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Post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia

Report[1]
Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee)
Co-rapporteurs: Ms Sibel ARSLAN, Switzerland, Socialists, Democrats and Greens Group, and Mr Joseph O'REILLY, Ireland, Group of the European People's Party

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1. Reference to Committee: Resolution 1115 (1997).

A. Draft resolution[2]

1. North Macedonia joined the Council of Europe in 1995. Until 2000, it was subject to the full monitoring procedure. By means of Resolution 1213 (2000), the Parliamentary Assembly decided to close the full monitoring procedure and engage in a post-monitoring dialogue on "the issues referred to in paragraph 13 [of Resolution 1213 (2000)] or any other issue arising from the obligations of Macedonia as a member State of the Council of Europe".[3] Since 2000, the progress in addressing these outstanding concerns has been systematically assessed by the Assembly and its Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee), in particular in Assembly's Resolution 1949 (2013) and Resolution 2304 (2019).

2. The Assembly refers to Resolution 2304 (2019), in which it acknowledged the progress made by North Macedonia in the fields of democracy, rule of law, human rights protection and relations with neighbouring countries. However, it resolved then not to close the post-monitoring dialogue and to assess, in its next report, the progress made in particular in the following areas: the further consolidation of the sustainability and functioning of democratic institutions, the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the consolidation of the electoral framework and the pursuance of inclusive policies aiming at securing the rights of minorities (including for the Roma community).

3. The last parliamentary elections took place on 8 May 2024. They were won by the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO DPMNE) party, after seven years in opposition. On the same day, following a second round of election, the VMRO DPMNE candidate, Ms Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, was elected as first female Head of State of North Macedonia. On 23 June 2024, the parliament approved a new government led by Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski, backed by a coalition of the VMRO-DPMNE party, the Albanian coalition VLEN and the ZNAM (For Our Macedonia) party. Local elections took place in two rounds on 19 October and 2 November 2025, VMRO-DPMNE candidates won in the majority of municipalities, including Skopje.

4. The Assembly welcomes the swift establishment of the coalition government and its demonstrated political will and commitment to fully honour the commitments and obligations reflected in Resolution 2304 (2019), as confirmed by its continued co-operation with Council of Europe bodies including the Monitoring Committee and the European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission).

5. The 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections were observed by Assembly ad hoc committees for the observation of elections, which concluded that the elections were competitive and well run and that fundamental freedoms, including media freedom, were respected. The local elections of 19 October 2025 were observed by a mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, which concluded that the elections were well-organised.

6. Nevertheless, the Assembly notes that several key recommendations from the Venice Commission and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) remain unimplemented, particularly with regard to campaign rules, access to the media, and the allocation of State funding. It reiterates that, in a democratic State, it is crucial that the legal framework remains conducive to the holding of democratic elections. Therefore, the Assembly urges the authorities to reform, as a matter of priority, the Electoral Code and other relevant electoral laws, by implementing the outstanding recommendations of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR.

7. The Assembly welcomes the measures taken and envisaged by the authorities to reform the judiciary and prosecution services. In particular, it welcomes the steps taken to increase transparency in the work of the Judicial Council, the recruitment of new judges and prosecutors, and the introduction of the Automated Court Case Management Information System (ACCMIS) and other digital case management tools. However, the Assembly remains concerned about the low level of perceived judicial independence and the numerous allegations of the politicisation of the judiciary. It is also concerned about the judiciary's outdated infrastructure and its insufficient human and financial resources. It stresses that reforming the judiciary and prosecution services should be a priority, and that more financial and human resources are needed to make them fully operational. It urges the authorities to address these issues without delay.

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2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 9 December 2025.
3. At the time of the adoption of the resolution, the official denomination at the Council of Europe was "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia".

8. The Assembly welcomes the government's work on the draft laws on the Judicial Council, the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Council of Public Prosecutors as well as its co-operation with the Venice Commission on these matters. It calls on the authorities to adopt the draft legislation as soon as possible, taking into account the recommendations included in the Venice Commission's Opinions Nos. 1242/2025 (CDL-AD(2025)026) and 1259/2025 (CDL-AD(2025)036). In particular, the Assembly urges the authorities to implement the Group of States Against Corruption's (GRECO's) long-standing recommendation to remove the Minister of Justice from the Judicial Council's composition.

9. The Assembly welcomes the measures undertaken by the authorities with a view to preventing and combating corruption. It takes note of GRECO's decision of 1 December 2023 to close the Fourth Evaluation Round on prevention of corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors (Second Addendum to the Second Compliance Report) and notes that, out of 19 recommendations, North Macedonia has implemented 14, while four remaining recommendations have been partly implemented and one recommendation – concerning the Minister of Justice's *ex officio* membership in the Judicial Council – has not been implemented. In March 2025, GRECO also closed its Fifth Evaluation Round on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies, in which it formulated 23 recommendations. GRECO concluded that 17 recommendations had been implemented and six had been partly implemented (Addendum to the Second Compliance Report).

10. Despite this progress, the Assembly is concerned about numerous allegations of widespread corruption throughout the public sector, as well as the lack of effective measures to combat this phenomenon. It calls on the authorities to address these concerns as a matter of priority, in particular by:

10.1. fully implementing the outstanding GRECO's recommendations;

10.2. taking concrete steps to investigate and prosecute corruption offences;

10.3. amending the Criminal Code in order to remove the 2023 amendments that reduced criminal responsibility for certain corruption offences;

10.4. providing effective and dissuasive sanctions for corruption offences and in case of conflicts of interest;

10.5. reinforcing the resources of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption and of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption;

10.6. adopting a comprehensive legislation to protect whistle-blowers, in line with European standards.

11. The Assembly acknowledges that North Macedonia is a country with a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional character, which fosters and implements a "living together" culture and mentality. In particular, it welcomes the country's long-standing commitment to addressing the human rights issues faced by the Roma community. This commitment is evident in the adoption of the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2022-2030), as well as in the progress made in improving civil registration and access to education for the Roma community.

12. Nevertheless, some issues still need to be resolved, such as reforming the "balancer" mechanism concerning access to employment in the public sector, applying the Law on the Use of Languages, and respecting the rights of people belonging to the Bulgarian ethnic minority. There are also outstanding concerns affecting the Roma community, including environmental risks such as air and waste pollution, and inadequate housing conditions due to lack of access to clean water, sanitation and waste removal. Therefore, the Assembly invites the authorities to address these concerns without delay.

13. The Assembly regrets that, thus far, the parliament has been unable to reach a compromise on the "French proposal", which would involve including a reference to the Bulgarian ethnic minority in the Preamble to the Constitution. This is a prerequisite for progressing in the negotiation process for accession to the European Union. The Assembly invites all political forces to reach an agreement on this matter.

14. The Assembly notes that over 30 judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning North Macedonia are still to be implemented and calls on the authorities to implement them fully and swiftly. Priority should be given to the *X. v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia* judgment, which concerns the lack of legislation on the conditions and procedures for transgender people to change their sex on birth certificates, and the *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia* judgment, which concerns discrimination against Roma pupils due to their segregation in State-run schools.

15. The Assembly is concerned about the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment's (CPT's) findings regarding the numerous allegations of ill-treatment of people deprived of their liberty by the police, as well as the worrying situation in North Macedonia's prisons. This situation is characterised by physical ill-treatment of prisoners by staff, prolonged isolation of challenging prisoners, high levels of inter-prisoner violence, unhygienic and unsafe conditions, pervasive staff corruption and favouritism, and inadequate healthcare provision. The Assembly welcomes the authorities' commitment to solving these problems, as well as the measures recently taken to reform the prison system and improve the material conditions in the Idrizovo prison. It urges the authorities to implement the CPT's outstanding recommendations without delay, in co-operation with the Council of Europe Development Bank and other stakeholders.

16. Against this background, the Assembly resolves to close the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia and to follow the developments in the country with regard to pluralist democracy, the rule of law, and human rights in the framework of its periodic reviews. It invites the Monitoring Committee to devote one of its future periodic reviews to North Macedonia in order to evaluate progress with regard to the non-resolved issues such as the reform of the electoral framework, the judiciary and the prosecution services, combating corruption, the pursuance of inclusive policies aimed at securing the rights of minorities and poor conditions in detention centres.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Ms Sibel Arslan and Mr Joseph O'Reilly, co-rapporteurs[4]

1. Introduction

1. North Macedonia joined the Council of Europe in 1995 and was under a full monitoring procedure until 2000. In 2000, by means of Resolution 1213 (2000), the Parliamentary Assembly decided to close the full monitoring procedure and engage in a post-monitoring dialogue on "the issues referred to in paragraph 13 [of Resolution 1213 (2000)] or any other issue arising from the obligations of Macedonia as a member State of the Council of Europe".[5] Since then, two reports have been submitted to the Assembly by the Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by Member States of the Council of Europe (Monitoring Committee) in 2013 and 2019.

2. In Resolution 2018 (2014) "The progress of the Assembly's monitoring procedure (October 2013 - September 2014), the Assembly changed the procedure for the post monitoring dialogue by requiring that the draft resolutions on a post monitoring procedure should "either stat[e] that the post-monitoring dialogue should be concluded or establishes concrete deadlines for the fulfilment of outstanding commitments. In the latter case, the failure to meet those deadlines, if so stated in the following report submitted to the Assembly within the statutory period of three years, would imply the return to the full monitoring procedure".[6] The Monitoring Committee, as indicated in paragraph 1, already submitted one report since the entry into force of the new rules, in 2019.

3. In its last resolution on the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia – Resolution 2304 (2019) – the Assembly acknowledged the progress made by North Macedonia in the fields of democracy, rule of law, human rights protection and relations with neighbouring countries, since the adoption of the previous report on post-monitoring dialogue in 2013.[7] It resolved to assess, in its next report, the progress made in particular in the following areas: the further consolidation of the sustainability and functioning of democratic institutions, the independence of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, the consolidation of the electoral framework and the pursuance of inclusive policies aiming at securing the rights of minorities" (including for the Roma community).[8]

4. The Monitoring Committee's report,[9] on which Resolution 2304 (2019) was based, also acknowledged that North Macedonia had undergone significant political changes, with the signature of the Pržino Agreements in 2015 and 2016 by the main political parties which solved a long political crisis and led to political alternation as well as the signature of the Treaty of Friendship, Good-neighbourliness and Cooperation between the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia in 2017 and the Prespa Agreement in 2018 with Greece, which resolved the name issue and re-launched the accession negotiations with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU).

