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2025 Rule of Law Report Country Chapter on the rule of law situation in North Macedonia

Accompanying the document

**Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the
European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions**

2025 Rule of Law Report The rule of law situation in the European Union

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ABSTRACT

North Macedonia continued implementing its judicial reform. Interference and pressure from other State branches raise serious concerns about judicial independence. The dismissal procedure launched against the Chief Prosecutor exposed shortcomings in the rules for the dismissal and a risk of politicisation. Measures were taken across the judiciary to enhance transparency, while some concerns remain regarding appointment decisions. Legislative drafting processes are ongoing regarding the independence of the judiciary and the autonomy of the public prosecution service. The limited financial resources allocated to the judiciary continue to affect its financial autonomy. While the lack of human resources was partly mitigated by new recruitments, shortages of staff remain a concern. Efforts to further improve the digital tools for case management and court statistics continue, but challenges remain, such as with outdated infrastructure. The efficiency of the judiciary has overall declined as the length of proceedings increased for almost all case categories.

Implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy continues to be insufficient overall. Despite recent efforts in investigating and prosecuting corruption, delays in court proceedings and resource constraints continue to hinder the establishment of a robust track record of high-level corruption cases. The 2023 amendments to the Criminal Code continue to significantly undermine efforts to combat corruption, particularly affecting the prosecution of high-level corruption cases. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption continues to focus on prevention and institutional cooperation but is less active in detecting and reporting alleged instances of corruption. Concerns remain regarding the effective verification of asset declarations. Effective oversight of political party financing continues to be hampered by an inadequate legislative framework and a lack of resources and expertise. Whistleblower protection remains weak, discouraging individuals from reporting corruption. Corruption risks are high, in particular in the healthcare and public procurement areas, while the impact of political influence on efforts to address corruption is highlighted as a concern.

The financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services has been improved. Appointments of new members to its Council are still pending. The self-regulatory Council of Media Ethics continues its activities despite concerns about securing long-term sustainable funding. The Public Service Broadcaster faces challenges despite improvements in its funding. Challenges remain concerning transparency of media ownership. The reintroduction of state-funded advertising has drawn criticism from media experts and civil society organisations. While the legal framework for access to public information is in place, its inconsistent implementation can pose challenges to the effective exercise of this right. Despite some progress in strengthening the legal protection for journalists, their working environment has not improved.

The Parliament is implementing the new Rules of Procedure, which were adopted with the aim of improving its oversight and efficiency. Challenges remain regarding parliamentary appointments which raise concerns about merit-based selections. Shortcomings remain in implementing processes for inclusive and evidence-based policymaking. The new Constitutional Court Act entered into force, strengthening its role in the monitoring and enforcement of its decisions. Financial and human resource constraints continue to affect the functioning of the Ombudsperson's Office and of the Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination. The Government initiated measures to enhance cooperation with civil society, while civil society raised challenges, including online hate speech.

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM¹

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in North Macedonia continues to be very low among both the general public and companies. Overall, 28% of the general population and 26% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2025². The perceived judicial independence remains low but has increased in comparison with 2024 both among the general public (25% in 2024) and companies (20% in 2024). The main reasons cited by the general public for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges are the perception of interference or pressure from the Government and politicians as well as, cited by both the general public and companies, the interference or pressure from economic or other specific interests³.

North Macedonia continued implementing the Strategy for Judicial Reform 2024-2028, although challenges remain. The implementation rate of activities planned in 2024 stands at 42.9%⁴. Key challenges to the implementation were insufficient interinstitutional coordination and cooperation, as well as lack of funding and human resources. The budget planned for 2025 does not provide for the funds necessary to implement the envisaged measures. A Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy was established in May 2024, but did not meet in 2024⁵, which called into question the proper monitoring and coordination among involved institutions. In 2025, the Council was restructured in an effort to improve its functioning, including to ensure regular meetings and coordination for the implementation of the Justice Sector Strategies⁶. The Council has not yet met in its new composition.

Interference and pressure from other State branches raise serious concerns about the respect for judicial independence. Initiatives presented by the Government as aiming to tackle corruption have largely focused on taking ‘robust action’ against the judiciary, which in some instances raised serious concerns regarding the respect for the independence of the judiciary and the principle of separation of powers. This is particularly the case as regards announcements from the highest Government level about plans to ‘dissolve’ the Judicial Council and the Council of Prosecutors. Following public statements from Government officials repeatedly calling for the dismissal of the members of the Judicial Council, in March 2025, the Parliament voted on ‘interpellation motions’⁷ against the five non-magistrate

¹ An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

² Flash Eurobarometers 554 and 555 (2025). The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

³ Flash Eurobarometers 554 and 555 (2025); Flash Eurobarometers 540 and 541 (2024).

