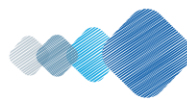


Rule of Law in View of EU Accession

Quarterly brief

July–September 2024



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This brief summarises the key developments in relation to the rule of law in view of EU accession in North Macedonia for the period July–September 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

- » In late September, the Assembly passed amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government.
- » The European Union (EU) separated North Macedonia from Albania on its EU membership path, with Albania set to open its first negotiation cluster on October 15.
- » The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) submitted an initiative to the Constitutional Court challenging the Balancer Calculator’s requirement for administrative job candidates to declare ethnicity, leading to a temporary freeze on the measure; subsequently, on September 30, 2024, the Ministry of Public Administration instructed institutions to cancel job announcements specifying ethnicity as a criterion, following the Constitutional Court’s decision No. 90/2024.
- » On August 20, 2024, the Government submitted the draft Law on the Use of Data from the Public Sector to the Assembly. This law mandates that all public institutions publish and regularly update data created in their daily operations, ensure website functionality and linkage to the central data catalogue, and designate a contact person for technical adjustments and data publication.
- » On August 14, 2024, the Assembly established an Interim Commission to monitor equitable representation of all communities within state government bodies and public institutions at all levels.
- » In August, following plea agreements, the Basic Criminal Court of Skopje sentenced a Supreme Court judge to three years in prison for unlawful influence and a member of the Council of Public Prosecutors to a suspended one-year term for bribery, leading to their resignations and professional restrictions.
- » Following the Prime Minister’s call for judiciary reform, an August 20 meeting led by the Judicial Council President concluded with the Prime Minister reaffirming support for dissolving the Judicial and Prosecutors Councils, while remaining open to alternative proposals to restore public trust.
- » After the High Administrative Court’s verdict that the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors violated election and anti-corruption laws in its trainee admissions, its director resigned on July 12. The deputy director assumed interim leadership, and the Management Board sought an opinion from the Government and Ministry of Finance on whether to proceed with trainee admissions while initiating a search for a new director.
- » The SCPC issued special reports on financing the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections, revealing numerous weaknesses, corruption risks, and financial challenges related to campaign financing.
- » According to the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, North Macedonia improved by two spots, ranking 36th out of 180 countries, despite issues of disinformation, lack of professionalism, limited state funding, and verbal attacks against media workers.
- » The 2024–2025 school year began with significant challenges for students with disabilities, including a lack of educational assistants and inadequate classroom tools, such as smart boards and printed materials. These challenges prompted the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) to initiate proceedings against the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) for indirect discrimination in access to primary education.
- » In early August, the Basic Civil Court Skopje ruled that the Government, the MES, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, the State Education Inspectorate, and the municipalities of Bitola and Shtip had committed discrimination through the segregation of Roma children in education.



List of Abbreviations

BPPO	Basic Public Prosecutor's Office
BPPOPOCC	Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption
CMP	Center for Change Management
CPPD	Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination
DCAF	Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance
DUI	Democratic Union for Integration
EU	European Union
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HRM	Human Resource Management
IPA	Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance
LOWSAB	Law on the Organization and Work of State Administration Bodies
MES	Ministry of Education and Science
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Moi	Ministry of Interior
MKD	Macedonian Denar
MP	Member of Parliament
MPA	Ministry of Public Administration
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PAR	Public Administration Reform
ReSPA	Regional School of Public Administration
RNM	Republic of North Macedonia
SAO	State Audit Office
SCPC	State Commission for Prevention of Corruption
SDSM	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
UN	United Nations
VMRO-DPMNE	Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity



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Functioning of democratic institutions



Elections

In late September, the Assembly passed amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government with 83 votes in favour (including a Badinter majority) and 17 against. These amendments allow acting mayors in Aerodrom, Saraj, and Gostivar to remain in office until the next regular local elections in October 2025. The amendments were introduced to avoid holding early elections, as the previous mayors had become MPs or Ministers. Supporters of the law amendments, including the European Front, argued that this change would prevent unnecessary spending and spare citizens the inconvenience of elections just a year before the scheduled local elections. VMRO-DPMNE described the measure as transitional, intended to ensure continuity in local governance and avoid disruptions until the regular elections.¹ However, MPs from the opposition party SDSM opposed the changes, arguing they infringe upon citizens' right to elect their leaders.²

1 'There will be no early local elections, Saraj, Aerodrom and Gostivar will be managed by acting mayors (Нема да има предвремени локални избори, со Сарај, Аеродром и Гостивар ќе раководат в.д. градоначалници)', Nova Makedonija, 24 September 2024, <https://novamakedonija.com.mk/makedonija/nema-da-ima-predvremeni-lokalni-izbori-so-saraj-aerodrom-i-gostivar-kje-rakovodat-v-d-gradonachalnici/>.

2 'The Assembly decided: There will be no early local elections in Gostivar, Saraj and Aerodrom (Собранието одлучи: Нема предвремени локални избори во Гостивар, Сарај и Аеродром)', Kanal 5, 24 September 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/sobranieto-odluchi-nema-predvremeni-lokalni-izbori-vo-gostivar-saraj-i-aerodrom/a660768>.

Assembly

On 5 July, at its 9th session of the Assembly, a new Secretary General and Deputy Secretary General of the Assembly were elected.³

On 11 July, the Assembly of North Macedonia marked the Day of Remembrance of the Genocide in Srebrenica, underscoring the importance of educating future generations on the dangers of hatred and prejudice and reaffirming North Macedonia's commitment to supporting the United Nations' (UN) stance on Srebrenica and preserving its memory reaffirmed.⁴ However, controversy arose after a photograph showing a prayer held in the Assembly during the commemoration sparked reactions from political parties. Both opposition and ruling coalition parties argued that religious rites in state institutions violated the country's secular constitution, with the Left party announcing plans to submit an interpellation against the Speaker of the Assembly.⁵ Participants in the event defended the act, clarifying that the prayer was a personal choice and not an official religious ritual.⁶

At the end of July, it was reported by the Assembly Speaker that DUI MPs received anonymous threatening messages. He condemned all threats and urged relevant institutions to investigate the incidents promptly.⁷

On 10 September, the Parliamentary Club for Youth Issues and Policies was established in the Assembly with 21 MPs, mostly under 35. The club aims to improve the status of young people and restore trust in institutions, working with youth organisations and informal groups.⁸ Its first session was held on 19 September, focusing on youth policies and the Law on Youth Participation.⁹

At the end of September, the Assembly Speaker held a briefing with parliamentary reporters, informing them that since the start of the current parliamentary term, 15 plenary sessions have been held. Plans to increase the frequency of plenary sessions were also announced.¹⁰

3 'Marina Dimovska was elected as the Secretary General of the Assembly (Марина Димовска избрана за генерална секретарка на Собранието)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 5 July 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-marina-dimovska-izbrana-za-generalna-sekretarka-na-sobranieto.nspх>.

4 'Remembrance of the genocide in Srebrenica in the Assembly of North Macedonia (Сеќавање на геноцидот во Сребреница во Собранието на РСМ)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 July 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-sekavane-na-genocidot-vo-srebrenica-vo-sobranieto-na-rsm.nspх>.

5 'Reaction of the parties to the prayer in the Assembly: This is a secular state (Реакција на партиите за молитвата во Парламентот: Ова е секуларна држава)', A1on, 12 July 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/po-levica-reakcija-i-na-drugite-partii-za-molitvata-vo-parlamentot-ova-e-sekularna-drzhava/>.

6 'One humane gesture does not threaten the secularity of the state, say "Vredi" about the prayer in the Assembly (Еден човечки гест не ја загрозува секуларноста на државата, велат од „Вреди“ за молитвата во Собранието)', 360 Stepeni, 13 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/eden-choveчки-gest-ne-ja-zagrozuvasekularnosta-na-drzhavata-velat-od-vredi-za-molitvata-vo-sobranieto/>.

7 'Announcement to the public (Соопштение до јавноста)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 27 July 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-soopshenie-do-javnosta.nspх>.

8 'The Club for Youth Issues and Policies was established in the RSM Assembly (Конституиран Клубот за младински прашања и политики во Собранието на РСМ)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 10 September 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-konstituiran-klubot-zamladinski-prasana-i-politiki-vo-sobranieto-na-rsm.nspх>.

9 'The Club for Youth Issues and Policies remains a partner for all youth organisations (Клубот за младински прашања и политики останува партнер за сите младински организации)', 19 September 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-klubot-zamladinski-prasana-i-politiki-ostanuva-partner-za-site-mladinski-organizacii.nspх>.

10 'President Gashi's September briefing with parliamentary reporters (Септемврски брифинг на претседателот Гаши со собраниските известувачи)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 26 September 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk//ns-newsarticle-septemvriski-brifing-na-pretседatелot-gasi-so-sobraniskite-izvestuvачi.nspх>.

Governance

According to the state auditor's report, North Macedonia ranks fifth in Europe for brain drain, losing an average of 2,500 highly educated professionals annually between 2013 and 2021. This has resulted in over EUR 700 million in damages over the past eight years and a negative impact of 8.34% on the country's GDP. The report highlights ineffective government measures, including inadequate student standards, poor employment opportunities, and a flawed scholarship strategy that sends students abroad without ensuring their return. It also notes that the national strategy to address the brain drain (2013–2020) has not been published, and key government action plans have been poorly implemented.¹¹ Additionally, the UN estimates indicate that North Macedonia's population is projected to decline from 1,836,000 to 1,519,000 by 2050, representing a 17.3% decrease.¹²

In early July, North Macedonia's Prime Minister announced a EUR 500 million loan agreement with Hungary, which was reached during a NATO summit meeting with the Hungarian Prime Minister. The loan, with a three-year grace period and a 12-year repayment plan, is aimed at supporting the country's economy and funding municipal capital investments. The deal also includes provisions for future financial assistance from Hungary if needed.¹³ The loan was authorised in the Assembly on September 17, despite concerns raised by the opposition about the loan's transparency and warnings of increased public debt.¹⁴

On 17 July, the Finance Minister presented the rebalanced budget, highlighting challenges inherited from the previous government and the anticipated economic improvements. The government, led by VMRO–DPMNE, criticised the previous government for inadequate planning and overspending, noting that initial economic growth projections were now deemed unattainable. The rebalancing shows a projected budget deficit of MKD 44 billion, with significant allocations for salaries, pensions, and other social programmes. Critics, including the now-opposition party SDSM, claim the government is shifting blame while failing to address union demands for minimum wage increases.¹⁵ On 12 August, the Assembly approved the rebalancing with 67 votes in favour. The revised budget projects GDP growth of 2.1%, inflation at 3.5%, and a budget deficit of 4.9%, with total revenues estimated at MKD 318.2 billion and expenditures at MKD 362.8 billion.¹⁶

In August, the Prime Minister alleged that political rivals attempted to provoke unrest and ethnic tensions. He specifically accused DUI, the largest ethnic Albanian party, of plotting to undermine inter-ethnic harmony to protect their interests. DUI, claiming to represent the largest ethnic Albanian population, expressed frustration at being excluded from the government in favour of an ethnic-Albanian rival. This VLEN coalition received fewer votes in the parliamentary elections. They described this exclusion as an act of "ignoring the will of the Albanians" and announced possible protests this autumn, raising concerns about stability in the country. However, DUI denied the Prime Minister's accusations, labelling them as untrue and a diversion from the government's shortcomings.¹⁷

11 'Macedonia ranks fifth in Europe in terms of brain drain (Македонија на петто место во Европа по одлив на мозоци)', Sitel, 2 July 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/makedonija-na-petto-mesto-vo-evropa-po-odliv-na-mozoci>.

