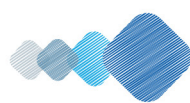


# Rule of Law in View of EU Accession

Quarterly brief

April–June 2024



European  
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Skopje



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This brief summarises the key developments in relation to rule of law in view of EU accession in North Macedonia for the period April – June 2024. It includes the **monitoring of 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

- » The first round of the presidential elections took place on April 24, with candidates from VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM moving on to the second round, which coincided with the parliamentary elections on May 8.
- » VMRO-DPMNE's candidate became North Macedonia's first female president with 65.14% of the vote and was inaugurated on May 12.
- » The "Your Macedonia" coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE won 43.32% of the parliamentary vote, securing 58 seats in the 120-seat assembly. The SDSM-led coalition's poor performance, with 15.37% of the vote, led to intra-party elections.
- » The newly elected Assembly convened on May 28, verified new mandates and elected a speaker from the VLEN coalition.
- » On June 23, the Assembly, comprising members from VMRO-DPMNE, VLEN, and ZNAM, approved the new government with 77 votes in favour.
- » Voting accessibility issues for persons with disabilities persisted, with some polling stations inaccessible due to a lack of elevators or ground-floor locations.
- » Women's representation in the new Assembly and Government declined, with only 40 female MPs out of 120 and three female ministers out of 24, both fewer than before. Additionally, there is no Roma MP in the new Assembly.
- » On June 8, the Assembly passed amendments to the Law on the Organization and Work of State Administration Bodies with 88 votes in favor. The amendments include reorganizing ministries, such as merging Labour with the Ministry of Economy, creating a new Ministry of Social Policy, Demography, and Youth, and establishing new ministries for Sports, Energy, Mining and Mineral Resources, Culture and Tourism, Digitization, Administration, and European Integration.
- » With the new government in place, plans to dismantle the Judicial Council and Council of Public Prosecutors intensified, raising concerns among diplomats and experts about potential power concentration and judicial disruption.
- » In May 2024, a Supreme Court judge was arrested for accepting a 10,000-euro bribe, leading to searches and evidence of collusion with a Council of Public Prosecutors member. The Judicial Council revoked the judge's immunity, approved his detention, and bypassed legal provisions to remove him from office.
- » The Judicial Council amended its rules and ranking regulations for judicial candidates, introduced deadlines for judicial accountability, and adopted a Communication Strategy with an Action Plan. With the amendments requiring individualized, objective decisions and new ranking criteria emphasizing qualitative performance, these changes partially implemented five of the 17 recommendations from the EU peer review mission aimed at improving its operations without requiring legal changes.
- » The Administrative and Higher Administrative Courts upheld the SCPC's decision against the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors for violating the Electoral Code and Anti-Corruption Law, leading to actions against the Academy's leadership.
- » A new public prosecutor responsible for monitoring hate crimes and discrimination cases in Skopje was elected in early June.
- » The fifth Pride Parade, themed "Spectacularly Disobedient," was held in Skopje on June 22.



# List of Abbreviations

<b>AA</b>	Alliance for Albanians
<b>AAVMS</b>	Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
<b>AJM</b>	Association of Journalists of Macedonia
<b>BPPO</b>	Basic Public Prosecutor's Office
<b>CPPD</b>	Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
<b>CPT</b>	European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment
<b>CSO</b>	Civil society organisation
<b>DUI</b>	Democratic Union for Integration
<b>ECHR</b>	European Convention on Human Rights
<b>ECtHR</b>	European Court of Human Rights
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>IRC</b>	Islamic Religious Community
<b>LGBTI</b>	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex communities
<b>LOWSAB</b>	Law on the Organization and Work of State Administration Bodies
<b>MES</b>	Ministry of Education and Science
<b>MFA</b>	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
<b>MISA</b>	Ministry of Information Society and Administration
<b>MOC-OA</b>	Macedonian Orthodox Church–Ohrid Archdiocese
<b>MoI</b>	Ministry of Interior
<b>MP</b>	Member of Parliament
<b>NATO</b>	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
<b>NAP</b>	National Action Plan
<b>OGP</b>	Open Government Partnership
<b>OSCE/ODIHR</b>	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights
<b>PDPA</b>	Personal Data Protection Agency
<b>RNM</b>	Republic of North Macedonia
<b>SCPC</b>	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
<b>SEC</b>	State Election Commission
<b>SDSM</b>	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
<b>SSNM</b>	Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers
<b>SSO</b>	State Statistical Office
<b>US</b>	United States
<b>VMRO–DPMNE</b>	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity
<b>ZNAM</b>	Movement Znam - FOR OUR MACEDONIA
<b>SEC</b>	State Election Commission
<b>SSNM</b>	Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers
<b>UNICEF</b>	The United Nations Children's Fund
<b>VMRO–DPMNE</b>	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization—Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity



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# Functioning of democratic institutions



# Elections

At the start of April, the promotion of parliamentary candidate lists concluded, with their submission to the State Election Commission (SEC) closing on April 2.<sup>1</sup> On April 12, the ballot order of the accepted lists was determined through a random draw.<sup>2</sup>

On April 2, six out of seven presidential candidates signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections. The candidate from the GROM party did not sign. The Code required the presidential candidates to adhere to all laws and avoid hate speech, ensuring fair and successful elections.<sup>3</sup> On April 17, ten representatives of candidate lists for North Macedonia's parliamentary elections also signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections, committing to ethical conduct. Seven representatives of parties/coalitions that submitted candidate lists did not sign the Code,<sup>4</sup> with some of the smaller political parties citing unfair distribution of state funds for election marketing and arguing that the current funding system favours major parties, thus hindering political pluralism.<sup>5</sup>

The campaign for the first round of the presidential elections began on April 4 and concluded at midnight on April 22.<sup>6</sup> On April 9, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) found that the paid political advertisements of two presidential candidates featured minors, violating Article 76 paragraph 3 of the Electoral Code. Consequently, broadcasters were instructed to cease airing those advertisements, and the candidates were urged to align their campaign content with legal regulations.<sup>7</sup> During the April 21 pre-election debate, presidential candidates shared their visions and programs on live TV, discussing topics like executive power balance, constitutional changes, EU integration, demography, and societal divisions.<sup>8</sup> The campaign for the parliamentary elections began on April 18, with candidates presenting their platforms nationwide, and concluded on May 6.<sup>9</sup>

Initially, the government declared April 24 and May 8 non-working days but only "recommended" the private sector follow suit, causing confusion. In mid-April, the government clarified that these days would be non-working for everyone, mandating private sector compliance to ensure workers could participate in the elections freely.<sup>10</sup>

The first round of the seventh presidential elections took place on April 24. Voting for the diaspora, prisoners, and the sick and infirm occurred the day before. A total of 1,814,317 voters were registered,<sup>11</sup> and the elections were monitored by 915 domestic and 544 foreign observers.<sup>12</sup>

1 'Lists for the parliamentary elections have been submitted to the SEC (Поднесени 17 листи на пратеници за парламентарните избори до ДИК)', *Nezavisen Vesnik*, 3 April 2024, <https://nezavisen.mk/podneseni-17-listi-na-pratenici-za-parlamentarnite-izbori-do-dik/>.

2 'The SEC determined the order of the candidate lists for the elections (ДИК го утврди редоследот на кандидатските листи за изборите)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 12 April 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32903092.html>.

3 'The presidential candidates signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections (Кандидатите за претседател потпишаа Кодекс за фер и демократски избори)', *Radio Slobodna Evropa*, 2 April 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32888142.html>.

4 'Political parties and coalitions signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections for the upcoming parliamentary elections (Политичките партии и коалиции потпишаа Кодекс за фер и демократски избори за претстојните парламентарни избори)', Official website of the State Election Commission, 17 April 2024, <https://www.sec.mk/politichkite-partii-i-koalicii-potpishaa-kodeks-za-fer-i-demokratski-izbori-za-pretojnite-parlamentarni-izbori/>.

5 'Funding for political marketing the reason why some of the smaller parties did not sign the Code for Fair and Democratic Parliamentary Elections (Парите за политички маркетинг причина дел од помалите партии да не го потпишаа Кодексот за фер и демократски парламентарни избори)', *360 Stepeni*, 17 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/parite-za-politichki-marketing-pricina-del-od-pomalite-partii-da-ne-go-potpishat-kodeksot-za-fer-i-demokratski-parlamentarni-izbori/>.

6 'The campaign for the presidential elections begins (Почнува кампањата за претседателските избори)', *360 Stepeni*, 4 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/pochnuva-kampanata-za-pretsedatelskite-izbori/>.

7 'Broadcasters should not broadcast PPA with minors (Радиодифузерите да не емитуваат ППР со малолетници)', Official website of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, 9 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3SnccvC>.

8 'Pre-election confrontation of the presidential candidates: They promise a better future for the country, conflicting views on the constitutional amendments (Предизборно соочување на претседателските кандидати: Ветуваат подобра иднина за државата, спротивставени ставови за уставните измени)', *Telma*, 21 April 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/04/21/predizborno-soochuvane-na-pretsedatelskite-kandidati-vetuvaat-podobra-idnina-za-drzhavata-sprotivstaveni-stavovi-za-ustavnite-izmeni/>.

9 'The campaign for the parliamentary elections begins, five more days of the presidential campaign (Стартува кампањата за парламентарните избори, уште пет дена претседателска кампања)', *Telma*, 18 April 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/04/18/startuva-kampanata-za-parlamentarnite-izbori-ushte-pet-dena-pretsedatelska-kampana/>.

10 'The Government decided that the wednesdays of April 24 and May 8 will be non-working for private companies as well (Владата одлучи средите на 24 април и на 8 мај да бидат неработни и за приватните фирми)', *Sakam da kazam*, 16 April 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/izbori-2024/vladata-odлучi-sredite-na-24-april-i-na-8-maj-da-bidat-nerabotni-i-za-privatnite-firmi/>.

11 'Citizens vote for the seventh president of the country (Граѓаните гласаат за седми претседател на државата)', *Sitel*, 24 April 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/gragjanite-glasa-at-za-sedmi-pretsedatel-na-drzhavata>.

12 'The elections are monitored by 915 domestic and 544 foreign observers (Изборите ги следат 915 домашни и 544 странски набљудувачи)', *Kanal 5*, 24 April 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/-izborite-gi-sledat-915-domashni-i-544-stranski-nabljuduvachi/a637047>.

The Ministry of Interior (Mol) stated that the election process was peaceful, safe, and democratic, with no major incidents. They recorded twelve cases of photographing ballot papers, two of tearing ballot papers, six reports of bribery, and fifteen reports of disruption at polling stations.<sup>13</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR assessed the first round of the presidential election as generally positive and peaceful while noting that some counting procedures were not followed correctly. They also noted harsh and negative rhetoric during the political campaign, ethnic divisions, and vagueness in the electoral code.<sup>14</sup> Nearly half of eligible voters participated (49.93%). The candidates from the two major parties, VMRO–DPMNE and SDSM, advanced to the second round, with the VMRO–DPMNE candidate gaining a substantial lead in the first round.<sup>15</sup>

After the first round of the presidential election, political campaigns intensified, with VMRO–DPMNE suggesting coalition plans with VLEN and possibly (For Our Macedonia) ZNAM for the post-electoral government.<sup>16</sup> This sparked a response from the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which asserted that government coalitions should adhere to the principle of partnering with the leading Macedonian and Albanian parties.<sup>17</sup>

The second round of the presidential elections and the parliamentary elections were held on May 8, monitored by 1,303 domestic and 860 foreign observers.<sup>18</sup> Both the Mol and the Temporary Election Monitoring Commission at the Public Prosecutor’s Office assessed the Election Day as peaceful.<sup>19,20</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR observation mission concluded that the elections were competitive and respected basic freedoms. It noted that recent amendments to the Electoral Code lacked transparency and public consultation, with key recommendations on media access and campaign finance remaining unaddressed. The pre-election period was marred by negative rhetoric and vote-buying allegations, which eroded confidence in the process. Additionally, female political participation remained low.<sup>21</sup>

VMRO–DPMNE’s candidate won 65.14% of the vote to become North Macedonia’s first female president,<sup>22</sup> inaugurated on May 12.<sup>23</sup> The “Your Macedonia” coalition led by VMRO–DPMNE also secured a decisive victory in the parliamentary elections with 43.32% of the vote. In contrast, the SDSM-led coalition achieved its weakest performance with just 15.37% of the vote, leading to intra-party elections.<sup>24</sup> The seat distribution in the 120-seat assembly was as follows: VMRO–DPMNE-led coalition with 58 seats; DUI-led coalition with 18 seats; SDSM-led coalition with 18 seats; VLEN with 14 seats, the Levica with 6 seats; and ZNAM with 6 seats.