⁴ Ministry of Justice (2024a). Of the 152 planned activities for 2024, 24 have been fully implemented, implementation of 69 is ongoing, and 57 have not yet been started.

⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025), pp. 1. The Ministry of Justice has prepared in June an annual report for the implementation of the Action Plan of the Justice System Development Strategy (2024-2028). A semi-annual report for the implementation of the Action Plan of the Justice System Development Strategy (2024-2028) will be also prepared and published in July 2025.

⁶ Ibidem.

⁷ Interpellations are inquiries into the work of public official by the Parliament. According to the Parliament’s Rule of Procedures, interpellations can be raised ‘for the work of any public official’ (Art. 45). If the motion is adopted, the parliament can adopt a conclusion on the contents of the interpellation.

members of the Judicial Council, which are elected by the Parliament⁸. While these motions do not provide the legal grounds for dismissing the Judicial Council members, they amount to *de facto* political no confidence votes⁹, and as such risk undermining the legitimacy and independence of the Council members. The reasons cited for the interpellations in the parliament were unprofessional performance of duties that eroded the already low public trust in the judiciary. In addition, Government officials publicly called that these votes should lead to the resignation of the Council members. The use of the interpellation motions was criticised by stakeholders¹⁰. Judges and prosecutors are also facing increased pressure from public smear campaigns, online and in the media, including by high officials of the executive and politicians¹¹. The President of the Judicial Council resigned in December 2024, citing undue political pressure as a reason, while continuing to serve as a Council member¹². A week later, the premises of the Judicial Council were searched by the police, following a notification by the Ministry of the Interior¹³. A new President of the Judicial Council was unanimously elected by its members in January 2025¹⁴. Moreover, in an effort to address wider concerns of undue influence in the judiciary, the Supreme Court, in collaboration with civil society organisations, is developing a project to internally report allegations of undue interference, since the existing avenues are deemed ineffective¹⁵.

The dismissal procedure launched against the Chief Prosecutor exposed shortcomings in the rules for the dismissal and its risk of politicisation. In March 2025, the Government initiated a dismissal procedure against the Chief Prosecutor, invoking, among others, that the Chief Prosecutor harmed the reputation of the judiciary¹⁶. The current grounds for a serious disciplinary violation, which can lead to the dismissal of the Chief Prosecutor,¹⁷ include broad definitions, such as ‘improper behaviour that damage the reputation of the public prosecution office’, which leave room for legal uncertainty and politicisation of the dismissal

⁸ In December 2024, the Parliament had not approved the Judicial Council’s 2023 annual report which provides a legal basis to initiate a debate in the bodies which elected members of the Judicial Council about an assessment of their respective work (Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia (2024, 2025)).

⁹ 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 (Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia (2025)).

¹⁰ European Parliament (2025), §5: “Urges the authorities of North Macedonia to refrain from opaque, politicised dismissals from, and appointments to, positions within independent bodies and agencies, as well as to ensure that the organisations are adequately funded, and that decisions and recommendations are implemented consistently”. Country Visit North Macedonia (2025), Judicial Council, Coalition All for Fair Trials, IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law”, European Policy Institute Skopje (2024); Citizen Association Institute for Human Rights (2024), mia.mk (2025a).

¹¹ Country visit North Macedonia, Associations for judges and prosecutors.

¹² Judicial Council (2024a).

¹³ The Skopje Basic Public Prosecutor’s Office explained that the search was conducted in relation to a notification from the Interior Ministry that ordered to secure the minutes of a Council Session that discussed the term limit of the former Council President. European Policy Institute Skopje (2025).

¹⁴ Judicial Council (2025c).

¹⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 12.

¹⁶ The Government claimed that the Chief prosecutor reportedly proposed in the Council of Public Prosecutors an unlawful nomination to a higher prosecution office, exercised undue pressure upon the lower prosecution services, and that the country’s drop in the Transparency International corruption perception index was imputable to the alleged poor performances of the Chief Prosecutor. North Macedonia was ranked 88th in 2024, losing two positions from the 2023 index (Transparency International, 2024). 24.mk (2025); Balkan EU (2025)

¹⁷ Law on the Public Prosecutor’s Office (2020), Articles 88 and 91.

of the Chief Prosecutor¹⁸. On 26 March 2025, the Government announced that it would halt the dismissal procedure, noting the importance to ensure the continuation of the prosecutors' work in the aftermath of the 16 March fire in a nightclub in Kochani¹⁹. In April, the Council of Public Prosecutors provided a negative opinion, not supporting the dismissal proposal²⁰.