12 'Macedonia will have 300,000 fewer inhabitants by 2050 - United Nations estimate (Македонија ќе има 300.000 жители помалку до 2050 година - Проценка на Обединетите Нации)', Telma, 23 August 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/08/23/makedonija-ke-ima-300-000-zhiteli-pomalku-do-2050-godina-proценка-na-obedinetite-nacii/>.

13 'Mickoski agreed with Orban on a Hungarian loan of 500 million euros (Мицкоски со Орбан договорил унгарски кредит од 500 милиони евра)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 11 July 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33032671.html>.

14 'The Assembly passed the law for a loan of half a billion euros from Hungary (Собранието го изгласа законот за заем од половина милијарда евра од Унгарија)', Meta.Mk, 17 September 2024, <https://meta.mk/sobranieto-go-izglasa-zakonot-za-zaem-od-polovina-milijarda-evra-od-ungarija/>.

15 'Budget rebalancing – Salvation from clinical death or looking for an alibi (Ребаланс на буџетот – Спас од клиничка смрт или барање алиби)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 17 July 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/budjet-plati-dolg-/33039965.html>.

16 'The Assembly approved the rebalancing of the budget for 2024 (Собранието го изгласа ребалансот на буџетот за 2024)', VOA, 12 August 2024, <https://mk.voanews.com/a/sobranieto-go-izglasa-rebalansot-na-budjetot-za-2024/7739508.html>.

17 'US keeps an eye on North Macedonia amid "destabilisation" fears', Balkan Insight, 20 August 2024, <https://balkaninsight.com/2024/08/20/us-keeps-an-eye-on-north-macedonia-amid-destabilisation-fears/>.

Regarding the ongoing dispute with Bulgaria, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade stated in August that he anticipates the formation of a new government in Bulgaria, which would allow for enhanced dialogue on various issues, noting the upcoming election year in Bulgaria as a potential catalyst for renewed talks.¹⁸ Additionally, he argued for delaying the implementation of constitutional amendments to ensure security against potential issues with Bulgaria and emphasised the need for reciprocity regarding minority rights.¹⁹ The Minister of European Affairs expressed similar views on delaying the implementation of constitutional amendments as a possible solution,²⁰ also emphasising that creating a favourable political climate and public support is essential for constitutional amendments.²¹ In late August, the Prime Minister announced changes in the composition of the Joint Multidisciplinary Expert Commission for Historical and Educational Issues between North Macedonia and Bulgaria, stating that its members had failed to protect national interests.²² The new composition of the Commission was appointed on 10 September, with members including historians from different institutes. The new Commission President had previously resigned in 2021, citing political pressure and interference.²³ Following the decision, former members of the Historical Commission criticised the political misuse of the Commission's work by both Macedonian and Bulgarian authorities. They accused politicians and intellectuals of prioritising political and party goals over academic principles, especially regarding national identity and historiography. They called for changes in the Commission's methodology and the involvement of international experts to reduce political interference.²⁴

Diplomatic tensions arose between North Macedonia and Bulgaria after a meeting between both Presidents in Sofia in mid-September, where the Macedonian flag was absent in official photos. This led North Macedonia to summon the Bulgarian ambassador to issue a protest note, but it was not delivered. Bulgaria downplayed the incident, stating it was not a formal visit, while North Macedonia criticised the omission as undermining its national dignity.²⁵

In late September, the EU separated North Macedonia from Albania on its path to EU membership, with Albania set to open its first negotiation cluster on 15 October.²⁶ Following this decision, the Prime Minister reiterated that while the government is ready to negotiate, it demands that any constitutional changes be activated only after Bulgaria ratifies North Macedonia's EU accession protocol. He expressed frustration over perceived double standards and urged the EU to accept North Macedonia's proposals for negotiations.²⁷

18 'Mucunski: I expect a political government in Bulgaria with which we can open a dialogue on several levels (Муцунски: Очекувам политичка влада во Бугарија со која ќе можеме да отвориме дијалог на повеќе нивоа)', 360 Stepeni, 16 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mutsunski-ochekuvam-politichka-vlada-vo-bugarija-so-koja-ke-mozheme-da-otvorime-dijalog-na-poveke-nivoa/>.

19 'Mucunski: The delayed effect of constitutional amendments is a rational approach', Sloboden Pечат, 19 August 2024, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/en/mucunski-odlozhenoto-dejstvo-na-ustavnite-izmeni-e-racionalen-pristap/>.

20 'Murtezani: Constitutional amendments with delayed effect would be a guarantee that there will be no new blockades, the negotiation framework does not change (Муртезани: Уставни измени со одложено дејство би биле гаранција дека ќе нема нови блокади, преговарачката рамка не се менува)', Libertas, 22 August 2024, <https://libertas.mk/murtezani-ustavni-izmeni-so-odlozhenodejstvo-bi-bile-garanci-a-deka-e-nema-novi-blokadi-pregovarachkata-ramka-ne-se-menuva/>.

21 'For constitutional amendments, an appropriate political climate is needed - a meeting between Murtezani and Vårhelyi (За уставни измени треба соодветна политичка клима - средба на Муртезани и Вархеји)', Telma, 4 September 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/09/04/za-ustavni-izmeni-treba-soodvetna-politichka-klima-sredba-na-murtezani-i-varheji/>.

22 'Mickoski announced personnel changes in the historical commission with Bulgaria: The current one did not protect national interests (Мицкоски најави кадровски промени во историската комисија со Бугарија: Актуелната не ги штитеше националните интереси)', 360 Stepeni, 26 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mitskoski-najavi-kadrovski-promeni-vo-istoriskata-komisija-so-bugarija-aktuelnata-ne-gi-shtiteshe-natsionalnite-interesi/>.

23 'The Government has chosen the new composition of the Commission for Historical Issues with Bulgaria - Vancho Gjorgjiev has been appointed as President (Владата го избра новиот состав на Комисијата за историски прашања со Бугарија - За претседател е назначен Ванчо Ѓорѓиев)', 360 Stepeni, 10 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/vladata-go-izbra-noviot-sostav-na-komisijata-za-istoriski-prashana-so-bugarija-za-pretседател-e-naznachen-vancho-gorgjiev/>.

24 'The historical commission was misused for political and party purposes in both countries, say the former members of the Macedonian team (Историската комисија беше злоупотребена за политички и партиски цели во двете земји, велат поранешните членови од македонскиот тим)', 360 Stepeni, 12 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/istoriskata-komisija-beshe-zloupotrebena-za-politichki-i-partiski-tseli-vo-dvete-zemji-velat-poranesnite-chlenovi-od-makedonskiot-tim/>.

25 'Skopje and Sofia - From cultural diplomacy to a note of protest (Скопје и Софија – Од културна дипломатија до протестна нота)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 16 September 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/bugarija-protest-zname/33122018.html>.

26 'The EU separated Macedonia and Albania on the path to the EU (ЕУ ги раздели Македонија и Албанија на патот кон ЕУ)', Telma, 26 September 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/09/26/eu-gi-razdeli-makedonija-i-albanija-na-patot-kon-eu/>.

27 'A bad message is being sent to the Macedonian citizens, they are only torturing us - Mickoski on the separation of North Macedonia and Albania from the path to the EU (Се испраќа лоша порака кон македонските граѓани, само се изживуваат врз нас – Мицкоски за одвојувањето на С.Македонија и Албанија од патот кон ЕУ)', 360 Stepeni, 26 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/se-ispraka-losha-poraka-kon-makedonskite-gragani-samo-se-izzhivuvaat-vrz-nas-mitskoski-za-odvojuvaneto-na-s-makedonija-i-albanija-od-patot-kon-eu/>.

Civil Society

On 25 September 25, a “Dialogue between the Government and Civil Society” was held, focusing on the rule of law, good governance, and the fight against corruption. The Prime Minister expressed confidence in the Government’s commitment to addressing these issues with support from civil society and international partners.²⁸ At the same time, the Minister of Justice underscored the government’s openness to collaboration with civil society, highlighting their involvement in legal reforms and anti-corruption efforts as essential for achieving meaningful progress.²⁹

28 ‘Mickoski: The fight against crime and corruption must be decisive, I am convinced that with IRI and NGOs we will achieve a lot (Мицкоски: Борбата со криминалот и корупцијата мора да биде одлучна, убеден сум дека со ИРИ и невладините ќе направиме многу)’, 360 Stepeni, 25 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/mitskoski-borbata-so-kriminalot-i-koruptsijata-mora-da-bide-odluchna-ubeden-sum-deka-so-iri-i-nevladinite-ke-napravime-mnogu/>.

29 ‘Filkov: The Government and the civil society will fight crime and corruption together (Филков: Владата и граѓанскиот сектор заедно ќе се борат против криминалот и корупцијата)’, Fokus, 25 September 2024, <https://fokus.mk/filkov-vladata-i-graganskiot-sektor-zaedno-ke-se-borat-protiv-kriminalot-i-koruptsijata/>.