5. We were appointed rapporteurs respectively on 1 February 2022 (in replacement of Ms Lise Christoffersen) and on 13 September 2023 (in replacement of Ms Ria Oomen-Ruijten). In January 2022, the then co-rapporteurs presented a revised information note, summarising, without being exhaustive, the main political developments that had occurred since the last report, in particular in relation to the fight against corruption, inter-ethnic relations, human rights protection, including fight against torture and inhuman treatment.[10]

6. In the preparation of this report, we were confronted with the difficult task of ascertaining whether developments in five areas of concern since October 2019 justify a proposal to the Assembly to close the post-monitoring dialogue or to return North Macedonia to a full monitoring procedure.

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4. The explanatory memorandum is drawn up under the responsibility of the co-rapporteurs.
5. At the time of the adoption of the resolution, the official denomination at the Council of Europe was "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia". Issues referred to in paragraph 13 of the said resolution included integration of ethnic minorities, reform of the judiciary, full respect of human rights by police forces, adoption of anti-corruption and anti-money laundering legislation, reform of the education system, ensuring freedom of expression and media freedom, adoption of a new asylum law and reform of the local government in line with Council of Europe's standards.
6. Paragraph 13 of the terms of reference of the Monitoring Committee.
7. Paragraph 23 of the resolution.
8. Paragraph 25 of the resolution.
9. Doc. 14964, 16 September 2019, report of Monitoring Committee, co-rapporteurs: Ms Lise Christoffersen (Norway, SOC) and Mr Aleksander Pociej (Poland, EPP/CD).
10. AS/Mon(2022)04 declassified, 2 February 2022.

7. In this context, we undertook a fact-finding visit to Skopje on 23-25 April 2025, which was the first one since 2019. During the visit, we met the President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, representatives of all six political groups, members of a number of parliamentary committees, as well as members of North Macedonia's delegation to the Assembly. We also met the Foreign Affairs and Interior Ministers, the Deputy Minister of Justice, judges of the Supreme and Constitutional Courts, the President of the Judicial Council, the Ombudsman, representatives of the Public Prosecutor's Office, and members of the State Commissions dealing with the Prevention of Discrimination, with the Prevention of Corruption and with Elections, as well as representatives of a number of NGOs and members of the diplomatic community. We would like to express our gratitude to the authorities of North Macedonia for their warm welcome and the efficient organisation of a considerable number of meetings, which were needed for the preparation of this report.[11]

8. This report is also based on the findings and recommendations of various Council of Europe's bodies and European Union's institutions (European Commission and European Parliament) as well as judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and external sources. Referring to Resolution 2304 (2019), we have focused on the functioning of democratic institutions, electoral framework, the situation of the judiciary, the fight against corruption, and the rights of minorities.

9. The committee considered our preliminary draft report at its meeting in Strasbourg on 1 October 2025. On 6 and 14 November 2025, the head of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly, Ms Marija Petrushevska (EPP/CD), and the executive authorities provided their comments, respectively. This report takes these comments into account.

2. Democratic institutions: latest developments

2.1. The 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections

10. The President of the Republic is elected for a five-year term through a general and direct vote and can be re-elected once.[12] In 2024, a new President was elected following two rounds on 25 April and 8 May 2024. They led to a victory of the right-wing VMRO DPMNE (Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity) candidate, Ms Gordana Siljanovska-Davkova, who was elected as first female Head of State of North Macedonia.

11. Members of the 120-seat unicameral Assembly (*Sobranie*) are elected by proportional representation for four-year terms. The last parliamentary elections took place on 8 May 2024 and concluded with a victory for the VMRO DPMNE party, after seven years in opposition. They received over 43% of votes. The previously ruling Social Democrats (SDSM) only received around 15% of the vote, followed by the junior ruling party, the ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) with 13,8% and the united Albanian opposition VLEN with 10,7% of votes.

12. Both 2024 elections took place against a background of voters' dissatisfaction with the political establishment, and a general sense that both the government and opposition lacked the political will to address long-standing calls for comprehensive reforms and to speed up the European integration process.

13. On 23 June, the parliament approved a new government coalition led by Prime Minister Hristijan Mickoski, with 77 votes in favour and 22 against in the 120-seat parliament. The ruling coalition comprises the VMRO-DPMNE party, the Albanian alliance VLEN/VREDI, and ZNAM – an ethnic Macedonian splinter group from the Social Democrats. Members of parliament from the DUI-led European Front did not take part in the vote.

14. The government is composed of five deputy prime ministers and 18 ministers. The newly established Ministry of European Affairs or the restructured ministries became operational by September 2024.[13]

2.2. Election observation

15. The 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections were observed by the Assembly together with the the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE/ODIHR). The Election Observation Mission (EOM) assessed the compliance of the electoral

11. Statement made after the visit, 30 April 2025.
12. Article 80 of the North Macedonia's Constitution.
13. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, SWD(2024)693 final, 30 October 2024, p. 4.

process with OSCE commitments, other international obligations and standards for democratic elections, and national legislation. For the 24 April election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by a delegation from the Assembly, while for the 8 May election day, the ODIHR EOM was joined by delegations from the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the European Parliament (EP) and the Assembly to form an International Election Observation Mission (IEOM).

16. In its election observation report, the Assembly concluded that the election was competitive and well run, given the challenge of organising two different elections at the same time and despite some allegations of vote buying and the negative rhetoric in the election campaign. An extensive and pluralistic campaign helped voters to make an informed choice. Fundamental freedoms, including media freedom, were respected.[14]

17. Both election days were calm and peaceful, proceeding in a constructive atmosphere, despite the strong political polarisation and fragmentation. Some 1.8 million citizens were registered to vote in these elections. Voting procedures were largely respected and public confidence in the election administration was generally high.[15]

2.3. Parliament's work

18. Parliament's work has been constantly affected by political polarisation, resulting in delays and the frequent, sometimes inappropriate, use of accelerated legislative procedures. As a result of the intense divisions, challenges persist in the effective planning of the lawmaking process.[16] The obstruction of parliamentary activities, often due to a lack of dialogue, has delayed appointments to key positions in independent institutions, including judges to the Constitutional Court,[17] Deputy Ombudspersons[18] and members of the Programme Council of the Public Service Broadcaster and the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. The candidates selected by the parliamentary Committee on Election and Appointment Issues often did not have relevant professional experience or did not meet the qualification criteria, which raised concerns about merit-based selections.[19]

19. The previous parliament (of the 10th legislature) was criticised for the excessive and sometimes inappropriate use of fast-track "EU flag" procedure for proposals not related to aligning legislation with the EU *acquis.* This type of procedure must be used in relation with laws aimed at aligning national legislation with the European Union's *acquis* and based on comprehensive consultations, including with the European Commission.[20]

20. There is hope that this practice will be reduced following the adoption in November 2023 of new Rules of Procedure for Parliament, which are designed to improve parliamentary oversight and efficiency and limiting the inappropriate use of accelerated procedures. These rules came into effect following the general election in May 2024, during the constitutive session of the new parliament.[21]

21. Following the election of the new parliament, a new Committee for Monitoring Equitable Representation of Citizens belonging to all Communities was established in August 2024. An Inter-Party Group Against Corruption was established in July 2024. The Speaker survived a no confidence motion on 3 September 2024.[22]

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14. Observation of the presidential and parliamentary elections in North Macedonia (24 April and 8 May 2024), Doc. 16013, 21 June 2024.
15. Ibid., appendix 7.
16. European Commission, 2024 Rule of Law report, Country chapter on the rule of law situation in North Macedonia, SWD(2024)830 final, 24 July 2024, p.21.
17. The Constitutional Court is now in full composition following the February 2024 appointment of Judge Ana Pavlovska-Daneva. In June 2024, Judge Darko Kostadinovski was elected as the new president of the Constitutional Court following multiple unsuccessful attempts to fill the position.
18. Outstanding appointments concern seven deputy ombudspersons.
19. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law report, Country chapter on the rule of law situation in North Macedonia, SWD(2025) 930 final, 8 July 2025, p. 17.
20. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 report, op. cit., p. 22.
21. European Commission, 2024 Rule of Law report, op. cit., pp. 4 and 21. In her comments to the draft preliminary report submitted on 6 November 2025, the head of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly, indicated that the new Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of North Macedonia, also included clearer provisions for constitutive sessions, dedicated opposition question time, public debates, and stronger oversight functions.
22. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, p.21.

22. In July 2024, the Parliament of North Macedonia had 43 women members out of a total of 120 deputies, representing 35.8%.[23] At the beginning of November 2025, there were 47 women in the *Sobranie*. The current Secretary General, Marina Dimovska, a woman, was elected in July 2024.[24] In 2023, in the previous legislature, the number of women MPs reached 51 (out of 120), thus reaching the highest percentage ever (42.5%). According to the Electoral Code, at least 40% of the candidates shall be of the less represented sex.

2.4. Local democracy

23. On 19 October 2025, the first round of the local elections was held (the previous one had been held on 17 October 2021). The main ruling centre-right VMRO DPMNE party won decisively over its main rival, the SDSM, extending its domination of politics to local level. VMRO DPMNE came first in 53 of the country's 81 municipalities. The turnout was just under 48%, a slight decline from the 50% who voted in the previous local elections in 2021. In those municipalities where a mayor was not elected in the first round by winning more than half of the votes, a second round was held on 2 November 2025.[25] Consequently, the ruling VMRO DPMNE party won in 21 out of the 33 municipalities where second rounds were held (also in Skopje), confirming its overall dominance in the local elections. In total, after the two election rounds, the party is set to govern 54 of the country's 81 municipalities. This is 12 more than in the previous 2021 local polls, when it won 42.[26]

24. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities observed the elections, along with the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament. In its statement of 20 October 2025, it welcomed the fact that election day was well-organised, which was "a positive backdrop for resolving outstanding issues affecting local democracy in North Macedonia", such as "the overly-politicised environment and perception about corruption that erode public confidence in institutions". It also regretted the low number of women mayoral candidates and the lack of accessibility for voters with disabilities and older people as well as the absence of local media, particularly outside the capital.

