани, Љупчо Папазов поднесе неотповиклива оставка на функцијата по стравичниот пожар во дискотеката „Пулс“ во кој загинаа 59 лица, а 155 се повредени.) Telma, 17 March 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/03/17/gradonachalnikot-na-kochani-lupcho-papazov-podnese-ostavka/>

21 Nikoloski: 427 licenses of construction companies that circumvented the law have been revoked (Николоски: Одземени 427 лиценци на градежни фирми кои го заобиколувале законот), Alfa TV, 23 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3H2WOSl>

22 30 days detention for Bekteshi and 12 others as court extends measures against suspects (30 дена притвор за Бектеш и уште 12 лица, судот ги продолжи мерките за осомничените), Plusinfo, 21 March 2025, <https://plusinfo.mk/30-dena-pritvor-za-bekteshi-i-za-12-drugi-lica-sudot-odluchi-da-gi-prodolzhi-merkite-za-osomnichenite/>

23 Former Kochani mayors Dimitrievski and Iliev placed under house arrest (Поранешните градоначалници на Кочани, Димитриеви и Илиев одат во куќен притвор), Radio Slobodna Evropa, 26 March 2025, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33361046.html>

24 Public call for the election of 14 members and deputy members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society from among associations and foundations. (Јавен повик за избор на 14 членови и заменици членови на Советот за соработка меѓу Владата и граѓанското општество од редот на здруженијата и фондациите), Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 20 January 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1030>

25 Public call for expressions of interest for membership of a civil society organisation of persons with disabilities in the National Coordinating Body for the Implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities within the Government (Јавен повик за изразување интерес за членување на граѓанска организација на лица со попреченост во Националното координативно тело за имплементација на Конвенцијата на Обединетите нации за правата на лицата со попреченост при Владата), Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 05 February 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1031>

26 Report on registered organisations with candidates and Public Call for Voting for the Election of Members and Deputy Members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society (Извештај за пријавени организации со кандидати и Јавен повик за гласање за избор на членови и заменици членови на Советот за соработка меѓу Владата и граѓанското општество), Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 February 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1032>

27 List of candidates according to the number of votes received for members and deputy members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society (Листа на кандидати според бројот на добиени гласови за членови и заменици членови на Советот за соработка меѓу Владата и граѓанското општество), Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 06 March 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1033>

28 Public call for the selection of a member and deputy member of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society in the field of Protection of Marginalized Persons (Јавен повик за избор на член и заменик член на Советот за соработка меѓу Владата и граѓанското општество во областа Заштита на маргинализираните лица), Government of North Macedonia, 06 March 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1034>

29 First meeting of the Working Group for the Development of the Government Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2025–2028 (Прв состанок на Работната група за изработка на Стратегијата на Владата за соработка со и развој на граѓанското општество 2025–2028), Government of North Macedonia, 14 March 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1035>

30 Report on registered organizations with candidates and Public Call for Voting for the Election of a Member and Deputy Member of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society in the Area of Protection of Marginalized Persons (Извештај за пријавени организации со кандидати и Јавен повик за гласање за избор на член и заменик член на Советот за соработка меѓу Владата и граѓанското општество во областа Заштита на маргинализираните лица) Government of North Macedonia, 28 March 2025, <https://www.nvosorabotka.gov.mk/?q=mk/node/1039>

# Civilian Oversight of the Security/Intelligence Sector

On 5 February, the Constitutional Court ruled that the dismissal of the former Director of the Intelligence Agency in June 2024 did not constitute discrimination on the grounds of gender or political affiliation, as alleged by the former officeholder.<sup>31</sup>

In the meantime, on 7 February, several schools in Skopje received bomb threats and were subsequently evacuated.<sup>32</sup>

On February 14, the National Security Agency announced the introduction of mandatory polygraph testing as part of its employment procedures, professional integrity assessments, and security clearance process, in line with the Law on the National Security Agency.<sup>33</sup>

On 27 February, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) closed proceedings against the Deputy Director of the Intelligence Agency, citing the existence of a parallel investigation by the Public Prosecutor's Office into allegations of submitting falsified qualifications.<sup>34</sup> On 7 March, the Prosecutor's Office launched a new investigation into a separate case related to the Intelligence Agency.<sup>35</sup>

31 Erol Musliu was not discriminated against when dismissed as director of the Intelligence Agency, the Constitutional Court finds (Еролд Муслиу не бил дискриминиран при разрешувањето од директор на Агенцијата за разузнавање, констатира Уставен), 5 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4lvP0sm>

32 Bomb threats reported in several Skopje schools (Дојави за бомби во неколку скопски училишта), Radio Slobodna Evropa, 7 February 2025, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33306477.html>

33 The National Security Agency begins polygraph testing (Агенцијата за национална безбедност почнува со полиграфско тестирање), 14 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4lvP4s6>

34 Similar to the director of the NBA—Anti-corruption officers also “cleaned up” the deputy director of the Intelligence Agency (Слично како и директорот на АНБ – Антикорупционерите ја „исчистија“ и заменик директорката на Агенцијата за разузнавање), 27 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42odD1j>

35 More reports about the Intelligence Agency—investigation into whether there was an illegal promotion (Уште пријави за Агенцијата за разузнавање – се истражува дали имало незаконско унапредување), Sloboden Pечат, 7 March, 2025, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/ushte-priccccjavi-za-agencija-za-razuznavanje-se-istrazhuva-dali-imalo-nezakonsko-unapreduvanje/>

# Public Administration Reform

In January 2025, the Assembly adopted amendments to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification, and Confidential Services, which stipulate that a printed electronic document obtained by a citizen shall have the same validity as the original document.<sup>36</sup> These amendments to the law will streamline the process of obtaining documents, enabling citizens to access services on their mobile devices.<sup>37</sup>

In January 2025, the Government adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2028.<sup>38</sup> It represents a roadmap for strengthening the resilience and security of the state in cyberspace. This strategy marks a turning point in the country's efforts to protect its digital infrastructure and build a safer, more secure future for all.<sup>39</sup> It was adopted after a three-year gap, during which the absence of a national cybersecurity framework left the country vulnerable to increased threats.<sup>40</sup>

On March 10 2025, the third session of the Secretariat for Public Administration Reform (PAR) was held, during which the draft annual report for 2024, covering the period from January to June 2024, was adopted. This report outlines the implementation of the PAR Strategy (2023–2030) with its Action Plan. Additionally, the Action Plan for planned activities in accordance with the monitoring report from the assessment mission of SIGMA from 2024 for the Republic of North Macedonia was reviewed and discussed.

In March 2025, in line with the goals defined in the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans, the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) announced the preparation of the following laws: the Law on Electronic Communications; amendments to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification, and Confidential Services; the Law on Archival Material and Archival Activities, and the Law on Network and Information Systems Security.<sup>41</sup>

- The Law on Electronic Communications aims to align the national legal framework with European standards by harmonising with the European Electronic Communications Code (2018/1972) and the Gigabit Infrastructure Act (2024/1309). The law will ensure the updating of the regulatory framework for electronic communications by promoting investments in high-quality, high-speed networks, protecting consumers, and promoting competitiveness. It will establish a comprehensive framework to support the faster, more cost-effective, and simplified deployment of high-capacity networks, commonly referred to as gigabit networks.<sup>42</sup>

36 'Law amending and supplementing the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Confidential Services (Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за електронски документи, електронска идентификација и доверливи услуги)', Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 3/2025.

37 <https://www.radiomof.mk/andonovski-od-ovoj-mesec-pechatenite-elektronski-dokumenti-se-priznavaat-kako-originalni/>

38 'Strategy for Cybersecurity 2025–2028 (Стратегија за сајбер безбедност 2025 – 2028)' (Ministry of Digital Transformation, January 2025), [https://mdt.gov.mk/files/sodrzina\\_na\\_CCB\\_2025\\_2028\\_usoglasen\\_tekst.pdf](https://mdt.gov.mk/files/sodrzina_na_CCB_2025_2028_usoglasen_tekst.pdf).

39 'Andonovski: The Government has adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2028 (Аноновски: Владата ја донесе Националната стратегија за сајбер безбедност 2025–2028 година)', Official website of the Ministry of Public Administration, 21 January 2025, <https://mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/andonovski-vladata-ja-donese-nacionalnata-strategija-za-sajber-bezbednost-2025%E2%80%932028-godina---21012025.nspх>.

40 'The Government has adopted the National Cyber Security Strategy 2025–2028 (Владата ја донесе Националната стратегија за сајбер безбедност 2025–2028 година)', Meta.Mk, 21 January 2025, 2025–2028, <https://meta.mk/vladata-ja-donese-nacionalnata-strategija-za-sajber-bezbednost-2025-2028-godina/>.