Measures were taken across the judiciary to enhance transparency, while some concerns remain regarding judicial and prosecutorial appointment decisions. New systems to register audio and video recordings of court hearings were introduced, thereby replacing obsolete technology and improving transparency²¹. In September 2024, the Supreme Court revised its Rules of Procedure²², allowing public access and media presence to general sessions. The Supreme Court and Judicial-Media Council²³ issued joint recommendations to ensure reporting on court cases of public interest, in an effort to improve transparency and public trust²⁴. Almost all acts adopted by the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors²⁵ are made publicly available on their websites, and the sessions are public. Judicial Council sessions are broadcast²⁶, whereas Council of Public Prosecutors' sessions allow journalists and CSOs to attend, without broadcasting²⁷. The Judicial Council made progress addressing the recommendations from the 2023 Peer Review Mission within its competences²⁸, notably to strengthen merit-based appointments and promotions, and to enhance transparency²⁹. As of September 2024, the Judicial Council has been implementing its new rules of procedures requiring provision of both oral and written explanations for the selection or non-selection of judges³⁰. However, transparency is still implemented inconsistently, as the reasoning is often insufficiently substantiated³¹. For the Council of Public Prosecutors, no similar transparency rules are in place and the decision-

¹⁸ Article 88, Law on Public Prosecution. European standards call for clarity on the conditions for the pre-term dismissal of the Prosecutor General, including an *ex-ante* opinion of an expert body as to whether there are sufficient grounds for dismissal, and a fair hearing of the Prosecutor General in dismissal proceedings. Venice Commission (2010), paras. 39-40.

¹⁹ The Government noted that no matter the opinion of the Council of Public Prosecutors, the Government would not proceed to send it for a vote in Parliament. 4News.mk (2025), mia.mk (2025b).

²⁰ The procedure prescribes that the Council of Public Prosecutors provides a non-binding opinion on the dismissal request from the government, before it can be submitted for a vote to the Parliament. Council of Public Prosecutors (2025b).

²¹ Judicial Council (2024b).

²² Official Gazette No.199/24.

²³ The Judicial-Media Council was established by the Association of Judges and brings together judges and journalists to enhance transparency and tackle misinformation by providing guidance and standards for reporting on court cases of public interest.

²⁴ Supreme Court of the Republic of North Macedonia (2024a). In one case, a judge from the Basic Court in Bitola failed to comply, prompting an ongoing legal review by the Supreme Court. European Policy Institute (2025).

²⁵ The Council of Public Prosecutors (CPP) has a new, more accessible website.

²⁶ In line with its Communication Strategy (2024-2028), see Judicial Council (2024c).

²⁷ Country Visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law".

²⁸ In September 2023, a team of European experts conducted a peer review mission focused on strengthening the functioning and independence of the Judicial Council through the EU's TAIEX programme. The Judicial Council has implemented 7 out of 17 recommendations that do not require constitutional or legislative amendments.

²⁹ Citizen Association Institute for Human Rights (2024).

³⁰ Country visit North Macedonia, Institute for Human Rights.

³¹ Country visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law", Coalition All for Fair Trials, European Policy Institute.

making is generally less transparent, despite some recent improvements³². In addition, stakeholders remain concerned about the lack of a merit-based selection process³³. In October 2024, the selection process for the new Director of the Academy for Judges was also criticised for the lack of a clear legal procedure³⁴.

Legislative drafting processes are ongoing regarding the independence of the judiciary and the autonomy of the public prosecution service. Following the 2023 Peer Review mission, a process started to implement its recommendations, and a revised draft law of the Judicial Council has been prepared³⁵. The draft law aims to align with European standards, and among others, strengthen the independence of the judiciary, by clarifying the selection procedure and qualification requirements for Council members, and provisions concerning the appointment and disciplinary procedures of judges and Judicial Council members. The draft law was published for public consultation and sent to the Venice Commission which adopted an opinion in June, recommending that the grounds for dismissal are clarified³⁶. In parallel, work to amend the Law on Public Prosecution and the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors started in November³⁷. The amendments would aim to implement European standards and strengthen the autonomy of the prosecution service, including GRECO recommendations³⁸, focusing on automatic case distribution, and clarifying oversight and accountability procedures, as well as disciplinary violations, sanctions, and reinforcing the Council's role³⁹.

Quality

Limited financial resources allocated to the judiciary continue to affect its financial autonomy. 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 GDP⁴⁰, 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

³² Country Visit, North Macedonia, civil society organisations, IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law”. In March 2025, the Council of Public Prosecutors started providing explanations for its decisions regarding the election of prosecutors of the 8th generation graduates of the Academy. Council of Public Prosecutors (2025d).

³³ Country Visit North Macedonia, Coalition All for Fair Trials, IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law”.