Civilian Oversight of the Security/ Intelligence Sector

On 1 July, the Prime Minister announced that the Intelligence Agency and the National Security Agency would be merged into one entity, a process expected to take several months. The merger follows previous reforms in North Macedonia's security services after the 2019 wiretapping scandal. Announcing this, the Prime Minister stated that the merger aims to strengthen cooperation in combating terrorism and organised crime, following NATO and EU standards. The plan is part of the Government's agenda, with a new facility to be built for the Agency.³⁰

Following a leadership change in late June, which sparked political confrontations between the new government and the opposition, questions arose over the appointment of the new Deputy Director of the Intelligence Agency in early July. Critics argued she lacks the legally required ten years of experience in relevant fields, with only seven years in the Agency and previous roles unrelated to security. However, the President's Office defended her qualifications, citing academic roles in security-related subjects and additional experience in cybersecurity.³¹ In response to these concerns, the SCPC opened a case on 10 July to investigate whether the appointee meets the legal requirements.³² Criticism over this appointment came from former defence ministers and current SDSM MPs, who also accused the government of illegal appointments in the Ministry of Interior and warned against party loyalists being placed in the National Security Agency and military intelligence.³³

On 18 July, the President of the Assembly met with representatives from the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance's (DCAF) Skopje office to discuss their strategic partnership on parliamentary and security intelligence reforms. They reviewed project progress, including the near-completion of a 'protected room' for secure discussions, and stressed the need to form a Civil Oversight Council for effective oversight.³⁴

Towards the end of September, a group of Intelligence Agency employees sent an anonymous letter to media, foreign embassies, and the President's Office claiming that the Prime Minister plans to abolish the National Security and Intelligence Agencies to establish a politically controlled service. They accused party-affiliated individuals of drafting the new law and expressed concern over the erosion of professional oversight. The letter urged the President to intervene and prevent the alleged betrayal of the country's security sector.³⁵

30 'The intelligence services will be merged into one agency (Разунавачките служби ќе се спојуваат во една агенција)', DW, 1 July 2024, <https://www.dw.com/mk/nov-plan-na-vladata-mesto-dve-razunavacki-sluzbi-samo-edna-agencija/a-69527789>.

31 'Does Ivana Stojanovska meet the requirements for Deputy Director of the Intelligence Agency? (Дали Ивана Стојановска ги исполнува условите за заменик-директор на Агенцијата за разузнавање?)', 360 Stepeni, 4 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dali-ivana-stojanovska-gi-ispolnuva-uslovite-za-zamenik-direktor-na-agentsijata-za-razunavane/>.

32 'The SCPC opened cases for the Deputy Director in the Intelligence Agency and for the Former Deputy Minister in the Ministry of Interior (ДКСК оформи предмети за заменик-директорката во Агенцијата за разузнавање и за поранешниот заменик-министер во МВР)', 360 Stepeni, 10 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dskk-oformi-predmeti-za-zamenik-direktorkata-vo-agentsijata-za-razunavane-i-za-poraneshniot-zamenik-minister-vo-mvr/>.

33 'Petrovska accused of illegal appointment of officials in the Ministry of Interior and warned against the deployment of party henchmen in the National Security Agency and military intelligence (Петровска обвини за незаконски распоредувања службеници во МВР и предупреди за именување партиски послушници во АНБ и военото разузнавање)', 360 Stepeni, 10 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/petrovska-obvini-za-nezakonski-rasporeduvana-na-sluzhbenitsi-vo-mvr-i-predupredi-za-imenuvane-partiski-poslushnitsi-vo-anb-i-voenoto-razunavane/>.

34 'Meeting of President Gashi with representatives of the DCAF office in Skopje (Средба на претседателот Гаши со претставници на канцеларијата на ДЦАФ во Скопје)', Official website of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, 18 July 2024, <https://www.sobranie.mk/ns-newsarticle-sredba-na-pretsedatelot-gasi-so-prettstavnicina-kancelarijata-na-dcaf-vo-skopje.nspix>.

35 'Intelligence warns of betrayal: The Prime Minister wants to abolish the NSA and IA and put a close person in a leadership position (Разунавачките алармираат за предавство: Премиерот сака да ја укине АНБ и АР и да постави блиско лице на раководна позиција)', Sloboden Pечат, 23 September 2024, <https://www.slobodenpechat.mk/razunavachite-alarмираат-za-predavstvo-premierot-saka-da-ja-ukine-anb-i-ar-i-da-postavi-blisko-lice-na-rakovodna-pozicija/>.

Public Administration Reform

At the press conference held on 30 July 2024, the Minister for Public Administration pointed out that the laws on public sector employees, administrative servants, and the professional development and training of administrative servants have been withdrawn from parliamentary procedure due to the latest amendments to the Law on Organisation and Work of the State Administrative Bodies (LOWSAB).³⁶ Besides the amendments to the LOWSAB, it was highlighted that the broad debate on these laws will be reopened in order for all stakeholders—including civil society organisations, state institutions, unions, international organisations, representatives of SIGMA and the European Commission, the expert public, and the opposition—to provide their input and opinions.³⁷

On 31 July 2024, the Ministry of Public Administration (MPA), in cooperation with the Center for Change Management (CMP), organised a public discussion on the key challenges faced by public sector institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia. The purpose of the discussion was to present the Government's vision and future commitments in the area of good governance and Public Administration Reform (PAR), as well as to open a broad debate with the professional public, representatives from institutions, and other stakeholders for improving regulation in Human Resource Management (HRM) in the public sector. Drafts of the following laws were discussed: the Law on Public Sector Employees, the Law on Administrative Servants, and the Law on Professional Development and Training of Administrative Servants.³⁸ This event marked the commencement of the campaign 'All Together for Professional and Quality Public Administration'.³⁹

On 31 July 2024, the Minister for Digital Transformation opened the working group's first meeting to prepare the National Strategy for Cyber Security 2024–2028.⁴⁰ The new strategy will focus on the following: (i) establishing, maintaining, and upgrading ICT infrastructure that is resistant to cyber threats, (ii) clearly identifying and defining the sources of threats to national interests in terms of cybersecurity, as well as developing preventive measures and a clear response plan, (iii) building and improving the necessary capacities for protection, (iv) promoting a culture of cyber security among citizens, the public and private sector, in terms of understanding risks, practising cyber hygiene, and preventing and addressing threats (v) strengthening national capacities for the prevention, investigation, and response to cybercrime, (vi) reinforcing the defence of national interests and reducing of current and future risks in cyberspace, and (vii) promoting international cooperation and the exchange of information.⁴¹

On 20 August 2024, the Government submitted the draft Law on the Use of Data from the Public Sector to the Assembly.⁴² All institutions must publish the data they create during their daily operations and make it accessible to the public.⁴³ Each public sector institution must ensure the regular updating of published

36 'Press conference of the Minister for Public Administration (Прес-конференција на министерот за јавна администрација / Konferenca për shtypin e ministrit të administratës publike)', Official website of the Ministry for Public Administration, 30 July 2024, <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/pres-konferencija-na-ministerot-za-javna-administracija--konferenca-per-shtypin-e-ministrit-te-administrates-publike.nspх>.

37 Ibid.

38 'The Minister for Public Administration, Goran Minchev, marked the beginning of the "ALL TOGETHER FOR PROFESSIONAL AND QUALITY PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION" campaign (Министерот за јавна администрација, Горан Минчев, го означил почетокот на кампањата "СИТЕ ЗАЕДНО ЗА ПРОФЕСИОНАЛНА И КВАЛИТЕТНА ЈАВНА АДМИНИСТРАЦИЈА")', Official website of the Ministry for Public Administration, 31 July 2024, <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/ministerot-za-javna-administracija-goran-mincev-go-oznaci-pocetokot-na-kampanata-site-zaedno-za-profesionalna-i-kvalitetna-javna-administracija%E2%80%9D.nspх>.

39 Ibid.

40 'Minister Andonovski opened the first working meeting of the working group for the development of the National Strategy for Cyber Security 2024-2028 (Министерот Андоновски го отвори првиот работен состанок на работната група за изработка на Националната стратегија за сајбер безбедност 2024-2028 година)', Official website of the Ministry for Public Administration, 30 July 2024, <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/ministerot-andonovski-go-otvori-privot-raboten-sostanok-na-rabotnata-grupa-za-izrabotka-na-nacionalna-strategija-za-sajber-bezbednost-2024-2028-godina.nspх>.

41 Ibid.

42 'Quarterly reports become mandatory - Institutions will have more obligations, those who do not comply will pay high fines (Кварталните извештаи стануваат задолжителни - Институциите ќе имаат повеќе обврски, непочитувачите ќе плаќаат високи казни)', Faktor.Mk, 20 August 2024, <https://faktor.mk/kvartalnite-izveshtai-stanuvaaat-zadolzitelni--institutuicite-kje-imaat-povekje-obvrski-nepochituvachite-kje-plakjaat-visoki-kazni>.

43 Ibid.

data, the functionality of the website where the data is published, and the active link to the central catalogue of data from the public sector at www.otvorenipodatoci.gov.mk.⁴⁴ A designated contact person will be responsible for technical adjustments and data publication.⁴⁵

On 14 August 2024, the Assembly decided to establish an Interim Committee to monitor the implementation of the principle of equitable representation.⁴⁶ In that regard, the opposition has accused VMRO–DPMNE of striking a “secret deal” with DUI, pointing out that the government is not adhering to its promise to abolish the Balancer but rather upgraded its function by assigning responsibility for monitoring the equitable representation to the Assembly.⁴⁷

The SCPC has submitted an initiative to the Constitutional Court regarding the Balancer Calculator because it believes that the obligation for candidates for administrative positions to indicate their nationality when applying for a job violates the constitutionally guaranteed right to free expression of national affiliation.⁴⁸ According to the SCPC, ethnic affiliation is a personal feeling, can be variable, and is not a condition for employment under the Law on Public Sector Employees or the Law on Administrative Servants. The SCPC views this requirement as an exclusionary prerequisite for participation in a public announcement, which violates the merit-based principle.⁴⁹

After the temporary measure to freeze the application of the Balancer, the Ministry of Public Administration, on 30 September 2024, instructed institutions to cancel job announcements in which ethnicity is specified as a special criterion. Any ongoing employment procedure should be cancelled if the public announcement was prepared according to provisions subject to item 1 of the Constitutional Court decision (no.90/2024, dated 18 September 2024), i.e. if the announcement requires candidates to declare their ethnicity.⁵⁰

On 2 September 2024, the Minister for Digital Transformation presented the ministry’s Four-Year Strategic Action Plan to international partners and donors. He highlighted the ministry’s vision for a digital society where innovation empowers every citizen, combats corruption, attracts investment, and fosters sustainability and equity. He emphasised that the key mission in the following four years would be to lead the digital transformation through innovative policies, strategic investments, and collaborative partnerships.⁵¹

44 Ibid.

45 Ibid.

46 ‘Decision on the establishment of the Commission of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia for Monitoring the Adequate and Fair Representation of Citizens Who Belong to All Communities (Одлука за основање на Комисија на Собранието на Република Северна Македонија за следење на соодветната и правична застапеност на граѓаните кои припаѓаат на сите заедници)’, De Jure, 14 August 2024, <https://dejure.mk/zakon/odluka-za-osnovanje-na-komisija-na-sobranieto-na-republika-severna-makedonija-za-sledenje-na-soodvetnata-i-pravichna-zastapenost-na-gragjanite-koi-pri-De Jure>, 14 August 2024, <https://dejure.mk/zakon/odluka-za-osnovanje-na-komisija-na-sobranieto-na-republika-severna-makedonija-za-sledenje-na-soodvetnata-i-pravichna-zastapenost-na-gragjanite-koi-pri-De Jure>; ‘Decision on the Establishment of the Commission of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia for Monitoring the Adequate and Fair Representation of Citizens Who Belong to All Communities (Одлука За Основање На Комисија На Собранието На Република Северна Македонија За Следење На Соодветната и Правична Застапеност На Граѓаните Кои Припаѓаат На Сите Заедници

47 ‘The opposition accuses: Secret “deal” between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, the balancer exposed them (Опозицијата обвинува: Таен „дил“ меѓу ВМРО-ДПМНЕ и ДУИ, балансерот ги разоткри)’, Sloboden Pечат, 14 August 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/obvinuvanje-taen-dil-megju-vmro-dpmne-i-dui-balanserot-gi-razotkri/>.