41 'All draft laws of the Ministry of Digital Transformation related to the Reform Agenda have been published on ENER (Објавени на ЕНЕР сите нацрт закони на Министерството за дигитална трансформација во однос на Реформската агенда)', Official website of the Ministry of Digital Transformation, 25 March 2025, <https://mdt.gov.mk/mk-MK/objaveni-na-ener-site-nacrt-zakoni-na-ministerstvoto-za-digitalna-transformacija-vo-odnos-na-reformskata-agenda>

42 Ibid.

- The amendments to the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification, and Confidential Services are in alignment with the EU Regulation 2024/1183. The primary goal of the law is to establish a single, unified digital identity system nationwide, enabling easy and secure access to both public and private services. This will simplify the use of electronic services and increase the number of electronic transactions between users.<sup>43</sup>
- The Law on Archival Material and Archival Activity establishes a modern legal framework for managing archival activities, including the electronic handling of archival documents, which will improve the preservation and operational efficiency of archival institutions in the country.<sup>44</sup>
- The Law on Network and Information Systems (NIS) Security serves as the foundation for alignment with the EU's NIS 2 Directive. The law aims to ensure a high level of cyber resilience by integrating cybersecurity into every segment of digital transformation.<sup>45</sup>

Through this package of laws, the MDT establishes the legal foundation for comprehensive, fundamental, and tangible reforms in the field of information and communication technologies, as well as the country's digital transformation. With timely implementation of the planned steps, significant funds for accelerated reforms and development will be secured, which will enhance economic growth and support the country on its path to EU membership.<sup>46</sup>

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43 Ibid.

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

# Chapter 23



# Functioning of the judiciary

## Management bodies

At the beginning of 2025, a new President of the Judicial Council was elected to succeed the previous officeholder, who had resigned.<sup>47</sup> In February, the Judicial Council announced its intention to establish a commission to define indicative caseload benchmarks for judges every month.<sup>48</sup>

## Independence and impartiality

Following the adoption of a new Rulebook in November 2024, the constitutive session of the restructured Council for the Coordination of Information and Communication Technology in Judicial Bodies (ICT Council) was held on 27 January. The Council, established in accordance with Article 87-a of the Law on Courts, comprises representatives from judicial institutions and is responsible for coordinating digitalisation efforts across the judiciary.<sup>49</sup>

In January, the Supreme Court and the Ministry of Interior signed a cooperation agreement to enable the electronic exchange of data via the National Interoperability Platform, in line with the Law on Electronic Documents, Electronic Identification and Trust Services.<sup>50</sup> At the end of the month, the Supreme Court operationalised several web services on the platform, including those for criminal and penal records, bans on professional activity, and revoked legal capacity for natural persons.<sup>51</sup>

In February, the Association of Judges elected a new composition of the Judicial Media Council for 2025, comprising eight journalists and seven judges.<sup>52</sup> The Council issued a public statement criticising the exclusion of a journalist from a court hearing in Veles, reaffirming that public access to court proceedings is a core principle of fair trial and transparency, subject only to legally prescribed exceptions.<sup>53</sup>

47 The Judicial Council has a new president—Aleksandar Kambovski (Судскиот совет доби нов претседател - Александар Камбовски), DW News, 3 January 2025, [https://www.dw.com/mk/sudskiot-sovet-dobi-nov-pretседatel-aleksandar-kambovski/a-71208784?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol\\_makedonija\\_timemk-4727-xml-mrss](https://www.dw.com/mk/sudskiot-sovet-dobi-nov-pretседatel-aleksandar-kambovski/a-71208784?maca=maz-rss-maz-pol_makedonija_timemk-4727-xml-mrss)

48 The Judicial Council will form a commission to determine the number of cases a judge should resolve per month. (Судскиот совет ќе формира комисија за утврдување на бројот на предмети што треба да ги реши судијата месечно) Sloboden Pечат, 26 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/sudskiot-sovet-kje-formira-komisija-za-utvrduvanje-na-brojt-na-predmeti-shto-treba-da-gi-reshi-sudijata-mesechno/>

49 The constitutive session of the new composition of the ICT Coordination Council: Strategy for a digital future! (Конститутивната седница на новиот состав на Советот за координирање на ИКТ: Стратегија за дигитална иднина!), Ministry of Justice, 27 January 2025, <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/vest/6814>

50 The Supreme Court and the Ministry of Interior signed an agreement for cooperation and faster use of electronic services (Врховниот суд и Министерството за внатрешни работи склучија договор за соработка и побрзо користење на електронските услуги), Supreme Court of North Macedonia, 30 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jHiqle>

51 Web services deployed on an interoperability platform (Поставени веб сервиси на платформа за интероперабилност), Supreme court of North Macedonia, 27 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3S4xf5B>

52 New composition of the Judicial Media Council, Judicial Media Council, 18 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4lMDZCZ>

53 Public Statement by the Judicial Media Council, Judicial Media Council, 12 March, 2025, <https://bit.ly/42CFzyk>



## Accountability

In February, following a fatal traffic accident that sparked public outrage, the Minister of Justice removed a judge from a working group established by the Ministry. The judge had imposed a non-custodial educational measure in a prior case involving the same driver accused in the recent incident.<sup>54</sup> The Judicial Council announced it would review the driver's case history given his prior offences.<sup>55</sup>

The President of the Judicial Council publicly rejected calls for the Council's dissolution, cautioning against radical reforms that could undermine the judiciary.<sup>56</sup> At the end of the month, the Council examined the findings of a working group that assessed the judge's conduct and found no basis for disciplinary action. The Council unanimously supported the judge, affirming that decisions had been taken within the bounds of legal discretion.<sup>57</sup>

On 28 February, a Judicial Council member refused to resign following interpellation votes, alleging political pressure from the executive branch and interference in judicial independence.<sup>58</sup>

Separately, media reports raised concerns over the President of the Supreme Court's compensation from the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors between 2022 and 2024. Despite receiving approximately MKD 400,000, she was reportedly absent from over half of the Board's sessions. The Academy stated that advance notice was not provided in time to summon a deputy, while the President claimed she had not received timely invitations.<sup>59</sup>

## Professionalism and competence

On 6 February, the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors 'Pavel Shatev' awarded certificates to 97 graduates of its initial training programme, including 50 future judges and 47 future public prosecutors.<sup>60</sup> On the same day, the Council of Public Prosecutors announced a call to fill 47 positions in basic public prosecutor's offices, including two vacancies in the Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption.<sup>61</sup> The Judicial Council also opened a call for 50 new judicial appointments across the court system.<sup>62</sup>

54 Filkov dismissed judge Aleksovska Stojanovska from a working group at the Ministry of Justice (Филков ја разреши судијката Алексовска Стојановска од работна група во Министерството за правда), Fokus, 03 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4kl74no>

55 The Judicial Council will reexamine the previous cases of the defendant Vasil Jovanov, says Kambovski (Судскиот совет ќе ги преиспитуваат претходните случаи на обвинетиот Васил Јованов, вели Камбовски), Sloboden Pечат, 5 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/sudskiot-sovet-kje-gi-preispituvaat-prethodnite-sluchai-na-obvinetiot-vasil-jovanov-veli-kambovski/>

56 President of the Judicial Council Kambovski: Institutions should be promoted, not dissolved (Претседателот на Судскиот совет Камбовски: Институциите треба да се унапредуваат, не да се распуштаат), Sloboden Pечат, 21 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/pretsedatelot-na-sudskiot-sovet-kambovski-institucite-treba-da-se-unapreduvaat-ne-da-se-raspushtaat/>

57 Judicial Court Stands Behind Judge Who Tried Vasil Jovanov – Judges Can't Be Guilty of Everything (Судски застапа зад судијката што му судеше на Васил Јованов – не може судиите да се виновни за се), Sloboden Pечат, 26 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/gggsudski-zastana-zad-sudijkata-shtosudeshe-jovanov-ne-mozhe-sudiite-da-se-vinovni-za-se/>

58 Milazim Mustafa from the Judicial Council is not resigning: The executive branch is interfering in the judiciary (Милазим Мустафа од Судскиот совет не поднесува оставка: Извршната власт се меша во судството), Sloboden Pечат, 28 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/milazim-mustafa-od-sudskiot-sovet-ne-podnesuva-ostavka-izvrshnata-vlast-se-mesha-vo-sudstvoto/>

59 Besa Ademi received compensation of almost MKD four hundred thousand from the Academy of Judges and Prosecutors, and did not attend even half of the sessions of the Board of Directors! (Беса Адеми добила надоместоци од скоро 400 илјади денари од Академијата за судии и обвинители, а не присуствувала ниту на половина од седниците на Управниот одбор!), Fokus, 10 February 2025, <https://fokus.mk/besa-ademi-dobila-nadomestotsi-od-skoro-400-iljadi-denari-od-akademijata-za-sudii-i-obviniteli-a-ne-prisustvuvala-nitu-na-polovina-od-sednitsite-na-upravniot-odbor/>

60 The Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors awarded certificates to 97 candidates for judges and public prosecutors (Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители додели уверенија на 97 кандидати за судии и јавни обвинители), Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, 5 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/44t8yrh>

61 'Advertisement for the election of public prosecutors (Оглас за избор на јавни обвинители), Council of Public Prosecutors, 6 February 2025, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/oglas-za-izbor-na-javni-obviniteli/>

62 Advertisement for the selection of judges (Оглас за избор на судии), Judicial Council, 06 February 2025, <http://sud.mk/wps/wcm/connect/ssrm/8b83baf0-f92d-4aae-86d2-078b920afb1a/ОГЛАС+ЗА+СУДИИ.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CVID=>

On 10 February, the Council of Public Prosecutors elected a new president of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje.<sup>63</sup> However, she tendered her resignation just eight days later, citing the need to focus on casework and recommending that a more experienced colleague be appointed to the position. The Council also appointed new chiefs of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices in Gevgelija and Prilep on the same day.<sup>64</sup>