³⁴ While the law requires a public vote, no further details for the voting procedure are specified through by-laws or rulebooks. In the absence of clear internal voting procedures, the Academy’s Managing Board held a vote by selecting one of more candidates on a ballot. The unsuccessful candidate challenged the appointment with the Administrative Court. Transparency International Macedonia (2024).

³⁵ IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law” (2025). The consultations covered key recommendations of the peer review, including the election process for Judicial Council members in the Parliament, disciplinary liability of Council members, and defining the competent authorities for action and the right to appeal.

³⁶ Venice Commission on the draft Law on Judicial Council (2025a) p. 13.

³⁷ Government of North Macedonia (2025), p. 2. A revised Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors is intended to align it with the Justice Sector Reform Strategy 2024-2028, including to improve the transparency of the Council of Public Prosecutors. The draft Law on Public Prosecution was published for public consultation in April 2025. It will be submitted as well for the opinion of the Venice Commission.

³⁸ GRECO (2024), Recommendation No 16 (2).

³⁹ Regarding amendments to the Law on Public Prosecution, the working group aims to enhance electronic case allocation mechanisms and clarify the oversight and accountability powers of competent institutions and public prosecutors, while also addressing the disciplinary framework.

⁴⁰ 2010 Law on the Court Budget; Law on judicial budget, OG No. 60/2003, 37/2006, 103/2008 and 145/2010.

envisaged 0.4%⁴¹. The budget allocation declined in 2024 compared to the previous year. The courts and prosecution offices still need formal approval from the Ministry of Finance for internal budget allocations, such as resource and staffing decisions, which does not allow them budgetary autonomy⁴². The laws regulating the salaries of judges, public prosecutors, members of the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors were amended in December, resulting in a remuneration freeze at the level of the previous year⁴³.

The deficit of human resources in the judiciary was partly addressed by new recruitments but remains a concern. Staffing levels at the end of 2024 were critically low, ranging from 20-50% for courts, with similarly low figures in prosecution offices⁴⁴. In February 2025, the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors published vacancies for the graduates of the Academy for Judges and Prosecutors, 50 for judges and 47 for public prosecutors. Following the application processes⁴⁵, 49 new judges were elected, but only 28 public prosecutors. Therefore 19 vacancies as public prosecutor remained unfilled. Both Councils published a new round of vacancies, *de facto* competing for recruiting the unelected candidates⁴⁶, and 19 more judges were elected⁴⁷. A further aggravating factor is that currently no training of new judges and prosecutors takes place. The ongoing admission process to the Academy, which was launched more than two years ago and aims to recruit 130 trainees, remains on hold⁴⁸, for reasons which remain unclear⁴⁹. Another challenge is the lack of implementation of the human resource strategies for the

⁴¹ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 14-15.

⁴² Country visit North Macedonia, Judicial Council, PPO, Association of Judges, Association of Public Prosecutors. The Government intends to have amendments to the Law on Judicial Budget prepared and adopted by December 2025. Analysis has been prepared for the judicial and public prosecutor's budgets, which provide further recommendations and guidelines. Government of North Macedonia (2025), p. 3. That the Ministry of Finance decides on details of the operational budget of judicial bodies contains dangers of undue interference in the independent exercise of their functions. Venice Commission (2025b), p. 25, see also Venice Commission (2012), §§95-98; (1995), p. 3.

⁴³ Official Gazette No. 272/2024. Amendments to the laws regulating the salaries of judges, public prosecutors, members of the Judicial Council and members of the Council of Public Prosecutors and the Law on court service have been prepared and submitted in Governmental procedure. Government of North Macedonia (2025), p.4.

⁴⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 9, 17. According to the data for end 2024, the total number of judicial positions planned for all courts is 539, of which 268 are filled, and 271 remain vacant. In the Public Prosecutor's Office only 169 out of 261 prosecutor positions are filled and only 360 out of 1 126 administrative staff positions occupied. Furthermore, there are just six IT officers serving the entire country; Council of Public Prosecutors (2025a).

⁴⁵ The Judicial Council elects judges. The Council elects a judge of a basic court from the list of candidates, submitted by the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors, that applied on the announcement, following an interview conducted by Council.

⁴⁶ Judicial Council (2025b), Council of Public Prosecutors (2025c): On 11 and 12 March 2025, the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors adopted decisions to publish new vacancies, for 35 judges and 19 public prosecutors respectively. The situation has led to conflicting views, with the Council of Public Prosecutors opposing the Judicial Council's decision to announce a second vacancy.

⁴⁷ Judicial Council (2025a).