48 ‘“The balancer” at the session of the Constitutional Court tomorrow - SCPC is worried that the application leads to abuse! („Балансерот“ утре на седница на Уставниот суд – ДКСК смета дека примената води кон злоупотреби)’, TV 21, 17 September 2024, <https://mk.tv21.tv/balanserot-utre-na-sednitsa-na-ustavniot-sud-dksk-smeta-deka-primenata-vodi-kon-zloupotrebi/>.

49 Ibid.

50 ‘The Ministry for Public Administration with guidelines on how to deal with “the balancer” (Министерството за јавна администрација со насоки како да постапува со „балансерот“), Kanal 5, 30 September 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/ministerstvoto-za-javna-administracija-so-nasoki-kako-da-postaruva-so-balanserot/a661727>.

51 ‘Minister Andonovski presented the Strategic Plan of Activities of the Ministry for Digital Transformation (Министерот Андоновски го презентираше Стратешкиот план на активности на Министерството за дигитална трансформација)’, Official website of the Ministry for Public Administration, 23 September 2024, <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/ministerot-andonovski-go-prezentirase-strateskiot-plan-na-aktivnosti-na-ministerstvoto-za-digitalna-transformacija.nspk>.

On 24 September 2024, the Regional School of Public Administration (ReSPA) launched the fourth module of the Regional Academy on the Evidence-Based Policymaking Process, focusing on “Policymaking in the Digital World”. It was attended by representatives from government institutions and experts involved in the planning and coordination of policies in the public sector.⁵² The Minister for Public Administration emphasised the critical role of digitisation in modern governance and the Republic of North Macedonia’s commitment to PAR, referring to the successful implementation of the application for monitoring the PAR Strategy developed with the support of ReSPA.⁵³

52 ‘The Minister for Public Administration, Goran Minchev, addressed the fourth module of the Regional School for Public Administration - ReSPA, with a focus on “Creating politics in the digital world” (Министерот за јавна администрација Горан Минчев се обрати на четвртиот модул на Регионалната школа за јавна администрација - РеСПА, со фокус на „Креирање политики во дигиталниот свет“), Official website of the Ministry for Public Administration, 24 September 2024, <https://www.mioa.gov.mk/mk-MK/news/ministerot-za-javna-administracija-goran-mincev-se-obrati-na-cetvrtiot-modul-na-regionalnata-skola-za-javna-administracija---respa-so-fokus-na-kreirane-politiki-vo-digitalniot-svet.nspх>.

53 Ibid.

Chapter 23



Functioning of the Judiciary

Strategic Documents

There were no notable developments in strategic documents during this reporting period.

Management Bodies

During the reporting period, the Judicial Council terminated the mandate of the member elected from among the judges who had also served as the unlawfully elected president the previous year upon the expiration of his term.⁵⁴ Additionally, the Council appointed a new member—the sole registered candidate—from among judges representing communities with populations comprising less than 20% of North Macedonia's population.⁵⁵

The termination of a member's mandate also occurred within the Council of Public Prosecutors in July.⁵⁶ In that same month, the Council elected a new member, the sole registered candidate, from among public prosecutors within the jurisdiction of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Bitola.⁵⁷ That same month, following the resignation of the vice-president, who, in August, pleaded guilty to accepting bribes and received a suspended one-year prison sentence, the Council elected a new vice-president from among the prosecutors, based on a recommendation from the Council president.⁵⁸ In September, the Council appointed one of its members to the Ethical Council of Public Prosecutors and another to the National Coordinating Body for the Implementation of the Council of Europe's Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence.⁵⁹

Independence and Impartiality

On July 12, the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, during its General Session, adopted a principled position regarding media accreditation for civil cases of significant public interest. This decision aligns with constitutional and legal principles of transparency and publicity, as well as the European Convention on Human Rights.⁶⁰ Through this move, the Supreme Court reaffirmed its commitment to an open and transparent judiciary.

Following the Prime Minister's public call for proposals to reform the judiciary, a meeting took place on 20 August, initiated by the President of the Judicial Council.⁶¹ While no specific proposals were disclosed to the public after the meeting, the Prime Minister reiterated his stance on dissolving the Judicial Council

54 'Announcement from the 498th Session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 10.09.2024 (Соопштение од 498-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 10.09.2024 година)', Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4eDm79A>.

55 'Announcement (Соопштение)', Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 5 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/3BGf29A>.

56 'Minutes of the 106th Session of the Council of Public Prosecutors (Записник од 106 седница на Советот на јавни обвинители)', Official Website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia, 17 July 2024, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/zapisnik-od-106-sednica-na-sjorm/>.

57 'Announcement of the Final Results of the Elections for a Member of the Council of Public Prosecutors from the Area of the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office of Bitola, Held on 29.07.2024 (Соопштение за конечни резултати од спроведени избори за член на Советот на јавните обвинители од подрачјето на Вишото јавно обвинителство Битола, одржани на 29.07.2024 година)', Official Website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/soopshtenie-za-konechni-rezultati-od-sprovedeni-izbori-za-chlen-na-sovetot-na-javnite-obviniteli-od-podrachjeto-na-vishoto-javno-obvinitelstvo-bitola-odrzhani-na-29-07-2024-godina/>.

58 'Minutes of the 106th Session of the Council of Public Prosecutors (Записник од 106 седница на Советот на јавни обвинители)'.

59 'Public Announcement for the Session Held on September 20, 2024 (Соопштение за јавност за одржана седница на ден 20.09.2024 година)', Official Website of the Council of Public Prosecutors of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://sjorm.gov.mk/soopshtenie-za-javnost-za-odrzhana-sednica-na-den-20-09-2024-godina/>.

60 'The Supreme Court Established a Principled Position on Accreditation for the Media in Civil Cases of Public Interest (Врховниот суд утврди начелен став за акредитациите за медиумите во граѓанските предмети од јавен интерес)', Official Website of the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, 12 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3BKmkcs>.

61 'Working Meeting (Работна Средба)', Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 22 August 2024, <https://bit.ly/4ha6Xuk>.

and the Council of Public Prosecutors.⁶² However, he left open the possibility of considering alternative proposals to restore public trust in these institutions amidst the ongoing public discourse.⁶³

The State Audit Office (SAO), in its report on the compliance of the financial operations of the Basic Civil Court Skopje, published in August, identified significant issues related to the financial management of the judiciary in North Macedonia.⁶⁴ One of the primary concerns raised is the ongoing reduction of funds allocated to the judiciary, which directly contravenes the Law on the Judicial Budget, prohibiting budget cuts during rebalancing.⁶⁵ Despite these legal protections, a reduction of MKD 89,906,000 was enacted in December 2023. The report also pointed out inconsistencies in the management of court deposits, a lack of clear regulations for determining the salaries of technical and auxiliary court personnel, and discrepancies in legal provisions governing the ownership of outdated court deposits.⁶⁶ Additionally, the Basic Civil Court Skopje faces unresolved financial difficulties, including inadequate documentation of the value of its premises and ongoing legal disputes related to employee claims for back pay and salary adjustments, resulting in significant financial liabilities.⁶⁷

In response to repeated criticism from the professional public regarding its transparency, the Council of Public Prosecutors began the final phase of developing a new website in September. The website is expected to be operational by early October.⁶⁸

Accountability

In July, the President of the Judicial Council informed the President of the Assembly that a Constitutional Court judge, who had served as the Court's President until June, had reached retirement age, thereby losing the status of an active judge, which is a requirement for membership in the Constitutional Court.⁶⁹ In its letter, the Judicial Council equated the status of its members with that of Constitutional Court judges, referencing relevant provisions of the Constitution and the Law on the Judicial Council.⁷⁰ As a result, the Council informed the Assembly to consider potential further actions regarding the judge. Additionally, the Judicial Council proposed two judges as new members of the Constitutional Court.⁷¹ The Constitutional Court has not commented on the matter, citing only Article 111, Paragraph 4 of the Constitution. Furthermore, no explanation was provided by the Judicial Council for why the notification was sent at this time, considering the judge had fulfilled retirement conditions two years earlier, on 30 June 2022.⁷²

62 'The Government Maintains Its Stance on the Need for Radical Reforms in the Judiciary, Mickoski Said after the Meeting with Dameva (Владата останува на ставот за потребата од коренити реформи во правосудството, порача Мицкоски по средбата со Дамева)', MIA - Media Information Agency, <https://bit.ly/3zZMrE2>.

63 'Mickoski: The VMRO Program Provides for the Dissolution of the Judicial Council, but We Are Open to Suggestions (Мицкоски: Програмата на ВМРО предвидува распуштање на Судскиот совет, но отворени сме за предлози)', Alfa TV, 21 August 2024, <https://alsat.mk/mk/mitskoski-programata-na-vmro-predviduva-raspushtane-na-sudskiot-sovet-no-otvoreni-sme-za-predlozi/>.