13 'Toshkovski and Bojmacaliev: Citizens voted for the election of the president of the country, in a peaceful, safe and democratic atmosphere (Тoшкoвски и Boјмaцaлиeв: Гpaѓaнитe глacaa зa избop нa прeтceдaтeл нa држaвaтa, вo мирнa, бeзбeднa и дeмoкpaтcкa aтмocфepa)', Official website of the Ministry of Interior, 24 April 2024, <http://mvr.gov.mk/vest/31218/>.

14 'OSCE/ODIHR: Election day positively assessed, remarks about the campaign (OБCE/OДИHP: Избopниoт дeн пoзитивнo oцeнeт, зaбeлeшкa зa кaмпaњaтa)', Radio Free Europe, 25 April 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32920691.html>.

15 'The deadlines for objections to the SEC are approaching, there will be no re-voting at the three polling stations in Kumanovo (Teчaт poкoвитe зa пpигoвopи дo ДИК, нeмa пpeглacувaњe нa тpитe избиpaчки мeстa вo Кyмaнoвo)', Nova Makedonija, 25 April 2024, <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/techat-rokovite-za-prigovori-do-dik-nema-preglasuvanje-na-trite-izbirachki-mesta-vo-kumanovo/>.

16 'Parties ask the citizens to vote en masse on May 8, VMRO–DPMNE declared that it would form a government with Vredi (Пapтиитe бapaат oд гpaѓaнитe мaсoвнo дa излeзaт нa глacaњe нa 8 мaј, BМPO–ДПMHE ce изјacни дeкa би фopмирaлa влaдa co Bpeди)', 24.Mk, 29 April 2024, <https://24.mk/details/partiite-baraat-od-gra-anite-masovno-da-izlezat-na-glasanje-na-8-maj-vmro-dpmne-se-izjasni-deka-bi-formirala-vlada-so-vredi>.

17 'Post-election coalitions cause of quarrel between political parties (Пocтизбopни кoaлиции пpичинa зa кaвгa мeѓy пoлитичкитe пapтии)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32930853.html>.

18 'The double elections will be monitored by 1,303 domestic and 860 foreign observers (Двoјнитe избopи кe ги слeдaт 1.303 дoмaшни и 860 cтpaнски нaбљyдyвaчи)', Radio Free Europe, 7 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32936901.html>.

19 'Mol: The voting was generally peaceful, no violations of public order and peace were registered (MБP: Глacaњeтo гeнepaлнo мирнo, нe ce peгистpиpaни нapyшyвaњa нa јaвниoт peд и мир)', Radio Free Europe, 8 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32938145.html>.

20 'Voting is taking place peacefully, without major disturbances of the electoral process (Глacaњeтo ce oдвивa мирнo, бeз пoгoлeми нapyшyвaњa нa избopниoт пpoцeс)', Radio Free Europe, 8 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32938202.html>.

21 'OSCE/ODIHR: The elections were competitive, remarks on the electoral legislation (OБCE/OДИHP: Избopитe бeа кoнкypeнтни, зaбeлeшкa зa избopнoтo зaкoнoдaвcтвo)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 9 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32939858.html>.

22 'Gordana Siljanovska Davkova will become the first female president (Гopдaнa Cилјaнoвcкa Дaвкoвa кe cтaнe пpвaтa жeнa пpeтceдaтeл)', Radio Free Europe, 8 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/pretsedatel-siljanovska-izbori/32938587.html>.

23 'Inauguration of the newly elected president of the state Gordana Siljanovska Davkova in the Assembly (Инугуpациja вo Cобpaниeтo нa нoвoизбpaнaтa пpeтceдaтeлкa нa држaвaтa Гopдaнa Cилјaнoвcкa Дaвкoвa)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 May 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-inuguracija-vo-sobranieto-na-novoizbranata-pretsedatelka-na-drzavata-gordana-siljanovska-davkova.nspх>.

24 'Kovachevski: The result is disappointing, I call for new internal elections in SDSM (Koвaчeвcки: Peзyлтaтoт e paзoчapaвaчки, пoвикувaм нa нoви внaтpeшни избopи вo CДCМ)', Radio Free Europe, 8 May 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/32938666.html>.



# Assembly

In April, the Inter-Party Parliamentary Group against Corruption was established by MPs from the 2020–2024 parliamentary term to bolster the Assembly’s role in combating corruption. Key areas include health, energy, state administration reform, and construction. The group plans to meet with relevant institutions based on findings from the State Audit Office, the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, and civil society organisations to address key issues and improve legislative quality and oversight.<sup>25</sup>

On May 23, the President of the Assembly scheduled the constitutive session of the newly elected Assembly for May 28, 2024, with the oldest MP designated to chair the session. The session, limited to three days under the new rules of procedure, aimed to elect a Verification Commission, the Commission on Elections and Appointments, and the President of the Assembly.<sup>26</sup> 118 mandates were verified at this session, and a new Speaker was elected from the VLEN coalition. Six MPs suspended their government roles to focus on Assembly duties. The Prime Minister from the transitional–technical government, who also gained a parliamentary mandate, announced he would retain his position until the new government was elected and would not participate in Assembly activities during that time.<sup>27</sup> In late June, MPs from the Levica filed a joint criminal complaint against the President of the Assembly for “reckless work in the service” related to the non-revocation of this MP’s mandate due to constitutional incompatibility with his role as prime minister in the technical–transitional government.<sup>28</sup>

On June 3, the Parliamentary Institute organised an introductory session for newly elected MPs, providing information on the legislative authority’s organisation, procedures, supervisory role, budget adoption, and ethical framework. According to the Parliamentary Institute’s statistics, nearly half of the new MPs were elected for the first time.<sup>29</sup>

On June 8, the Assembly passed amendments to the Law on Organisation and Work of State Administration Bodies with 88 votes in favour following a meeting between VMRO–DPMNE and the European Front that secured the necessary two-thirds majority. The amendments, which reorganise ministries and the state administration, faced criticism from SDSM and Levica MPs, who argued they were politically motivated and lacked proper analysis.<sup>30</sup> On June 23, after a two-day debate, the Assembly elected the new Government with 77 votes in favour. The new government comprises 20 ministries, including new and reorganised ones, with members from VMRO–DPMNE, VLEN, and ZNAM.<sup>31</sup>

On June 20, the Assembly held a two-day session with parliamentarians from eleven assemblies, concluding with a declaration to enhance regional cooperation and socioeconomic reforms while promoting democracy. This marked the end of North Macedonia’s chairmanship of the South East Cooperation Process Parliamentary Assembly, with Albania as the next chair.<sup>32</sup>

25 ‘An inter-party anti-corruption group was formed to promote the role of the Assembly in the prevention of corruption (Формирана меѓупартиска антикорупциска група за унапредување на улогата на Собранието во спречувањето на корупцијата), Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 22 April 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-formirana-megupartiska-antikorupciska-grupa-za-unapreduvane-na-ulogata-na-sobranieto-vo-sprecurvaneto-na-korupcijata.nspх>.

26 ‘Following consultations with the parliamentary parties, president Mitreski will schedule the constituent session on May 28 at 11 a.m. (По консултациите со парламентарните партии, претседателот Митрески ќе ја закаже конститутивната седница на 28 мај во 11 часот), Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 23 May 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-po-konsultacite-so-parlamentarnite-partii-pretседателot-mitreski-ke-ja-zakaze-konstitutivnata-sednica-na-28-maj-vo-11-casot.nspх>.

27 ‘The new parliamentary composition has been constituted, Gashi appointed as new speaker (Конституиран новиот собраниски состав, Гаши нов спикер), 24.mk, <https://24.mk/details/konstituiran-noviot-sobraniski-sostav-gashi-nov-spiker>.

28 ‘Levica filed a criminal complaint against Afrim Gashi for not revoking Talat Xhaferi’s mandate (Левица поднесе кривична пријава против Африм Гаши поради неодземањето на мандатот на Талат Џафери), А1он, 27 June 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/levica-podnese-krivichna-prijava-protiv-afrim-gashi-poradi-neodzemaneto-na-mandatot-na-talat-dzhaferi/>.

29 ‘Introductory session for the newly elected MPs (Воведна сесија за новоизбраните пратеници), Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 3 June 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-vovedna-sesija-za-novoizbranite-pratenici.nspх>.

30 ‘The Law on Reorganisation of the Ministries was adopted (Усвоен Законот за реорганизација на министерствата), DW, 8 June 2024, <https://www.dw.com/mk/usvoen-zakonot-za-reorganizacija-na-ministerstvata-namesto-16-ke-ima-20/a-69309528>.

31 ‘Mickoski assumed the post of Prime Minister (Мицкоски ја презеде премиерската функција), Radio Free Europe, 24 June 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33006767.html>.

32 ‘Final Declaration of the 11th Plenary Session of SEESP PA adopted (Усвоена финална Декларација на 11. пленарна сесија на ПСЈИЕ), Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 20 June 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-usvoena-finalna-deklaracija-na-11-plenarna-sesija-na-psjie.nspх>.

# Governance

At its 16<sup>th</sup> session in mid-April, the Government adopted the Draft Reform Agenda 2024–2027 under the Growth Plan for the Western Balkans. The agenda outlines key reform priorities, deadlines, and aims for EU alignment before final adoption. Key areas include public administration, public finances, digital and green transitions, human capital, the business environment, and the rule of law.<sup>33</sup>

According to the April 9 Freedom House Nations in Transit report, North Macedonia is classified as a “cyclical hybrid” system, indicating that government and political leadership changes have not led to significant reforms. The report highlights that North Macedonia remains burdened by corrupt patronage networks, with power concentrated among a few parties. Over the past year, the country has faced setbacks in the rule of law, high-level corruption, and contentious debates over constitutional amendments needed for EU accession.<sup>34</sup> Subsequently, in April, the State Department’s Country Reports on Human Rights Practices noted that the North Macedonian government has taken limited action to identify and punish individuals responsible for human rights violations. The report also highlights the ineffective implementation of criminal penalties for corruption and changes in the Criminal Code that significantly reduced charges and penalties for corruption-related crimes.<sup>35</sup>

During the pre-election campaign and immediately following the elections, relations with Greece and Bulgaria became a major topic. Controversy arose when the new President referred to the country as “Macedonia” rather than “North Macedonia” during her swearing-in, sparking diplomatic concerns from Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and EU officials, who stressed the importance of adhering to the Prespa Agreement.<sup>36</sup> In response, the President’s office clarified that while the official constitutional name “North Macedonia” will be used, the President reserves the right to use “Macedonia” as a personal expression of self-determination and identity.<sup>37</sup> The new Prime Minister stated that the Government must follow the laws and Constitution regarding the use of the constitutional name. However, he will not use the adjective “North” in statements.<sup>38</sup> He also announced that the new Government plans to negotiate at least three new possible solutions with Bulgaria. He also believes the EU negotiation framework can be revised and will seek assurances that there will be no additional bilateral conditions from Bulgaria.<sup>39</sup>

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade affirmed that North Macedonia fully respects its international commitments, including the Prespa Agreement, in response to concerns raised by the Prime Ministers of Greece and Bulgaria at the European Council meeting about the country’s adherence to its EU accession commitments.<sup>40</sup> The new Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade attended the EU and Western Balkans diplomacy meeting held within the framework of the European Council for Foreign Affairs

33 ‘From the 15th and 16th Government session: Another step towards improving the status of the trainees - a decision to regulate their rights and obligations by law (Од 15. и 16. владина седница: Уште еден чекор кон унапредување на статусот на специјализантите – Одлука, нивните права и обврски да се уредат со закон)’, Official website of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, 16 April 2024, <https://vlada.mk/node/36332>.

34 ‘Nations in Transit 2024: A region reordered by autocracy and democracy’ (Freedom House, 9 April 2024), [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/NIT\\_2024\\_Digital\\_Booklet.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/2024-04/NIT_2024_Digital_Booklet.pdf).

35 ‘2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: North Macedonia’, United States Department of State, 23 April 2024, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>.

36 ‘North Macedonia President-elect sparks row with Greece at swearing-in’, Politico, 12 May 2024, <https://www.politico.eu/article/north-macedonia-president-elect-sparks-row-with-greece-swearing-in-ceremony/>.