25. In May 2025, the Constitutional Court repealed a bill adopted in March 2024 that restricted conditions for non-party and grassroot candidates to stand in elections. However, the ruling did not automatically restore the previous, more favourable, provision, which required the collection of 1 000 signatures to register as candidate and called on parliament to legislate before the forthcoming local elections. Under the previous legislation (of March 2024) any candidate had to collect signatures representing 1% of all registered voters in their respective electoral unit, i.e. between 5 000 and 7 000 signatures. In the absence of a parliamentary consensus on a new law, the State Electoral Commission adopted on 18 August, a new electoral rulebook, which required non-party candidates and independents to collect only two signatures of support. While this measure seems to be in favour of such candidates, critics argue that their candidacies may be lost in long and confusing ballot papers stuffed with "trick" candidates.[27] However, the authorities have indicated that the number of independent candidates for the mayorship of Skopje had been so far limited.[28]

26. According to the European Commission, no progress has been made in reforming local government. Due to delayed decentralisation process, many municipalities face economic problems, which affect the quality of their services. The government should urgently and actively relaunch the dialogue between different governance levels to improve the regulatory and financial framework in line with the 2021-2026 Programme for sustainable local development and decentralisation[29] and its action plan for 2024-2026.[30]

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23. www.equalfuture-eurasia.org/womens-representation-in-politics-and-public-administration/north-macedonia.
24. https://mia.mk/en/story/marina-dimovska-elected-new-parliament-secretarygeneral%C2%A0.
25. North Macedonia Ruling Party Celebrates Triumph in Local Elections | Balkan Insight, 20 October 2025.
26. North Macedonia Municipal Runoffs Seal Ruling Party's Triumph | Balkan Insight, 3 November 2025.
27. Balkan Insight, Under New Election Rules, North Macedonia's Independents Fear 'Trick' Candidates, 25 August 2025.
28. In 2021 there were 12 candidates for the mayorship of Skopje, including two independent, whereas in 2025 – 16, including three independent.
29. Which was prepared by the Ministry of Local Self-Government through a participatory process. It sets medium-term goals and priorities for the development of local self-government and the decentralisation process (according to the information provided by the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly on 6 November 2025).
30. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p.23. According to the comments of 6 November 2025, the action plan "operationalises the program in a matrix format, detailing its components, ranked priorities, measures, and associated activities. It specifies responsible implementers, implementation timelines, current and expected indicators, and includes a separate financial framework."

2.5. Civil society

27. Civil society organisations in North Macedonia continue to operate in an enabling environment, although their operational space has "narrowed" according to some sources.[31] NGOs working on sensitive issues are often victims of online hate speech.[32]

28. Co-operation with the authorities seems to have improved in the past months. The government prepared the new Strategy for cooperation with, and development of, civil society for 2025-2028. It was adopted in July 2025, along with an action plan, and aims at "supporting an inclusive, independent and professional civil sector as a partner in achieving the State's strategic goals".[33] In March 2025, following a two-year boycott by civil society organisations, the government appointed the members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society. A first meeting took place in April.[34] So far, the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society has met five times; the last two meetings were held on 25 September and 28 October 2025.[35]

29. In January 2025, the government adopted a decision regarding the allocation of State funds to civil society organisations.[36] Nevertheless, during our visit, we heard that many NGOs were facing problems with funding following cuts in USAID's support. It seems that national funding is not always available and remains insufficient. The necessary amendments to the current legal and financial frameworks for ensuring transparent public funding to civil society organisations have not yet been adopted.[37] The authorities consider that civil society organisations generally operate in an enabling environment. However, they also acknowledge that the government should increase its efforts to ensure that civil society is involved in all priority areas and in consultation activities.[38]

2.6. Media

30. The general context is favourable to media freedom, allowing for critical reporting. In 2025, North Macedonia ranked 42th out of 180 countries in the Reporters Without Borders' World Press Freedom Index, with a score of 70,44; this constituted a decrease in comparison with 2024, when it ranked 36th with a score of 73,78. The media landscape is deeply polarised along political lines, with private outlets often tied to political or business interests that influence their content. Nevertheless, several critical and independent outlets operate, primarily online.

31. According to the European Commission, North Macedonia falls between a basic and moderate level of preparedness regarding freedom of expression, with limited progress in this area. In July 2023, the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services was amended to align with the Media Directive. Further amendments in February 2024 reintroduced State advertising in commercial media, a move later criticised by the media regulator and media organisations.[39] In its 2025 report, the European Union concluded that the financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services had been improved but that the Public Service Broadcaster still faced financial problems. Challenges remain concerning transparency of media ownership.[40]

32. Amendments to the Criminal Code and the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation, which reduced fines imposed on journalists, raised the overall level of journalists' legal protection. However, working conditions for journalists remain challenging. A number of attacks, threats and cases of harassment towards journalists have been reported. The use of Strategic Lawsuits Against Public Participation (SLAPPs) remains a problem, in particular with regard to investigative journalists.[41] The absence of legislation to counter this

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31. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 19. The European Commission refers to CIVICUS's rating.
32. Ibid., p.20.
33. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
34. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 20.
35. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
36. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 20.
37. European Commission, North Macedonia Report 2025, SWD (2025)753 final, 4 November 2025, p. 5.
38. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
39. European Commission, North Macedonia Report 2024, op. cit., p.7.
40. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 1.
41. Amnesty International, The State of the World Human Rights, 23 April 2024, p. 56.

phenomenon, coupled with the limited awareness of this issue among judges, lawyers and journalists, continues to hinder the effective protection for journalists and other stakeholders from this form of harassment.[42]

33. On 3 November 2024, North Macedonia ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205). This convention encourages transparency and henceforth democracy and pluralism by recognising a general right of access to official documents held by public authorities.[43] While the legal framework for access to public information is now in place, its inconsistent implementation can pose challenges to the effective exercise of this right.[44] The authorities have indicated that the government was preparing amendments to the Law on Access to Public Information with the aim to harmonise it with the said convention, by further improving the efficiency of the procedure for access to public information and strengthening the accountability of holders of information of public character.[45]

3. Electoral framework

34. While the legal framework remains conducive to the holding of democratic elections, many gaps and inconsistencies remain, making further reform essential. A number of key recommendations made by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and ODIHR remain unimplemented.

35. Some important area such as campaign rules, access to the media, and allocation of State funding are not regulated, undermining the key principle of legal certainty and merit a revision of the Electoral Code.[46]

36. As regards campaign financing in the last elections, the method for distributing State funds for campaigning and media time disadvantaged smaller parties and those without any representation in parliament. At the same time, the transparency and accountability of campaign finances were weakened by the minimal campaign finance reporting requirements, as well as the limited resources and capacities given to oversight bodies. Therefore, there is a need to adopt measures to increase the transparency of party and campaign financing and the regulations on the apportioning of paid political advertisement should be revised.[47]

37. In particular, many voters who live abroad were unable to vote for an MP to represent them in parliament due to thresholds for diaspora's vote. The 40% voter turnout requirement for the second round of presidential elections also needs urgent reform to avoid the risk of cycles of failed elections.[48]

38. The accuracy of the electoral register should be improved through systematic checks, reviews and data updates. The State Election Commission also needs to allocate the necessary resources in good time before the elections, so that it can carry out its mandate efficiently and independently. A future reform of the electoral framework should lay down clear tenure and appointment procedures for State Election Commissioners and eliminate restrictions that impede effective electoral dispute resolution.[49]

39. Moreover, it is worrying that the Electoral Code was amended shortly before the last elections through an expedited process without public consultation, contrary to international standards, and despite prior ODIHR criticism about previous similar practices.[50]

40. Electoral legislation should be comprehensively reviewed to address inconsistencies in a timely, inclusive and transparent manner, through inclusive consultations.

41. During our visit, we were informed that the government was preparing a new electoral law and plans to reform the rules concerning diaspora voting. According to the current rules, three seats are reserved for the diaspora which votes in six electoral constituencies, and there is a threshold requiring a candidate to secure at least 6 500 diaspora votes to take a seat. With only 5 500 voters registered abroad, the three seats are regularly left vacant. The government is willing to introduce a single constituency, lift the three-seat restriction

42. European Commission, North Macedonia Report 2025, op. cit., p. 38.
43. www.coe.int/fr/web/conventions/full-list?module=treaty-detail&treatynum=205.
44. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 1.
45. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
46. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p. 21.
47. Ibid.
48. The presidential run-off is only valid if there is a turnout of at least 40%.
49. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p. 21.
50. ODIHR, Election Observation Mission Final Report, 23 September 2024, p.1.

and possibly allow postal voting.[51] It has just announced that the Minister of Justice will propose a wide ranging and in-depth revision of the entire Electoral Code, in line with ODIHR's recommendations and remarks.[52]

4. The judiciary and public prosecution services

4.1. Undue pressure and risks of politicisation

42. The level of perceived judicial independence continues to be very low. In 2025, only 28% of the general population and 26% of companies considered the level of independence of courts and judges to be "fairly or very good". Although the level of perceived judicial independence remains low, it has increased compared to 2024, among both the general public (25%) and companies (20%).[53] In June 2024, the newly elected president of the Constitutional Court declared that the priority of his mandate would be to restore confidence in the Constitutional Court and in the rule of law.[54]

43. Interference and pressure from the government and politicians as well as interference or pressure from economic or other specific interests are cited as the main reasons of the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges. Some initiatives taken by the government to combat corruption were directly targeting the judiciary (and, in particular, the Judicial Council), which in some cases raised serious concerns regarding the respect for the independence of the judiciary and the principle of separation of powers. Judges and prosecutors are also subject to increased pressure from public smear campaigns in the media and online.[55]

44. In January 2025, a court in Skopje overturned the convictions of four former officials from the VMRO-DPMNE party, who had been sentenced for organising a violent attack on parliament on 27 April 2017. The court ruled that a 2018 amnesty law applied to their case, leading to their release. The trials and legal debates surrounding the attack have exacerbated political divisions, with critics accusing the authorities of exploiting amnesty laws to protect influential individuals.[56]

45. In this context, it is also worth mentioning the latest developments concerning the Judicial Council, including the controversial changes in its presidency and composition. In November 2022, the President of the Judicial Council resigned to protest against alleged attempts to exert undue influence from within the judiciary and the business community. The new President, who took office in December 2022, was demoted in April 2023 through a controversial procedure, raising questions about respect for laws and procedures. In May 2023, she filed a lawsuit with the Administrative Court challenging the legality of her demotion and also filed a criminal report with the Skopje Basic Public Prosecutor's Office against some of her Judicial Council peers for misuse of official duty and authorisation. Two members of the Judicial Council, judges elected by their peers, resigned in June 2023. In July 2023, the judges elected two new members, one of whom, a judge of the Supreme Court, resigned shortly afterwards citing personal reasons.[57]

46. In December 2024, the then President of the Judicial Council resigned, citing undue political pressure as the reason, while continuing to serve as a Council member. A week later, the Judicial Council's premises were searched by the police following a notification from the Ministry of the Interior ordering to secure the minutes of a Judicial Council's session that had discussed the term limit of the former Council President. In January 2025, a new President of the Judicial Council was unanimously elected by its members.[58]

47. In December 2024, the parliament did not approve the Judicial Council's annual report for 2023, which provided the legal basis for initiating a debate about an assessment of their respective work. Subsequently, the government proposed to "dissolve" the Judicial Council and the Council of Prosecutors, and, in March 2025, the parliament voted on "interpellation motions" against the five non-magistrate members of the Judicial Council, who had been elected by the parliament. The reasons given for the interpellations were the unprofessional performance of duties, which further eroded the already low level of public trust in the judiciary.