⁴⁸ The ongoing intake process had been launched in January 2023 and was initially delayed due to technical and procurement issues, then postponed for the election period in 2024. The Ministry of Finance informed the Managing Board of the Academy that no funds were secured in the 2025 state budget for recruiting 130 candidates. See public statement of the Managing Board of the Academy of Judges and Public Prosecutors (2025). The Academy is awaiting a government decision to proceed with the intake process. Given that no recruitment is ongoing, there will be a gap of several years before new graduates of the Academy become judges and prosecutors.

⁴⁹ Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee with North Macedonia (2025). Country Visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law", Academy for Judges and Prosecutors.

Courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office, which were adopted in 2020. The specified targets and timelines under the strategies' action plans have not been achieved⁵⁰. Elections to higher courts were also delayed, including judges to the Supreme Court, where only 14 out of 26 positions are filled⁵¹. A new president of the Supreme Court was elected in May. In February 2025, the Law on Labour Relations was amended enabling judges and prosecutors to opt to serve beyond the retirement age of 64, which may contribute to reducing the deficit in human resources in the judiciary to a certain extent⁵². Regarding judicial training, the Academy continued to strengthen its curricula for basic and continuous training, while also struggling with insufficient staffing, inadequate technical equipment, and unsuitable premises.

Efforts to further improve the digital tools for case management and court statistics continue, but challenges remain. While some progress has been made to advance digitalisation, for example to provide new computers, this fell short of addressing the courts' IT needs. Courts still struggle with outdated infrastructure, insufficient IT support, and inconsistent application of digital tools⁵³. The Council for Coordination of Information and Communication Technology in Judicial Bodies (ICT Council), established by the Ministry of Justice, leads the digitisation process. In November 2024, a Rulebook on the composition and functioning of the Council was adopted, aiming to increase its efficiency and technical expertise⁵⁴. The Automated Court Case Management Information System (ACCMIS) continues to require improvements, in particular to take into account case complexity⁵⁵. Between October and December 2024, the Commission for Supervision of ACCMIS conducted reviews in 13 courts, confirming that ACCMIS was operational in all these courts and that cases were assigned solely through the ACCMIS system. However, in numerous instances, exemptions from the automatic allocation of cases were registered and cases were reallocated by the court president. The randomised allocation of cases is also limited by the fact that for certain courts there are not sufficient judges to allow a random allocation⁵⁶. The prosecution service's new case management system is under development with the help of international support⁵⁷. The plans envisage the interoperability between the systems, enabling the efficient transfer information with courts, and the full tracing of cases⁵⁸. The challenges of the sector persist, notably shortage of qualified IT technicians and auxiliary legal personnel.

Efficiency

The efficiency of the justice system has overall declined as the length of proceedings increased for almost all case categories. Except for first instance administrative cases, the clearance rate lay below 100% in 2023 in all case categories for both first and second instance, meaning that there were more incoming than resolved cases over the year, and thus

⁵⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 17. 2024 Enlargement report, North Macedonia.

⁵¹ Ministry of Justice (2025), p. 2. Elections of new judges of the Court of Appeals were partly completed and three Supreme Court judges were elected in April.

⁵² Parliament of the Republic of North Macedonia, Archive number 08-751/1 (2025).

⁵³ Supreme Court (2024c).

⁵⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 18; Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee with North Macedonia (2025).

⁵⁵ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 28.

⁵⁶ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 9.

⁵⁷ A Commission for the Coordination of Activities Related to Information and Communication Technology in Public Prosecutor's Offices was established in June 2024 and is responsible for coordinating activities related to the IPA III programme of the European Union for the development of a new computer system in the Public Prosecutor's Office. Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p.10.

⁵⁸ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 19.

the numbers of pending cases are increasing. There is a concerning negative development from 2022-2023 especially for second instance administrative cases, where the clearance rate dropped from 103% to 69%, and the disposition time more than tripled, from 92 to 306 days. The respective pending cases at the end of year have more than doubled. For civil and commercial second instance cases, the development is also negative, the clearance rate declined from 97% to 86% and the disposition time increased from 166 to 257 days. For second instance criminal cases, the clearance rate remained stable at 99%, while the disposition time increased from 129 to 149 days. In first instance, the indicators show an improvement for administrative cases with the clearance rate increasing from 104% to 112%, and the disposition time declining from 303 to 283 days. For civil and commercial cases, the first instance clearance rate improved from 85% to 93%, while the disposition time increased from 312 to 339 days. For criminal cases, however, the negative trend from 2021 to 2022 continued also in 2023, with a clearance rate declining from 94% to 88% and a disposition time increasing from 159 days to 223 days⁵⁹.

II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The perception among experts, citizens and businesses is that the level of corruption in the public sector is high. In the 2024 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, North Macedonia scores 40/100 and ranks 88th globally⁶⁰. This perception has improved over the past five years⁶¹. The 2025 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 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%). As regards businesses, 91% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 63%) and 54% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 35%). Furthermore, 34% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 36%), while 50% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 33%)⁶².