37 ‘Office of the President: Siljanovska will adhere to the official application of the constitutional name, and may use the name Macedonia as an act of personal right (Кабинет на претседателот: Сиљановска ќе се придржува до официјалната примена на уставното име, а може да го употребува името Македонија како чин на лично право)’, Sloboden Pечат, 13 May 2024, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/kabinet-na-pretседателot-siljanovska-kje-se-pridrzuva-do-oficijalnata-prime-na-na-ustavnoto-ime-a-mozhe-da-go-upotrebuva-imeto-makedonija-kako-chin-na-lichno-pravo/>.

38 ‘Mickoski: We cannot pretend that the constitutional name is not part of the legal system (Мицкоски: Не можеме да се правиме наудрени дека уставното име не е дел од правниот систем)’, Večer, 19 June 2024, <https://bit.ly/3y5hoh5>.

39 ‘Mickoski: It is possible to change the negotiating framework, we will seek a solution with the new Government in Bulgaria (Мицкоски: Можна е промена на преговарачката рамка, ќе бараме решение со новата Влада во Бугарија)’, 25 June 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mitskoski-mozhna-e-promena-na-pregovarachkata-ramka-ke-barame-reshenie-so-novata-vlada-vo-bugarija/>.

40 ‘MFA: We fully respect the obligations from international agreements (МНР: Во целост ги почитуваме обврските од меѓународните договори)’, 360 Stepeni, 28 June 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mnr-vo-tselost-gi-pochituvame-obvrskite-od-megunarodnite-dogovori/>.

in late June, where he emphasised the new government's commitment to reforms and EU integration.<sup>41</sup> He also met with the NATO Secretary General, reaffirming the country's commitment to NATO membership, support for the defence and deterrence policy, and continued support for Ukraine.<sup>42</sup>

The coalition partners VMRO–DPMNE and VLEN announced plans to abolish the balancer tool after finding another legal solution ensuring equal representation.<sup>43</sup> The Prime Minister stated that this decision follows an EU recommendation stemming from the screening process due to the tool's dysfunctionality and misuse, denying any intent to disenfranchise communities.<sup>44</sup> On June 28, the Minister of Digital Transformation announced changes to the balancer tool to align with the 2021 census results, excluding those living abroad, stating that this is the first step towards completely abolishing the tool while ensuring fair ethnic representation.<sup>45</sup> Opposition parties, DUI and Alliance for Albanians (AA), criticised the move, arguing that the principle of fair representation, a key aspect of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, is being undermined.<sup>46</sup>

## Civil society

On April 1, the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs met with civil society representatives to reflect on the dialogue and cooperation between the government and civil society organisations (CSOs) during the government's mandate. The meeting highlighted the need for intensified cooperation with civil society to achieve EU membership, align with European norms, and implement reforms.<sup>47</sup>

On June 6, eco-activists from six CSOs submitted an initiative to the Constitutional Court challenging provisions 17 and 18 of the Electoral Code. They argue these provisions violate four constitutional articles and significantly worsen conditions for submitting independent candidate lists by raising the signature threshold. Activists claim the changes favour political parties and harm civil associations' participation in elections, undermining the democratic process.<sup>48</sup>

The Platform of Civil Society Organisations for the Fight Against Corruption criticised the Assembly for its closed and non-consultative process regarding the Draft Law on Amendments to the Law on the Organisation of the Work of State Administration Bodies. They also criticised the creation of three new ministries and the reorganisation of the state administration without thorough analysis. The Platform emphasises that this approach harms cooperation and trust between civil society and policymakers.<sup>49</sup>

41 'Mucunski in a meeting with Várhelyi: The new Government is strongly committed to the Reform Agenda and European integration (Муцунски на средба со Вархеји: Новата Влада е силно посветена на реформската агенда и европските интеграции)', Sitel, 24 June 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/mucunski-na-sredba-so-varheji-novata-vlada-e-silno-posvetena-na-reformskata-agenda-i-evropskite>.

42 'Mucunski: In the complex geopolitical context in Europe, we must be a responsible member of NATO (Муцунски: Во сложениот геополитички контекст во Европа мораме да бидеме одговорна членка на НАТО)', Republika, 25 June 2024, <https://republika.mk/vesti/makedonija/mucunski-vo-slozheniot-geopolitichki-kontekst-vo-evropa-morame-da-bideme-odgovorna-chlenka-na-nato-2/>.

43 'A solution to the balancer is sought - the coalition partners have opened the way to modify it (Се бара решение за балансерот - коалиционите партнери отворија пат за негово модифицирање)', 24.Mk, 26 June 2024, <https://24.mk/details/se-bara-reshenie-za-balanserot-koalicionite-partneri-otvorija-pat-za-negovo-modificiranje>.

44 'Mickoski: Scrapping of the balancer is a result of the screening process with the EU (Мицкоски: Бришење на балансерот е резултат на скрининг процесот со ЕУ)', Kanal 5, 26 June 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/mickoski-brishenje-na-balanserot-e-rezultat-na-skrining-procesot-so-eu/a646648>.

45 'The balancer tool departs to the annals of history (Балансерот заминува во историјата)', 24.Mk, 28 June 2024, <https://24.mk/details/balanserot-zaminuva-vo-istorijata>.

46 'DUI and AA react to the announcement of the abolition of the balancer: One of the main pillars of the Ohrid agreement is under attack (ДУИ и АА реагираат на најавата за укинување на балансерот: Се напаѓа еден од главните столбови на охридскиот договор)', 360 Stepeni, 28 June 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dui-i-aa-reagiraat-na-najavata-za-ukinuvane-na-balanserot-se-napaga-eden-od-glavnite-stolbovi-na-ohridskiot-dogovor/>.

47 'Marichik at a meeting with civil society organizations: "Cooperation and dialogue with civil society" (Маричиќ на средба со граѓанските организации: „Соработка и дијалог со граѓанското општество“)', Kanal 5, 1 April 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/marichik-na-sredba-so-gragjanskite-organizacii-sorabotka-i-dijalog-so-gragjanskoto-opshtestvo/a633291>.

48 'Civil society organisations demand an evaluation of the constitutionality of provisions of the Electoral Code, they submitted the initiative to the Constitutional Court (Граѓански организации бараат оценување на уставноста на одредби од Изборниот законик, иницијативата ја поднесоа до Уставен)', 360 Stepeni, 6 June 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/gragjanski-organizatsii-baraat-otsenuvane-na-ustavnosta-na-odredbi-od-izborniot-zakonik-initsijativata-ja-podnesoa-do-ustaven/>.

49 'Reaction to the absence of a consultative process for amending the systemic Law on the Organisation of the Work of State Administration Bodies (Реакција за отсуство на консултативен процес за измена на системскиот Закон за организација на работата на органите на државна управа)', Transparency International Macedonia, 7 June 2024, <https://transparency.mk/2024/06/07/reakcija-za-otsustvo-na-konsultativen-proces-za-izmena-na-sistemskiot-zakon-za-organizacija-na-robotata-na-organite-na-drzhavna-uprava/>.

In June, civil society representatives from the country participated in the EU Civil Society Forum for the Western Balkans and Türkiye. The event highlighted the need for clearer guidelines and enforcement mechanisms for civil society's role in monitoring the Growth Plan, emphasising that public consultation is a legal requirement under EU oversight. Persistent challenges include inconsistent implementation of legal frameworks. While cooperation has expanded to involve various stakeholders, fostering trust remains essential. Strengthening the sector requires diversifying funding, prioritising local expertise, partnering with the private sector, and investing in human resources to better serve constituents.<sup>50</sup>

## Civilian oversight of the security/intelligence sector

In April, the Director of the Intelligence Agency claimed that Chinese and Russian propaganda occurred in North Macedonia during the pre-election period, promoting Euroscepticism and suggesting alternatives like BRICS and the Euroasian Union. However, he did not provide concrete evidence or identify specific political or media actors involved.<sup>51</sup>

A new director of the Intelligence Agency was appointed in June following the dismissal of the previous director before the end of his mandate. The position of Deputy Director has also changed. The President's Office did not disclose the reasons for the dismissals.<sup>52</sup> The former director claimed that party pressure on the President led to his removal.<sup>53</sup> In response, the now-ruling VMRO-DPMNE party accused the former director of party bias. It alleged that, under the influence of the former ruling coalition SDSM and DUI, he organised raids against media and individuals critical of the former government.<sup>54</sup>

## Public administration reform

The Ministry of Information Society and Administration (MISA)<sup>55</sup> held individual working meetings from 15 to 16 May by priority areas from the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026 (NAP). The purpose of the meetings was to support the implementation and reporting of the NAP. The organisation of the implementation process for NAP commitments and achievements was discussed, including the operation of subgroups, preparing contributions for NAP implementation, and using the portal [www.ovp.gov.mk](http://www.ovp.gov.mk).<sup>56</sup>

50 'EU Civil Society Forum for the Western Balkans and Türkiye', EU TACSO 3 LinkedIn Post, 17 June 2024, [https://www.linkedin.com/posts/eutacso3\\_eucsoforum2024-civilsociety-westernbalkans-activity-720840731160160256-Qibv/?utm\\_source=share&utm\\_medium=member\\_desktop](https://www.linkedin.com/posts/eutacso3_eucsoforum2024-civilsociety-westernbalkans-activity-720840731160160256-Qibv/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop).

51 'The Intelligence Agency is "hunting" for signals of Chinese propaganda in the elections (Разузнавачите „ловат“ сигнали на кинеска пропаганда во изборите)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 29 April 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/kina-propaganda-razuznavanje/32916172.html>.

52 'Female tandem at the head of the Intelligence Agency, it is not announced why the director Erol Musliu was replaced (Женски тандем на чело на Агенцијата за разузнавање, не е соопштено зошто е сменет директорот Еролд Муслиу)', Telma, 28 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/28/zheniski-tandem-na-chelo-na-agencijata-za-razuznavane-ne-e-soopshteno-zoshto-e-smenet-direktorot-erold-musliu/>.

53 'Siljanovska-Davkova gave in under party pressure, says the dismissed director of the Intelligence Agency Erol Musliu (Сиљановска-Давкова попушти под партиски притисоци, вели разрешениот директор на Агенцијата за разузнавање Еролд Муслиу)', Sakam da kazam, 28 June 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/silanovska-davkova-popushti-pod-partiski-prititsotsi-veli-razresheniot-direktor-na-agentsijata-za-razuznavane-erold-musliu/>.

54 'VMRO-DPMNE: Musliu turned the Intelligence Agency into party headquarters of SDSM, it is obscene to talk about a merit system (ВМРО-ДПМНЕ: Муслиу од Агенцијата за разузнавање направи партиски штаб на СДСМ, безобразно е да зборува за мерит-систем)', 360 Stepeni, 28 June 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/vmro-dpmne-musliu-od-agentsijata-za-razuznavane-napravi-partiski-shtab-na-sdsm-bezobrazno-e-da-zboruva-za-merit-sistem/>.

55 With the new Law on Reorganization of the State Administrative Bodies MISA is divided in two separate ministries, Ministry for Public Administration and Ministry for Digital Transformation.

56 'Working meetings held with the working group and all stakeholders for the implementation of the National Action Plan for Open Government Partnership 2024–2026 (Одржани работни средби со работната група со сите чинители за спроведување на националниот Акциски план за партнерство за отворена власт 2024–2026 година)', Official website of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 17 May 2024, <https://mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/odrzani-rabotni-sredbi-so-rabotnata-grupa-so-site-ciniteli-za-sproveduvane-na-nacionalniot-akciski-plan-za-partnerstvo-za-otvorena-vlast-2024-2026-godina.nspX>.

On June 5, the second session of the Council for Coordination and Monitoring of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) 2024–2026 process was held. Key issues for the functioning of the Council were reviewed, discussed, and voted on, such as the adoption of the Rules of Procedure of the Council and the election of co-presidents of the Council. Council members were briefed on the current state of the OGP at national and global levels.<sup>57</sup>

On 7 June, the Assembly passed the Law on the Organisation and Work of State Administration Bodies (LOWSAB) with 88 votes in favour, 22 against, and no abstentions. This expedited process allows for the transformation of departments in the future Government, increasing the number of ministries from 16 to 20. The proposer of the new LOWSAB was the future mandate holder and the leader of VMRO–DPMNE.<sup>58</sup> The law was adopted without a consultation process and public debate, with a shortened procedure and lacks RIA.