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51. Balkan Insight, Offering Electoral Reform, North Macedonia PM Covets Diaspora Vote, 10 June 2025.
52. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
53. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 2.
54. Костадиновски: Приоритет во мојот мандат ќе биде враќањето на довербата во Уставниот суд и во правната држава – Уставен суд на Република Северна Македонија.
55. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 2 and 3.
56. https://apnews.com/article/north-macedonia-trial-politics-parliament-attack-8307effc4c347ff2784d6d40edbeea82.
57. European Commission, North Macedonia 2023 Report, SWD(2023) 693 final, 8 November 2023, p. 18.
58. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 2-3.

Although these motions do not provide the legal grounds for dismissing members of the Judicial Council,[59] they effectively constitute political motions of no confidence, which risk undermining the legitimacy and independence of the Judicial Council members.[60]

48. The dismissal procedure launched against the Chief Prosecutor is another worrying example of the shortcomings in the rules for the dismissal and its risk of politicisation. In March 2025, the government initiated dismissal proceedings against the Chief Prosecutor, citing, among other things, damage to the reputation of the judiciary.[61] This decision was due to the existence of circumstances that gave rise to doubts about the impartiality and conflict of interest of the Chief Prosecutor, i.e. the appointment of an acting senior prosecutor without respecting the legally established criteria, as well as a violation of the obligation of secrecy in the proceedings.[62] However, on 26 March 2025, the government announced that it would halt the dismissal procedure, emphasising the importance of ensuring the continuation of prosecutors' work following the fire in a nightclub in Kocani on 16 March. In April, the Council of Public Prosecutors issued an opinion opposing the proposal to dismiss the Chief Prosecutor.[63]

4.2. Limited resources

49. The judiciary's limited financial and human resources is another issue of concern. This affects the quality and efficiency of justice,[64] which has overall declined as the length of proceedings increased for almost all case categories (except for first instance administrative cases).[65]

50. The budgets of the judiciary and the public prosecution service remain below the minimum prescribed in law. For the judicial system, instead of the legally prescribed 0.8% of GDP, the 2025 annual budget allocated 0.31% of GDP. For the Public Prosecutor's Office, the budget expressed as a percentage of the total budget is 0.22%, instead of the legally envisaged 0.4%. Furthermore, budget allocations declined in 2024 compared to the previous year. In December 2024, the salaries of judges, public prosecutors, members of the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors were frozen at the previous year's level.[66]

51. Shortages of staff remain a concern, despite new recruitments. At the end of 2024, staffing levels were critically low, ranging from 20-50% for courts, with similarly low figures in prosecution offices.[67]

52. In February 2025, the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors published 50 vacancies for judges and 47 for public prosecutors, for graduates of the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors. Following the application process, 49 new judges were appointed, but only 28 public prosecutors. Therefore, 19 public prosecutor positions remained unfilled. Both councils published new rounds of vacancies for 35 judges and 19 public prosecutors respectively, thus effectively competing to recruit unselected candidates. A further 19 judges were appointed in April 2025[68], as there were no candidates for public prosecutors. In May 2025, the Council of Public Prosecutors appointed one public prosecutor in the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office Skopje. With this, all 97 candidates from the 8th generation of the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors have been appointed.[69] During our visit to Skopje, we learnt that in some cities there had been no public prosecutors for nearly five years and public prosecutors had to be seconded from other cities.

53. An aggravating factor is that no training of new judges and prosecutors is currently taking place. The ongoing admission process to the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors, which began more than two years ago with the aim of recruiting 130 trainees, is still on hold for unclear reasons.[70] During our visit to Skopje, we were told that the last recruitment for this academy took place in 2020.

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59. According to the Law on the Judicial Council, the term of a Judicial Council member can only be terminated by the Judicial Council themselves based on conditions defined in the law. Nevertheless, the interpellations reasoned that the Council members had failed to perform their duties adequately, and members of parliament called for their resignation.
60. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 2-3.
61. The current grounds for serious disciplinary violations that can lead to dismissal include broad definitions such as "improper behaviour that damages the reputation of the public prosecution office", leaving room for legal uncertainty and the politicisation of dismissals.
62. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
63. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 3.
64. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p. 5.
65. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 7.
66. Ibid., p. 5.
67. Ibid., p. 6.
68. Ibid.
69. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.

54. Another challenge is the delay in holding elections for higher courts. This problem concerns even the Supreme Court, where only 14 out of 26 positions have been filled.[71] Its new president was elected in May 2025. In February 2025, the Labour Relations Law was amended to enable judges and prosecutors to choose to work beyond the retirement age of 64.[72] During our visit to the Supreme Court, we learnt that this amendment had led to the retirement of almost 25% of Supreme Court's judges in 2024.

4.3. Measures taken to reform the judiciary

55. In 2025, North Macedonia continued to implement judicial reforms outlined in the Strategy for Judicial Reform 2024-2028.[73] Unfortunately, the budget planned for 2025 does not provide for the funds necessary to implement all the envisaged measures. Besides lack of funding and human resources, insufficient interinstitutional co-ordination and co-operation remain main challenges. A Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy, established in May 2024, did not meet in 2024. In 2025, it was restructured[74] and met on 10 September and 22 October 2025. Its task consists in monitoring the implementation of the Justice Sector Development Strategy (2024-2028) with its Action Plan and the Reform Agenda 2024–2027.[75]

56. Nevertheless, some steps should be welcomed. On 10 June 2024, the new Communication Strategy of the Judicial Council and the Courts of North Macedonia for 2024-2028, which focused on strengthening public trust in the judiciary, was adopted. The Judicial Council has also taken measures to enhance transparency. New audio and video recording systems for court hearings have been introduced. In September 2024, the Supreme Court revised its Rules of Procedure, allowing public access and media presence to general sessions. Almost all acts (including session agendas, meeting minutes, decisions and reports), adopted by the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors are published on their websites, and their sessions are public. Judicial Council's sessions are broadcast via the Media Information Agency internet channel, whereas Council of Public Prosecutors' sessions only allow journalists and civil society representatives to attend. In April 2024, the Judicial Council started a practice of regular bi-monthly media briefings. It also made progress by providing explanations for the selection or non-selection and promotion of judges. However, no similar transparency measures have been foreseen for the decisions of the Council of Public Prosecutors.[76]

57. Despite ongoing efforts to enhance digital tools for case management and court statistics, challenges persist, mainly due to outdated infrastructure. While some progress has been made to advance digitalisation, this has fallen short of addressing the courts' IT needs. Courts still struggle with outdated infrastructure, insufficient IT support, and inconsistent application of digital tools. The Automated Court Case Management Information System (ACCMIS) continues to require improvements, in particular to take into account case complexity.[77] In 2024, the Commission for Supervision of ACCMIS, established by the Minister of Justice, conducted supervisions in all courts, according to its annual plan. It submitted reports to higher courts, the Judicial Council, and the Supreme Court, and published them on the Ministry of Justice's website. ACCMIS was confirmed as operational in all courts, with exclusive electronic case allocation and no manual assignment. Identified risks included shortages of judges, staff, and IT specialists, with staffing levels of only 20–50%.[78]

58. Legislative drafting processes are ongoing regarding the independence of the judiciary and the autonomy of the public prosecution service. The government is considering several draft laws concerning the remuneration of judges, prosecutors and members of the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors, the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests, which regulates the work of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), the Law on Civil Procedure, the Law on Misdemeanours and the Law on Whistleblower Protection.

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70. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 6. During our visit to the Supreme Court, we were informed that this was due to forged certificates for enrolment. Nevertheless, in their comments of 14 November 2025, the authorities indicated that this was due to municipal elections and the obligation to stop all employment procedures.
71. Ibid. At the time of our visit to the Supreme Court, we were informed that only 11 out of 28 judgeship positions were filled.
72. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 6.
73. Ibid., p. 2.
74. Ibid., p. 3.
75. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
76. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 4-5.
77. Ibid., pp. 7-8.
78. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.

59. In June 2025, the Venice Commission issued an opinion on the draft Law on the Judicial Council (requested by the Minister of Justice), and made a number of recommendations, including removing the Minister of Justice from the Judicial Council and clarifying the procedure for election of its members by the parliament, ensuring that the election is based on the merits and clarifying the grounds for dismissal of its members, President and Deputy President.[79] The government is still working on this draft law.[80] The proposed changes aim at strengthening the disciplinary accountability of the Judicial Council's members, defining competent authorities and legal remedies, raising the minimum judicial experience required, improving the selection process for members elected by the *Sobranie*, and introducing an electoral census.

60. It should be stressed that the Minister of Justice's membership in the Judicial Council has also been criticised by the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Although the authorities underline that the minister does not participate in the sessions of the Judicial Council and hence cannot exercise any pressure on it and that his/her removal requires a constitutional amendment, according to GRECO, "the risk of political influence always exists without formal voting rights or even formal attendance of the Minister of Justice in person at meetings".[81]

61. The Minister of Justice also requested the Venice Commission's opinion on the draft laws on the Public Prosecutor's Office and on the Council of Public Prosecutors. At its 114th plenary session on 10 October 2025, the Venice Commission adopted a joint opinion on the two draft laws. It concluded that the two draft laws contained many positive features but made a number of suggestions to further improve them. It also noted that a number of shortcomings, such as the possibility of renewal of the appointment of the Public Prosecutor and the simple majority needed in the *Sobranie* for both the appointment and dismissal of the Public Prosecutor, could not be addressed by these laws and necessitated constitutional amendments.

62. In July 2024, a working group was formed within the Judicial Council. It is responsible for amending the Program and Action Plan for Prevention and Monitoring of Corruption in the Judiciary 2022-2025. The SCPC is also involved in this process.[82]

63. It is obvious that the reform of the judiciary and prosecution services should be pursued as a matter of priority and that additional financial and human resources are needed to ensure their full operability. The Judicial Council should strive to protect the integrity and independence of judges and institutions and should resist any external influence. Its reform in line with the Venice Commission's recommendations would be welcome.

5. Fight against corruption

64. Corruption in the public sector remains a serious problem, and its perception among experts, citizens and businesses remains high. It concerns not only high-level officials in the political sphere but also other sectors, and in particular public healthcare, public procurement[83] and prisons.[84]

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79. CDL-AD(2025)026, North Macedonia. Opinion on the Draft Law on the Judicial Council, 16 June 2025.
80. In November and December 2024, four expert hearings were organised on this issue. In January 2025, a new working group was formed to prepare a draft Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on the Judicial Council. Moreover, between September 2020 and April 2025, an international project was implemented to enhance the efficiency, accountability, and transparency of North Macedonia's Judicial Council. This collaboration involved the Center for International Legal Cooperation, the Council for the Judiciary of the Netherlands, and the Judicial Council of North Macedonia. For more information, see: www.cilc.nl/projects/enhancing-efficiency-transparency-judicial-council-north-macedonia/.
81. GRECO, Fourth Evaluation Round, Second Addendum to the Second Compliance Report, GrecoRC4(2023)21, published on 12 March 2024, paragraphs 35 and 36.
82. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
83. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 12. During our visit, we were informed about nearly 40 cases pending concerning corruption (abuse of office, bribery, etc.) against, *inter alia*, a hospital's director, a head of a construction department in a small town's municipality and a mayor of a Skopje district.
84. European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT), Report to the Government of North Macedonia on the visit to North Macedonia carried out from 2 to 12 October 2023, CPT/Inf (2024)17, paragraph 8.