In March, the Council elected 31 new public prosecutors for 10 basic prosecutor's offices.<sup>65</sup> No candidates were elected for the offices in Gostivar and Kičevo, while five other offices had no registered applicants. During the same period, three judges from the Bitola Court of Appeal made solemn declarations. The Judicial Council appointed new presidents for the Appellate Court in Bitola and new judges in the Basic Courts in Bitola, Veles, Gevgelija, Gostivar, Delchevo, Kavadarci, Kichevo, Kochani, Kriva Palanka, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Prilep, Sveti Nikole, Struga, Strumica, Tetovo, and Shtip.<sup>66</sup>

On 10 March, the Judicial Council appointed an acting President of the Supreme Court by a vote of 10 to 2. The selection process for a permanent appointment remains ongoing.<sup>67</sup>

## Quality of justice

At its 229<sup>th</sup> session, held on 23 January 2025, the Management Board of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors decided to increase institutional transparency by initiating public broadcasts of its sessions via the Academy's YouTube channel. The measure will be monitored for effectiveness and supplemented with additional methods if necessary.<sup>68</sup>

At the following session, the Board was updated on preparations for admitting the ninth generation of initial training candidates and adopted a resolution requesting funding from the Ministry of Finance via the Judicial Budget Council. The Academy had previously sought guidance from the Government and the Ministry of Finance regarding the future structure of the entrance examination process.<sup>69</sup>

On 26 January, the Programme Council held an online meeting to review a proposed Training Plan template developed by the Academy's Deputy Director in collaboration with staff from the Continuous Training Sector. The template aims to introduce a unified structure for lectures. Members agreed to continue refining the proposal and provide further input on its content and format.<sup>70</sup>

At its 232<sup>nd</sup> session, held at the end of March, the Management Board reviewed the text of a public call for appointing a new Deputy Director and established a commission to oversee the selection procedure.<sup>71</sup>

63 Announcement of a meeting held (Соопштение за одржана седница), Council of Public Prosecutors, 10 February 2025, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/soopshtenie-za-odrzhana-sednica-13/>

64 Prosecutor Krstevska Caleva has filed a request to be relieved of her position as head of the High Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje. (Обвинителката Крстевска Цалева поднела барање да биде ослободена од функцијата шефица на Вишото јавно обвинителство Скопје), Alsat, 18 February 2025, <https://alsat.mk/mk/obvinitelkata-krstevska-tsaleva-podnela-barane-da-bide-oslobodena-od-funktsijata-shefitsa-na-vishoto-javno-obvinitelstvo-skopje/>

65 Announcement of a meeting held (Соопштение за одржана седница), Council of Public Prosecutors, 7 March 2025, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/soopshtenie-za-odrzhana-sednica-16/>

66 Announcement from the 517th session of the Judicial Council of the Republic of Macedonia held on 10.03.2025 (Соопштение од 517-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ одржана на 10 March 2025 година), Judicial Council, 10 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3GsXJvM>

67 Xhemali Saiti elected acting president of the Supreme Court (Џемали Саити е избран за в.д. претседател на Врховниот суд), Sloboden Pечат, 10 March 2025, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/dzhemali-saiti-e-izbran-za-v-d-pretседател-na-vrhovniot-sud/>

68 Report from the 229th session of the Management Board of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (Известување од одржана 229-та седница на Управниот одбор на Академија за судии и јавни обвинители), Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors, 24 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/44DCHUz>

69 Report from the 230th session of the Management Board of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (Известување од одржана 230-та седница на Управниот одбор на Академија за судии и јавни обвинители), Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors, 25 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4IMMD4p>

70 A working meeting of the members of the Program Council of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors was held (Одржан работен состанок на членовите на Програмскиот совет на Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители), Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors, 28 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42M88tr>

71 Notice of holding an urgent 232nd session of the Management Board of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (Известување за одржување итна 232-ра седница на Управниот одбор на Академија за судии и јавни обвинители), Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors, 25 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3S7VboK>

## Efficiency

On 5 February, the Constitutional Court annulled the Law on Solidarity Tax, finding that it undermined legal certainty and violated constitutionally protected property rights. The Court concluded that the retroactive regulation of legal relations infringed on taxpayers' legitimate expectations and the rule of law.<sup>72</sup>

Later in the month, the Court initiated a procedure to assess the constitutionality of the September 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code, which reduced penalties for abuse of office and criminal association, thereby potentially affecting the statute of limitations in several high-profile cases.<sup>73</sup>

In a unanimous decision, the Court also opened a procedure to review the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Public Prosecutors. The contested provision allows for a member's service on the Council, even without case-related duties, to be automatically considered as part of a positive performance evaluation for promotion after four years.<sup>74</sup>

The Court postponed its preparatory session on the Law on the Use of Languages due to the national mourning period following the Kochani tragedy.<sup>75</sup>

Meanwhile, the Government announced its intention to raise the retirement age for judges to 67, citing staff shortages and the need to strengthen the fight against corruption. The proposal was criticised by the opposition as discriminatory.<sup>76</sup>

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72 The Constitutional Court annulled the Solidarity Tax Law (Уставниот суд го поништи Законот за данок на солидарност), Constitutional Court, 6 February 2025, <https://ustavensud.mk/archives/32395>

73 The majority of constitutional judges challenged the amendments to the Criminal Code (Мнозинството уставни судии ги оспорија измените на Кривичниот законик), Sloboden Pечат, 12 February 2025, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/mnozinstvoto-ustavni-sudii-gi-osporija-izmenite-na-krivichniot-zakonik/>

74 The constitutional judges unanimously accepted the initiative of prosecutor Lence Ristoska against the Rules of Procedure of the Council of Public Prosecutors, adopted for the purpose of self-promotion. (Уставните судии едногласно ја прифатија иницијативата на обвинителката Ленче Ристоска против Деловникот на Советот на јавни обвинители, донесен со цел самоупроудување.), Sakam da Kazam, 19 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3YUn3AG>

75 The Constitutional Court postponed the preparatory session of the Law on the Use of Languages due to the seven-day mourning period for the victims of the Kocani tragedy. (Уставниот суд ја одложи подготвителната седница на Законот за употреба на јазиците поради седумдневната жалост за жртвите од трагедијата во Кочани), Constitutional Court, 17 March 2025, <https://ustavensud.mk/archives/32950>

76 Government extends the retirement age of incumbent judges to 67 (Власта го продолжува работниот век на постојните судии до 67 години), Sital TV, 13 February 2025, <https://sital.com.mk/vlasta-go-prodolzhuva-rabotniot-vek-na-postojnite-sudii-do-67-godini>

# Fight Against Corruption

Toward the end of February, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), in cooperation with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI), and the support of the Austrian Development Agency, organised a workshop on the implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest (2021–2025) and a roadmap for the development of a new anti-corruption strategy (2026–2030). The workshop was attended by representatives of state institutions involved in implementing the existing strategy, as well as representatives from international organisations in the country, civil society, and the private sector.<sup>77</sup>

The latest Transparency International Corruption Perception Index ranked North Macedonia 88<sup>th</sup> in the world with 40 index points, compared to 76<sup>th</sup> last year with 42 index points. Such backsliding is largely due to concerning developments in the judiciary over the past year, as well as the impunity of individuals involved in high-level corruption.<sup>78</sup>

## State Commission for Prevention of Corruption

In the second half of February, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) elected a new Deputy President based on the rotation principle to serve a six-month term.<sup>79</sup>

At the end of March, the SCPC published its 2024 Annual Report. The Commission received 689 reports of suspected corruption and initiated 78 cases ex officio. It issued a total of 742 decisions: 353 related to corruption, 98 to conflict of interest, 60 to election campaign financing, and 231 to asset declarations.<sup>80</sup>

The SCPC also released its 2024 Annual Report on the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. The report indicated that only 18% of planned activities were fully implemented, 32% were ongoing, and 50% had not commenced. The most progress was recorded in the law enforcement, health, and education sectors, while limited implementation was observed in urban planning, the environment, agriculture, and sport.<sup>81</sup>

Additionally, the SCPC published its 2024 Integrity System Monitoring Report, covering 72 central government institutions, 72 local authorities, and 16 judicial institutions.<sup>82</sup> The report noted widespread shortcomings, including the absence of internal rules on conflict of interest, insufficient regulation on gifts and hospitality, low ISO certification rates, and limited integrity-related training and monitoring.