The amendments foresee adding the labour segment to the Ministry of Economy, and the previous Ministry of Labor and Social Policy will be the Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth. The Ministry of Sports will succeed the Agency for Youth and Sports, and part of the Ministry of Economy’s competencies in the mining and energy field will be part of the competencies of a new Ministry of Energy, Mining and Mineral Resources.<sup>59</sup> The competencies for tourism will be held by the new Ministry of Culture and Tourism. A Ministry of Digital Transformation and a Ministry of Administration will be established, which will succeed the previous Ministry of Information Society and Administration.<sup>60</sup> The Secretariat for European Integration will become the Ministry for European Integration.<sup>61</sup>

According to the rationale behind the law, an EU-funded project for reorganising state administration bodies and efforts to modernise inspection services revealed significant shortcomings in the state apparatus due to an inadequate institutional structure. Currently, three key motives drive the intervention in ministry competencies: first, ambiguities exist in the distribution of powers between ministries; second, the allocation of functions is often irrational, with unrelated areas grouped within single institutions; third, the country’s strategic priorities are not adequately reflected in the institutional framework, existing only as units within certain ministries.<sup>62</sup>

MISA has prepared the draft of the first Annual Report on the Implementation of the Action Plan of the PAR Strategy for 2023–2026 and, on June 17, sent a request for contributions/comments to the CSOs.

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57 'The second session of the Council for Coordination and Monitoring of the Process of the Open Government Partnership 2024-2026 was held (Одржана втора седница на Советот за координација и следење на процесот на партнерството за отворена власт 2024-2026 година)', Official website of the Ministry of Information Society and Administration, 6 June 2024, <https://mioa.gov.mk//mk-MK/news/odrzana-vtora-sednica-na-sovetot-za-koordinacija-i-sledene-na-procesot-na-partnerstvoto-za-otvorena-vlast-2024-2026-godina.nspх>.

58 'With 88 votes "for" the Law on the Reorganisation of the Ministries in the Government was adopted (Со 88 гласа „за“ усвоен Законот за реорганизација на министерствата во Владата\_', VOA, 8 June 2024, <https://mk.voanews.com/a/so-88-glas-a-za-usvoen-zakonot-za-reorganizacija-na-ministerstvata-vo-vladata-/7647926.html>.

59 'Draft Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on the Organization and Work of the State Administration Bodies, under an abbreviated procedure (Предлог Закон за изменување и дополнување на Законот за организација и работа на органите на државната управа, по скратена постапка)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 6 June 2024, <blob:https://www.sobranie.mk/3dd20cf2-0cd7-45c1-8c75-0256c280d426>.

60 *ibid*

61 *ibid*

62 *ibid*

# Chapter 23



# Functioning of the Judiciary

## Strategic documents

No significant developments occurred during this reporting period, primarily due to the pre-and post-election activities and the formation of the new government.

## Management bodies

In May 2024, as part of the Action Plan adopted in February to address the EU's peer review mission's recommendations,<sup>63</sup> the Judicial Council amended the Rules of Procedure of the Judicial Council, as well as the Rulebook on the method of ranking candidates for the election of judges in higher courts.<sup>64</sup> The Rules of Procedure amendments, although foreseen as part of their mandate, require Council members to explain their decisions, particularly when voting against the selection of a judge, ensuring that decisions are individualised, based on objective standards, and consistently comparable.<sup>65</sup> In addition, specific deadlines have been introduced for the procedures for determining judicial responsibility.<sup>66</sup> The updated ranking rules now consider judges' additional work and temporary referrals, awarding points accordingly. They also prioritise selecting judges for higher courts based on actual qualitative performance.<sup>67</sup> Furthermore, in June 2024, the Communication Strategy of the Judicial Council (2024–2028) was adopted with an Action Plan aimed at adopting high European standards for communication at all levels in the judiciary.<sup>68</sup> With this, the Council has fully or partially implemented five of the seventeen recommendations from the EU peer review mission aimed at improving its operations without requiring legal changes.

After three unsuccessful attempts, on June 7, a member of the Judicial Council was finally elected from among the judges of the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia.<sup>69</sup> This new member, together with the elected member from the Bitola Appellate area, completes the composition of the Judicial Council. The elections were conducted properly, with adequate media and public reporting, including the publication of a summary recording of the results.<sup>70</sup>

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

64 'Announcement from the 488th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 29.05.2024 (Соопштение од 488-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 29.05.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4b0IHkL>.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 'Announcement from the 490th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 10.06.2024 (Соопштение од 490-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 10.06.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4cYkWAk>.

69 'Announcement (Соопштение)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 7 June 2024, <https://bit.ly/3LqhEdu>.

70 After the published announcement, on May 15, 2024, the Judicial Council determined the candidate lists for the election of its members and established a Commission for the implementation of the elections. On June 3, 2024, the Council also reported the withdrawal of one judge-candidate's application for the election of a Judicial Council member from among the judges of the Supreme Court, without specifying additional details about the reason. Additionally, the Council duly informed the public about the time and duration of the selection procedure: 'Candidate Lists for the Election of Members of the Council from among Judges (Кандидатски Листи За Избор На Членови На Советот Од Редот На Судиите)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia (blog), 22 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3xOQk2>; 'Announcement from the 486th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 15.05.2024 (Соопштение од 486-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 15.05.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/3S32Sgf>; 'Announcement from the 489th emergency session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 03.06.2024 (Соопштение од 489-та итна седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 03.06.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia (blog), <https://bit.ly/3W6dLij>; 'Announcement (Соопштение)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 5 June 2024, <https://bit.ly/4cGm2RA>.

## Independence and impartiality

With the formation of the new government, the Prime Minister reinforced his election promise for judicial reform by announcing plans to dismantle the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors.<sup>71</sup> He proposed dismissing the current members and changing the election process to prevent partisan influence.<sup>72</sup> The lack of specific details and legal solutions in his statements raised concerns among diplomatic missions<sup>73</sup>, experts,<sup>74</sup> and the now former Minister of Justice,<sup>75</sup> who warned of potential power concentration and halting the selection of judges and prosecutors, ultimately affecting the entire judicial system's functionality. The Prime Minister dismissed the diplomatic missions' reactions as interference in state affairs.<sup>76</sup> Additionally, the new government's program for the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors includes plans to divide it into two separate institutions (one for judges; one for public prosecutors) and completely overhaul the admission process for candidates.<sup>77</sup>

To enhance its transparency and accountability, the Judicial Council held a briefing on April 26. During the briefing, the Council presented its ongoing activities on implementing the EU peer review mission's recommendations and the 2023 Annual Report and discussed current issues concerning the Judicial Council and the courts. The Council also announced plans for regular media briefings.<sup>78</sup>

71 'Mickoski requires a two-thirds majority to pass a law that would dissolve the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors (Мицкоски бара двотретинско мнозинство за да донесе закон со кој ќе ги распушти Судскиот совет и Советот на јавни обвинители)', Sakam Da Kazam, 6 June 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/mitskoski-bara-dvotretinsko-mnozinstvo-za-da-donese-zakon-so-koj-ke-gi-raspushti-sudskiot-sovet-i-sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli/>.

72 'Documents - Draft work program of the Government (Документи - Предлог програма за работа на Владата)', Official website of The Assembly of The Republic of North Macedonia, <https://www.sobranie.mk/detali-na-materijal.nsp?param=3ae13141-ac9e-486a-950e-f603c34dcea4>.

73 'The EU and the US have given support to the Judicial Council (ЕУ и САД му дадоа поддршка на Судскиот совет)', Deutsche Welle, 3 July 2024, <https://www.dw.com/mk/eu-i-sad-mu-dadoa-poddrska-na-sudskiot-sovet/a-69549287>.

74 'Cvetanovska: The dissolution of the Judicial Council will set a dangerous precedent and further undermine trust in the judiciary (Цветановска: Распуштањето на Судскиот совет ќе постави опасен преседан и дополнително ќе ја наруши довербата во правосудството)', Telma TV, 5 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/05/cvetanovska-raspushtaneto-na-sudskiot-sovet-ke-postavi-opasen-presedan-i-dopolnitelno-ke-ja-narushi-doverbata-vo-pravosudstvoto/>.

75 'Krenar Lloga informed the international community with a letter (Кренар Лора со писмо ја извести меѓународната заедница)', Official website of The Ministry of Justice (blog), 4 June 2024, <https://pravda.gov.mk/galerija/3394>.

76 'FACTOR OF THE DAY: Prime Minister reacts to ambassadors interfering in internal affairs and asks if they have solutions to offer (ФАКТОР НА ДЕНОТ: Премиерот реагира дека амбасадорите се мешаат во внатрешните работи и бара ако имаат решенија да понудат)', Faktor, 4 July 2024, <https://faktor.mk/faktor-na-denot-premierot-reagira-deka-ambasadorite-se-meshaat-vo-vnatreshnite-raboti-i-bara-ako-imaat-reshenija-da-ponudat>.

77 'Documents - Draft work program of the Government (Документи - Предлог програма за работа на Владата)'.

78 'A briefing was held with representatives of the media (Одржан брифинг со претставници на медиумите)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia (blog), 26 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3Y2hikR>.



## Accountability

In May 2024, a Supreme Court judge, who had previously run for a position in the Judicial Council despite ongoing disciplinary procedures and withdrew to allow his son to be appointed as a judge, was arrested for accepting a 10,000-euro bribe to favor a defendant.<sup>79</sup> Following his arrest and a search of the Supreme Court, evidence was collected, and information emerged about the involvement of a member of the Council of Public Prosecutors.<sup>80</sup> This led to searches of the member's home and office for their alleged joint action in selling information from criminal proceedings to suspects and accused persons.<sup>81</sup> At an emergency session on May 21, the Judicial Council revoked the judge's immunity, approved his detention, and temporarily removed him from office<sup>82</sup> without a public vote<sup>83</sup> and without adhering to the legally prescribed provisions for determining detention and temporary removal from office.<sup>84</sup> Subsequently, a preliminary procedure judge at the Basic Criminal Court Skopje, on the proposal of the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organised Crime and Corruption, issued a 30-day detention order for the Supreme Court judge on suspicion of receiving a reward for illegal influence, citing the risk of obstructing the criminal procedure by influencing witnesses.<sup>85</sup> The member of the Council of Public Prosecutors received a precautionary measure.<sup>86</sup>

## Professionalism and competence

During the reporting period, the Judicial Council elected forty-one jurors: four for Basic Criminal Court Skopje,<sup>87</sup> nine for Struga Basic Court,<sup>88</sup> sixteen for Kavadarci Basic Court, ten for Strumica Basic Court, and two for Radovish Basic Court.<sup>89</sup> The Council of Public Prosecutors did not elect any public prosecutors.

79 'The Supreme Court judge Nake Georgiev was arrested, he was caught taking bribes, said the Ministry of Interior (Уапсен врховниот судија Наќе Георгиев, фатен е во моментот дека зема мито, кажа МВР)', Sakam Da Kazam, 20 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/468ksp8>.

80 'Ichet Memeti, a member of the Council of Public Prosecutors, was suspected of selling information for money in a scheme with the arrested Supreme Court judge Georgiev (Во шема со уапсениот врховен судија Георгиев, бил Ичет Мемети, член на Советот на јавни обвинители, осомничени дека продавале информации за пари)', Sakam Da Kazam, 21 May 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/vo-shema-so-uapseniot-vrhoven-sudija-bil-idhet-memeti-chlen-na-sovetot-na-javni-obviniteli-osomnicheni-deka-prodavale-informatsii-za-pari/>.

81 Ibid.

82 'Announcement from the 487th emergency session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 05/21/2024 (Соопштение од 487-та итна седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 21.05.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/3zGApqq>.

83 Although the beginning of the session was public, and a link to it was published on the Council's official website, the voting of the Judicial Council members on the decision was not public. According to the law, the exclusion of the public can only be carried out to protect the reputation and integrity of the judge, with adequate notification to the public of the reasons for the exclusion. However, when a decision is made by voting at this type of session, the voting must also be public. 'Public reaction of the Coalition "All for Fair Trials" for the 487th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM (Јавна реакција на Коалиција „Сите за правично судење“ за 487-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ)', <https://all4fairtrials.org.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/34-JR-SS-052024.pdf>.