65. Whistleblower protection remains weak and those who expose corruption cases often face harassment, job loss or other negative consequences. The current legislation only provides a fragmented legal protection for whistleblowers and needs to be revised.[85] The government has prepared a draft Law on Protected Reporting and Whistleblower Protection, which is now pending receipt of an opinion of the European Commission's experts. The planned deadline for the adoption of this new law is the end of 2025.[86]

66. According to Transparency International's 2024 Corruption Perception Index, North Macedonia's score and rank slightly declined since 2023; it now scores 40/100 and ranks 88th globally (-2 since 2023, both in score and ranking).[87] According to the 2025 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption, 89% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 69%) and 31% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%).[88]

67. Numerous cases illustrate ongoing concerns about high-level corruption within the country. For example, in December 2024, eight former senior officials, including a former Prime Minister, were investigated for alleged financial misconduct involving the gambling licenses of a State lottery company from the previous government.[89] In February 2025, the former head of the government's Service for General and Common Affairs, Pece Mirceski, was arrested on corruption charges on four accounts: accepting bribes, forging official documents, embezzlement and negligence at work.[90]

68. The 16th March tragedy in the Kocani Pulse nightclub, which led to 62 deaths and over 220 injured people – mainly teenagers and young people – as a result of a deadly fire, revealed many shortcomings in the nightclub's fire safety: the building had almost no fire safety measures in place and lacked adequate fire exits. The nightclub was officially licensed to accommodate 250 people, while on the day of the tragedy it was overcrowded with over 1 500 people. The severe safety violations were reportedly known and tolerated due to corruption and bribery within the institutions responsible for law enforcement, highlighting systemic issues in regulatory oversight. An investigation launched after the tragedy revealed that the nightclub's license had been illegally issued by the Ministry of Economy. Moreover, according to some reports, it took firefighters and medical personnel longer than necessary to arrive at the scene of the tragedy. This raises serious questions about the efficiency and emergency preparedness of State institutions. Following the tragedy, the authorities arrested approximately 20 people, including government officials, and ordered immediate inspections of similar venues nationwide. On 13 June, the prosecution filed the indictment against 34 defendants, including three companies.

69. Corruption is not only present in the government but also in prisons. In its latest report, the CPT denounced once again the endemic staff corruption in prisons (especially in Idrizovo prison) and called for reforms.[91]

70. Despite recent efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption, delays in court proceedings and limited resources continue to prevent the development of a strong track record in high-level corruption cases. Such cases often face delays or result in minimal sentences and rarely result in final convictions.[92]

71. In December 2024, the Chief Prosecutor issued a mandatory instruction that all public prosecutors and investigative centres within the prosecutor's offices must prioritise corruption cases alongside cases of significant public interest. The Public Prosecutor's Office has reportedly strengthened capacity for investigations and established better inter-institutional collaboration.[93] Five investigative centres are now operational – in Skopje, Tetovo, Kumanovo, Bitola and within the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption.[94]

85. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 12.
86. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025
87. www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2024/index/mkd.
88. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 8.
89. https://apnews.com/article/north-macedonia-gambling-investigation-36da944fd7d83c9279c40c7368723076.
90. https://balkaninsight.com/2025/02/06/north-macedonia-charges-former-govts-services-chief-with-corruption/.
91. CPT/Inf (2024)17, op. cit., paragraphs 60 and 69.
92. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 9.
93. Ibid., p. 9.
94. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.

72. The issue of insufficient public prosecutors has been partially addressed with the selection of new prosecutors from graduates of the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors. However, newly recruited prosecutors can be assigned for the first three years of their tenure only to cases involving criminal charges with prison sentences of up to five years, as per the Law on Public Prosecutors and the Law on Criminal Procedure.

73. Despite a relocation to new premises, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption continues to lack adequate budget and staff, notably financial experts.[95]

74. Efforts to combat corruption were also undermined by the changes made to the Criminal Code under the previous government, in September 2023. Its Article 353 (5), which foresaw prison sentences of at least five years for "abuse in office" in public procurements that damaged the budget, was scrapped. A second key change was made in Article 394, which regulates the crime of "criminal enterprise". The previously prescribed maximum sentence of 10 years was reduced to three years.[96]

75. The entry into of force of these amendments led to the termination of a number of cases against former and current government officials, as penalties were removed or reduced and the statute of limitations expired. This also led to the increase in legal uncertainty and impunity. There are no official statistics of the impact of this amendment on corruption cases.[97] However, during our visit to the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption, we were told that following the changes to the Criminal Code concerning the "abuse of office" offence, in 2023, 11 indictments had been withdrawn, 5 requalified and in 10 cases procedures had been discontinued because of the statute of limitations. The data for 2024 were still being collected.

76. It is also regrettable that following the said amendment, jurisdiction over cases involving high-level corruption was moved from the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices, which lack specialisation and resources.[98]

77. In March 2025, the Constitutional Court formulated reservations regarding the constitutionality of the September 2023 Criminal Code changes. Consequently, the parliament has six months to review the relevant provisions, after which the Constitutional Court can decide whether to repeal or annul them.[99]

78. During our visit, the authorities informed us that the Ministry of Justice was preparing amendments to the existing Criminal Code, in order to address the negative impact of the changes made in September 2023. Nevertheless, such amendments to the Criminal Code would not be retroactive and therefore would not allow relaunching the discontinued investigations and proceedings. The Ministry of Justice is working on a comprehensive new Criminal Code, which will modernise the penal policy and address organised crime and corruption, that should be adopted by the parliament by December 2025. It also plans to prepare a new Law on Criminal Procedure, which would focus on areas such as confiscation, asset freezing, electronic evidence, financial investigations, special investigative measures, detention, and the appeals process.[100]

79. The State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, which started its mandate on 8 February 2024, continues to focus on corruption prevention and institutional co-operation but it has been criticised for not having been proactive in detecting and reporting corruption cases and for a backlog of cases in verifying asset declarations.[101] This may be due to the insufficient funds and resources allocated to this institution and problems with the interoperability of the data management system (see below, under GRECO's conclusions). Moreover, the appointment of its members by parliament was also criticised for favouring candidates who are uncritical about power structures. It is regrettable that its head, Ms Tatiana Dimitrovska, who had been appointed at the end of 2023 despite some criticism from civil society, resigned in July, facing criminal charges of leaking official secrets to a suspect and computer forgery.[102] She had not launched a single major case during her tenure.[103] During our visit to Skopje, we did not meet with Ms Dimitrovska and had already heard about the charges brought against her. Nevertheless, we had a fruitful discussion with other members of the Commission, who explained to us in detail their work.

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95. Ibid.
96. Balkan Insight, North Macedonia's President Urged to Block Sudden Criminal Law Changes, 7 September 2023.
97. Ibid., p. 9.
98. Ibid., p. 10.
99. Ibid.
100. Ibid.
101. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 10 and 11.
102. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025, two indictments were finally lodged against the President of the SCPC. On 30 September 2025, a court trial started. In August 2025, the *Sobranie* launched a procedure for choosing her successor, but it was further suspended due to the forthcoming local elections.

80. The current government has stated that the fight against corruption is a priority. However, improvement is needed in this area, including in the implementation of the anti-corruption strategy for 2021-2025. According to the SCPC 2025 annual report, which analysed obstacles to implement this strategy over the past five years, the main problems are inefficient inter-institutional co-ordination, insufficient monitoring and budget planning, as well as a lack of expertise due to frequent staff turnover and methodological flaws.[104] A new anti-corruption strategy is now being developed for 2026-2030. In September 2025, the SCPC held a consultative meeting with civil society representatives with the preparation of such a new strategy.[105]

81. As regards implementation of GRECO's recommendations, almost all recommendations from its Fourth Evaluation Round concerning prevention of corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors have been implemented. Fourteen of the nineteen recommendations have been implemented satisfactorily or dealt with in a satisfactory manner, four recommendations have been partly implemented and one recommendation (concerning removing the Minister of Justice from the Judicial Council) has not been implemented. As regards members of parliament, GRECO took note of the progress made in streamlining the Code of Ethics for MPs and in developing a training programme on its implementation and other awareness raising measures. However, it regretted the lack of progress on the sanctioning system provided in the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflicts of Interest.[106] As for prosecutors, the only outstanding recommendation concerns extending the range of sanctions available for disciplinary violations by prosecutors. According to the authorities, this recommendation will be addressed in the forthcoming amendments to the Law on Public Prosecution. Therefore, in December 2023, GRECO decided to close the Fourth Evaluation Round compliance procedure with respect to North Macedonia.[107]

82. Progress was also noted by GRECO this year as regards fulfilling its recommendations made in the Fifth Evaluation Round on preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies.[108] In its Addendum to the Second Compliance Report, published on 9 July 2025, GRECO concluded that North Macedonia had satisfactorily implemented seventeen of the twenty-three recommendations contained in the Fifth Evaluation Round report, adopted in 2019. Six recommendations remain partly implemented.[109] Therefore, GRECO also decided to close the Fifth Evaluation Round compliance procedure with respect to North Macedonia.

83. GRECO welcomed the steps taken to improve transparency and promote integrity as regards persons entrusted with top executive functions. The new Rules of Procedure of the Government now allow public online access to the list of individuals invited to or attending sessions of the government sub-committees and working groups. New Guidelines on the reporting and processing of gifts were adopted, and an online catalogue detailing gifts was being prepared.[110] GRECO also welcomed the creation of an electronic database for registering and verifying asset declarations of elected and appointed public officials at the SCPC, although it was not yet fully operational.[111] An analysis has also been carried out to assess the processes and practices of the SCPC's Department for Monitoring of Property Status to determine which areas needed to be improved and what the current status of interoperability concerning the control and verification of asset declarations was within the SCPC.[112] GRECO noted that further improvements were needed in this area, in particular as regards the SCPC staffing and the expertise of the said department.[113] Finally, it also welcomed the setting of a working group to prepare draft amendments to the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and

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103. Balkan Insight, Crisis of credibility: North Macedonia's Anti-Corruption Future at Crossroads, 7 August 2025.
104. European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., pp. 8 and 9.
105. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
106. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025, the government was now preparing amendments to this law in order to provide for efficient, proportionate and dissuasive sanctions.
107. GrecoRC4(2023)21, op. cit., paragraphs 66-71.
108. In its Second Compliance Report published in October 2023, GRECO concluded that North Macedonia was not "in sufficient compliance", as it had implemented only 13 out of its 23 recommendations, 9 partially implemented and 1 not implemented. Nevertheless, GRECO acknowledged some progress in integrity risk assessments within central government, the enhancement of resources for the SCPC, and certain measures aimed at strengthening integrity within the police. GRECO, GrecoRC5(2023)1, 18 October 2023, paragraphs 133-135.
109. GRECO, GrecoRC5(2025)1, adopted on 19 March 2025, paragraph 64.
110. Ibid., paragraph 66.
111. Ibid., paragraphs 18 and 23. In their comments of 6 November 2025, the delegation indicated that advanced IT tools and software solutions had been implemented with the aim of enabling easier and more efficient monitoring and analysis of asset declaration data. These systems included access to registers from which data would be provided in electronic form, automated verification of asset declarations and interests, visualisation of data and reports. However, there was still a need for continuous improvement of these systems and increasing their functionality.
112. GRECO, GrecoRC5(2025)1, op. cit., paragraph 19.
113. Ibid., paragraph 22.