77 'Workshop on the implementation of the National Strategy for Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest (2021–2025) and a roadmap for the development of a new anti-corruption strategy (2026–2030) (Работилница за имплементација на Националната стратегија за спречување на корупцијата и судир на интереси (2021–2025) и патоказ за развој на нова антикорупциска стратегија (2026–2030))', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 28 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42Q5sMq>

78 'Corruption Perceptions Index 2024: Corruption's devastating role in the climate change crisis (Индекс на перцепција на корупцијата 2024: Погоубна улога на корупцијата во кризата со климатските промени)', Official website of Transparency International—Macedonia, 11 February 2025, <https://transparency.mk/2025/02/11/indeks-na-percepција-na-korupcijata-2024-pogubna-uloga-na-korupcijata-vo-krizata-so-klimatskite-promeni/>

79 'Biljana Karakasheva Shulev new deputy president of the SCPC (Билјана Каракашева Шулев нова заменик претседателка на ДКСК)', Telma TV, 21 February 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/02/21/biljana-karakasheva-shulev-nov-zamenik-pretsedatelka-na-dksk/>

80 State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 'Annual Report on the Work of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption for 2024', March 2025, [https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ГИ-за-работата-на-ДКСК-за-2024\\_за-web-без-прилози.pdf](https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/ГИ-за-работата-на-ДКСК-за-2024_за-web-без-прилози.pdf)

81 State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 'Annual Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest 2021–2025 for the period between 01 January 2024 and 31 December 2024', March 2025, <https://dksk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Годишен-извештај-Национална-Стратегија-2024.pdf>

82 'Integrity as a pillar of good governance—SCPC with an extensive report and a call for greater institutional accountability (Интегритетот како столб на доброто владеење – ДКСК со обеман извештај и повик за поголема институционална одговорност)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 26 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3RrTgLx>

The SCPC announced its intention to regularly publish information on enforcement actions under the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest.<sup>83</sup> It published the names of former and current officials fined in the past year for breaches of the law.<sup>84</sup>

## The Public Prosecutor's Office

During this quarterly period, the Public Prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia amended the mandatory instruction for all public prosecutors in the country to prioritise corruption cases. Those of particular public interest concern procedures for providing data and information on bank accounts, property, or objects of interest located abroad that are relevant to corruption-related cases and pertain to all individuals involved in acts of corruption, regardless of their role or status. These amendments are the result of a meeting held with representatives of the specialised analytical centre at Europol, responsible for combating corruption, where possibilities for establishing in-depth cooperation in corruption-related cases were discussed.<sup>85</sup>

This quarter was marked by the fire that broke out in a nightclub in the city of Kochani, where initially 59 young people lost their lives and over 160 people were hospitalised.<sup>86</sup> The Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) formed a team of five public prosecutors,<sup>87</sup> which initiated an investigation against 27 persons and three companies,<sup>88</sup> but due to its complexity, six more public prosecutors joined the team.<sup>89</sup> Their preliminary findings discovered several anomalies in the building: it did not have a hydrant or a sufficient number of fire extinguishers; it was not registered as a catering facility, but as a light industry site with an operating permit from the Ministry of Economy issued 15 years ago; it was lined with materials for sound insulation and visual effects that were easily flammable; and pyrotechnic materials were used illegally.<sup>90</sup> These findings led to various institutional reactions: prison or house detention was ordered for a total of 24 suspects for serious crimes against public security;<sup>91</sup> the mayor of Kochani resigned;<sup>92</sup> and the SCPC launched an anti-corruption review of relevant legislation to enable the detection and prevention of potential corruption risks.<sup>93</sup> Simultaneously, citizens reacted by organising protests in Kochani<sup>94</sup> and other cities across the country,<sup>95</sup> while the Platform of Civil Society Organisations to Fight

83 'Press release of 26.02.2025 (Соопштение за јавност од 26.02.2025 година)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 26 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jeZZVf>

84 'Information on fines imposed—2024 (Pursuant to Article 98 of the LPCCI) (Информации за изречени глоби – 2024 година (Согласно член 98 од ЗСКЦИ))', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 26 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/442o650>

85 'Europol's system will provide data on bank accounts and assets abroad of corrupt businessmen and officials (Преку системот на Европол ќе се обезбедуваат податоци за банкарски сметки и имот во странство на корумпирани бизнисмени и функционери)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 February 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/preku-sistemot-na-evropol-ke-se-obezbeduvaat-podatoci-za-bankarski-smetki-i-imot-vo-stranstvo-na-korumpirani-biznismeni-i-funkcioneri/>

86 'Why was the fire at the Kochani night club so deadly? (Зошто пожарот во клубот во Кочани беше толку смртоносен?)', Deutsche Welle, 18 March 2025, <https://www.dw.com/mk/zosto-pozarot-vo-improviziraniot-noken-klub-vo-kocani-bese-tolku-smrtonosen/a-71940018>

87 'Kocevski: A team of five public prosecutors has been formed for the Kochani tragedy (Коцевски: Формиран е тим од пет јавни обвинители за трагедијата во Кочани)', Radio MOF, 16 March 2025, <https://www.radiomof.mk/kocevski-formiran-e-tim-od-pet-javni-obviniteli-za-tragedijata-vo-kochani/>

88 'The Public Prosecutor's Office has opened an investigation into 27 people and three companies in connection with the fire in Kochani (Јавното обвинителство отвори истражна постапка за 27 лица и три компании во врска со пожарот во Кочани)', Radio MOF, 21 March 2025, <https://www.radiomof.mk/javnoto-obvinitelstvo-otvori-istrayna-postapka-za-27-lica-i-tri-kompanii-vo-vrska-so-pozharot-vo-kochani/>

89 'Announcement of 24.03.2025 (Соопштение од 24.03.2025 година)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 24 March 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/soopshenie-150/>

90 'The night club was full of flammable material, had no fire hydrant, and there was no contract for the concert (Дискотеката била полна со запаливи материјали, немала хидрант, а за концертот немало договор)', Radio MOF, 16 March 2025, <https://www.radiomof.mk/diskotekata-bila-polna-so-zapalivi-materijali-nemala-hidrant-a-za-koncertot-nemalo-dogovor/>

91 'The two former mayors of Kochani are being placed under house arrest (Двајцата поранешни градоначалници на Кочани одат во куќен притвор)', Telma TV, 28 March 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/03/28/dvajcata-poranesni-gradonachalniczi-na-kochani-odat-vo-kuken-pritvor/>

92 'The Mayor of Kochani, Ljupco Papazov, has resigned (Градоначалникот на Кочани Љупчо Папазов поднесе оставка)', Radio MOF, 17 March 2025, <https://www.radiomof.mk/gradonachalnikot-na-kochani-ljupcho-papazov-podnese-ostavka/>

93 'SCPC: We have initiated a procedure for anti-corruption review of legislation on catering, protection and rescue, the Law on Inspection Supervision, the Law on Local Self-Government (ДКСК: Започнавме постапка за антикорупциска проверка на законите за угостителска дејност, заштита и спасување, Законот за инспекциски надзор, Законот за локалната самоуправа)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 24 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4ICGCVX>

94 'Protest in Kochani - justice and end to corruption (Протест во Кочани - правда и крај на корупцијата)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 17 March 2025, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33350703.html>

95 'Protests in Kochani from today at 3.00 p.m., and in Skopje from Monday (Од денеска протести во Кочани во 15 часот, од понеделник и во Скопје)', 24.mk, 22 March 2025, <https://24.mk/details/od-deneska-protesti-vo-kochani-vo-15-chasot-od-ponedelnik-i-vo-skopje>



Corruption made public requests to competent institutions, whose completion should lead to the cessation of the practice of impunity, selective justice, and merely formal fulfilment of obligations.<sup>96</sup>

During this quarterly period, several other criminal investigations were initiated, regarding the following: a former director of the Service for General and Common Affairs of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia suspected of accepting a bribe and embezzlement in office;<sup>97</sup> five individuals and one legal entity suspected of abusing their official positions and authority, falsification of official documents and abusing the public procurement procedure for the selection of a company for physical security at 14 toll stations of the Public Enterprise 'State Roads';<sup>98</sup> and two police officers suspected of abusing their official positions and authority, falsification of official documents, and obstruction of justice to prevent the presentation of evidence in proceedings conducted before the PPO Kumanovo.<sup>99</sup>

In addition, during this period, criminal charges were filed due to reasonable suspicion of abuse of official position and authority against the following individuals: the acting director of the General Hospital in Ohrid;<sup>100</sup> a former chief of the Department for Aviation Units within the Ministry of Interior (Mol);<sup>101</sup> and a former director of the Mining and Energy Combine Bitola.<sup>102</sup>

Criminal charges were filed for other corruption-related criminal offenses against the following individuals: 31 individuals and five legal entities accused of abusing their official positions and authority, falsification of official documents, abusing the public procurement procedure, money laundering, and several other crimes related to the procurement of coal additive for the needs of the Power Plants of North Macedonia;<sup>103</sup> four persons accused of abusing their official positions and authority and abusing the public procurement procedure regarding the execution of the façade and illumination project of the Government building;<sup>104</sup> a former director of the utility company of the Municipality of Gazi Baba for embezzlement in office;<sup>105</sup> fifteen customs officers and a police officer accused of having committed the crimes of accepting a bribe and abuse of their official positions and authority;<sup>106</sup> a police officer<sup>107</sup> and a surgeon<sup>108</sup> suspected of accepting bribes on different occasions.

96 'The Platform of Civil Society Organizations to Fight Corruption has made requests to competent institutions that will enable the cessation of the practice of impunity, selective justice and merely formal fulfilment of obligations (Платформата на граѓански организации за борба против корупцијата упати барања до надлежните институции кои ќе овозможат да се прекине праксата на неказниност, селективна правда и формално исполнување на обврски)', Official website of the Platform of Civil Society Organizations to Fight Corruption, 28 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jKut1r>

97 'Investigation into bribery and embezzlement in SOZR (Истрага за поткуп и проневера во СОЗР)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 6 February 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/istraga-za-potkup-i-pronevera-vo-sozr/>.

98 'Investigation into public procurement abuses in the PE "State Roads" (Истрага за злоупотреби при јавна набавка во ЈП „Државни патишта“)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 25 March 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/istraga-za-zloupotrebi-pri-javna-nabavka-vo-jp-drzhavni-patishta/>.