84 The Council, following a pre-trial judge's request, decided to revoke immunity and approve detention before a court decision on detention was made or a hearing held. This decision by the Judicial Council to approve detention prior to a court ruling can be seen as prejudging the outcome of the detention procedure, which is conducted before a basic court. Additionally, the Council decided on the judge's temporary removal from office. According to the law, such a decision is made when the judge is detained, is facing criminal proceedings for a crime punishable by at least five years in prison, or when a responsibility procedure has been initiated against him—none of which were met in this case. 'Public reaction of the Coalition "All for Fair Trials" for the 487th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM (Јавна реакција на Коалиција „Сите за правично судење“ за 487-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ)'.

85 'Ichet Memeti, a member of the Council of Public Prosecutors, was suspected of selling information for money in a scheme with the arrested Supreme Court judge Georgiev (Во шема со уапсениот врховен судија Георгиев, бил Ичет Мемети, член на Советот на јавни обвинители, осомничени дека продавале информации за пари)'.

86 'Precautionary measures have been imposed upon Idzet Memeti (Определени мерки за претпазливост за Ичет Мемети)', A1 On, 23 May 2024, <https://aton.mk/macedonia/opredeleni-merki-za-pret pazlivost-za-idzhet-memeti/>.

87 'Announcement from the 490th session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 10.06.2024 (Соопштение од 490-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 10.06.2024 година)'.

88 'Announcement from the 491st session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 24.06.2024 (Соопштение од 491-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 24.06.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4d5qzgg>.

89 'Announcement from the 483rd session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 01.04.2024 (Соопштение од 483-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 01.04.2024 година)', Official website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/3S60lwn>.

## Quality of justice

In response to the complaint submitted by VMRO–DPMNE to the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) regarding violations of the Electoral Code and the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, which prohibit hiring and firing in public institutions from the announcement of elections until the conclusion of the election process, the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors filed a lawsuit.<sup>90</sup> The Administrative Court reviewed and accepted the lawsuit on April 13.<sup>91</sup> Subsequently, the complaint was returned to the SCPC for further processing.<sup>92</sup> On April 19, the SCPC reaffirmed its decision,<sup>93</sup> which was later upheld by the Administrative Court (despite an initial ruling in favour of the Academy)<sup>94</sup> and the Higher Administrative Court, thereby rejecting the Academy's appeal.<sup>95</sup> Consequently, the SCPC launched an initiative for all competent authorities to determine the responsibility of the director, the president, and the members of the Management Board of the Academy due to violations of legal regulations.<sup>96</sup>

On May 28, the working group finalised the draft amendments to the Law on the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, addressing deficiencies identified by the EU's peer review mission and aligning with the Judiciary Development Strategy. Key changes include defining individual disciplinary responsibility for Council members, specifying the authority and bodies involved, and outlining the right to appeal. The proposed amendments include selecting Council members from the interuniversity conference and the Bar Association, both requiring 20+ years of experience. They also call for increasing judicial experience for judge members from six to 15 years and work experience for Assembly-elected members from 15 to 20 years. Changes involve regulating the election process for Assembly-elected Council members, introducing an electoral census requiring over half of registered voters for valid judge elections, and mandating that judge candidates receive more than half of the votes.<sup>97</sup> The draft version is awaiting upload to the Electronic National Register of Regulations (ENER).

90 'AJPP submitted a lawsuit to the Administrative Court following the decision of the SCPC (ACJO поднесе тужба до Управниот суд по одлуката на ДКСК)', Mkd.Mk, 12 April 2024, <https://mkd.mk/asjo-podnese-tuzhba-do-upravniot-sud-po-odlukata-na-dskk/>.

91 'The SCPC will again act on Siljanovska-Davkova's complaint for AJPP's violation of the election rules (ДКСК повторно ќе постапува по приговорот на Силјановска-Давкова за кршење на изборните правила)', Telma TV, 19 April 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/04/19/dskk-povtorno-ke-postapuva-po-prigovorot-na-siljanovska-davkova-za-krshene-na-izbornite-pravila/>.

92 Ibid.

93 'The SCPC decided again in favor of Siljanovska-Davkova, stating that the AJPP should put the procedure for the admission of 130 candidates on hold (ДКСК повторно одлучи во корист на Силјановска – Давкова, ACJO треба да ја стави во мирување постапката за прием на 130 слушатели)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 30 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3WpAV5>.

94 'Administrative Court: AJPP's lawsuit against the decision of the SCPC is unfounded (Управен суд: Неоснована е тужбата на ACJO за одлуката на ДКСК)', MIA - Media Information Agency, 22 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3xXaxGm>.

95 'Announcement - the Higher Administrative Court confirmed the decision of the SCPC regarding the objection from the organizer of an election campaign for employment in the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (Соопштение – Вишиот управен суд ја потврди одлуката на ДКСК во врска со приговорот од организатор на изборна кампања за вработувањата во Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 30 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3WpAV5>.

96 'Initiative for determining responsibility for the Director and the Management Board of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (Иницијатива за утврдување одговорност за директорката и управниот одбор на Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 23 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/3Lqp40o>.

97 'Implementation of the recommendations of the peer review mission for the Judicial Council (Имплементирање на препораките од оценската мисија за Судскиот совет)', Official website of The Ministry of Justice, 11 June 2024, <https://www.pravda.gov.mk/vest/6704>.

## Efficiency

After nine rounds of unsuccessful voting, with four candidate judges in play and one candidate withdrawing,<sup>98</sup> the constitutional judges elected a new president of the Constitutional Court on June 9,<sup>99</sup> succeeding the previous president whose term ended on June 2.<sup>100</sup> The new president will hold office for three years without the right to re-election.

At its session on May 29, the Council of Public Prosecutors reviewed and confirmed the alarming situation in the public prosecutor's offices under the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office of Bitola. The offices, particularly in Ohrid and Gevgelija, operate with 50% fewer public prosecutors than needed, significantly impacting efficiency. To address this, the Council considered announcing new public prosecutor positions<sup>101</sup> and extending the referral period of another public prosecutor to the Gevgelija office.<sup>102</sup>

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98 'BREAKING NEWS: Ana Pavlovska Daneva withdraws, will the Constitutional Court get a new president?(ВОПРЕДНА ВЕСТ: Ана Павловска Данева се повлекува, ќе добие ли Уставен претседател?); Telma TV, 3 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/03/vonredna-vest-ana-pavlovska-daneva-se-povlekuva-ke-dobie-li-ustaven-pretседател/>.

99 'Darko Kostadinovski is the new President of the Constitutional Court (Дарко Костадиновски е нов претседател на Уставен суд); 4 June 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/darko-kostadinovski-e-nov-pretседател-na-ustaven-sud/a643416>.

100 'The term of president Kacarska has ended (Заврши мандатот на претседателката Кацарска); Macedonian Radio Television (MRT), 29 May 2024, <https://mrt.com.mk/node/110303>.

101 'Announcement for the election of two public prosecutors in the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office Bitola (Оглас за избор на двајца јавни обвинители во Вишото јавно обвинителство Битола); Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia, 27 June 2024, <https://bit.ly/4cOSWzG>.

102 'Minutes of the 103rd session of the Council of Public Prosecutors (Записник од 103 седница на СЈОПСМ); Official website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/3LpnZF>.

# Fight Against Corruption

According to the latest “Nations in Transition” report by Freedom House, the corruption rating in North Macedonia declined from 3.25 to 3.00 due to several corruption allegations against high-level officials and the latest amendments to the Criminal Code. The country earned an overall score of 46/100 and is considered a transitional or hybrid regime.<sup>103</sup>

## State Commission for Prevention of Corruption

The SCPC published a list of over 1,000 public institutions, such as ministries, municipalities, courts, hospitals, schools, and public enterprises, which have not fulfilled the legal obligation to submit data on the motor vehicles they have.<sup>104</sup> This data, due ten days after the election announcement to prevent political abuse, was not provided by 75% of these institutions, raising concerns about potential corruption, according to the SCPC.<sup>105</sup>

At the beginning of June, the SCPC announced that the data from the statements of assets and interests submitted through the new electronic system, which was put into operation on January 1, is publicly available on its website.<sup>106</sup> This system is intended to overcome previous shortcomings in this area, as 80 cases were opened in 2021 by the SCPC regarding public officials who failed to submit an asset statement, and the SCPC was unable to initiate misdemeanour proceedings. Consequently, those cases are now obsolete.<sup>107</sup>

After the new Assembly was constituted, announcements were issued from all ministries where ministers became MPs, indicating that their functions were being transferred to deputies. However, this did not apply to the former Prime Minister and the previous Minister of Health, who also became MPs. The occupation of both public functions led to a reaction by the SCPC, reminding them of the constitutional principle of incompatibility of public functions and the obligation to respect the principle of integrity.<sup>108</sup> It recommended the Assembly to revoke their mandate as MPs; otherwise, it would initiate a misdemeanour procedure against them.<sup>109</sup> The Assembly did not revoke the mandate of the former Prime Minister as MP. Still, he stated that he would refrain from parliamentary duties to avoid any conflict of interest until a new Prime Minister takes office.<sup>110</sup> This led to a criminal complaint against the President of the Assembly filed by the political party Levica for reckless work in public service.<sup>111</sup>

103 ‘Nations in Transit 2024: North Macedonia’ (Freedom House, 11 April 2024), <https://freedomhouse.org/country/north-macedonia/nations-transit/2024>.

104 ‘Over 1,000 institutions have not provided data on how many vehicles they have, according to the Anti-Corruption Commission (Над 1 000 институции не доставиле податоци со колку возила располагаат, велат од Антикорупциската комисија)’, 360 Stepeni, 1 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/nad-1-000-institut-sii-ne-dostavile-podatotsi-so-kolku-vozila-raspolagaat-velat-od-antikoruptionskata-komisija/>.

105 ‘SCPC: There is a suspicion of abuse of official vehicles during the elections (ДКСК: Постои сомнеж за злоупотреба на службени возила на изборите)’, Prizma.Mk, 4 April 2024, [https://prizma.mk/dskk-postoi-somnezh-za-zloupotreba-na-sluzhbeni-vozila-na-izborite/?fbclid=IwAR1sS5yZvp2pFccoR4KiN4goLBCG7e-RRppcw2XbX-fKnq0aE8solYFs5\\_2l](https://prizma.mk/dskk-postoi-somnezh-za-zloupotreba-na-sluzhbeni-vozila-na-izborite/?fbclid=IwAR1sS5yZvp2pFccoR4KiN4goLBCG7e-RRppcw2XbX-fKnq0aE8solYFs5_2l).

106 ‘Announcement (Соопштение)’, Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 3 June 2024, <https://bit.ly/4c1AzWU>.

107 ‘SCPC: About 80 cases have become obsolete - public officials neither submitted an asset statement, nor paid a fine (ДКСК: Застареа околу 80 предмети – функционери ниту поднесоа анкетен лист, ниту платија глоба)’, Sloboden Pecat, 12 June 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/dskk-zastarea-okolu-80-predmeti-funkcioneri-nitu-podnesoa-anketen-list-nitu-platija-globa/>.

108 ‘Anti-Corruption urges the elected officials to respect the constitutional and legal obligations (Антикорупциска ги повикува избраните функционери да ги почитуваат уставните и законските обврски)’, Civil Media, 31 May 2024, <https://civilmedia.mk/antikoruptionska-gi-povikuva-izbranine-funktsioneri-da-gi-pochituvaaat-ustavnite-i-zakonskite-obvrski/>.

109 ‘From 300 to 500 euros, the fine for the two positions of Talat Xhaferi and Ilir Demiri - SCPC with the view that the Assembly should dismiss them (Од 300 до 500 евра тежи казната за двете функции на Талат Џафери и Илир Демири - ДКСК со став дека Собранието треба да ги разреши)’, Telma TV, 3 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/03/od-300-do-500-evra-tezhi-kaznata-za-dvete-funkcii-na-talat-dhaferi-i-ilir-demiri-dskk-so-stav-deka-sobraniето-treba-da-gi-razreshi/>.

110 ‘The Assembly will not revoke the mandate of MP Talat Xhaferi (Собранието нема да му го одземе мандатот на пратеникот Талат Џафери)’, Telma TV, 7 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/07/sobraniето-nema-da-mu-go-odzeme-mandatot-na-pratenikot-talat-dhaferi/>.

111 ‘Levica filed a criminal complaint against Afrim Gashi for not revoking Talat Xhaferi’s mandate (Левица поднесе кривична пријава против Африм Гаши поради неодземањето на мандатот на Талат Џафери)’, A1 On, 27 June 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/levica-podnese-krivichna-prijava-protiv-afrim-gashi-poradi-neodzemanjeto-na-mandatot-na-talat-dzhaferi/>.