Conflict of Interest, aimed at reinforcing the sanctioning regime for the violation of conflict of interests, integrity and anti-corruption rules (as requested by GRECO); such amendments are expected to be adopted by the end of 2025.[114]

84. As regards law enforcement agencies, GRECO noted progress in strengthening the operational independence of the police and in depoliticising it. It welcomed the effective implementation of the 2023 amendments to the Law on Internal Affairs on the basis of which inspections in seven cases had been initiated after complaints about alleged political activities of certain employees of the Ministry of Interior. In three out of these seven cases, disciplinary proceedings were initiated, while in four other cases insufficient evidence was established. The authorities also continued to organise training of officials on new provisions.[115]

85. GRECO also welcomed reinforcing internal and external oversight mechanisms of the police. As regards internal control mechanism, it welcomed changes in police command, where operational orders are now issued by the Director of the Public Security Bureau (namely the head of Police) instead of the Minister of the Interior; the moving of the Department for Internal Control Criminal Investigations and Professional Standards (DICCIPS) out of the premises of the Ministry of the Interior; and the reinforcement of the DICCIPS resources.[116] In November 2025, the authorities informed us that GRECO's recommendations had been further implemented by the adoption of the Law on Internal Affairs,[117] which expanded the competences of the DICCIPS, provided for a system of integrity checks and introduced an obligation for all employees of the Ministry of Interior to report any increase in their assets and the assets of members of their families.[118] Concerning external oversight, three parliamentary committees which are responsible for the supervision of security, defence and intelligence services and also cover, to a certain extent, the police,[119] had carried out several supervisory and working visits between 2020 and 2024. Moreover, external supervision is also carried out by the Ombudsman Office (Civil Control Mechanism) and by the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption.[120] Nevertheless, despite this progress, GRECO stated that further efforts were needed to ensure objective and transparent appraisals of police officers and to strengthen whistleblower protection within the police.[121]

86. According to the European Commission, as regards fight against corruption, the legal and institutional framework is in place, but law enforcement aspects need to be improved.[122] As regards preventive measures, the institutional framework is also in place but the legal framework should be enhanced.[123] The authorities agree on the need to improve law enforcement aspects in combating and preventing corruption.[124] It is critical that the SCPC "acts with the highest level of professionalism, integrity and independence", continues to "provide proactively policy guidance to prevent corruption, and to work in an inclusive and transparent manner" and that its recommendations are effectively followed up. The SCPC, the Public Prosecutor Office and units specialised in combating corruption should be reinforced.[125]

6. The human rights of minorities and combating discrimination

6.1. National minorities

87. North Macedonia is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional country. The Ohrid Framework Agreement, signed on 13 August 2001 between Macedonian and Albanian leaders, enabled the adoption, in 2002, of sweeping constitutional changes empowering ethnic communities in local and national politics, the public sector and education. Representation in the judiciary, police and civil service was to be proportionate to

114. Ibid., paragraph 66.
115. Ibid., paragraphs 32 and 34.
116. Ibid., paragraph 50.
117. Official Gazette No. 160/25.
118. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
119. These are the Committee on Defence and Security, the Committee on Oversight of the Work of the National Security Agency and the Intelligence Agency, and the Committee on the Supervision of the Implementation of the Interception of Communication Measures.
120. GRECO, op. cit., paragraph 57.
121. Ibid, paragraph 67.
122. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p. 6.
123. Ibid., pp. 32-33.
124. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
125. European Commission, North Macedonia 2024 Report, op. cit., p. 6.

the share in the overall population.[126] Commissions for Inter-Community Relations to consult representatives of national minorities were to be established in all municipalities where communities constitute at least 20% of the population.[127]

88. According to the 2021 census, out of 1 836 713 persons living in North Macedonia, 58.44% declared themselves as Macedonians, 24.30% as Albanians, 3.86% as Turks and 2.53% as Roma.[128] North Macedonia has not ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148), although it signed it in 1996.

89. In its Fifth Opinion on North Macedonia adopted in May 2022, the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC) praised the country for having made significant progress in the legal protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, in particular in the field of anti-discrimination and the use of the Albanian language (following the adoption of the Law on the Use of Languages in 2018). The ACFC considered that, at a policy level, the strategy "One Society for All" provided a valuable roadmap towards an integrated multi-ethnic society and was in line with the principles of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities insofar as it promoted respect for diversity through intercultural dialogue. The ACFC noted however, that the practical implementation of legislation and policies on national minorities still needed to be improved.[129] In February 2023,i n its Resolution (2023) 2 based on the ACFC opinion, the Committee of Ministers urged the authorities to take further steps to promote "an integrated society that is based on respect and trust between the various communities" (in particular by providing high-level support, solid financing and outreach to practitioners in education, media, civil society and the general public); to increase efforts to prevent cases of human rights violations against Roma by the police; and improve Roma children's access to education.[130]

90. In June 2023, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance's (ECRI) report on North Macedonia highlighted progress since 2016 in combating discrimination and protecting minority rights, including the creation of the Commission on Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD); the adoption of a new anti-discrimination law; and efforts to improve Roma inclusion in housing, health, education and employment. However, it also raised concerns about the CPPD's lack of financial independence, incidents of violence against those identifying as Bulgarians, and the social marginalisation of Roma.[131]

91. Progress was noted as regards the Roma's situation by the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights ("the Commissioner"), Michael O'Flaherty, who visited North Macedonia at the same time as us (22-25 April 2025). In his memorandum published in July 2025, the Commissioner commended North Macedonia's long-standing commitment to address human rights issues faced by Roma and commended, in particular, the adoption of the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion (2022-2030). He acknowledged efforts by government bodies, the Ombudsperson, and the CPPD, and welcomed the involvement of Roma women in all these structures.[132] The Commissioner also commended progress in eradicating statelessness and improving civil registration among Roma.[133]

92. Moreover, the Commissioner noted progress in Roma children's access to education, thanks to measures like free transportation, the role of educational mediators and scholarships. He noted that the enrolment of Roma children in primary education was now at 90 %.[134] At the same time, he urged the authorities to improve access to pre-school education, to take measures to reduce dropout rates and to tackle the situation of about 400 Roma children in street situations.[135] He also emphasised the importance of ending the segregation of Roma children in schools by enforcing catchment area rules, creating local desegregation

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126. European Western Balkans, 13 August 2021.
127. Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Fifth Opinion on North Macedonia, adopted on 18 May 2022, published on 21 September 2022, ACFC/OP/V(2021)10, paragraph 104.
128. As concerns language, 61.38% of the enumerated population stated that their mother tongue is Macedonian, 24.34% Albanian, 3.41% Turkish and 1.73% Romani. In addition, there are also other, numerically smaller, ethnic, linguistic and religious communities in the country. Source: Republic of North Macedonia State Statistical Office 2022, Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of North Macedonia, 2021 – first dataset, available at: https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSoopstenie_en.aspx?rbrtxt=146.
129. ACFC, op. cit., p. 4.
130. Committee of Ministers, CM/ResCMN(2023)2, 8 February 2023, paragraphs 1, 2 and 3.
131. ECRI, Report on North Macedonia (Sixth monitoring cycle), adopted on 29 June 2023, published on 20 September 2023, p. 5-6.
132. Commissioner for Human Rights, Memorandum on the human rights of Roma and on issues related to the right to a clean and healthy environment in North Macedonia, CommHR(2025)42, 29 July 2025, paragraphs 10 and 11.
133. Ibid., paragraphs 26-38.
134. Ibid., paragraphs 16 and 17.
135. Ibid., p. 7 and paragraph 30.

plans with Roma input, reaching out to non-Roma parents, and monitoring progress through national mapping of affected schools. He encouraged continued commitment to implementing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in *Elmazova and Others v. North Macedonia*.[136] In this judgment, the European Court of Human Rights examined cases of discrimination against Roma pupils due to their segregation in two State elementary schools attended predominantly by Roma children: one a Roma-only school and the other with Roma-only classes. The Court found a violation of Article 14 of the European Convention. on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") in conjunction with Article 2 of the Additional Protocol to the Convention (ETS No. 9).[137]

93. In their submission of 14 November 2025, the authorities informed us that the Ministry of Education and Science was fully committed to fulfilling all the obligations arising from this judgment of the European Court of Human Rights and continued to implement consistent public education policies for the Roma community. The Ministry has accepted the Council of Europe's offer of support in preparing a feasibility study. Through this study, the Ministry will work with all relevant stakeholders to improve the situation of Roma pupils experiencing segregation in the primary schools "Goce Delchev" in Shtip and "Gjorgji Sugarev" in Bitola. Moreover, the Law on Primary Education has been amended.[138]

94. As regards other findings included in the Commissioner's memorandum, while welcoming the acknowledgement in the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion of police violence against Roma as a manifestation of antigypsyism and as "institutional discrimination", the Commissioner expressed concern over continued reports of ethnic profiling, excessive use of force during arrests, and impunity for cases of unlawful use of force. He recommended that the authorities reiterate their stance of zero-tolerance for police violence, ensure effective investigations into allegations of abuse, and ensure that such acts were brought to justice.[139] In response to these findings, in their submission of 14 November 2025, the authorities have stressed that, according to the Law on Internal Affairs, any person who believed that the actions of an employee of the Ministry of Interior had violated their freedoms or rights, or who sought to protect or exercise their rights, had the right to file a complaint with the DICCIPS. According to the authorities, the latter treats all complaints impartially and equally and does not keep records of the ethnic identity of complainants, including whether they belong to the Roma community.