64 'Final Report on the Audit of Financial Statements and Compliance Audit for 2023: Basic Civil Court Skopje – Budget Accounts 603 and 631 (Конечен извештај за извршена ревизија на финансиски извештаи и ревизија на усогласеност за 2023 година на Основен граѓански суд Скопје- Сметка на основен буџет 603 и 631)', Official Website of The State Audit Office of the Republic of North Macedonia, August 2024, <https://dzt.mk/mk/240911-revizija-na-usoglasenost-2024-osnoven-graganski-sud-skopje>.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 'Public Announcement for the Session Held on September 20, 2024 (Соопштение за јавност за одржана седница на ден 20.09.2024 година)'

69 'The Judicial Council Believes That Kacarska Can No Longer Be a Constitutional Judge (Судскиот совет смета дека Кацарска не може повеќе да биде уставна судија)', MKD, 4 July 2024, <https://mkd.mk/sudskiot-sovet-smeta-deka-kacarska-ne-mozhe-da-bide-ustaven-sudija/>.

70 The Constitution sets a six-year term for elected members of the Judicial Council and outlines the conditions for terminating their mandate, with further details provided in the Law on the Judicial Council. While the Constitution does not explicitly require the termination of a member's mandate upon reaching the age for an old-age pension, the Judicial Council has consistently interpreted that when a member is elected from the judiciary, their mandate automatically ends when their judicial office is terminated, regardless of how much time remains in their term. This interpretation has been consistently upheld by the Judicial Council and forms the basis for decisions regarding the termination of mandates in such cases.

71 Ibid.

72 Ibid.

In August, the Basic Criminal Court Skopje issued a final judgment based on a plea agreement with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for the Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption (BPPOPOCC), sentencing the Supreme Court judge—who had previously run for office in the Judicial Council despite facing disciplinary proceedings, and later withdrew to facilitate his son's judicial appointment—to three years in prison for accepting a reward for unlawful influence.⁷³ Consequently, the Judicial Council terminated his judicial function and barred him from practicing his profession while serving his sentence.⁷⁴ Additionally, the second defendant, a member of the Council of Public Prosecutors and former ombudsman, also entered into a plea agreement with the BPPOPOCC.⁷⁵ He pleaded guilty to accepting bribes and received a suspended one-year prison sentence, which will not be enforced if he does not commit another crime within three years.⁷⁶ As part of the agreement, he submitted his permanent resignation from the Council of Public Prosecutors to the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia.⁷⁷

In connection with the case involving the convicted Supreme Court judge, two phones belonging to an employee at the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors were confiscated on 25 July by the Department for Suppression of Organized Crime at the Ministry of Interior (Moi), at the request of the BPPOPOCC, due to suspicious communications with the detained judge.⁷⁸ Investigators also reviewed records for the seventh, eighth, and ninth generations of trainees, with unofficial media reports indicating that bribery related to the acceptance of candidates for judicial and prosecutorial positions is also under investigation.⁷⁹

On 11 and 18 September, the Committee of Reporters of the Judicial Council held public hearings concerning two disciplinary proceedings against a judge of the Basic Court Kavadarci and its former president.⁸⁰ The first proceeding centred on allegations of negligent and unprofessional conduct during his presidency, specifically involving 95 phone calls made with a defendant in a case he presided over.⁸¹ The second addressed accusations of damaging the reputation of the Judicial Council president,⁸² during which both parties exchanged personal accusations and disparagement in the 18 September hearing.⁸³ Separately, on 20 September, the Council of Public Prosecutors halted disciplinary proceedings against three public prosecutors due to the untimeliness of the proposals for initiating these cases. In an unrelated disciplinary matter, the Council upheld a prior decision to impose a 30% salary reduction for six months, deeming the complaint unfounded.⁸⁴

73 As part of the accepted agreement between the competent Prosecutor's Office and Judge Naqe Georgiev, €15,000 was confiscated as compensation for the damage caused by the crime. 'Basic Criminal Court Skopje: The Agreement Was Accepted, Naqe Georgiev Was Sentenced to 3 Years in Prison (Основен Кривичен Суд Скопје: Прифатена Спогодбата, Наке Георгиев е Осуден На 3 Години Затвор)', Sitel TV, 15 August 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/osnoven-krivichen-sud-skopje-prifatena-spogodbata-nakje-georgiev-e-osuden-na-3-godini-zatvor>.

74 'Announcement from the 495th Emergency Session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 16.08.2024 (Соопштение од 495-та итна седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 16.08.2024 година)', Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/3YbYu0G>.

75 'Ijet Memeti Resigned, Pleaded Guilty and Settled with the Prosecutor's Office for a Suspended Sentence (Иџет Мемети си поднесе оставка, призна вина и се спогоди со Обвинителството за условна казна)', 360 Stepeni, 14 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/idhet-memeti-si-podnese-ostavka-prizna-vina-i-se-spogodi-so-obvinitelstvoto-za-uslovna-kazna/>.

76 Ibid.

77 Ibid.

78 'Announcement (Соопштение)', Official Website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors "'Pavel Shatev'", 29 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/4fc7zxE>.

79 'Search in the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors - since the Elections, They Are under Constant Pressure (Претрес во Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители – од изборите наваму се под постојан притисок)', Meta.Mk, 26 July 2024, <https://meta.mk/pretres-vo-akademijata-za-sudii-i-javni-obviniteli-od-izborite-navamu-se-pod-postojan-pritisok/>.

80 'ANNOUNCEMENT (СООПШТЕНИЕ)', Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 6 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4h73wV6>.

81 'Judge Lazar Nanev Made 95 Phone Calls to a Defendant in a Case He Was Presiding over (Судијата Лазар Нанев имал 95 телефонски повици кон обвинет во предмет што го водел)', 360 Stepeni, 11 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/sudijata-lazar-nanev-imal-95-telefonski-povitsi-kon-obvinitet-vo-predmet-shtogo-vodel/>.

82 'Quarrel and Mutual Accusations of Dameva and Nanev at the Session of the Judicial Council (Кавга и меѓусебни обвинувања на Дамева и Нанев на седницата на Судски совет)', Telma TV, 18 September 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/09/18/kavga-i-megusebni-obvinuvana-na-dameva-i-nanev-na-sednicata-na-sudski-sovet/>.

83 Ibid.

84 'Public Announcement for the Session Held on September 20, 2024 (Соопштение за јавност за одржана седница на ден 20.09.2024 година)'.

Following the submission of an initiative in May by the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC),⁸⁵ which requested proceedings against the president and members of the Management Board of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (AJPP) for violations of the Electoral Code and the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest—specifically related to the prohibition on hiring and firing in public institutions during election periods—the Judicial Council,⁸⁶ the Council of Public Prosecutors,⁸⁷ and the Association of Judges⁸⁸ rejected the initiative in July. The rejection was based on the failure to meet the 15-day deadline outlined in Article 33, Paragraph 7, of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest. Consequently, no further analysis of the case was conducted. The SCPC clarified that the initiative was submitted within the required 15-day period, calculated from the receipt of the final decision from the High Administrative Court.⁸⁹ They further argued that the 15-day deadline is instructive, not preemptive, meaning the right to act is not automatically lost, as the law does not specify consequences for missing the deadline.⁹⁰ The SCPC also noted that they learned of the rejection through media reports and, upon official notification, intend to challenge the decision through all available legal avenues.⁹¹

Professionalism and Competence

In September, due to the ongoing challenge of securing an appropriately accredited institution to conduct integrity and psychological tests for judges, the Judicial Council decided to continue its cooperation with “Vista Group” and the Institute for Sociological and Political-Legal Research. A new agreement was reached to provide technical support, conduct psychological and integrity tests, and process data for selecting judges and court presidents, thereby ensuring the continuation of the court selection process.⁹²

Quality of Justice

Following the High Administrative Court’s verdict confirming that the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors violated the Electoral Code and the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest in its admission process for the ninth generation of trainees, the Academy’s director submitted an irrevocable resignation on 12 July. In response, the deputy director assumed interim leadership for up to three months and promptly convened a meeting on 16 July to ensure continuity in institutional activities.⁹³ On the same day, the Academy’s Management Board requested guidance from the Government and the Ministry of Finance on whether to proceed with the examination process for the ninth generation of trainees, suspend employment contracts, or potentially halt the process altogether.⁹⁴ This decision is still pending.

85 ‘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>.

86 ‘Announcement from the 492nd Session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 07/08/2024 (Соопштение од 492-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 08.07.2024 година)’, Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, <https://bit.ly/4f9v3Dp>.

87 ‘Minutes of the 106th Session of the Council of Public Prosecutors (Записник од 106 седница на Советот на јавни обвинители)’.

88 ‘The Association of Judges Deemed the SCPC’s Initiative Regarding the Responsibility of the AJPP’s Management Board to Be Untimely (Здружението на судии одлучи дека иницијативата на ДКСК за одговорност на УО на АСЈО е ненавремена)’, MKD, 11 July 2024, <https://mkd.mk/zdruzhenieto-na-sudii-odluchi-deka-incipijativata-na-dksk-za-odgovornost-na-uo-na-asjo-e-nenavremena/>.

89 ‘ANNOUNCEMENT Regarding a Decision of the Judicial Council (СОПШТЕНИЕ во врска со одлука на Судскиот совет)’, Official Website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 9 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/4dPDbld>.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 ‘Announcement from the 498th Session of the Judicial Council of the RNM - 10.09.2024 (Соопштение од 498-та седница на Судскиот совет на РСМ - 10.09.2024 година)’.

93 ‘Informative Working Meeting of the Deputy Director of the AJPP, Judge Ilir Iseni, M.Sc., with the Employees (Информативен работен состанок на заменикот на директорот на АСЈО, судија м-р Илир Исени со вработените)’, Official Website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors “Pavel Shatev”, 16 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/48padxO>.

94 ‘Announcement from the 215th Session of the Management Board of the Academy (Соопштение од 215та седница на Управниот одбор на Академијата)’, Official Website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors “Pavel Shatev”, 17 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3Usqnk7>.

Meanwhile, on 26 August, a call for a new director was issued,⁹⁵ which closed on 10 September and drew seven applicants: the acting deputy director (who is also a judge), four additional judges, and two public prosecutors.⁹⁶ To further reinforce institutional integrity, the deputy director also initiated discussions on 27 August—in line with the Academy’s statute—on forming an alumni association for graduates of the Academy’s initial training programme.⁹⁷ This proposed association aims to foster ongoing collaboration through regular meetings for experience-sharing, legal discussions, and tracking alumni career progress, as well as to establish connections with similar international associations.⁹⁸ A select group attended the preliminary meeting, carefully chosen based on their experience in NGOs and associations, judicial roles, representation across appellate areas, and gender balance, to help shape the association’s vision and framework.⁹⁹

Efficiency

During the reporting period, the Judicial Council president and vice president,¹⁰⁰ along with the Supreme Court president,¹⁰¹ held separate meetings with judges nationwide to address persistent issues such as staffing shortages, court efficiency, transparency, and financial resources. The Judicial Council leaders met with judges from the Skopje Court of Appeal, Basic Criminal Court Skopje, and Basic Civil Court Skopje,¹⁰². At the same time, the Supreme Court president held meetings with judges from the basic courts in Veles, Negotino, Kavadarci, Gevgelija, Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka, and Kratovo.¹⁰³ These meetings aimed to continue gathering input from judges and explored solutions to the challenges faced by the judiciary.