The SCPC has initiated a total of 45 cases related to the existence of suspected violations in the electoral process concerning employment procedures, initiation of disciplinary procedures, suspicion of extraordinary payments made by public institutions, and organising public performances.<sup>112</sup>

During this period, the SCPC ruled on the unlawful dismissal of the Medical Director of Toxicology and the Director of State Cardiac Surgery by the Health Minister for violating anti-corruption, health protection, and electoral laws.<sup>113</sup> It also addressed a conflict of interest and nepotism case where a mayor promoted his wife from an associate to a councillor<sup>114</sup> and began investigating the property of the organisational director of the University Clinic for Toxicology Skopje for submitting inconsistent two asset statements.<sup>115</sup>

## The Public Prosecutor's Office

Pursuant to the initiative of the SCPC,<sup>116</sup> an indictment was filed against the current director of the Agency for Youth and Sports, his predecessor, the head of the Macedonian Olympic Committee, and nine other persons for the criminal acts of abuse of official positions and malpractice.<sup>117</sup> The defendants are accused of ignoring criteria for awarding funds under the voucher system and repeatedly making illegal distributions of sports vouchers since 2020 to favoured users, federations, and clubs linked to individuals, groups, or possibly political parties.<sup>118</sup> The court proceedings in this case have begun, and partial precautionary measures have been imposed against the defendants.<sup>119</sup>

The amendments to the Criminal Code had implications on the “Imperija” case, among other cases, since the Appellate Court Skopje returned the case to the competent basic court for a retrial, which in turn made a decision on the conditional release of the former head of the former Security and Counter-intelligence Directorate at the end of this year.<sup>120</sup> Regarding the other defendants in the case, the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (BPPO) Skopje decided to partially or entirely withdraw the indictments against them.<sup>121</sup>

112 'Anti-Corruption initiated 45 cases related to the elections (Антикорупциска оформила 45 предмети поврзани со изборите)', 360 Stepeni, 5 May 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/antikoruptionska-oformila-45-predmeti-povrzani-so-izborite/>.

113 'SCPC: The dismissals of the directors of Toxicology and Cardiosurgery are unlawful (ДКСК: Незаконски се разрешувањата на директорите на Токсикологија и Кардиохирургија)', Sloboden Pecat, 10 June 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/dksk-nezakonski-se-razreshuvanjata-na-direktorite-na-toksikologija-i-kardiohirurgija/>.

114 'SCPC: A mayor promoted his wife to councilor in his municipality (ДКСК: Градоначалник си ја унапредил сопругата во советник во неговата општина)', Telma TV, 12 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/12/dksk-gradonachalnik-si-ja-unapredil-soprugata-vo-sovetnik-vo-negovata-opshtina/>.

115 'The SCPC will review the property of the director of Toxicology, Besija Iljazi, who submitted two different asset statements (ДКСК ќе го проверува имотот на директорката на Токсикологија, Бесија Иљази, доставила два различни анкетни листови)', MakPress.Mk, 23 May 2024, <https://m.makpress.mk/Home/PostDetails?PostId=588697>.

116 'An indictment has been filed for the distribution of sports vouchers, precautionary measures are being sought for 12 people (Поднесено обвинение за распределбата на спортските ваучери, за 12 лица се бараат мерки на претпазливост)', 360 Stepeni, 30 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/podneseno-obvine-nie-za-raspredelbata-na-sportskite-vaucheri-za-12-litsa-se-baraat-merki-na-pretpazlivost/>.

117 'Mojsoski, Kaevski and Dimevski accused of abusing sports vouchers (Мојсоски, Каевски и Димевски обвинети за злоупотреби со спортските ваучери)', Telma TV, 30 April 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/04/30/mojsoski-kaevski-i-dimevski-obvineti-za-dodeluvaneto-na-sportski-vaucheri/>.

118 'Lidija Raicevik: The case with AYS vouchers is specific in many ways, there is damage of over 5 million euros (Лидија Раичевиќ: Случајот со ваучерите на АМС е специфичен по многу нешта, има штета од над 5 милиони евра)', Nezavisen.Mk, 27 June 2024, <https://nezavisen.mk/lidija-raicevikj-sluchajot-so-vaucherite-na-ams-e-spezifichen-po-mnogu-neshta-ima-shteta-od-nad-5-milioni-evra/>.

119 '“Sports vouchers” case - Mojsoski, Kaevski and Dimevski must report to the court, but will keep their passports (Случај „Спортски ваучери“ – Мојсоски, Каевски и Димевски ќе се јавуваат во суд, но ќе ги задржат пасошите)', Telma TV, 10 May 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/05/10/sluchaj-sportski-vaucheri-mojsoski-kaevski-i-dimevski-ke-se-javuvaat-vo-sudot-no-ke-gi-zadrzhat-pasoshite/>.

120 'Mijalkov received a conditional release from the Struga prison, he will be released in December (Мијалков доби условен отпуст од струшкиот затвор, во декември излегува на слобода)', 360 Stepeni, 1 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mijalkov-dobi-usloven-otrust-od-strushkiot-zatvor-vo-dekemvri-izleguva-na-sloboda/>.

121 'The amendments to the Criminal Code had implications on the “Imperija” case (Измените на Кривичниот законик со последици и врз предметот „Империја“)', Telma TV, 7 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/07/izmenite-na-krivichniot-zakonik-so-poslediczi-i-vrz-predmetot-imperija/>.

# Fundamental Rights

The 2023 Country Report of the U.S. State Department on Human Rights Practices for North Macedonia determined that there were no significant changes in this area during the past year. It cites various critical issues, which were identified as follows: severe restrictions on freedom of expression and media freedom, including violence and threats of violence against journalists, serious government corruption and crimes involving violence and threats of violence targeting lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or intersex persons, but it concludes that the government only took limited steps to identify and punish officials who may have committed human rights abuses.<sup>122</sup>

## Case Law of the European Court of Human Rights

The European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) issued a judgment on May 14 in the case of *Mitrevska v. North Macedonia*. The case revolved around the inability of the applicant, who was adopted as a child, to obtain information concerning her biological origins and health information about her biological parents because the relevant authorities treat information concerning a completed adoption as an official secret under domestic law which cannot be shared. The ECtHR ruled that there has been a violation of Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) since the domestic authorities failed to strike a balance between the competing interests at stake. As a result, the court ordered the country to pay 4,500 euros to the applicant for non-pecuniary damage and 1,440 euros to cover costs and expenses related to the proceedings.<sup>123</sup>

In June, the ECtHR also made a judgment in the case of *Vlaisavlevikj v. North Macedonia*. The case involved domestic courts failing to protect the applicant from a private energy supplier's unlawful collection and use of his personal data, as the supplier repeatedly invoiced him for services he did not use. The ECtHR found a violation of Article 8 of the ECHR, ruling that the courts did not adequately safeguard the applicant's right to privacy. The court ordered the country to pay the applicant 1,400 euros for non-pecuniary damages.<sup>124</sup>

## The Ombudsperson

From the day of the start of the campaign for the election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia until the parliamentary and presidential elections in North Macedonia, the Ombudsperson announced that a telephone line for reporting voting rights violations would be opened.<sup>125</sup> This allowed citizens to report irregularities during the pre-election period and on election days, prompting the Ombudsperson to take immediate action to protect their guaranteed rights.<sup>126</sup> The Ombudsperson's office informed that on the day of the second round of the presidential and parliamentary elections, they received thirty phone reports and one personal report of violation of citizens' voting rights, mostly claiming that they were asked if they wanted to vote at the elections.<sup>127</sup>

122 '2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: North Macedonia' (United States Department of State, 23 April 2024), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/north-macedonia/>.

123 ECtHR, 'Case of *Mitrevska v. North Macedonia* (Случај Митревска против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 20949/21))', 14 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d1U56Y>.

124 ECtHR, 'Case of *Vlaisavlevikj v. North Macedonia* (Случај Влаисавлевиќ против Северна Македонија (А.бр. 23215/21))', 25 June 2024, <https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/#/{%22tabview%22:%22document%22,%22itemid%22:%22001-234420%22}}>.

125 'The Ombudsperson has opened a free telephone line for reporting violations of the right to vote (Народниот правобранител отвори бесплатна телефонска линија за пријавување повреда на избирачкото право)', Official website of the Ombudsperson of the Republic of North Macedonia, 4 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/4brdOLH>.

126 'The Ombudsperson has opened a free telephone line for reporting violations of the right to vote (Народниот правобранител отвори бесплатна телефонска линија за пријавување повреда на избирачкото право)', Radio MOF, 23 April 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/narodniot-pravobranitel-otvori-besplatna-telefon-ska-linija-za-prijavuvanje-povreda-na-izbirachko-pravo/>.

127 'The Ombudsperson received 30 calls and one personal report for violation of the right to vote (Народниот правобранител примил 30 повици и една лична пријава за повреда на избирачкото право)', 360 Stepeni, 8 May 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/narodniot-pravobranitel-primil-30-povitsi-i-edna-lichna-prijava-za-povreda-na-izbirachko-pravo/>.

## Torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

In mid-May, the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) published the report of its periodic visit to North Macedonia, which took place in October 2023. The CPT delegation assessed the treatment of persons held in four prisons, a correctional educational institution for juveniles, and two psychiatric hospitals. The report noted certain improvements in prisons in terms of hygiene and the conditions in the cells. Still, there are many allegations of police harassment, as well as alleged corruption among the prison staff. There are incidents of physical altercations between the convicts and the prison police and there is overcrowding in some prisons. In connection with the visit to the two psychiatric hospitals, it was assessed that the patients were generally treated properly. However, informal practices of segregation of patients were noted, as well as practices of tying patients to beds with metal chains and padlocks—considered inhumane and degrading treatment and must stop immediately.<sup>128</sup>

## Prison and Detention facilities

According to the Council of Europe's 2023 Annual Penal Statistics, released in early June, North Macedonia's incarceration rate reached 142 prisoners per 100,000 inhabitants, marking a 25.5% annual increase—the second highest country.<sup>129</sup> As such, it is no surprise that the Ombudsperson's data revealed that a total of 2,499 convicted persons are serving sentences in prisons across the country, which is an excess of 386 persons pursuant to the capacity of those institutions.<sup>130</sup> Further alarming data revealed that 119 convicts escaped from Idrizovo, the country's largest prison, and 24 remain at large.<sup>131</sup>

The overcrowding in Idrizovo, as well as its deteriorating conditions, have led to physical altercations between the convicts,<sup>132</sup> escape attempts,<sup>133</sup> injuries to the prison police<sup>134</sup> and numerous other incidents<sup>135</sup> in this reporting period. The relevant state authorities reacted by conducting coordinated action in the prisons,<sup>136</sup> sealing potential escape tunnels<sup>137</sup> and initiating an investigation against 17 prison police officers suspected of facilitating the escape of a person deprived of liberty and illegal release of a person de-

128 'Report to the Government of North Macedonia on the visit to North Macedonia carried out by the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) from 2 to 12 October 2023' (European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 15 May 2024), <https://rm.coe.int/1680af95e2>.

129 'Prison overcrowding remains a problem in Europe: Council of Europe's Annual Penal Statistics for 2023', Official website of the Council of Europe (blog), 6 June 2024, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/tirana/-/prison-overcrowding-remains-a-problem-in-europe-council-of-europe-s-annual-penal-statistics-for-2023>.

130 'Convicts take weekends off and do not return, in one year 119 escapes from the prison in Idrizovo were recorded (Затвореници земаат слободни викенди и не се враќаат, за една година евидентирани 119 бегства од затворот во Идризово)', Sloboden Pечат, 4 April 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/zatvorenici-zemaat-slobodni-vikendi-i-ne-se-vrakjaat-za-edna-godina-evidentirani-119-begstva-od-zatvorot-vo-idrizovo/>.

131 Ibid.

132 'Mass fight in the prison in Idrizovo (Масовна тепачка во затворот во Идризово)', Alsat M, 27 June 2024, <https://alsat.mk/mk/masovna-tepachka-vo-zatvorot-vo-idrizovo/>.

133 'Details: Police officers from "Idrizovo" released a man convicted of murder - instead of being in the hospital, he was walking around Skopje (Детали: Полицијци од „Идризово“ ослободиле осуден за убиство – наместо во болница, тој се шетал низ Скопје)', Skopje1.Mk, 15 April 2024, <https://skopje1.mk/archives/285999>.