95. During our visit to Skopje, we discussed mainly the situation of the Albanian and Bulgarian minorities. As regards the former, concerns have been raised about the possible consequences of a judgment of the Constitutional Court abolishing the "balancer" mechanism,[140] thus putting in question the Ohrid Framework Agreement. At the end of June 2025, the government finalised a new Law on Fair and Adequate Representation, which stipulates that the composition of public institutions should reflect the ethnic composition of the population. The new draft law is going to be assessed by the Venice Commission. According to the authorities, the "balancer" no longer meets the objectives, as the percentage in the formula does not reflect census data on the resident population. Parallel recruitment procedures designed to increase minority employment in the public sector may, in practice, undermine the principles of merit, effectiveness and equitable representation, and affect the independence of institutions when selecting employees to meet their needs in accordance with equitable representation requirements.[141] Another issue of disagreement is the application of the 2019 Law on the Use of Official Languages, which states that Albanian is a second official language; the issue of its constitutionality has still not been sorted out by the Constitutional Court.[142]

96. The situation of the Bulgarian minority, which is not officially recognised in the Constitution and legislation, affects the State of North Macedonia's negotiations on its EU accession (see below). There are officially about 3 500 ethnic Bulgarians. According to the 2023 ECRI report, they are sometimes victims of hate speech, labelled as "fascists" and physically attacked.[143] ECRI report refers to an arson attack against the Bulgarian Cultural Centre "Ivan Mihajlov" in Bitola on 4 June 2022 and an attack against the Secretary of the Bulgarian Cultural Club "Tsar Boris III" in Ohrid on 19 January 2023. On 2 November 2022, the parliament amended the Law on Foundations and Associations in order to overturn the legal registration of ethnic

136. Ibid., paragraphs 24-30.
137. ECtHR, application No. 11811/2020, judgment of 13 December 2022.
138. Official Gazette of the Republic of North Macedonia, Nos. 161/19, 229/20, 3/25, and 74/25.
139. Commissioner for Human Rights, op. cit., paragraphs 31-35.
140. The "balancer" is a human resources tool, which determines the proportion of public employees from each ethnic group.
141. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.
142. Balkan News, North Macedonia Court Delays Ruling on Language Law Amid Ethnic Tensions | Latest Balkan and Southeast European News | Politics, Sports, Society, and Business, 18 December 2024.
143. ECRI, op. cit., paragraphs 28, 31 and 41-43.

Bulgarians' organisations, which raised several legal issues, including that of retroactive application of the new provisions.[144] Although ECRI was aware of the controversies surrounding the use of the names of Ivan Mihajlov and Tsar Borris III,[145] it has recommended that "the authorities continue taking a strong public stance condemning all forms of violence against persons who self-identify as ethnic Bulgarians or their organisations as well as ensuring that local-level authorities do the same. Also, in line with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the authorities should refrain from cancelling the registration of, or dissolving, associations of persons self-identifying as Bulgarians in North Macedonia, if they do not incite, promote, spread or justify violence, hatred or discrimination.".[146] During our visit, we met with some representatives of the ethnic Bulgarian minority. They complained about cases of anti-Bulgarian rhetoric, hate speech, hate crime and destruction of some historical and cultural sites. The authorities rebutted these allegations.

97. During our visit, we also met the Ombudsman and members of the CPPD, who have an important role in protecting the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. We fully agree with ECRI and the European Commission that the financial and human resources constraints continue to negatively affect their functioning.[147]

98. In November 2025, the authorities informed us that the Ministry of Intercommunity Relations had identified the following strategic priority areas for the 2025-2027 period: establishing protective mechanisms for cultural, ethnic and linguistic identities; improving education in the languages of the communities and monitoring the situation; ensuring equitable representation of ethnic communities in the public sector; ensuring the full use of the official languages of community members at central and local levels and strengthening the capacity and financial support of the civil sector. In 2025, the aforementioned ministry held celebrations to mark the national days of the ethnic communities living in the Republic of North Macedonia. It also works intensively to create a modern, inclusive and efficient public administration that reflects the values of fairness and professionalism.[148]

6.2. LGBTI people's rights

99. In its 2023 report, the ECRI noted the lack of independent comprehensive study on all forms of discrimination against LGBTI persons and the lack of an action plan or platform for dialogue between the government and the LGBTI communities. There is still no legal framework that affords same-sex couples the possibility to have their relationship legally recognised. Furthermore, the conditions for official recognition of a person's new gender are still not clearly regulated (see also below "Execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights").[149]

100. ECRI was also concerned about attacks against an LGBTI centre in Skopje, which had repeatedly occurred without any judicial follow-up.[150] Similar worrying developments were also reported by Amnesty International in 2024. Threats and discriminatory rhetoric preceded the Skopje Pride Day in June 2024 and were followed by a large protest from religious communities against the proposed Gender Equality Act and Law on Birth Registry. The threats led to the Macedonian Helsinki Committee creating a safety guide for LGBTI people. In September 2024, a man received a two-year sentence for severely injuring the president of LGBTI United in Skopje, reflecting the discriminatory nature of the attack.[151]

6.3. Gender equality

101. As regards women's representation, North Macedonia has made progress in advancing gender equality in political and public life. In the last elections, women comprised 43% of parliamentary candidates and a female candidate won the presidential election. However, few political parties featured women speakers at

144. Ibid., paragraphs 41 and 42. The law as amended includes a provision (Article 8 paragraph 4), which reads: "Names that on any basis in the past have been associated [with] and cause racial, religious, national, ethnic and other intolerance, hatred, genocide, extremism, spreading or supporting fascism, Nazism, National Socialism and the Third Reich cannot be used."

145. Ibid., paragraph 42: "ECRI is aware of the public controversy with regard to the use of the name of the historical figure Ivan Mihajlov and his political ideas, which are associated with the view that sees Macedonians as being actually of Bulgarian ethnicity. The naming of the Bulgarian Cultural Club in Ohrid after Tsar Boris III is similarly controversial and provocative, especially considering the Bulgarian role in the occupation of the country during World War II."

146. Ibid., paragraph 46.

147. Ibid., and European Commission, 2025 Rule of Law Report, op. cit., p. 18.

148. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.

149. ECRI, op. cit., p. 5.

150. Ibid.

151. Amnesty International, op. cit., pp. 289-290.

campaign events and appeared to make little effort to engage women voters in general. While all registered candidate lists were in line with the law and had a minimum of 40% representation of women. However, they were often placed in the lowest possible positions.[152]

102. In recent years, North Macedonia has made notable strides toward gender equality, yet challenges persist. The country improved its Gender Equality Index score from 62 points in 2019 to 64.5 in 2022, with significant progress in the domains of power, knowledge, and money.[153]

103. In September 2023, the Council of Europe's Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) published its Baseline Evaluation Report on North Macedonia in which it commended the authorities for having established a solid legal framework to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence, but it regretted significant gaps in their implementation as well as traditional beliefs that such violence is a private matter.[154]

104. According to Amnesty International, in 2024, legal measures were strengthened to combat gender-based violence. North Macedonia aligned its laws with the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CETS No. 210, "Istanbul Convention"), criminalising stalking and sexual harassment. However, the Istanbul Convention faces strong opposition from the Macedonian Orthodox Church and other religious groups, as well as from some local authorities and political parties.[155]

105. In November 2025, the authorities provided us with information about measures taken to implement the Istanbul Convention. The Ministry of Social Policy, Demography and Youth has prepared a draft of the National Strategy for Prevention and Protection from Gender-Based Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (2026-2034), which will be implemented through two four-year action plans. From 2024 to 2025, the campaigns "We Are With You – Together Against Violence Towards Women and Girls" an "Help Is Available for a Life Without Violence" were carried out continuously, including on social media. As part of these campaigns, informational materials such as posters, flyers and stickers were produced to provide information on how to report gender-based and domestic violence. These materials were distributed to all police stations, social work centres, healthcare institutions and general practitioners. During the same period, five one-day training sessions were held for multidisciplinary teams from eight regions. The sessions aimed to enhance the teams' knowledge and practical skills in responding to cases of gender-based and domestic violence.[156]

7. Other human rights issues

7.1. Execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights

106. As of 18 September 2025, the Committee of Ministers was supervising the execution of 36 judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning North Macedonia, including 20 "leading" cases.[157]

107. Four judgments/groups of judgments are under the "enhanced supervision" procedure: cases concerning ill-treatment by police and lack of effective investigation in this respect (Kitanovski group); the *X.* judgment concerning the lack of legislation on conditions and procedures for changing the sex of transgender people on birth certificates; cases concerning refusal to register certain associations as religious entities (Orthodox Ohrid Archdiocese group of cases); and cases about discrimination against Roma pupils due to their segregation in two State elementary school attended by a majority of Roma children (Elmazova and Others). In 2024, the Committee of Ministers noted progress in the implementation of the Kitanovski group of cases. As regards the X. judgment, it urged the authorities to complete the legislative process to adopt a new civil status registration act.

108. In November 2024, the Department for the Execution of the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights went to Skopje to discuss the implementation of several judgments of the Court. They discussed, in particular, the implementation of the case Elmazova and Others, with a specific focus on additional amendments to the recently proposed draft changes to the Primary Education Law.[158]

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152. Doc. 16013, op. cit., p. 89.
153. European Institute for Gender Equality – North Macedonia.
154. GREVIO, Baseline Evaluation Report on North Macedonia, 7 September 2023, p. 6.
155. Amnesty International, "The State of the World Human Rights", p. 18.
156. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
157. North Macedonia – Department for the Execution of Judgments
of the European Court of Human Rights
158. www.coe.int/en/web/roma-and-travellers/-/visit-to-north-macedonia-on-the-execution-of-the-european-court-s-judgments.