Implementation of the national anti-corruption strategy 2021-2025 continues to be insufficient overall. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) reported in its annual report of 2025⁶³ that out of 154 activities planned for 2024, only 28 activities (18%) have been fully implemented, 49 activities (32%) are in the process of implementation, while 77 (50%) have not yet been implemented. The slow implementation rate of the Strategy reflects a general lack of political commitment and ownership among the involved state institutions⁶⁴. In line with the legal requirements, the 2024 report on the implementation of the strategy has been submitted to the Parliament in March 2025⁶⁵ and published on the website of the SCPC. Together with external experts, the SCPC has analysed the main obstacles to fully implement the anti-corruption strategy over the past five years. The analysis

⁵⁹ CEPEJ (2024), pp. 16-20.

⁶⁰ The level of perceived corruption is categorised as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (between 79-60), relatively high (between 59-50), high (below 50).

⁶¹ In 2020 the score was 35, while, in 2025, the score is 40. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points); has been relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.

⁶² Data from Special Eurobarometer 561 (2025) and Flash Eurobarometer 557 (2025).

⁶³ State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2025a).

⁶⁴ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 33.

⁶⁵ State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2025b).

points to inefficient inter-institutional coordination, insufficient monitoring and budget planning, a lack of expertise due to frequent staff turnover and methodological flaws⁶⁶. Work has started on drafting a new Strategy for 2026-2030, taking into account the findings of the analysis and its recommendations⁶⁷. The composition of the inter-institutional body for coordination of anti-corruption activities⁶⁸ now also includes a CSO representative as voting member⁶⁹, which is a positive development⁷⁰.

Despite recent efforts in investigating and prosecuting corruption, delays in court proceedings and resource constraints continue to hinder the establishment of a robust track record of high-level corruption cases. High-level corruption cases often face delays or result in minimal sentences, which reinforces public scepticism about the judiciary's effectiveness. Investigations into high-profile cases rarely lead to final convictions⁷¹. In December 2024, the Chief Prosecutor issued a mandatory instruction that all public prosecutors must prioritise corruption cases alongside cases of significant public interest⁷². Investigative centres within the prosecutor's offices are also required to give these cases precedence. The Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) has reported strengthened capacity for investigations, better inter-institutional collaboration, and four investigative centres are now operational⁷³. 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 Procedure⁷⁴. Despite a relocation to new premises, the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (OCCPPO) continues to lack adequate budget and staff, notably financial experts.

The effect of the amendments to the Criminal Code continues to significantly undermine efforts to combat corruption, particularly affecting the prosecution of high-level corruption cases. The implementation of the amended Criminal Code⁷⁵ continues to result in termination of additional ongoing cases, notably of the former Special Public Prosecutor's Office (SPO). Several cases had to be terminated at investigation or court phase, either because they became time-barred due to the reduction of penalties of the offences concerned, or because the specific offences had been removed from the Criminal Code⁷⁶. Nevertheless, there are no precise official data on how many corruption cases are affected by these amendments. A ruling of the Supreme Court maintained abuse of office in public

⁶⁶ USAID (2024) and Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 26.

⁶⁷ USAID (2024).

⁶⁸ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 14.

⁶⁹ Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee with North Macedonia (2025).

⁷⁰ The constitutive session of the Interinstitutional Body for coordination of anti-corruption activities under the chairpersonship of Deputy Prime Minister for Good Governance took place on 8 April. The re-establishment of this body could be a positive development pending political leadership and shared vision.

⁷¹ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 29. Country visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law".

⁷² In the aftermath of the Kochani tragedy, the PPO has started several investigations. Currently, the investigation is conducted against 45 individuals. The majority are suspected and charged with serious crimes against public safety under Art. 292 in conjunction with Art. 288 of the Criminal Code.

⁷³ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 33, 113.

⁷⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 33.

⁷⁵ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 13. According to North Macedonia's Criminal Procedure Code, the reduction in maximum penalties has implications and reduces the applicable statute of limitations.

⁷⁶ Article 353 (5) abuse of office in public procurement.

procurement as a criminal offence, but with lighter sentences⁷⁷. In addition, the new provisions moved jurisdiction over cases involving high-level corruption from the dedicated Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (OCCPPO) to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices (PPOs)⁷⁸, where insufficient specialisation and lack of resources may hinder the effective prosecution of such offences⁷⁹. The lower penalties for perpetrators of corruption, and the legal uncertainty that the amendments caused, have further contributed to a sense of impunity⁸⁰. In March 2025, the Constitutional Court has 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 Court can decide whether to repeal or annul them⁸¹. In parallel, initial steps are being taken towards reform. The Ministry of Justice has formed a working group to prepare amendments to the existing Criminal Code to address the negative impacts of the changes made in September 2023 and ensure effective enforcement⁸². Moreover, the Ministry of Justice is also preparing a comprehensive new Criminal Code, to be adopted by the Parliament by December 2025, and a new Law on Criminal Procedure. The latter would focus on areas such as confiscation, asset freezing, electronic evidence, financial investigations, special investigative measures, detention, and the appeals process⁸³.