134 'Four employees of "Idrizovo" ended up in Toxicology after a fire broke out in the women's ward yesterday (Четворица вработени во „Идризово“ завршиле на Токсикологија откако вчера избувнал пожар во женското одделение)', 360 Stepeni, 22 May 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/chetvoritsa-vraboteni-vo-idrizovo-zavrshile-na-toksikologija-otkako-vchera-izbuvnal-pozhar-vo-zhenskoto-oddelenie/>.

135 'Public Prosecutor's Office: Traces have been collected and recordings from the surrounding cameras where the vehicle of KPU "Idrizovo" was set on fire have been provided. (Обвинителство: Прибрани се траги и обезбедени се снимки од околните камери каде што беше запален автомобилот на КПУ „Идризово“)', 360 Stepeni, 15 May 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/obvinitelstvo-pribrani-se-tragi-i-obezbedeni-se-snimki-od-okolnite-kameri-kade-beshe-zapalena-avtomobilot-na-kpu-idrizovo/>.

136 'Public Prosecutor's Office entered with special police officers and left with a bunch of items from Idrizovo Prison (Обвинителство влезе со специјалци и излезе со еден куп предмети од затворот Идризово)', Sitel TV, 11 April 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/obvinitelstvo-vleze-so-specijalci-i-izleze-so-eden-kup-predmeti-od-zatvorot-idrizovo/>.

137 'Implemented preventive measures: Neutralization of all escape options – deployed concreting machine to close old tunnels in Idrizovo prison (Спроведени превентивни мерки: Невутрализација на сите опции за бегство – распоредена машина за бетонирање за затворање на стари тунели во затворот Идризово)', Lider.Mk, 11 April 2024, <https://lider.mk/sprovedeni-preventivni-merki-neutralizacija-na-site-opcii-za-begstvo-rasporedena-mashina-za-betoniranje-za-zatvoranje-na-stari-tuneli-vo-zatvorot-idrizovo/>.

prived of liberty.<sup>138</sup> Incidents of physical altercations between the convicts<sup>139</sup> and mass protests of prison police officers due to poor working conditions and understaffing<sup>140</sup> were also witnessed in other prisons across the country in the same period.

## Personal Data Protection

Following a public call<sup>141</sup> issued by the Personal Data Protection Agency (PDPA) for the representatives of the controllers from the public sector to be actively involved in the development of the new Strategy for Personal Data Protection 2024–2030, a workshop for its preparation was held in mid-May. On this occasion, participants discussed the challenges they face regarding personal data protection in the workplace, potential strategic goals and their prioritisation, activities, and indicators, as well as the time frame for achieving the objectives of the new Strategy.<sup>142</sup>

The Rulebook on the Method of Managing the Credit Risk has been implemented starting from May, making it harder to misuse personal data for quick loans, as seen in the past.<sup>143</sup> The Rulebook requires loan seekers to be identified either in person at the financial company or through a secure electronic identification system in accordance with the law.<sup>144</sup>

## Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

The 2023 U.S. State Department Report on International Religious Freedom highlighted that smaller Protestant churches have reported government favouritism towards the Macedonian Orthodox Church—Ohrid Archdiocese (MOC—OA) and the Islamic Religious Community (IRC), citing greater privileges granted to these groups. The report also points out that the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights received twelve reports of religiously based online hate speech during the year, compared to two cases in 2022 and thirty in 2021.<sup>145</sup>

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138 'Investigation against six prison police officers and 11 others covered by pre-investigation procedure (Истрага против шестмина затворски полицајци и уште 11 опфатени со предистражна постапка)', Official website of the Public Prosecutor's Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, 15 April 2024, <https://jorm.gov.mk/istraga-protiv-shestmina-zatvorski-policajci-i-ushte-11-opfateni-so-predistrazhna-postapka/>.

139 'Two groups of convicts were fighting in the Stip prison, people from outside came to help one of them (Две групи затвореници се степале во штипскиот затвор, на едната тргнале да ѝ помогнат и лица однадвор)', 360 Stepeni, 15 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dve-grupi-zatvorenitsi-se-stepale-vo-shtipskiot-zatvor-na-ednata-trgnale-da-pomognat-i-litsa-odnadvor/>.

140 'The guards in the Prilep prison "fell ill" en masse (Чуварите во прилепскиот затвор масовно „се разболеа“)', Telma TV, 3 May 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/05/03/chuvarite-vo-prilepskiot-zatvor-masovno-se-razbolea/>.

141 'Call for participation in a workshop for the development of the Strategy for Personal Data Protection 2024-2030 (Повик за учество на работилница за изработка на Стратегија за заштита на личните податоци 2024-2030 година)', Official website of the Personal Data Protection Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (blog), 23 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/46tpxZl>.

142 'Workshop for the preparation of the new Strategy for Personal Data Protection 2024-2030 (Работилница за подготовка на новата Стратегија за заштита на личните податоци 2024-2030 година)', Official website of the Personal Data Protection Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia (blog), 20 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/4d12SGl>.

143 'There is no more issuing of quick loans without the physical presence of the client (Повеќе нема издавање брзи кредити без физичко присуство на клиентот)', Vecer.Mk, 14 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/3A8sSB6>.

144 'Rulebook on the Method of Managing the Credit Risk of a Financial Company (Правилник за начинот на управување со кредитниот ризик на финансиско друштво)', Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia no. 82/2024 and 107/2024.

145 '2023 Report on International Religious Freedom: North Macedonia' (US Department of State Office of International Religious Freedom, 26 June 2024), <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-report-on-international-religious-freedom/north-macedonia/>.



## Freedom of Expression

The Republic of North Macedonia has improved its ranking according to the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders. The country is currently ranked 36<sup>th</sup> out of 180 countries, a slight climb from its previous 38<sup>th</sup> spot. While the overall environment is deemed favourable for media freedom, the report highlights challenges such as strong political polarisation and pressure on the media from authorities, politicians and business people at both national and local levels, slow harmonisation of the legislation with EU standards, and threats and attacks against journalists. It concluded that the public broadcasting service has no editorial or financial independence.<sup>146</sup>

There was an attack on a media crew at a political party rally on the first day of the election campaign. A journalist and a cameraman were verbally assaulted by one of the participants at the rally. The rally organisers said they had not noticed or caused this incident.<sup>147</sup> The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) condemned it and indicated such acts can hinder citizens' right to information to receive information about the elections.<sup>148</sup> Nevertheless, there was an incident of obstructing the work of a journalist during the first round of presidential elections when a member of an election board prevented her from taking photographs of the premises even after she identified herself as a journalist.<sup>149</sup> The AJM submitted a petition before the SEC, to which it responded that before the elections, clear directions to all election authorities were given that their work is public and transparent and that media workers can freely go to the polling stations and record and take photographs while respecting the secrecy of the personal data of the citizens and the secrecy of the vote.<sup>150</sup>

Another unrelated incident occurred shortly after those mentioned above when a founder and editor of an online media outlet was arrested for obstructing the work of an official.<sup>151</sup> The media's editorial team stated that such an act was politically motivated and represented an attempt to inflict pressure on free journalism. The AJM and the Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM) appealed for the case to be resolved immediately and for political parties not to use him for election campaign purposes.<sup>152</sup> The AAVMS joined this plea,<sup>153</sup> and shortly after such pressure, the journalist was released,<sup>154</sup> pending further criminal proceedings against him.<sup>155</sup>

146 'Freedom of the media in North Macedonia is satisfactory, noted "Reporters Without Borders" (Слободата на медиумите во Северна Македонија задоволителна, забележа „Репортери без граници“); Voice of America, 3 May 2024, <https://mk.voanews.com/a/slobodata-na-pechatot-vo-severna-makedoni%D1%98a-na-zadovolitelno-nivo-zabelezha-reporteri-bez-granici-/7592495.html>.

147 'The crew of TV 24 was verbally attacked at the VMRO-DPMNE rally, the political party distanced itself from the incident (Вербално нападната екипа на ТВ 24 на митингот на ВМРО-ДПМНЕ, партијата го осуди и се огради од инцидентот); 360 Stepeni, 5 April 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/verbalno-napadnata-ekipa-na-tv-24-na-mitingot-na-vmro-dpmne-partijata-go-osudi-i-se-ogradi-od-intsidentot/>.

148 'AJM: Condemnation for the attack on the TV 24 journalist team on the first day of the political campaign (ЗНМ: Осуда за нападот кон новинарската екипа на ТВ 24 на првиот ден од политичката кампања); Radio MOF, 5 April 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/znm-osuda-za-napadot-kon-novinarskata-ekipa-na-tv24-na-prviot-den-od-politichkata-kampanja/>.

149 'AJM: Petition to the SEC for obstructing the work of journalist Meri Jordanovska (ЗНМ: Претставка до ДИК за попречување на работата на новинарката Мери Јордановска); Radio MOF, 24 April 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/znm-pretstavka-do-dik-za-poprechuvanje-na-rabotata-na-novinarskata-meri-jordanovska/>.

150 'SEC with a message to the electoral authorities: Media workers should do their work without disruption (ДИК со порака до изборните органи: Медиумските работници непречено да ја вршат својата работа); Radio MOF, 2 May 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/dik-so-poraka-do-izbornite-organi-mediumskite-rabotnici-neprecheno-da-ja-vrshat-svojata-rabota/>.

151 'Mol with details about the arrest of journalist Saliu (MBP со детали за апсењето на новинарот Салиу); Sloboden Pечат, 7 April 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/mvr-so-detali-za-apseneto-na-novinarot-saliu/>.

152 'AJM: Journalist Furkan Saliu should be released, and Mol should inform the public about the reasons for his detention (ЗНМ: Новинарот Фуркан Салиу да биде пуштен на слобода, а МВР да ја информира јавноста за причините за неговото приведување); A1 On, 7 April 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/znm-novinarot-furkan-saliu-da-bide-pushten-na-sloboda-a-mvr-da-ja-informira-javnosta-za-prichinite-za-negovoto-priveduvanje/>.

153 'AAVMS calls on Mol to immediately resolve the case of the arrest of the journalist Saliu (АВМУ го повикува МВР веднаш да го расчисти случајот со апсењето на новинарот Салиу); Brif.Mk, 7 April 2024, <https://www.brif.mk/avmu-go-povikuva-mvr-vednash-da-go-raschisti-sluchajot-so-apseneto-na-novinarot-saliu/>.

154 'Journalist Furkan Saliu was detained and then released, media organizations are demanding clarification of the case (Приведен па ослободен новинарот Фуркан Салиу, медиумските организации бараат расчистување на случајот); Radio MOF, 8 April 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/priveden-pa-osloboden-novinarot-furkan-saliu-mediumskite-organizacii-baraat-raschistuvanje-na-sluchajot/>.

155 'AJM and SSNM: BPPO to reject the unfounded criminal complaint of Mol against the journalist Saliu (ЗНМ и ССНМ: ОЈО да ја отфрли неоснованата кривична пријава на МВР кон новинарот Салиу); Radio MOF, 13 April 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/znm-i-ssnm-ojo-da-ja-otfrli-neosnovanata-krivichna-prijava-na-mvr-kon-novinarot-saliu/>.

## Rights of the Child

According to the State Statistical Office (SSO), the number of reported children breaking the law in 2023 decreased by 8.5% compared to 2022, while the number of children convicted of crime increased by 17.2%. 433 children were reported, 287 of which received a proposal for punishment or measure against them. For 110 cases, no procedure was initiated, and for 36 cases, the procedure was terminated. 307 children were convicted as they were found guilty of crimes against property, crimes against public order, crimes against life and limb, or crimes against public traffic safety.<sup>156</sup>

## Vulnerable Groups and the Principle of Non-discrimination

According to the 2023 Annual Report, the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) received a total of 520 complaints, which represents an increase of 109.68% compared to 2022, opened three cases on its own initiative, and worked on 76 cases still open from the previous year. The CPPD established discrimination in 59 cases, while in 118 cases, it did not find instances of discrimination. It rejected 315 complaints and decided not to act, and in 29 cases, did not initiate or halt the procedure. The reported cases concern the areas of public information and media (48.18%), work and labour relations (24.86%), education, science, and sports (8.03%), access to goods and services (5.93%), social security, including the area of social protection, pension and disability insurance, health insurance and health care (4.02%), membership and action in political parties, associations, foundations, trade unions and other membership-based organisations (4.02 %), judiciary and administration (3.25 %), housing (1.34 %), and culture (0.96%).<sup>157</sup>

In the past three months, 77 petitions were submitted by citizens to the CPPD, which adopted 37 opinions, 16 of which found an instance of discrimination.<sup>158</sup> Among others, there was a case where a café in Skopje discriminated against women wearing a hijab by banning them from entering the premises,<sup>159</sup> a teacher and pupils with a hearing disability were harassed and humiliated based on their disability by another employee of a secondary school for deaf pupils<sup>160</sup> and a three-year-old girl who has cerebral palsy was discriminated against by an employee in a playhouse who did not allow her mother to stay with her while playing, even after her parents had previously explained her condition.<sup>161</sup>

During this reporting period, the CPPD issued its opinions regarding the amendments to the primary and secondary education laws. The CPPD proposes amending the Law on Primary Education by including desegregation measures related to adequate integration of Roma pupils in the education system<sup>162</sup> pursuant to the ECtHR's judgment in *Elmazova and others v. North Macedonia*.<sup>163</sup> Regarding the draft Law on Sec-

156 'In 2023, 433 children in conflict with the law were reported, and 307 were convicted. (Во 2023 биле пријавени 433 деца во судир со законот, а 307 биле осудени)', Skopje Info, 31 May 2024, <https://skopjeinfo.mk/vo-2023-bile-prijaveni-433-deca-vo-sudir-so-zakonot-307-bile-osudeni>.