7.2. Prison conditions

109. In May 2024, the CPT published the report of its October 2023 periodic visit to the country, in which it concluded that there had been no improvement since 2019 in the treatment of people deprived of their liberty by the police. Although the CPT found some improvements at the Skopje, Štip and Prilep Prisons, the situation at Idrizovo prison remained alarming due to physical ill-treatment by staff and prolonged isolation of challenging prisoners, high levels of inter-prisoner violence, unhygienic and unsafe conditions and pervasive staff corruption and favoritism. The CPT concluded that health care provision was inadequate and that a strategic reform of the prison system should focus on eradicating corruption among staff and professionalising prison management through transparent, merit-based and depoliticised appointments.[159]

110. In June 2024, a state of emergency was declared at Idrizovo prison, prompting the deployment of police and army forces due to security risks resulting from chronic understaffing. In 2021, the CPT had deemed parts of the prison inhumane, overcrowded, and unsanitary. The persistence of impunity for torture and other ill-treatment is facilitated by an underfunded National Preventive Mechanism, insufficient training and investigations, and the failure to implement an independent oversight system for guards and police.[160]

111. On 8 October 2024, the President of the CPT, Alan Mitchell, and the Vice-Governor of the Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), Tomáš Boček, held a reportedly constructive exchange with the Prime Minister, Hristijan Mickoski, on increasing efforts to implement prison reform in the country. Mr Mickoski was briefed about the dire situation in Idrizovo prison. In response, the Prime Minister stated that his government recognised the importance of prison reform as a key component in the criminal justice system and that the country would abide by its international commitments. He acknowledged that the prison system needed greater investment.[161]

112. Moreover, on 4 October 2024, the CPT published the response of the authorities of North Macedonia on its October 2023 visit.[162] The authorities informed about the measures undertaken and planned to implement the CPT's recommendations. These measures referred in particular to the preparatory work for the project to rebuild the closed-regime section of Idrizovo prison, which is being co-funded through a loan from the Council of Europe Development Bank; the improvement of the quality of food provided to prisoners at Idrizovo prison; the recruitment and training of additional prison officers; and the continuous efforts to combat corruption. Finally, the response highlighted the efforts made to combat ill-treatment by the police and to address the prolonged and inadequate restraint of psychiatric patients, to renovate dilapidated psychiatric hospital units, and the ensure the deinstitutionalisation of social care home residents.[163]

113. In November 2025, we received additional information from the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions about the recent measures taken to implement CPT's recommendations, in particular on combating corruption in prisons and correctional institutions (inspections, criminal investigations and proceedings), the continuation of the second construction phase at the Idrizovo prison, trainings for prison staff, launching of procedures for appointments of managerial and other staff in prisons and measures taken to enhance healthcare services in prisons and correctional institutions.[164] We were also informed that the Ministry of Justice had published the new draft Probation Law (2025). The purpose of this law is to address the shortcomings identified in previous probation service practices and improve the system's effectiveness.[165]

7.3. Dealing with the past

114. On 15 January 2024, the former Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, Dunja Mijatović, sent letters to the Prime Ministers of the Council of Europe member States in the region of the former Yugoslavia, in order to recommend specific steps to be taken to deal with their violent past and move more resolutely toward social cohesion, justice and reconciliation. In her letter to the Prime Minister of North Macedonia, while recognising that the conflict in this country was of a much smaller scale than in some of the other countries in the region, she nevertheless invited the authorities to take concrete steps to enhance respect for victims' rights, dealing with past grievances and social cohesion (such as repealing the 2012

159. CPT/Inf(2024)17, op. cit., paragraphs 8 and 67.
160. Amnesty International, op. cit., p. 289.
161. CPT, press release of 8 October 2024.
162. CPT/Inf (2024)29, 4 October 2024.
163. CPT, Council of Europe anti-torture Committee (CPT) publishes the response of the authorities of North Macedonia to the report on the 2023 visit – CPT, 4 October 2024.
164. According to the authorities' comments of 14 November 2025.
165. According to the comments of the chairperson of the delegation of North Macedonia to the Assembly of 6 November 2025.

authentic interpretation of the 2002 Amnesty Law; investigating the files that were transferred by the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia to domestic courts; and reforming the education system).[166]

115. In its resolution of 9 July 2025, the European Parliament recalled the need to open Yugoslav secret archives kept in North Macedonia to "deal with the totalitarian past in a transparent way, with a view to strengthening democracy, accountability and institutions in the Western Balkans".[167]

7.4. Right to a clean and healthy environment

116. During his April 2025 visit to North Macedonia, the Council of Europe Commissioner also examined the issue of environmental protection and its impact on human rights. He noted that three cities in the country – Skopje, Bitola and Tetovo – regularly exceeded safe levels of polluting particles present in the air and ranked among the 10 most polluted cities in Europe, and sometimes the world. According to the European Environmental Agency, each year about 3 600 people in the country die prematurely due to air pollution. The key causes of air pollution are the burning of wood, low quality fuel and waste by private households for heating in winter months, as well as industrial pollution – notably the coal power plant in Bitola, which is the key source of energy in the country – as well as traffic.[168] The Commissioner was concerned about environmental risks disproportionately affecting Roma, including air and waste pollution, and about their exclusion from public services, including clean water, sanitation and the removal of waste (including of the toxic one).[169]

117. While recognising North Macedonia's strong legal and policy framework and international commitments, including constitutional recognition of the right to a healthy environment, the Commissioner noted that poor implementation negatively impacts health and human rights. He recommended ensuring that courts are empowered to address environmental human rights violations and recommended supporting environmental human rights defenders, including through access to funding and safeguards against SLAPPs.[170]

8. European integration

118. North Macedonia has remained dedicated to its European integration process. On 26 March 2020, the Council of the European Union decided to open membership negotiations with North Macedonia (and Albania) – a decision that the country had waited for since 2004, when it applied for membership in the EU.[171]

119. Nevertheless, the country's accession to the European Union is still being delayed by a dispute with Bulgaria concerning history, language and culture. In July 2022, following a French proposal aimed at lifting Bulgaria's veto on North Macedonia's accession to the EU, it was agreed that the country would amend its Constitution to include a reference to the Bulgarian minority in the preamble to the Constitution. On 18 July 2023, the previous government adopted the initiative for constitutional changes, which was submitted to parliament.[172] The draft foresaw the inclusion of six further communities in the preamble and in two articles of the Constitution, namely Bulgarian people, Croatian people, Montenegrin people, Slovenian people, Jewish people, and Egyptian people. On 18 August 2023, a plenary session to adopt these constitutional amendments was adjourned as the required two-third majority votes could not be ensured.[173]

120. The current Prime Minister, Mr Mickoski, said that his government would only amend the Constitution if Bulgaria first approved North Macedonia's EU membership. Mr Mickoski also invoked the fact that Bulgaria had not yet implemented the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights concerning the registration of

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166. Commissioner for Human Rights, Commissioner highlights key steps to better respect the rights of victims and deal with the past in the region of the former Yugoslavia – Commissioner for Human Rights, 8 February 2024.
167. European Parliament, 2023 and 2024 reports on North Macedonia, P10_TA(2025)0157, 9 July 2025, item 81.
168. Commissioner for Human Rights, CommHR(2025)42, op. cit., paragraph 30.
169. Ibid., paragraphs 39-41.
170. Ibid., pp. 15-16.
171. In March 2004. On 23 February 2004, the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the European Union and North Macedonia entered into force. In December 2005, the country was granted a candidate status by the Council of the European Union. In October 2009, the European Commission recommended the opening of accession negotiations.
172. Prepared by a working group composed of 23 representatives from different political parties, including MPs and experts. Opposition parties, including VMRO-DPMNE and Levica, did not take part in it.
173. Several notable protests were held throughout July 2022, organised by the country's main opposition, VMRO–DPMNE, against the French proposal.

associations of Macedonians living in that country. While a new Bulgarian Government was appointed in January 2025 led by Rosen Zhelyazkov – a centre-right politician and a former parliamentary speaker – observers are skeptical that it will solve the impasse with North Macedonia.[174]

121. The relations with Bulgaria and also with the European Union have become even more strained after the EU ambassadors meeting in Brussels on 25 September 2024, which decided to push ahead with Albania's EU accession process, independently of North Macedonia even though the negotiations on EU accession for the two Western Balkan countries were coupled and formally launched in 2022.[175] The first set of accession negotiations between Albania and the EU were formally opened on 15 October 2024.

122. In November 2024, the EU's Enlargement Commissioner, Marta Kos, said that she expected North Macedonia to proceed with adopting the constitutional amendment.[176] A similar position was expressed by the European Parliament on 9 July 2025 in a resolution on the European Commission's 2023 and 2024 reports on North Macedonia. The European Parliament praised the country's pro-European and pro-NATO policies and welcomed the progress in democracy and socio-economic reforms. It backed North Macedonia's path towards the EU. It recalled, however, that the Council of the EU had not excluded the adoption of further new conditions (i.e. other than the implementation of the 'French proposal') for the starting of accession negotiations.[177] It was also concerned about the authorities' strengthening alliances with "illiberal regimes".

123. During our visit in Skopje, we discussed the issue of EU accession and the required constitutional changes with many interlocutors, including MPs and the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The majority of our interlocutors from various parliamentary committees and political groups did not object to the adoption of the constitutional amendment. However, the authorities and MPs supporting them expressed the opinion that such amendment could be adopted only on the condition that it would only enter into force once North Macedonia had joined the European Union.

9. Conclusion

124. This report presents the main developments which occurred in North Macedonia in relation with the implementation of Assembly's Resolution 2304 (2019). Referring to the conclusions included in this resolution, we have focused on the functioning of democratic institutions, the electoral framework, the judiciary, measures taken to combat and prevent corruption, and the pursuance of inclusive policies aimed at securing the rights of minorities (including Roma's rights) and we have also looked at the general human rights situation in the country.

125. We conclude that North Macedonia is a well-functioning democracy, where human rights and fundamental freedoms (including political freedoms – such as the rights to freedom of association, assembly and expression, and media pluralism) are generally respected. Nevertheless, there is an urgent need to reform the electoral framework, in line with long-standing recommendations from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission. We hope that, following the conclusion of the recent local elections, the authorities will take the necessary legislative measures without delay.

126. As regards respect for rule of law, the authorities have been taken a number of measures to reform the judiciary and the prosecution services and to fight and prevent corruption. We welcome in particular progress achieved as regards ensuring transparency of work of the Judicial Council, the functioning of the judiciary in general and the implementation of GRECO's recommendations in order to better fight and prevent corruption. Nevertheless, we remain concerned about numerous allegations of politicisation of the judiciary and widespread corruption throughout the public sector, as well as the lack of effective measures to combat these phenomena.

127. North Macedonia, is a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional country, which could serve as a model for other countries in promoting a "living together" culture and mentality, although some issues still need to be sorted out such as the reform of "balancer" mechanism, respect of the rights of persons belonging to the Bulgarian ethnic minority, the living conditions of Roma people and their educational rights.

174. Bulgaria-North Macedonia Dispute: New Governments, Old Dividing Lines | Balkan Insight.
175. Euractiv: Albania's EU path decoupled from North Macedonia while Skopje remains in limbo.
176. https://constitutionnet.org/news/european-union-official-calls-north-macedonia-change-constitution.
177. European Parliament, 2023 and 2024 reports, op. cit.

128. While human rights and fundamental freedoms are generally respected, we remain nevertheless concerned about the poor conditions in some places of detention (especially in the Idrizovo prison) and urge the authorities to implement without delay the outstanding CPT recommendations, in co-operation with the Council of Europe Development Bank.

129. We regret that so far, the parliament has not been able to find a compromise to implement the “French proposal” by including a reference to the Bulgarian ethnic minority in the Constitution, which is a condition for moving ahead in the negotiation process of accession to the European Union.

130. In conclusion, we propose to close the post-monitoring dialogue with North Macedonia. However, we would also like to suggest that the Monitoring Committee devote within a few years one of its future periodic reviews to North Macedonia to evaluate progress meet with regard the non-resolved issues such as the reform of the electoral framework, the judiciary and the prosecution services, combating corruption, the pursuance of inclusive policies aimed at securing the rights of minorities and poor conditions in detention centres.