95 ‘Public Announcement for the Election of the Director of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors “Pavel Shatev”, (Јавен оглас за избор на директор на Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители „Павел Шатеv“); Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia No. 177/2024.

96 ‘New Attempt to Appoint a Director for the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (Нов обид да се именува директор за Академијата на судии и јавни обвинители); Telma TV, 14 October 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/10/14/nov-obid-da-se-imenuva-direktor-za-akademijata-na-sudii-i-javni-obviniteli/>.

97 ‘Announcement about the Held Initial Meeting for the Creation of an Alumni Association within the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (Соопштение за одржаниот иницијален состанок за создавање на алумни асоцијација во рамки на Академијата за судии и јавни обвинители); Official Website of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors “Pavel Shatev”, 2 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4fnx7rQ>.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

100 ‘VISITATION OF THE COURTS (ПОСЕТА НА СУДОВИТЕ); Official Website of the Judicial Council of the Republic of North Macedonia, 24 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4f9sPUD>.

101 ‘The President of the Supreme Court Visited the Basic Courts of Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka and Kratovo (Претседателката на Врховниот суд оствари посета на основните судови Куманово, Крива Паланка и Кратово); Official Website of the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, 10 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/4eOK122>; ‘The President of the Supreme Court Visited the Basic Courts of Veles, Negotino, Kavadarci and Gevgelija (Претседателката на Врховниот суд оствари посета на основните судови Велес, Неготино, Кавадарци и Гевгелија); Official Website of the Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia, 24 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3AdkdgP>.

102 ‘VISITATION OF THE COURTS (ПОСЕТА НА СУДОВИТЕ):

103 ‘The President of the Supreme Court Visited the Basic Courts of Kumanovo, Kriva Palanka and Kratovo (Претседателката на Врховниот суд оствари посета на основните судови Куманово, Крива Паланка и Кратово); ‘The President of the Supreme Court Visited the Basic Courts of Veles, Negotino, Kavadarci and Gevgelija (Претседателката на Врховниот суд оствари посета на основните судови Велес, Неготино, Кавадарци и Гевгелија).

Fight Against Corruption

State Commission for Prevention of Corruption

In mid-July, the Assembly adopted the conclusions of the 2023 annual report on the work of the SCPC, offering a positive assessment of its effort and commitment to the fight against corruption and the protection of integrity in the public sector.¹⁰⁴ However, it was also noted that increasing the SCPC's human resources through the allocation of additional job positions is necessary to improve its operational efficiency.

In light of this year's presidential and parliamentary elections, the SCPC issued special reports on the financing of the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections.^{105&106} These reports highlighted numerous weaknesses, corruption risks, and challenges related to the financial aspects of the election campaign. Notably, 77% of campaign funding was provided by the state budget, creating potential for political party influence on media editorial policies. Additionally, there was a low rate of compliance with the legal obligation to disclose information on motor vehicles owned by public institutions, posing a significant risk of misuse of these vehicles for election purposes. Furthermore, four parties participating in the elections did not submit financial reports on donations. The SCPC has initiated 65 investigations into suspected violations of the Election Code and the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, specifically for breaches of the prohibition on new hires and dismissals in public institutions during election periods.

During this quarterly period, the SCPC initiated several investigations involving current officials, including inquiries into the Prime Minister's son accompanying him on a business trip,¹⁰⁷ the politically motivated appointment of acting chief auditor for Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA) funds,¹⁰⁸ the appointment of the Chief of the General Staff of the Army,¹⁰⁹ and the appointment of the deputy director of the Intelligence Agency,¹¹⁰ who might not meet the necessary conditions for these positions. Other investigations include a gifted property to the Secretary General of the Government¹¹¹ and the veracity of the asset declaration of the former Prime Minister and current MP.¹¹² The SCPC also announced plans to closely monitor appointments of (acting) directors in several state institutions and examine each case individually to ensure compliance with legal requirements.¹¹³

104 'The conclusions of the Report on the work of the SCPC were adopted: Positive assessment of the Commission's activities (Изгласани заклучоците по Извештајот за работата на ДКСК: Позитивна оценка за активностите на Комисијата)', Civil Media, 12 July 2024, <https://civilmedia.mk/izglasani-zakluchotsite-po-izveshtajot-za-rabotata-na-dskk-pozitivna-otsenka-za-aktivnostite-na-komisijata/>.

105 State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 'Special report on the established conditions in the financing of the election campaign for the election of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia 2024 (Посебен извештај за утврдените состојби во финансирањето на изборната кампања за избор на претседател на Република Северна Македонија 2024 година)', 13 August 2024, <https://bit.ly/4eTmc47>.

106 State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 'Special report on the established conditions in the financing of the election campaign for the election of MPs in the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia 2024 (Посебен извештај за утврдените состојби во финансирањето на изборната кампања за избор на пратеници во Собранието на Република Северна Македонија 2024)', 30 August 2024, <https://dskk.mk/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/DKSK-Izveshtaj.pdf>.

107 'Dimitrovska: SCPC will investigate the trip of Mickoski's son to the USA (Димитровска: ДКСК ќе го проверува патувањето на синот на Мицкоски во САД)', Sloboden Pечат, 15 July 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/dimitrovska-dskk-kje-go-proveruva-patuvanjeto-na-sinot-na-mickoski-vo-sad/>.

108 'The chief auditor for IPA funds cannot be the acting official – the law stronger than the desire for a temporary solution in Verzivoli and Ramadani (Главен ревизор за ИПА фондови не може да биде в.д. – законот посилен од желбата за привремено решение во Верзиволи и Рамадани)', Telma TV, 12 August 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/08/12/glaven-revizor-za-ipa-fondovi-ne-mozhe-da-bide-v-d-zakonot-posilen-od-zhelbata-za-privremeno-reshenie-vo-verzivoli-i-ramadani/>.

109 'The SCPC opened a case on the newly appointed chief of the General Staff of the ARM (ДКСК отвори предмет за новоназначениот началник на Генералштабот на АРМ)', 360 Stepeni, 21 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dskk-otvori-predmet-za-novonaznacheniot-nachalnik-na-generalshtabot-na-arm/>.

110 'The SCPC initiated cases on the Deputy Director in the Intelligence Agency and on the former Deputy Minister for Interior (ДКСК оформи предмети за заменик-директорката во Агенцијата за разузнавање и за поранешниот заменик-министер во МВР)', 360 Stepeni, 10 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/dskk-oformi-predmeti-za-zamenik-direktorkata-vo-agentsijata-za-razuznavane-i-za-poraneshniot-zamenik-minister-vo-mvr/>.

111 'The Anti-corruption commission opened a case on the property worth 325,000 euros that was given to the Secretary General of the Government Janushev last year (Антикорупциската комисија отвори предмет за имотот вреден 325.000 евра што лани му бил подарен на генералниот секретар на Владата Јанусhev)', Sdk. Mk, 23 July 2024, <https://sdk.mk/index.php/makedonija/antikoruptionskata-komisija-otvori-predmet-za-imotot-vreden-325-000-evra-shto-lani-mu-bil-podaren-na-generalniot-sekretar-na-vladata-janushev/>.

112 'The SCPC opened a case for investigating the asset declaration of Kovachevski (ДКСК отвори предмет за проверка на анкетниот лист на Ковачевски)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 26 July 2024, https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/33052145.html?fbclid=IwY2xjawEQjepleHRuA2FlbQlXMQABHeyni6-fhcxFHY3Bb2FBorD-F_UwhcoFAEdfSh7YRTcfuwZRF6jOmwoe2A_aem_zd1GAh6pCg9FzWw5e4YBVw.

113 'Announcement on the process of appointing directors, i.e. acting directors (Соопштение за процесот на именување на директори односно вршители на должност (в.д.) директори)', Official website of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, 6 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3NdehYN>.

In addition, the SCPC also initiated investigations against former officials regarding 189 employee deployment decisions made by the former Deputy Minister of Interior in the technical government, allegedly in violation of the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest and the Electoral Code,¹¹⁴ as well as the nature of expenses incurred by the former Minister of Culture during a business trip.¹¹⁵ It also submitted initiatives for criminal proceedings before the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office (BPPO) Skopje against the former organisational director of the Toxicology Clinic for abuse of official position when signing contracts with health care workers contrary to the Law on Health Care,¹¹⁶ and against the former director of the Public Revenue Office for employee deployments and new employment contracts allegedly in violation of the Electoral Code.¹¹⁷

A request of the newly appointed members of the SCPC to obtain diplomatic passports prompted numerous reactions from the public, including the former president of the SCPC¹¹⁸ and civil society organisations.¹¹⁹ The SCPC argued that they have the right to diplomatic passports in order to perform their official duties,¹²⁰ to which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs responded that they will conduct additional consultations in order to determine whether there are justified reasons for granting this privilege.¹²¹

The Public Prosecutor's Office

Pursuant to the latest amendments to the Criminal Code, which affected many high-profile corruption cases, the statute of limitations entered into force in the "Tenk" case as well.¹²² In this case, a former Prime Minister was indicted for obtaining a reward and illegally influencing the purchase of a luxury Mercedes vehicle.

114 'SCPC: Deputy Minister in the technical government, although not allowed, deployed 189 employees (ДКСК: Заменик-министер во техничката влада, иако не смеел, распоредил 189 вработени)', Radio Slobodna Evropa, 24 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3BwuUeV>.

115 'The Anti-corruption commission opened a case for the expenses of Kostadinovska-Stojchevska (Антикорупциската комисија отвора предмет за трошоците на Костадиновска-Стојчевска)', Telma TV, 26 August 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/08/26/antikorupcziskata-komisija-otvara-predmet-za-troshoczite-na-kostadinovska-stojchevska/>.

116 'SCPC: BPPO Skopje initiated proceedings against the former organizational Director of the Toxicology Clinic (ДКСК: ОЈО Скопје отпочна постапка против поранешниот организациски директор на Клиниката за токсикологија)', Radio MOF, 25 September 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/dsk-ojo-skopje-otpochna-postapka-protiv-poraneshniot-organizaciski-direktor-na-klinikata-za-toksikologija/>.