157 Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, "Annual Report of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) for 2023" (2024) <<https://bit.ly/3yky83M>> accessed on 15 July 2024.

158 'Report on the work of the CPPD on petitions for protection against discrimination period April-June 2024 (Извештај за постапувањето на КСЗД по претставки за заштита од дискриминација период Април-Јуни 2024 година)' (Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, July 2024), <https://bit.ly/3Su1gg3>.

159 'A cafe in Skopje discriminates against women who wear headscarves and does not serve them (Кафуле во Скопје дискриминира жени што носат шамија и не ги услужува)', Sloboden Pecat, 17 May 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/kafule-vo-skopje-diskriminira-zheni-shto-nosat-shamija-i-ne-gi-usluzhuva/>.

160 "'We will not allow the deaf to decide about the school", a teacher shouted loudly about a deaf colleague, she also discriminated against the children in the school for the deaf, calling them "mute" („Нема да дозволиме глувите да одлучуваат за училиштето", викала професорка на глас за глува колешка, ги дискриминираше и децата во училиштето за глуви нарекувајќи ги „глувтари")', Sakam Da Kazam, 18 May 2024, <https://bit.ly/4fEiPUH>.

161 'A three-year-old child with cerebral palsy was kicked out of a children's playhouse, the CPPD determined (Тригодишно дете со церебрална парализа било избркано од детска игротека, утврди КСЗД)', Sloboden Pecat, 18 June 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/trigodishno-dete-so-cerebralna-paraliza-bilo-izbrkano-od-detska-igroteka-utvr-di-kszd/>.

162 'Opinion on the draft Law Amending and Supplementing the Law on Primary Education in relation to the implementation of the judgment *Elmazova and others v. North Macedonia* (Мислење по предлог на Законот за изменување и дополнување на Законот за основно образование во однос на спроведување на пресудата *Елмазова и други против Северна Македонија*)' (Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 23 April 2024), <https://kszd.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/mislenje-KSZD-ZOO-Elmazova.pdf>.

163 ECtHR, 'Case of *Elmazova and others v. North Macedonia* (Случај *Елмазова и други против Северна Македонија* А. Бр. 11811/20 и 13550/20)', 13 December 2022, <https://bit.ly/3i92CxS>.

ondary Education, the CPPD proposed introducing more inclusive language, abolishing any segregation and discrimination, including on the grounds of gender identity, and introducing measures that provide more support to pupils with disabilities.<sup>164</sup>

The Association for Development and Promotion of Inclusive Society “Inkluziva” Kumanovo identified the same issues for persons with disabilities in this year’s election as in previous ones. While monitoring polling stations in three cities, they found that some lacked access for those using medical aids due to non-functional or absent elevators, with polling stations not on the ground floor. To address this, the Association recommended amending voting guidelines for ill and infirm persons who vote at home to include persons with disabilities.<sup>165</sup>

## Gender

During the election campaign, nine political parties committed to complying with the recommendations of the Code of Conduct for Combatting Violence against Women in Politics and Electoral Processes, thus expressing a will to oppose the use of force or intimidation by public officeholders, political party officials and their supporters to achieve political goals.<sup>166</sup> Nevertheless, this initiative did not reduce the spread of misogynistic comments in traditional, online and social media during the election campaign, nor did it curb digital violence against female candidates, including the misuse of visual content on social media.<sup>167</sup>

Despite the election results appointing the country’s first female president, women’s representation in the new Assembly and Government has slightly declined. The initial Assembly composition includes only one-third female MPs (40), compared to 78 male MPs, fewer than the 43 female MPs in the previous Assembly.<sup>168</sup> Similarly, the new composition of the Government counts only three female Macedonian ministers out of a total of 24, which is two less than the number of female ministers in its previous composition.<sup>169</sup> The Platform for Gender Equality has expressed serious concern about the insufficient involvement of women in high positions of influence and decision-making due to the lack of political will and inadequate support from political parties.<sup>170</sup>

In the case of femicide, which occurred following extortion attempts, threats and stalking towards the end of September,<sup>171</sup> the competent court issued a judgment for the crime of murder committed during gender-based violence and in a brutal manner. The perpetrator of this act received a life sentence, displaying the court’s sensibility to classify the act as gender-based violence-related murder and to sentence the perpetrator accordingly.<sup>172</sup>

164 ‘Opinion on the draft Law on Secondary Education (Мислење по предлог Законот за средно образование)’ (Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 23 May 2024), <https://bit.ly/46unp3j>.

165 ‘Inkluziva: Inaccessible polling stations in Skopje, Kumanovo and Veles (Инклузива: Непристапни гласачки места во Скопје, Куманово и Велес)’, Civil Media, 26 April 2024, <https://civilmedia.mk/inkluziva-nepristapni-glasacki-mesta-vo-skopje-kumanovo-i-veles/>.

166 ‘Political parties supported the recommendations of the Code of Conduct for Combatting Violence against Women in Politics and Electoral Processes (Политичките партии ги подржаа препораките од Кодексот за однесување за борба против насилството врз жените во политиката и во изборните процеси)’, Official website of the Macedonian Women’s Lobby, 17 April 2024, <https://bit.ly/4ftMn75>.

167 Bojana Jovanovska and Sara Milenkovska, ‘Gender-based content analysis: Women politicians and media bias’ (Institute of Communication Studies, 17 June 2024), <https://bit.ly/3WNpHaR>.

168 ‘[Infographic] One third of women and only two young people in the new composition of the Macedonian Assembly ([Инфографик] Една третина жени и само двајца млади во новиот состав на македонското Собрание)’, Radio MOF, 28 May 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/infografik-edna-tretina-zheni-i-samo-dvajca-mladi-vo-noviot-sostav-na-makedonskoto-sobranie/>.

169 ‘Women in Mickoski’s Government are left aside, there is not a single female Albanian minister (Жените во Владата на Мицкоски оставени на страна, нема ниту една министерка албанка)’, Meta.MK, 25 June 2024, <https://meta.mk/zhenite-vo-vladata-na-mickoski-ostaveni-na-strana-nema-nitu-edna-ministerka-albanka/>.

170 ‘Reaction of the Platform for Gender Equality: Insufficient representation of women in executive positions in the new Government (Реакција на Платформа за родова еднаквост: Недоволна застапеност на жените на извршните позиции во новата Влада)’, Radio MOF, 26 June 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/reakcija-na-platforma-za-rodova-ednakvost-nedovolna-zastapenost-na-zhenite-na-izvrshnite-pozicii-vo-novata-vlada/>.

171 ‘Murder in Kochani – a man stabbed a 46-year-old woman 40 times (Убиство во Кочани – маж 40 пати избодел 46-годишна жена)’, Telma TV, 25 September 2023, <https://telma.com.mk/2023/09/25/ubistvo-vo-kochani-mazh-40-pati-izbodel-46-godishna-zhena/>.

172 ‘The murderer behind the Kochani femicide received a life sentence (Убиецот зад кочанскиот фемцид доби доживотна казна)’, Meta.MK, 18 April 2024, <https://meta.mk/ubiecet-zad-kochanskiot-femicid-dobi-dozivotna-kazna/>.

Following many years of suffering domestic violence, a woman murdered her husband and his father when her husband was attacking her.<sup>173</sup> The BPP0 Kumanovo initiated an investigation into the double murder,<sup>174</sup> while the Platform for Gender Equality demanded the reclassification of the crime as self-defence, considering that the defendant had been a victim of violence for years and the system had failed to protect her.<sup>175</sup>

## Hate speech

In early June, a public prosecutor was elected in the BPP0 Skopje to monitor hate crime and discrimination cases. She has the authority to oversee proceedings and establish contact with plaintiffs and CSOs representing the injured parties.<sup>176</sup>

## LGBTI+

On June 22, Skopje hosted its fifth Pride Parade under the slogan “Spectacularly Disobedient”. The organisers stated that the slogan represents defiance against patriarchy and celebrates five years of the parade, which drew hundreds of citizens in a peaceful atmosphere.<sup>177</sup>

## Roma

The political party of the Roma Avaja expressed their disappointment with the results of the parliamentary elections and the entire process, which, according to them, was conducted through manipulation, massive bribery, and pressure on Roma voters. They also noted that the Roma electorate’s expectations have not been met, as there is no Roma MP in the new parliamentary composition.<sup>178</sup>

A potential abuse of the state scholarship quota for Roma was uncovered by the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) in the second half of May. Eight students who applied for a state scholarship for full-time Roma students in the MES call, having declared themselves as part of the Roma community, did not receive any payment. The MES revealed that these students had declared themselves as members of other ethnic communities when enrolling in higher education, thus preventing quota abuse.<sup>179</sup>

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173 ‘New details about the murder in Kratovo - the woman who committed the murder reported domestic violence, but they also reported against her (Нови детали за убиството во Кратово – жената-сторител на убиството пријавувала семејно насилство, но пријавувале и против неа); Telma TV, 14 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/14/novi-detali-za-ubistvoto-vo-kratovo-zhenata-storitel-na-ubistvoto-prijavuvala-semejno-nasilstvo-no-prijavuvale-i-protiv-nea/>.

174 ‘The husband beat and strangled the suspect for the double murder in Kratovo, the Public Prosecutor’s Office said (Мажот ја тепал и давел осомничената за двојното убиство во Кратово, соопшти Обвинителството); Telma TV, 15 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/15/mazhot-ja-tepal-i-davel-osomnichenata-za-dvojnoto-ubistvo-vo-kratovo-soopshti-obvinitelstvoto/>.

175 ‘Self-defense, not premeditated murder – the Platform for Gender Equality against the Public Prosecutor’s Office regarding the double murder in Kratovo (Самоодбрана, а не убиство со умисла – Платформата за родова еднаквост контра Обвинителството за двојното убиство во Кратово); Telma TV, 18 June 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/06/18/samoodbrana-a-ne-ubistvo-so-umisla-platformata-za-rodova-kontra-obvinitelstvoto-za-dvojnoto-ubistvo-vo-kratovo/>.

176 ‘Nominated public prosecutor for monitoring hate crime and discrimination cases in the Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office Skopje (Номиниран јавен обвинител за следење на предметите од омраза и дискриминација во ОЈО Скопје); Radio MOF, 8 June 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/nominiran-javen-obvinitel-za-sledenje-na-predmetite-od-omraza-i-diskriminacija-vo-ojo-skopje/>.

177 ‘Under the motto “Spectacularly disobedient”, the fifth Pride Parade marched in Skopje (Под мотото „Спектакуларно непослушни“ петтата парада на гордоста маршираше во Скопје); Sakam Da Kazam, 22 June 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/pod-mototo-spektakularno-neposlushni-pettata-parada-na-gordosta-marshirashe-vo-skopje/>.

178 ‘Avaja: For the first time, there is no Roma MP in the Assembly (Аваја: За првпат нема пратеник ром во Собранието); Sloboden Pечат, 3 June 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/avaja-za-prvpat-nema-pratenik-rom-vo-sobranieto/>.

179 ‘Macedonians pretended to be Roma to obtain a scholarship, but the MES exposed them (Македонци се пишале роми за да добијат стипендија, но МОН ги разоткри); Sloboden Pечат, 21 May 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/makedonci-se-pishale-romi-za-da-dobijat-stipendija-no-mon-gi-razotkri/>.