The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) continues to focus on prevention and institutional cooperation but is less active in detecting and reporting alleged instances of corruption. Challenges remain at the SCPC regarding staff as well as funding for and interoperability of data management systems⁸⁴. Stakeholders have raised concerns about SCPC's overall lack of proactivity in initiating cases and in verifying the facts of the cases when it does pursue allegations, which may hinder its effectiveness, particularly as the SCPC often relies on media reports to identify possible cases of corruption⁸⁵. The process of amending the Law on Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest, which regulates the work of the SCPC, has been re-initiated, with a focus on strengthening the penalties⁸⁶. A new Memorandum of Cooperation was prepared in October 2024, aiming to

⁷⁷ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 32.

⁷⁸ Following the changes to the Criminal Code, Article 353(5), abuse of office in public procurement, was deleted from the Criminal Code. Prior to that, this offence was exclusively under the jurisdiction of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption for the entire country (Article 32 of the Law on PPO).

⁷⁹ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 30; Chief Public Prosecution (2024).

⁸⁰ Country visit North Macedonia, State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, civil society organisations.

⁸¹ Constitutional Court of the Republic of North Macedonia (2025). The Court's President highlighted that there are constitutionality reservations as to the use of the fast-tracked 'EU flag' procedure, the differing timing for the entry into force of relevant provisions, and the substance of the amendments.

⁸² Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 8: Notably, the crime 'Abuse of Official Position and Authority' would be redefined because its present description raises many application issues, with increased criminal penalties. Additionally, to strengthen penal policy, the Ministry has redefined and tightened sanctions for the crimes of 'Misconduct in the Service' and 'Criminal Association.'

⁸³ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 32.

⁸⁴ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 12.

⁸⁵ Country Visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

⁸⁶ GRECO (2023). GRECO has observed that the current law lacks an adequate sanctioning mechanism for violations related to conflicts of interest, integrity, and anti-corruption rules.

improve the cooperation between the SCPC and the PPO, but its signing was delayed in relation to the initiated dismissal procedure against the Chief Prosecutor⁸⁷.

Concerns remain regarding the effective verification of asset declarations. A backlog of cases and a lack of resources affected the SCPC's ability to verify asset declarations. In 2024, 3 620 asset declarations were submitted, and 109 cases of irregularities were detected, the majority of which were due to a failure to declare assets. The number of systematic asset verifications declined from 2023 to 2024⁸⁸. Some progress was made, benefiting from international support, in implementing software solutions for enabling access to databases from public institutions⁸⁹.

The number of registered lobbyists in the transparency register remains low. The Law on Lobbying, which entered into force in June 2022, outlines the criteria for becoming a lobbyist or registering a lobbying organisation and expanded the SCPC's competencies to maintaining a "Register of Lobbyists, Lobby organisations and Lobbying". The Register has so far recorded 32 lobbied bodies that have fulfilled the obligation to establish internal procedures for transparent lobbying, in line with Article 24 of the Law on Lobbying⁹⁰. To date, only three lobbying organisations have registered⁹¹.

Effective oversight of political party financing continues to be hampered by an inadequate legislative framework and a lack of resources and expertise in the SCPC. Amendments to the Electoral Code in March 2024⁹² did not address systemic issues to be tackled, namely the regulation of third-party financing of political campaigns, reporting on in-kind contributions and loans, and effective sanctioning, as recommended by ODIHR⁹³. A draft of new Electoral Code was prepared by the Ministry of Justice, aiming to address the ODIHR recommendations, and was sent to ODIHR for an opinion⁹⁴. In October 2024, the SCPC published its reports on the financing of parties' electoral campaigns during the 2024 presidential and parliamentary elections⁹⁵, in which it provided a positive self-assessment of its role and fulfilment of its legal responsibilities in the electoral process. The two reports were submitted to the Parliament and adopted, with no debate⁹⁶. The SCPC concluded that the Electoral Code should be revised, as many provisions are either contradictory or too vague. It highlighted that the percentage (64%) of election campaign funding coming from the State Budget was too high and favours the main political parties, enabling political

⁸⁷ Further, in November 2024, the SCPC became a full member of the European Partners against Corruption/European Anti-Corruption Network (EPAC/EACN) in order to stimulate the exchange of best practices with similar institutions (State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2024b)). In April 2025, the president of the SCPC took leave following investigation on a case related to abuse of public procurement rules in the energy sector.