99 'Two police officers under investigation (Под истрага двајца полициски службеници)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 4 March 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/pod-istraga-dvajca-policziski-sluzhbeniczi/>.

100 'Criminal charges against the director of the Ohrid general hospital! (Кривична пријава за директорот на охридската општа болница!)', TV 21, 6 February 2025, <https://mk.tv21.tv/krivichna-prijava-za-direktorot-na-ohridskata-opшта-bolnitsa/>.

101 'Ministry of Interior files criminal charges against former head of the Department for Aviation Units (MBP со кривична пријава за екс началникот на одделот за воздухопловни единици)', 24info.Mk, 8 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/44uPc4Q>.

102 'Financial Police files criminal charges against former ESM director Matevski (Финансиска поднесе кривична против екс директорот на ЕСМ Матеvски)', Telma TV, 13 February 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/02/13/finansiska-podnese-krivichna-protiv-eks-direktorot-na-esm-matevski/>.

103 'Indictment filed in the "Aditiv" case (Поднесен обвинителен акт во предметот „Адитив“)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 27 February 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/podnesen-obvinitelen-akt-vo-predmetot-aditiv/>.

104 'Indictment for four persons involved in the execution of the facade and illumination project of the Government building (Обвинение за четири лица инволвирани во изведбата на проектот за фасада и илуминација на зградата на Владата)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 7 February 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/obvinenie-za-chetiri-licza-involvirani-vo-izvedbata-na-proektot-za-fasada-i-iluminaczija-na-zgradata-na-vladata/>.

105 'Indictment of former director—he paid salaries to freelancers who were abroad (Обвинение против поранешен директор – давал плати на хонорарци кои биле во странство)', Telma TV, 16 January 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/01/16/obvinenie-protiv-poraneshen-direktor-daval-plati-na-honorarci-koi-bile-vo-stranstvo/>.

106 'Indictment for 16 persons in the "Premin" case, the proceedings for two persons has been terminated (Обвинение за 16 лица во предметот „Премин“, за две лица постапката е запрена)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 10 January 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/obvinenie-za-16-licza-vo-predmetot-premin-za-dve-licza-postapkata-e-zaprena/>.

107 'Police officer "fell" with EUR 50 bribe, cash, and documentation found (Полициски службеник „падна“ со 50 евра поткуп, пронајдени пари и документација)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 18 January 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/policziski-sluzhbenik-pad-na-so-50-evra-potkup-pronajdeni-pari-i-dokumentaczija/>.

108 'Bitola surgeon suspected of accepting bribe (Битолски хирург осомничен за примане поткуп)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 29 January 2025, <https://jorm.gov.mk/bitolski-hirurg-osomnichen-za-primane-potkup/>.



In the 'Tvrđina' case, the Criminal Court Skopje imposed a fourteen-and-a-half year and a nine-year-ten-month prison sentence on two former intelligence officials, respectively, for abusing their official positions and authority, and for falsification of official documents, related to the destruction of the communication monitoring systems in the former Security and Counterintelligence Directorate. A former Minister of Interior was acquitted, because the prosecution did not prove that she committed the crime for which she was accused.<sup>109</sup>

## Legal Framework

Following objections by the SCPC<sup>110</sup> and the Platform of Civil Society Organisations to Fight Corruption<sup>111</sup>, concerns were raised over the proposed amendments and supplements to the Law on Public Procurement. These concerns led to the withdrawal of the amendments and supplements from the expedited procedure and their submission under the regular legislative procedure with certain corrections.<sup>112</sup> Those amendments were adopted by the Assembly, including the contested provisions on the abolition of administrative control over public procurement carried out by the Public Procurement Bureau and on the changes to the composition of the State Commission for Public Procurement Appeals.<sup>113</sup>

In mid-February, a draft law amending and supplementing the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest was published on the Unique National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER). It was noted that these amendments are intended to address the identified shortcomings of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, which have a negative impact on the efficiency of the SCPC and the enforcement of established prohibitions and responsibilities.<sup>114</sup>

During this quarterly period, the Ministry of Justice announced that it would soon prepare amendments to the applicable Criminal Code, which are expected to eliminate the harmful implications of the latest amendments introduced in 2023. These amendments should enhance the provisions related to the fight against corruption by increasing the existing penalties for the criminal offence of abuse of official position and authority, and by expanding the scope of criminal offences to allow for extended confiscation.<sup>115</sup> In the meantime, the Constitutional Court initiated a procedure for assessing the constitutionality of the 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code<sup>116</sup> and instructed the Assembly to amend and/or supplement them within six months to mitigate their implications.<sup>117</sup>

109 'Fugitive UBK head officers Grujevski and Boshkovski given highest sentences, Jankuloska acquitted – verdicts in the "Tvrđina" case (Избераните началници на УБК, Грујевски и Бошковски со највисоки казни, Јанкуловска доби ослободителна – пресуди за предметот „Тврдина“)', Telma TV, 13 January 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/01/13/izbeganite-nachalniczi-na-ubk-grujevski-i-boshkovski-so-najvisoki-kazni-jankuloska-dobi-osloboditelna-presudi-za-predmetot-tvrđina/>.

110 'The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption calls for transparency and analysis when adopting amendments to the Law on Public Procurement (Државната комисија за спречување на корупцијата повикува на транспарентност и анализа при донесување на измените на Законот за јавни набавки)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 12 December 2024, <https://bit.ly/4jxiGnE>.

111 'Anti-Corruption Platform: Instead of strengthening it, the amendments to the Law on Public Procurement abolish the control of tenders (Платформа против корупција: Наместо да ја зајакнува, преку измени на Законот за јавни набавки се укинува контролата на тендери)', Radio MOF, 12 December 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/platforma-protiv-korupcija-namesto-da-za-zajaknuva-preku-izmeni-na-zakonot-za-javni-nabavki-se-ukinuva-kontrolata-na-tenderi/>.

112 'VMRO-DPMNE MPs withdrew it from the abbreviated procedure and submitted the same proposal for amendments to the Law on Public Procurement that increase corruption in the regular procedure (Пратениците на ВМРО-ДПМНЕ го повлекоа од скратена постапка и го поднесоа во редовна истиот предлог за измени на Законот за јавни набавки со кои се засилува корупцијата)', Sakam da kazam, 16 December 2024, <https://bit.ly/3CtK6KI>.

113 'Law amending and supplementing the Law on Public Procurement (Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за јавните набавки)', Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 14/2025.

114 Ministry of Justice, 'Draft Law amending and supplementing the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest (Предлог на Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за спречување на корупцијата и судирот на интереси)' (National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER), 17 February 2025), [https://ener.gov.mk/Default.aspx?item=pub\\_regulation&subitem=view\\_reg\\_detail&itemid=66368](https://ener.gov.mk/Default.aspx?item=pub_regulation&subitem=view_reg_detail&itemid=66368).

115 'Firstly short and important amendments, then a new Criminal Code: Minister Filkov announces an urgent revision of the controversial amendments of 2023 (Прво кратки и важни измени, а потоа нов Кривичен законик: Министерот Филков најавува итна ревизија на контроверзните измени од 2023 година)', Plusinfo.Mk, 13 January 2025, <https://plusinfo.mk/prvo-kratki-i-vazhni-izmeni-a-potoa-nov-krivichen-zakonik-ministerot-filkov-na-avuva-itna-revizi-a-na-kontroverznite-izmeni-od-2023-godina/>.

116 'The amendments to the Criminal Code before the Constitutional Court (Измените на Кривичниот законик пред Уставен суд)', Deutsche Welle, 11 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42FRADu>.

117 'U. No. 162/2023 and U. No. 163/2023 (У.Бр.162/2023 и У.Бр.163/2023)', Official website of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 February 2025, <https://ustavensud.mk/archives/32824>.

# Fundamental Rights

## Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a judgment on 4 March in the case of K.M. v. North Macedonia. The case concerns North Macedonia's alleged failure to protect a fourteen-year-old girl from sexual abuse related to an incident in which an adult had allegedly caressed her leg and touched her breast and shoulders. The ECtHR ruled that the domestic criminal-law framework in force at the material time did not afford the requisite protection for the applicant's rights under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It found that the lack of an effective criminal-law response to the alleged sexual abuse, resulting in the dismissal of the applicant's criminal complaint, did not correspond to the requisite respect of the best interests of the child. Furthermore, it held that the domestic civil-law provisions, as applied in practice by the domestic courts, did not afford the applicant the necessary protection against sexual abuse. The ECtHR ruled that there had been a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR).<sup>118</sup>

## The Ombudsperson

In February, the Ombudsperson signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Human Rights Department of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (FRONTEX), to ensure cooperation between the two institutions and the exchange of information regarding the guidelines for human rights violations during the operational activities of the Agency on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> ECtHR, 'Case of K.M. v. North Macedonia (Случај К.М. против Северна Македонија (А. бр. 59144/16)', 4 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4irHRX4>.

<sup>119</sup> 'The Ombudsperson signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX (Народниот правобранител потпиша меморандум за соработка со Европската агенција за гранична и крајбрежна стража - ФРОНТЕКС),' Official website of the Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia, 13 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3EdE0yN>.