117 'The SCPC submitted an initiative for criminal prosecution of Sanja Lukarevska due to illegal operation (ДКСК поднесе иницијатива за кривично гонење на Сања Лукаревска поради незаконско работење)', Skopje Info, 4 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4elctCs>.

118 'Biljana Ivanovska: The fact that we did not have a diplomatic passport did not prevent us from being active (Билјана Ивановска: Тоа што немавме дипломатски пасош не не спречи да бидеме активни)', Radio MOF, 21 July 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/biljana-ivanovska-toa-shto-nemavme-diplomatski-pasosh-ne-ne-sprechi-da-bideme-aktivni/>.

119 'Reaction: The Platform of Civil Organizations to Fight Corruption reacts to the views expressed by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption in the public announcement (Реакција: Платформата на граѓански организации за борба против корупција реагира на изнесените ставови на Државната комисија за спречување на корупција во соопштението за јавност)', Official website of the Platform of Civil Organizations to Fight Corruption, 22 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3YenUv1>.

120 'SCPC: Diplomatic passport is not a privilege, but a right in order to perform the official duty (ДКСК: Дипломатскиот пасош не е привилегија, туку право за извршување службена должност)', Radio MOF, 20 July 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/dsk-diplomatskiot-pasosh-ne-e-privilegija-tuku-pravo-za-izvrshuvanje-službena-dolžnost/>.

121 'MFA: It will be decided whether the members of the SCPC will receive diplomatic or official passports (МНР: Ќе се одлучува за членовите на ДКСК дали да добијат дипломатски или службени пасоши)', TV 21, 20 July 2024, <https://mk.tv21.tv/mnr-ke-se-odluchuva-za-chlenovite-na-dsk-dali-da-dobijat-diplomatski-ili-službeni-pasoshi/>.

122 'Gruevski safe from prison in the "Tenk" case for purchasing a "Mercedes" (Груевски се спаси од затворската казна за случајот „Тенк“ со набавката на Мерцедес)', Telma TV, 30 September 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/09/30/gruevski-se-spasi-od-zatvorskata-kazna-za-sluchajot-tenk-so-nabavkata-na-mercedes/>.

Fundamental Rights

Torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment

The Department for Internal Control, Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards within the Ministry of Interior filed a criminal complaint before the BPPD for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption against a police officer who committed a sexual assault on a woman who he stopped while performing traffic control.¹²³ He was accused of the crime of sexual assault by abuse of position and was placed under house arrest while the court proceedings continued.¹²⁴

Prison and Detention facilities

Similarly, as in the previous quarter of 2024, several incidents and shortcomings were detected in the penitentiary institutions across the country during this quarter as well. During an extraordinary inspection, the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions determined that several convicts were missing from their cells in Shutka Prison,¹²⁵ which prompted the filing of a criminal complaint for irregularities and violations of the law against the administration of that prison by the director of the Directorate.¹²⁶ This was followed by an identical incident the following month—ten convicts were missing from the same prison; some returned, while an investigation was launched for the others.¹²⁷

A criminal complaint was also filed against the former director of Stumica Prison for abuse of official position and authority after he instructed prison officers to release three convicts from prison and sign them in the record book as present in the institution.¹²⁸

Irregularities were also discovered during an extraordinary supervision of Idrizovo Prison, where several convicts were found to be absent.¹²⁹ Additionally, a female convict serving a sentence in that institution started a fire after her request to be transferred to the psychiatric hospital in Demir Hisar was denied.¹³⁰ This incident was followed by a group fight in the male ward a week later.¹³¹ These issues stem from prison overcrowding and poor living conditions. To address these problems, the renovated fifth wing of Idrizovo Prison was opened in mid-August to house 100 prisoners serving long-term or life sentences.¹³²

123 'Criminal complaint against a police officer: He stopped a woman during a traffic control and touched her body (Кривична пријава за полицаец: Сопрен жена при сообраќајна контрола и ја допирал по телото)', 360 Stepeni, 14 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/krivichna-prijava-za-politsaets-soprel-zhena-pri-soobrakajna-kontrola-i-ja-dopiral-po-teloto/>.

124 'The police officer who is suspected of sexual assault was placed under house arrest (Полицаецот кој е осомничен за обљуба доби домашен притвор)', 360 Stepeni, 15 August 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/politsaets-koj-e-osomnichen-za-obljuba-dobi-domashen-pritvor/>.

125 'On paper, they are in Shutka, during the control of the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions, it was found that 13 convicts are missing (На хартија се во Шутка, при контрола на Управата за санкции констатирано – 13 затвореници фалат)', Telma TV, 20 July 2024, <https://telma.com.mk/2024/07/20/na-hartija-se-vo-shutka-pri-kontrola-na-upravata-za-sankcii-konstatirano-13-zatvorenci-falat/>.

126 'Pandov filed a complaint for irregularities in prison Shutka (Пандов поднесе пријава за неправилности во Шутка)', Alsat M, 29 July 2024, <https://alsat.mk/mk/pandov-podnese-prijava-za-nepravilnosti-vo-shutka/>.

127 'Mass escape from Shutka, 10 convicts escaped (Масовно бегство од Шутка, избегале 10 затвореници)', Press24.Mk, 12 August 2024, <https://press24.mk/masovno-begstvo-od-shutka-izbegale-10-zatvorenci/>.

128 'Criminal complaint against the former Director of the prison Strumica - He ordered the release of convicts, while reporting them present (Кривична пријава за поранешен директор на затворот во Струмица – Наредувал да се пуштаат затвореници, а да се заведуваат како присутни)', 360 Stepeni, 27 September 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/krivichna-prijava-za-poraneshen-direktor-na-zatvorot-vo-strumitsa-naredual-da-se-pushtaat-zatvorenci-a-da-se-zaveduvaat-kako-prisutni/>.

129 'Urgent meeting to resolve key issues in prison Idrizovo - the Director of the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions has proposals for improving the functioning of the facility after the inspection (Итен состанок за решавање на клучните прашања во затворот Идризово – Директорот на Управата за извршување санкции Пандов со предлози за подобрување на функционирање на објектот по извршената инспекција)', Lider.Mk, 24 July 2024, <https://lider.mk/iten-sostanok-za-reshavanje-na-kluchnite-prashanja-vo-zatvorot-idrizovo-direktorot-na-upravata-za-izvrshuvanje-sankcii-pandov-so-predlozi-za-podobruvanje-na-funkcioniranje-na-objektot-po-izvrshenata-i/>.

130 'A convict caused a fire in "Idrizovo" - Demanded to be transferred to "Demir Hisar" (Затвореничка предизвикала пожар во „Идризово“ – Барала да биде префрлена во „Демир Хисар“)', Sloboden Pecat, 1 August 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/zatvorenicika-predizvikala-pozhar-vo-idrizovo-barala-da-bide-prefrlena-vo-demir-hisar/>.

131 'Group fight in "Idrizovo": They fought with metal, wooden and sharp objects (Групна тепачка во „Идризово“: Се тепале со метални, дрвени и остри предмети)', Skopje Info, 8 August 2024, <https://bit.ly/4eBrENV>.

132 'The renovated "fifth wing" in prison Idrizovo was put into use (Пуштено во употреба реновираното „петто крило“ во Идризово)', Kanal 5, 15 August 2024, <https://kanal5.com.mk/pushteno-vo-upotreba-renoviranoto-petto-krilo-vo-idrizovo/a654630>.

Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion

On the occasion of 11 July—the day of remembrance for the genocide in Srebrenica—a prayer for the victims was organised in the Assembly.¹³³ This prompted many reactions from political parties concerning the secularity of public institutions,¹³⁴. On the other hand, the organisers of the prayer defended it as a sign of respect for the victims.¹³⁵

Freedom of Expression

Cases of online threats against journalists, both through comments on their social media posts¹³⁶ and via personal messages,¹³⁷ were noted during this reporting period. The BPPO Skopje filed an indictment in one of these cases for the criminal act of Endangering Safety under Article 144 of the Criminal Code¹³⁸. Journalist associations condemned these incidents.¹³⁹ Such threats, along with disinformation, lack of professionalism, limited and non-transparent state funding, and verbal attacks against media workers, were among the reasons cited for the country's ranking on the 2024 World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders. Nevertheless, the country advanced by two spots this year, ranking 36th out of 180 countries.¹⁴⁰

A positive judgment for the freedom of expression was adopted by the Basic Civil Court Skopje following a lawsuit filed by a journalist who was attacked while performing her work in the Assembly on 27 April 2017, when more than 20 journalists were threatened, attacked, and prohibited from reporting from the scene.¹⁴¹ The judgment ordered the Republic of North Macedonia to compensate her for non-pecuniary damage due to the fear suffered, as well as on the basis of violation of freedom of expression. In contrast, the same court denied a similar legal request from another journalist involved in the same incident in the Assembly, stating that because he worked in online media, which is not legally recognised as media, he is therefore not considered a journalist.¹⁴² This judgment highlights the lack of legal regulation for online media in the Republic of North Macedonia, creating legal uncertainty for the protection of journalists and media crews, as well as for safeguarding freedom of expression.

133 'Smailovic: The gathering for Srebrenica was an event, not a session of the Assembly, the prayer – a gesture of respect, not a religious ritual (Смаиловиќ: Собирот за Сребреница беше настан, а не седница на Собранието, молитвата – гест на почит, а не религиозен ритуал)', 360 Stepeni, 12 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/smailovic-sobiro-za-srebrenitsa-beshe-nastan-a-ne-sednitsa-na-sobraniето-molitvata-gest-na-pochit-a-ne-religiozen-ritual/>.

134 'SDSM: Afrim Gashi violated the secularity of the state, that is disrespect for the Constitution (СДСМ: Африм Гаши ја наруши секуларноста на државата, тоа е непочитување и на Уставот)', A1 On, 12 July 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/sdsm-afrim-gashi-ja-narushi-sekularnosta-na-drzhavata-toa-e-nepochituvanje-ina-ustavot/>.

135 'One human gesture does not threaten the secularity of the state, say "Vredi" about the prayer in the Assembly (Еден човечки гест не ја загрозува секуларноста на државата, велат од „Вреди“ за молитвата во Собранието)', 360 Stepeni, 13 July 2024, <https://360stepeni.mk/eden-chovechki-gest-ne-ja-zagrozuva-sekularnosta-na-drzhavata-velat-od-vredi-za-molitvata-vo-sobraniето/>.