## Prison and Detention Facilities

A series of incidents in early 2025 highlighted persistent challenges within the penitentiary system, particularly at the largest correctional facility, Idrizovo. In mid-January, a series of violent incidents were reported, including assaults on prison staff<sup>120</sup> and fights among inmates in both male<sup>121</sup> and female wards.<sup>122</sup> One prisoner physically assaulted a guard during a court transfer.<sup>123</sup> The Union of Prison Police and Administration within the Independent Union of State Administration highlighted the problems faced by prison officers. It emphasised the need to improve the rights of employees and the conditions within the prison system.<sup>124</sup> These incidents point to serious gaps in inmate supervision, internal control, and safety procedures for both staff and convicts.

Further concerns arose over alleged misconduct by prison staff. Reports indicate that a prison officer facilitated unauthorised access to a mobile phone for a high-profile inmate.<sup>125</sup> The Ministry of Interior confirmed the officer's suspension.<sup>126</sup> In separate inspections, 70 mobile phones<sup>127</sup> and cash<sup>128</sup> were discovered in inmate cells in both Idrizovo and Shuto Orizari prisons, highlighting serious deficiencies in internal control and prison governance.

In response to these issues, authorities announced measures to improve conditions and accountability. The Health Fund and the Administration for the Execution of Sanctions introduced a reform ensuring that all convicted individuals receive health insurance immediately upon entering the prison system. Previously, this coverage was delayed by up to one month.<sup>129</sup> Additionally, steps are being taken to introduce a standardised injury register to improve data collection and inform prison policy reforms.<sup>130</sup>

## Personal Data Protection

In February, the Personal Data Protection Agency (PDPA) reaffirmed that media outlets have the right to publish personal data in the public interest, particularly in cases involving public figures. The PDPA emphasised that such reporting must comply with professional standards and not infringe upon personal dignity.<sup>131</sup>

To mark Safer Internet Day on 6 February, the PDPA launched public awareness activities targeting children and youth, promoting responsible digital behaviour and raising awareness about online data privacy.<sup>132</sup>

120 'Convict beats up prison officer (Осуденик претепал затворски полицаец),' 24 Info, 14 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4losgug>.

121 'Prisoner attacked in Idrizovo (Нападнат затвореник во Идризово),' 24 Info, 16 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/3RIT3DD>.

122 'Female' fight in Idrizovo, convict seriously injured („Женска“ тепачка во Идризово, осуденичка е тешко повредена),' Skopje Info, 25 May 2025, <https://bit.ly/4i4E6Xp>.

123 'Prisoner from Idrizovo attacked a guard (Затвореник од Идризово нападнал чувар),' 24 Info, 20 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/3Ely5HX>.

124 'Prison police officers complain that criminal harass them after work: They are quitting their jobs because it is unbearable to work in Skopje prisons (Затворските полицајци се жалат дека криминалци ги малтретираат после работа: Нануштаат работа бидејќи е неиздржливо да се работи во скопските затвори),' Plusinfo.mk, 4 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42ykFSb>.

125 'Prison officer who gave Jovanov a cell phone in custody will be suspended (Затворски полицаец му овозможи на Јованов мобилен во притвор, ќе биде суспендиран),' 24 Info, 2 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/43HfoZK>.

126 'Pandov: The police officer who took Jovanov's cell phone has been suspended, 70 phones discovered in 40 cells (Пандов: Суспендиран полицаецот кој му го пренел мобилниот на Јованов, во 40 ќелии откриени 70 телефони),' Mkd.mk, 2 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3RE0Hzc>.

127 'Searches in 'Shutka'—police found 70 phones! (Претреси во „Шутка“ – полицајците најдоа 70 телефони!),' 24 Info, 3 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/42iCCDb>.

128 'Search in Idrizovo: Money and mobile phones found! (Претрес во Идризово: Пронајдени пари и мобилни телефони!),' TV 21, 22 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4j0VP3o>.

129 'Prisoners will no longer be treated in hospitals as if they were uninsured, but only a participation fee will be paid for them (Затворениците нема повеќе да се лекуваат во болниците како да се неосигурани, туку за нив ќе се плаќа само партиципација),' Sloboden Pечат, 13 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/421OZod>.

130 'North Macedonia's authorities discussed the setting of a Standardized register of injuries in prisons,' Council of Europe Programme Office in Skopje, North Macedonia, 26 February 2025, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/skopje/-/north-macedonia-s-authorities-discussed-the-setting-of-a-standardized-register-of-injuries-in-prisons>.

131 'PDPA: The media have the right to publish information related to public figures, especially if it is relevant to the public (АЗЛП: Медиумите имаат право да објавуваат информации поврзани со јавни личности, особено ако тие се релевантни за јавноста),' Skopje Info, 7 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3G2BOuH>.

132 'International Safer Internet Day celebrated (Одбележан Меѓународниот ден за безбеден интернет),' Official Website of the Personal Data Protection Agency, 12 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42DoPby>.

## Freedom of Expression

Structural challenges persist, continuing to impact media independence and the safety of journalists. In January, the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (SEMM) reported that online outlets remain the most frequent violators of ethical standards, with 84 complaints received in 2024. SEMM's Complaints Commission raised concerns about the disregard for self-regulation in the digital media sector and called for enhanced professionalisation and adherence to ethical norms.<sup>133</sup>

The appointment of new members to the Council of the AAVMS remained stalled. Although seven candidates passed the screening process by the Parliamentary Committee on Elections and Appointments,<sup>134</sup> the Assembly failed to secure the required two-thirds majority in February.<sup>135</sup> Media<sup>136</sup> and international actors<sup>137</sup> reiterated the need for transparent appointments based on merit, warning of the risks to regulatory independence.

In March, the Government announced a tender for the development of media monitoring software to assess news content as positive, negative, or neutral.<sup>138</sup> Media organisations warned that such tools could enable censorship and limit editorial freedom.

This quarter saw an increase in threats against journalists. In January, a female journalist's vehicle was set on fire in Veles.<sup>139</sup> Media organisations condemned the attack, linking it to a broader trend of gender-based threats.<sup>140</sup> In February, further cases emerged of personal image misuse and hate speech targeting female investigative journalists.<sup>141</sup> The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) and the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) called for institutional responses<sup>142</sup> and gender-sensitive protective measures.<sup>143</sup>

Media organisations also raised concerns about restrictions on reporting following the Kochani tragedy.<sup>144</sup> Journalists reported experiencing verbal pressure and obstruction by local officials, highlighting that, instead of supporting transparent reporting during a crisis, they sought to control the narrative or restrict media access, thereby undermining public trust and freedom of expression.<sup>145</sup> The Ministry of Interior, following

133 'Online media remain the biggest violators of the journalists' Code (Онлајн медиумите и понатаму најголеми прекршители на Кодексот на новинарите),' Radio MOF, 21 January 2025, <https://www.radiomof.mk/onlajn-mediumite-i-ponatamu-najgolemi-prekrshiteli-na-kodeksot-na-novinarite/>.

134 'Seven candidates for AAVMS passed the Committee filter in the Assembly (Седум кандидати за ААВМУ го поминаа комисијскиот филтер во Собранието),' Telma TV, 29 January 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/01/29/sedum-kandidati-za-avmu-go-pominaa-komisiskiot-filter-vo-sobranie/>.

135 'The Assembly did not vote on the new members of the AAVMS today, because a two-thirds majority was not achieved (Собранието денеска не ги изгласа новите членови на ААВМУ, бидејќи не се постигна двотретинско мнозинство),' 24 Vesti, 13 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4i9ZH0L>.

136 'Experts react that the proposed AAVMS members are party-based, not professional solutions (Експертите реагираат дека предложените членови на ААВМУ се партиски, а не професионални решенија),' 24 Vesti, 30 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4leqITj>.

137 'The international factor appeals for the members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services to be professional and independent (Меѓународниот фактор апелира, членовите на Советот на Агенцијата за аудио и аудиовизуелни медиумски услуги да бидат професионалци и независни),' Alsat M, 7 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4j4RE6K>.

138 'The Government will evaluate positive, negative and neutral news, tender announced for press clipping (Владата ќе оценува позитивни, негативни и неутрални вести, распишан тендер за пресклипинг),' Sakam Da Kazam, 27 March 2025, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/vladata-ke-otsenuva-pozitivni-negativni-i-neutralni-vesti-raspishan-tender-za-pres-kliping/>.

139 'Car of the correspondent of sakamdakazam.mk from Ohrid set on fire (Запалена колата на дописничката на сакамдаказам.мк од Охрид),' Sakam Da Kazam, 6 January 2025, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/zapalena-kolata-na-dopisnichkata-na-sakamdakazham-mk-od-ohrid/>.

140 'The Women's Media Network EDNAKVA and SSNM support journalist Vrencovska (Женската медиумска мрежа ЕДНАКВА и ССНМ со поддршка за новинарката Вренцовска),' The Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (Самостојниот синдикат на новинари и медиумски работници), 6 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4i7U0Fb>.

141 'What is Latas afraid of when he encourages you to rape and lynch us? (Од што се плаши Латас кога ве поттикнува да не силуваат и линчуваат),' Investigative Reporting Lab Macedonia, 27 February 2025, <https://irl.mk/od-shto-se-plashi-latas-koga-ve-pottiknuva-da-ne-siluvate-i-lichuvate/>.

142 'AJM demands an immediate investigation into the burning vehicle of the SDK.MK correspondent (ЗНМ бара итна истрага за запаленото возило на дописничката на СДК.МК),' Association of Journalists of Macedonia, 6 January 2025, <https://znm.org.mk/en/ajm-calls-for-an-urgent-investigation-into-the-burned-vehicle-of-sdk-mks-correspondent/>.

143 'AJM and SSNM: Condemnation of the malicious targeting of journalists and media by Dragan Pavlović Latas (ЗНМ и ССНМ: Осуда за малициозното сагребтирање на новинари и медиуми од Драган Павловиќ Латас),' Association of Journalists of Macedonia, 26 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jiBZ39>.

144 'AJM and SEMM: Appeal for careful and ethical reporting on the tragedy in Kochani (ЗНМ и СЕММ: Апел за внимателно и етичко известување за трагедијата во Кочани),' Association of Journalists of Macedonia, 16 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/427xKlv>.

145 'Win Win 27 March 2025 (Вин Вин 27.03.2025)' (Telma TV, 27 March 2025), <https://telma.com.mk/2025/03/27/vin-vin-27-03-2025/>.

a Civil Aviation Agency decision, imposed a drone ban in Shtip and Kochani during funerals.<sup>146</sup> While framed as a security measure, media stakeholders expressed concern over limitations on public documentation. The AJM and SSNM criticised the summoning of journalists for “informative talks” regarding drone usage, citing a lack of prior notice.<sup>147</sup>

Throughout the quarter, the AJM and SEMM emphasised the importance of ethical reporting on sensitive topics and advocated for institutional safeguards to ensure press freedom in practice.

## Vulnerable Groups and the Principle of Non-discrimination

The new Rules of Procedure for the Work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) were adopted, aiming to contribute to the institutional framework for addressing discrimination.<sup>148</sup> The CPPD also issued an opinion identifying direct political discrimination in the appointment process of a female police commander in Star Dojran. According to the findings, the Mol selected a candidate with less relevant experience over another based on political affiliation. The case exposed ongoing challenges related to both political bias and gender equality in public sector appointments.<sup>149</sup> On 17 February, the Assembly published a public call for the election of one member of the CPPD with a mandate of five years.<sup>150</sup>

The first session of the National Coordinative Body for Equality and Non-Discrimination was held in February. The Minister of Social Policy, Demography and Youth emphasised the importance of this body as a practical mechanism with broad responsibilities in monitoring implementation, proposing improvements, and coordinating the state’s efforts under the National Strategy for Equality and Non-Discrimination (2022–2026). A second Action Plan (2025–2026) is under preparation, aiming to consolidate inter-institutional cooperation and systematic responses to inequality.<sup>151</sup>

Regarding disability rights, the Ministry of Digital Transformation (MDT) launched consultations in January for a new Law on Accessibility, aiming to ensure that public sector websites and mobile applications are accessible to all citizens, including those with disabilities.<sup>152</sup> This legislative initiative reflects alignment with EU standards on digital accessibility. Additionally, the Ministry of Education and Science has announced that students with disabilities in secondary education will begin receiving educational assistants starting from September 2025. The Ministry pledged to provide additional support where needed during the school year, contributing to a more inclusive education system.<sup>153</sup>

146 ‘Ministry of Interior: Ban on the use of drones in Shtip and Kochani (MBP: Забрана за користење дрoнови во Штип и Кочани);’ A1 on, 18 March 2025, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/mvr-zabrana-za-koristenje-dronovi-vo-shtip-i-kochani/>.

147 ‘AJM and SSNM: Journalists summoned to an informational interview without a previously announced ban on drones—we demand an explanation from the Ministry of Interior and the CAA (ЗНМ и ССНМ: Новинари повикани на информативен разговор без претходно објавена забрана за дрoнови – бараме објаснување од МВР и АЦБ);’ Association of Journalists of Macedonia, 18 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3G3uK0V>.

148 ‘Rules of Procedure on the Work of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Деловник за работа на Комисијата за спречување и заштита од дискриминација)’ Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 4/2025.

149 ‘The Ministry of Interior chose a female commander in Star Dojran, discriminating against another policewoman based on political affiliation (МВР избрало командирка во Стар Дојран, дискриминирајќи друга полицајка врз основа на политичка припадност);’ Sloboden Pечат, 13 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/4ctLpqC>.

150 ‘Decision on publishing a public call for the selection of a member of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (Одлука за објавување јавен оглас за избор на член на Комисијата за спречување и заштита од дискриминација);’ Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 17 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jrXM8Q>.

151 ‘First constitutive session of the National Coordinating Body for Monitoring the Situation with Non-Discrimination and the Implementation of Laws, By-Laws, and Strategic Documents in This Area (Прва конститутивна седница на Националното координативно тело за следење на состојбите со недискриминација и реализацијата на законите, подзаконските акти и стратешки документи во оваа област);’ Official website of the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, 12 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4cxgpGc>.

152 ‘Andonovski: For the first time, a Law on Accessibility for Persons with Disabilities to State Websites and Applications (Андоновски: За прв пат Закон за пристапност на лицата со попреченост до државните веб страници и апликации);’ Official website of the Ministry of Public Administration, 16 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/425r87b>.

153 ‘High school students with disabilities will receive educational assistants starting in September (Средношколците со попреченост од септември ќе добијат образовни асистенти);’ Sloboden Pечат, 19 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jhR7hb>.

## Gender

Institutional efforts to strengthen gender equality continued amid persistent challenges in implementation and alarming cases of gender-based violence.

In January, the Assembly passed the amendments to the Law on Prevention and Protection from Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (first hearing), reinforcing institutional responsibilities to ensure gender-sensitive services.<sup>154</sup> In February, the Commission for Equal Opportunities between Women and Men adopted a new Action Plan for Gender Equality in the Parliament for 2025–2027,<sup>155</sup> and inter-institutional cooperation on gender equality was reinforced through the launch of a working group for the preparation of the National Action Plan on Gender Equality for the same period.<sup>156</sup> The Commission for Financial Compensation for Victims of Violence and Rape reported receiving several applications, including from survivors of child sexual abuse<sup>157</sup> and launched a public website with the support of the OSCE mission in Skopje.<sup>158</sup> A key labour reform has also been proposed by the political party Levica—namely, to extend maternity leave to 18 months—seeking to provide extended support for new mothers, promoting better work-life balance and child care.<sup>159</sup> On the other hand, the amendments to the Laws on Primary Education,<sup>160</sup> which entered into force on 11 January 2025, removed the terms “gender,” “sexual orientation,” and “gender identity” from Article 5, paragraph 1, as protected grounds against discrimination in education. This change directly contradicts the existing Law on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, which explicitly includes these categories. By excluding these protections, the amendments weaken institutional safeguards against discrimination and violence, particularly for LGBTI students and girls.

In March, the working group for the improvement and implementation of the standard operating procedure for referral centres for victims of sexual violence held its first meeting.<sup>161</sup> The goal of the working group is to identify shortcomings and challenges in the functioning of the sexual violence referral centres established at three public health institutions—procedures that are not aligned with the Istanbul Convention—and, based on that, to propose amendments and improvements to the standard operating procedure.<sup>162</sup>

154 'The Assembly adopted several legal solutions (Собранието донесе неколку законски решенија),' Kurir, 22 January 2025, <https://kurir.mk/vesti/makedonija/sobranieto-donese-nekolku-zakonski-reshenija/>.

155 'The Action Plan for Promoting Equality between Women and Men was adopted (Усвоен Акцискиот план за унапредување на рамноправноста меѓу жените и мажите),' Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 14 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jiM1C5>.

156 Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth, 'Meeting of the working group for the preparation of the National Action Plan for Gender Equality 2025–2027 (Состанок на работна група за подготовка на националниот Акциски план за родова еднаквост 2025–2027),' Resource Center for Gender Responsive Policymaking and Budgeting, 10 February 2025, <https://mtspresurcentar.mk/event/meeting-of-the-working-group-for-the-preparation-of-the-national-action-plan-for-gender-equality-2025-2027-2025-02-10>.

157 'The Commission for Financial Compensation for Victims of Violence and Rape has been established, a condition for requesting assistance is that the crime has been reported to the Ministry of Interior or the Public Prosecutor's Office (Проработе Комисијата за паричен надоместок на жртвите на насилство и силување, услов да се побара помош е делото да е пријавено во МВР или во Обвинителство),' Sakam Da Kazam, 8 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/4i4fP3O>.

158 Ministry of Justice (Министерство за правда), 'The Website of the Commission for Financial Compensation for Victims of Violent Crimes Has Been Promoted (Промовирана Веб Страницата На Комисијата За Паричен Надоместок На Жртви Од Кривично Дело Со Насилство),' 8 February 2025, <https://pravda.gov.mk/vest/6821>.

159 'Salary until the fifth and maternity leave of 18 months—Levica's proposals on the agenda tomorrow (Плата до 5-ти и породилно отсуство од 18 месеци – предлозите на Левица утре на дневен ред),' Sloboden Pecat, 31 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4lo3Z7m>.

160 'Закон За Изменување и Дополнување На Законот За Основно Образование,' Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 3/2025 (Службен весник на Република Северна Македонија бр. 3/2025) § (2025).

161 'Meeting of the working group for the promotion of centers for victims of sexual violence (Средба на работната група за унапредување на центри за жртви на сексуално насилство),' Kanal 5, 13 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/3XPDnCL>.