136 'SSNM: We condemn the threats against colleague Vidinovski and demand his protection (ССНМ: Ги осудуваме заканите кон колегата Видиновски и бараме негова заштита)', Radio MOF, 2 July 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/ssnm-gi-osuduvame-zakanite-kon-kolegata-vidinovski-i-barame-negova-zashtita/>.

137 'PPO: A man from the village of Grčec in Skopje threatened a journalist (ОЈО: Маж од скопското село Грчец и се заканувал на новинарка)', A1 On, 4 July 2024, <https://a1on.mk/macedonia/ojo-mazh-od-skopskoto-selo-grčec-i-se-zakanuval-na-novinarka/>.

138 'PPO filed charges against a 31-year-old man for endangering the safety of a journalist (ОЈО поднесе обвинение против 31-годишник за загрозување сигурноста на новинарка)', Radio MOF, 4 July 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/ojo-podnese-obvinenie-protiv-31-godishnik-za-zagrozuvanje-sigurnosta-na-novinarka/>.

139 'AJM condemns the threats against Kanal 5 journalist Aleksandar Vidinovski (ЗНМ ги осудува заканите кон новинарот на Канал 5 Александар Видиновски)', Official Website of the Association of Journalists of Macedonia, 2 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/3ZUFF4C>.

140 'Reporters Without Borders: Macedonia advanced by two places, but trust in the media declined (Репортери без граници: Македонија напредна за две места, но опадна довербата во медиумите)', Sloboden Pecat, 1 August 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/reporteri-bez-granici-makedonija-napredna-za-dve-mestano-opadna-doverbata-vo-mediумите/>.

141 'AJM: Justice for journalist Dusica Mrgja for "April 27": A significant step forward in the fight against threats against media workers (ЗНМ: Правда за новинарката Душица Мрѓа за „27 април“: Значаен чекор напред во борбата против заканите врз медиумските работници)', Makfax, 4 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/3zJtHtO>.

142 'AJM: New controversial judgment of the Basic Civil Court Skopje (ЗНМ: Нова контроверзна пресуда на Основниот граѓански суд Скопје)', Radio MOF, 26 September 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/znm-nova-kontroverzna-presuda-na-osnovniot-gragjanski-sud-skopje/>.

Vulnerable Groups and the Principle of Non-discrimination

At the beginning of July, the Coalition “Menuvame” requested a meeting with the new Government to discuss potential amendments to the National Strategy for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2023–2030. They suggested clarifying that disability is not a disease but a condition, lowering the age limit for assessing children with disabilities from 26 to 18 years and ensuring assessments are not based solely on conversations with parents. They also proposed introducing new courses in vocational education for medical personnel, judges, and attorneys to better equip them to meet the needs of persons with disabilities.¹⁴³ In regard to education for children with disabilities, they stated that the current educational programs are not adequately structured and called for the reinstatement of the previous educational model, which provided specific support for children with vision impairments, hearing and speech impairments, and intellectual disabilities.¹⁴⁴ Nevertheless, the new 2024/2025 school year did not begin without shortcomings affecting the students with disabilities. While the Ministry of Education and Science (MES) announced that more than 1,000 educational assistants would be hired in primary schools to help improve the educational process of students with disabilities,¹⁴⁵ parents of these students reported a continuing shortage of assistants, as well as a lack of necessary classrooms resources, such as smart boards, printed materials, and adequate course visualisation.¹⁴⁶ Additionally, the MES announced that students with disabilities in secondary schools will receive educational assistants by January 2025.¹⁴⁷ The CPPD appealed to the MES to adopt the new Law on Secondary Education to enhance inclusiveness in secondary education and improve access for students with disabilities to higher levels of education.¹⁴⁸ The CPPD also initiated ex officio proceedings against the MES to investigate indirect discrimination in access to compulsory primary education based on disability.¹⁴⁹

A previously established instance of gender-based discrimination concluded on a positive note with a judgment adopted by the Basic Civil Court Skopje¹⁵⁰. At the same time, a new case of discrimination based on trade union membership was identified by the CPPD, involving a police officer who was repeatedly denied promotion in favour of less qualified individuals.¹⁵¹

In a separate case, where a female public prosecutor was passed over for promotion due to her pregnancy and use of maternity leave, the Administrative Court upheld the CPPD’s finding of discrimination by the Council of Public Prosecutors.¹⁵² Nevertheless, the CPPD filed an appeal against this decision,

143 ‘The Coalition “Menuvame” requests a meeting with the Government on amendments to the Strategy for Persons with Disabilities (Коалицијата „Менуваме“ бара средба со Владата за измени на Стратегијата за лицата со попреченост)’, MIA - Media Information Agency, 3 July 2024, <https://bit.ly/4duLLfi>.

144 ‘Suaret Alishan, “Menuvame”: Changes are needed in inclusive education, because the previous ones did not bear fruit (Суарет Алишан, „Менуваме“: Потребни се измени во инклузивното образование, бидејќи претходните не вродија со плод)’, Radio MOF, 21 July 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/suaret-alishan-menuvame-potrebni-se-izmeni-vo-inkluzivnoto-obrazovanie-bidejkji-prethodnite-ne-vrodija-so-plod/>.

145 ‘Over 1,000 educational assistants in the new school year will support students with disabilities, announced the Ministry of Education and Science (Над 1.000 образовни асистенти во новата учебна година ќе бидат поддршка на учениците со попреченост, најави МОН)’, Radio MOF, 31 August 2024, <https://www.radiomof.mk/nad-1-000-obrazovni-asistenti-vo-novata-uchebna-godina-kje-bidat-poddrshka-na-uchenicite-so-poprechenost-najavi-mon/>.

146 ‘Children with disabilities left without assistants at the beginning of the school year (Децата со попреченост останаа без асистенти на почетокот на учебната година)’, Sitel TV, 2 September 2024, <https://sitel.com.mk/decata-so-poprechenost-ostanaa-bez-asistenti-na-pochetokot-na-uchebната-godina>.

147 ‘Janevska: From January, there will be educational assistants in secondary schools as well (Јаневска: Од јануари образовни асистенти ќе има и во средните училишта)’, Sloboden Pecat, 10 September 2024, <https://www.slobodenpecat.mk/janevska-od-januari-obrazovni-asistenti-kje-ima-i-vo-srednite-uchilishta/>.

148 ‘Reaction of the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination in relation to the delay in providing educational assistants for students with disabilities (Реакција на Комисијата за спречување и заштита од дискриминација во однос на доцнењето со обезбедување на образовни асистенти за учениците со попреченост)’, Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 3 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4dwQuwY>.

149 ‘CPPD initiates ex officio proceedings against the MES (КЦЗД поведува постапка по службена должност против МОН)’, Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 12 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4eKq4jс>.

150 ‘Discriminated because they are girls - Wrestlers Bojana and Olgica won the legal battle (Дискриминирани затоа што се девојки - Борачките Бојана и Олгица победија во правна битка)’, Radio Slobodna Evropa, 9 July 2024, <https://www.slobodnaevropa.mk/a/diskriminirani-zatoa-shto-se-devojki---borachkite-bojana-i-olgica-pobedija-vo-pravna-bitka/33026316.html>.

151 ‘A police officer is persistently left out of the promotions for the head of the Blace crossing because he is a trade unionist, continued discrimination established (Полицаец упорно е изоставуван од огласите за шеф на преминот Блаце оти е синдикалец, утврдена продолжена дискриминација)’, Sakam da kazam, 31 August 2024, <https://bit.ly/3Yco0t6>.

152 ‘The Administrative Court ruled that Jolevski discriminated against prosecutor Ristoska (Управен пресуди дека Јолевски ја дискриминира обвинителката Ристоска)’, Lider.Mk, 4 July 2024, <https://lider.mk/upraven-presudi-deka-jolevski-ja-diskriminiral-obvinitelkata-ristoska/>.

arguing that its opinion is not an administrative act and that an administrative dispute cannot be conducted against it, as this could create an illegal precedent of treating CPPD opinions as administrative acts in the future.¹⁵³

The CPPD signed a Memorandum of Cooperation with the Cabinet of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia to undertake coordinated activities aimed at promoting equality and protection against discrimination, ensuring full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all citizens.¹⁵⁴

Roma

At the beginning of August, the Basic Civil Court Skopje determined that the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the MES, the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health, the State Education Inspectorate, the Municipality of Bitola, and the Municipality of Shtip committed discrimination by segregating Roma children in the educational process.¹⁵⁵ This discrimination occurred through failure to take action to regulate rezoning practices to prevent potential segregation, ineffective implementation of rezoning decisions, the approach to enrolling Roma children in schools, and the failure to ensure equitable and appropriate integration of Roma students with other ethnic communities in classrooms.

The ongoing trend of false declarations as Roma ethnicity was once again noted during inspections of secondary school enrolments in several cities across the country.¹⁵⁶ It was found that some students submitted false statements of Roma ethnicity to qualify under the quota reserved for the Roma community.

A step forward in better housing for Roma was made in Shtip, where the construction began on houses for Roma families.¹⁵⁷ These homes are intended for 40 Roma families who have been living in substandard conditions for years in abandoned buildings.

153 'Press release (Соопштение за медиуми)', Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 2 September 2024, <https://bit.ly/4dxSm8S>.

154 'CPPD and the Cabinet of President Siljanovska-Davkova signed a Memorandum of Cooperation (КСЗД и кабинетот на претседателката Силјановска – Давкова, потпишаа Меморандум за соработка)', Official website of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, 1 August 2024, <https://bit.ly/4gVo2bk>.

155 'The Basic Civil Court determined the segregation of Roma children in the educational process (Основниот граѓански суд утврди сегрегација на децата Роми во образовниот процес)', Official website of The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of the Republic of North Macedonia, 6 August 2024, <https://mhc.org.mk/news/osnovniot-graganski-sud-utvrdi-segregacija-na-decata-romi-vo-obrazovniot-proces/>.

156 'They declare themselves as Roma in order to enroll in medicine school! False reporting of ethnicity in secondary schools (Се декларираат како Роми за да се запишат на медицина! Лажно пријавување на етничка припадност во средни училишта)', TV 21, 5 September 2024, <https://mk.tv21.tv/se-deklariraat-kako-romi-za-da-se-zapishat-na-medsina-lazhno-prijavuvane-na-etnichka-pripadnost-vo-sredni-uchilishta/>.

157 'The construction of houses for the accommodation of 40 Roma families from Shtip has begun (Започна изградбата на типски куќи за сместување на 40 штипски ромски семејства)', Sitel TV, 5 September 2024, <https://site1.com.mk/zapochna-izgradbata-na-tipski-kukji-za-smestuvanje-na-40-shtipski-romski-semejstva>.