162 'Changes are needed to the procedure for reporting victims of sexual violence (Потребни се измени на процедурата за пријавување жртви на сексуално насилство),' Telma TV, 13 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4jqMTUQ>.



Following public backlash from civil society, including the National Network against Violence against Women<sup>163</sup> and the Gender Equality Platform,<sup>164</sup> the Ministry of Interior withdrew draft amendments to the Law on Police<sup>165</sup> that would have allowed officers accused of domestic violence to retain their weapons during proceedings.

Controversy arose after a government minister made a discriminatory remark toward a female MP in February, based on marital status.<sup>166</sup> The incident was widely condemned by various actors,<sup>167</sup>—including the opposition<sup>168</sup> and the president,<sup>169</sup>—and prompted a formal complaint to the equality body.<sup>170</sup>

Gender-based violence and femicide remained in the spotlight, including a high-profile femicide case in which a woman was murdered by her extramarital partner in November 2024. The partner confessed to the murder<sup>171</sup> during a court trial,<sup>172</sup> receiving a life sentence.<sup>173</sup> Another case, involving a woman who killed her abusers after years of psychological and physical abuse, renewed debate over recognising self-defence in such contexts.<sup>174</sup> In March, public outrage followed the livestreamed assault of a pregnant woman in Radovish<sup>175</sup>—the suspect was detained<sup>176</sup> and committed to psychiatric care. To mark International Women’s Day on 8 March, women’s rights groups announced protest marches and a boycott of large supermarket chains—drawing attention to gender inequality and the inadequate institutional response.<sup>177</sup>

163 ‘Reaction to the proposed amendments to the Law on Police (Реакција на предложените измени на Законот за полиција),’ National Network to End Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence, 27 February 2025, <https://glasprotivnasilstvo.org.mk/en/reaction-to-the-proposed-amendments-to-the-law-on-police/>.

164 ‘Reaction to the proposed amendments to the Law on Police (Реакција на предложените измени на Законот за полиција),’ Gender Equality Platform, 27 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/3EdYPdQ>.

165 ‘The Ministry of Interior withdrew the amendments to the Law on Police that exposed victims of domestic violence to risk (MBP ги повлече измените на Законот за полиција кои ги изложуваа на ризик жртвите на семејно насилство),’ Gender Equality Platform, 4 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4los2TQ>.

166 ‘A new ‘attack’ from minister Kochoska due to her view of a can of peas —she lashed out at MP Petrovska with insults, and it was related to her family status (Нов „напад“ од министерката Кочоска поради нејзиниот поглед врз конзерва грашок – со навреди се нафрли кон пратеничката Петровска, а поврзано со семеен статус),’ Telma TV, 27 February 2025, <https://telma.com.mk/2025/02/27/nov-napad-od-ministerkata-kochoska-poradi-nejziniot-pogled-vrz-konzerva-grashok-so-navredi-se-nafrli-kon-pratenichkata-petrovska-a-povrzano-so-semeen-status/>.

167 ‘Slavjanka Petrovska is not touched by Kochoska’s insults ‘that she has no children’, the minister does not apologise to her, VMRO–DPMNE called her ‘Slavica’ and that she is ‘playing the victim’ (Славјанка Петровска не ја допираат навредите од Кочоска „дека нема деца“, министерката не и се извинува, ВМРО–ДПМНЕ ја нарече „Славица“ и дека „глуми жртва“),’ Civil Media, 28 February 2025, <https://civilmedia.mk/slavjanka-petrovska-ne-ja-dopiraat-navredite-od-kochoska-deka-nema-detsa-ministerkata-ne-i-se-izvinuva-vmro-dpmne-ja-nareche-slavitsa-i-deka-glumi-zhrtva/>.

168 ‘MP Slavjanka Petrovska targeted by extremely offensive attack by minister of finance Kochoska—harsh reactions from Filipche, Kostova and the SDSM Women’s Forum (Пратеничката Славјанка Петровска мета на крајно навредлив напад од министерката за финансии Кочоска – остри реакции од Филиче, Костова и Форумот на жени на СДСМ),’ Civil Media, 27 February 2025, <https://civilmedia.mk/pratenichkata-slavjanka-petrovska-meta-na-krajno-navredliv-napad-od-ministerkata-za-finansii-kochoska-ostri-reaktsii-od-filipche-i-kostova/>.

169 ‘Siljanovska Davkova: It’s not bad for a person to apologise sometimes (Силјановска Давкова: Не е лошо човек некогаш и да се извини),’ 24 Vesti, 3 March 2025, <https://24.mk/details/siljanovska-davkova-ne-e-losho-chovek-nekogash-i-da-se-izvini>.

170 ‘Petrovska sent a complaint to the Commission for Protection against Discrimination (Петровска испрати претставка до Комисијата за заштита од дискриминација),’ 24 Vesti, 4 March 2025, <https://24.mk/details/petrovska-isprati-pretstavka-do-komisijata-za-zashtita-od-diskriminacija>.

171 ‘Zejnelov confessed to the murder of Emilija Pesheva, the family and the public prosecutor are demanding life imprisonment (Зејнелов го призна убиството на Емилија Пешева, семејството и обвинителот бараат доживотен затвор),’ 24 Info, 10 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42kqDF4>.

172 ‘The trial for the murder of 29-year-old Emilija Prosheva has been scheduled at the Basic Court Shtip (Во штипскиот основен суд закажано судењето за убиството врз 29 годишната Емилија Прошева),’ Telma TV, 23 January 2025, <https://kanal5.com.mk/vo-shtipskiot-osnoven-sud-zakazhano-sudenjeto-za-ubistvoto-vrz-29-godishnata-emilija-prosheva/a681100>.

173 ‘Life imprisonment for the killer of the 29 year old Emilija Pesheva, with whom he lived for a long time (Доживотен затвор за убиецот на 29 годишната штипјанка Емилија Пешева со која живеел подолго време),’ Sakam Da Kazam, 12 February 2025, <https://bit.ly/42i8NT3>.

174 ‘Forensics—Iljevska committed the murders in a fit of passion, fearing for her own life (Вешти лица - Илијевска убиствата ги извршила во афект, стравувајќи за сопствениот живот),’ Sitel TV, 23 January 2025, <https://sitel.com.mk/veshti-lica-iljevska-ubistvata-gi-izvrshila-vo-afekt-stravuvajki-za-sopstveni-zhivot>.

175 ‘DISTURBING VIDEO: A thug from Radovish beats a pregnant woman “live” on TikTok, MPs did not vote to prosecute this crime ex officio (ВОЗНЕМИРУВАЧКО ВИДЕО: Насилник од Радовиш тела бремена жена „во живо“ на „ТикТок“, пратениците не изгласаа ова кривично дело да се гони по службена должност),’ Sloboden Pecat, 26 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4cmvUjX>.

176 ‘The beaten woman does not want to sue the abuser, the case was reported by her mother, the Ministry of Interior filed a complaint for “bodily injury” (Тепаната жена не сака да го тужи насилникот, случајот го пријавила мајка и, МВР поднесе пријава за „телесна повреда“),’ A1 On, 27 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/4joygBg>.

177 ‘“Let Them Eat Roses!” Protest march and boycott of large markets and shopping malls for March 8 („Нека јадат ружи!“ – Протестен марш и бојкот на големите маркети и трговските центри за 8 март),’ Radio MOF, 3 January 2025, <https://bit.ly/44dLPiA>.

## LGBTI+

The annual Trans Visibility March was cancelled out of respect for the victims of the fatal fire in Kochani, and the organisation expressed solidarity with the affected families. This gesture was also seen as an effort to foster understanding and empathy between the LGBTI+ community and the broader public during a sensitive time.<sup>178</sup>

## Roma

The Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) concluded that the Public Transportation Company (JSP) had discriminated against Roma residents of the Shuto Orizari Municipality based on their ethnicity and skin colour. Operational irregularities on bus lines serving Roma-majority areas were cited as evidence of this.<sup>179</sup> In their decision, they stated that access to public transportation is an important tool for the social and economic inclusion of Roma, and that the absence of such access contributes to their further marginalisation.

The first meeting of the National Coordinative Body for the Roma Strategy was held in February.<sup>180</sup> The body is tasked with overseeing the implementation of the Roma Strategy 2022–2030 and ensuring inter-institutional coordination on measures promoting inclusion, equality, and the socioeconomic development of Roma communities. The session reaffirmed the government's commitment to advancing the rights of Roma citizens and improving the effectiveness of targeted policies.

178 'Due to the tragedy in Kochani, the March for Visibility will not take place, the fight of transgender people for a place in society continues (Поради трагедијата во Кочани нема да се одржи маршот за видливост, продолжува борбата на трансродовите лица за место во општеството),' Sloboden Pечат, 30 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/42gheOJ>.

179 'JSP discriminates against Roma in Shutka: One driver was sleeping, another did not stop at the station for them to get on (ЈСП ги дискриминира Ромите во Шутка: Еден возач спие, друг не им застанувал на станица за да се качат),' Sloboden Pечат, 1 March 2025, <https://bit.ly/442rwor>.

180 'Saliu: The first meeting of the National Coordinating Body for Monitoring the Implementation of the Roma Inclusion Strategy 2022–2030 was held (Салиу: Се одржа првиот состанок на Националното координативно тело за следење на имплементацијата на Стратегијата за инклузија на Ромите 2022–2030),' Official website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 24 February 2025, <https://vlada.mk/node/38358>.