⁸⁸ According to its annual plan, the SCPC carried out only 14 systematic verification of asset declarations, a decline from 21 planned verifications in 2023. State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2025a).

⁸⁹ Through an EU project, an analysis was made of the needs of the SCPC as well as the possibilities for upgrading and additional operationalisation of the Electronic System for Filing a Declaration of Assets and Interests. IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law (2024).

⁹⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 46.

⁹¹ State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2025).

⁹² Official Gazette No. 58/2024.

⁹³ ODIHR (2024), p. 18; 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 15.

⁹⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025), p. 7.

⁹⁵ State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2024c).

⁹⁶ Parliament of North Macedonia (2024), Archive nr. 08-4019/1.

influence on media editorial choices through the purchase of advertising⁹⁷. ODIHR published its election report in September 2024, also pointing out deficiencies in the funding of campaign advertising⁹⁸ and noting that the SCPC took no action against parties failing to comply with financial reporting duties. It underlined that adequate resources and technical expertise for the SCPC and State Audit Office could improve campaign finance oversight⁹⁹.

Whistleblower protection remains weak, discouraging individuals from reporting corruption, while the new law remains to be adopted. While some legal protections for whistleblowers exist, enforcement mechanisms are insufficient, leaving many reports unaddressed. Those who expose misconduct often face harassment, job loss, or legal consequences, limiting the effectiveness of existing laws¹⁰⁰. In 2023, during the previous legislative period, a draft law on protected reporting and whistleblower protection was prepared, but not tabled before Parliament due to the parliamentary and presidential elections. The law continues to be under revision¹⁰¹.

Corruption risks are high in the healthcare and public procurement areas, while the impact of political influence on efforts to address corruption is highlighted as a concern. Corruption remains a significant challenge in multiple sectors. One area that is particularly susceptible to petty corruption is public healthcare, where instances of bribery and abuse have been reported, affecting the quality and accessibility of healthcare services¹⁰². Public procurement is also an area with a high risk for corruption, with concerns around the transparency of tender processes and state contracts¹⁰³. In December 2024, the SCPC criticised proposed amendments to the Public Procurement Law, exercising its anti-corruption oversight powers¹⁰⁴. Corruption in the public sector is mainly linked to political party influence and the inconsistent application of the merit-based hiring of civil servants¹⁰⁵. Furthermore, stakeholders raised concerns that corruption investigations and prosecutions might be perceived as selective, with some cases being potentially driven by political

⁹⁷ The SCPC (2024) recommends that the Electoral Code should either be revised, or a new one should be adopted. The key areas that need revisions: state budget financing criteria and amounts for political campaigns, inadequate media advertising regulations—especially for internet portals, rules on private donations to political parties, financial reporting standards, and the weak sanctions regime.

⁹⁸ ODIHR (2024), p. 3: “The current system of state funding for campaign advertising increases media dependence on state subsidies and does not prevent abuse by online news portals established only during the campaign and serving to channel state funds to parties”.

⁹⁹ ODIHR (2024): “The SCPC did not take action against parties failing financial reporting duties and, due to financial constraints, did not deploy field monitors or inspect bank accounts to oversee campaign spending. Analysts were hired late with limited access to information, reducing report scrutiny. Additionally, the SCPC inadequately addressed violations of political campaigning provisions.”

¹⁰⁰ Country visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law”.

¹⁰¹ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 46; Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee with North Macedonia (2025).

¹⁰² National Democratic Institute (2023), U.S. Department of State (2024).

¹⁰³ Country visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project “EU Support for Rule of Law”.

¹⁰⁴ State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2024a). It criticised the proposed abolition of administrative control over public procurement by the Public Procurement Bureau and the proposed changes to the composition of the State Commission for Public Procurement Appeals, which it believed could weaken anti-corruption protections. It also emphasised that the amendments were drafted with no adequate public consultation and in fast-track legislative procedure.

¹⁰⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025), written input, p.28.

considerations rather than a comprehensive approach to addressing corruption across all parties¹⁰⁶.

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

The financial independence of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services has been improved, while appointments of new members to its Council are still pending.

The appointments by Parliament to the media regulator's Council are overdue since July 2021¹⁰⁷. In January 2024, the parliamentary Commission for Elections and Appointments selected seven new members of the Agency's Council¹⁰⁸. The selection process raised concerns for its lack of transparency, clear criteria, and impartiality. Several stakeholders, including the Association of Journalists, notably expressed concerns for lacking professional qualifications¹⁰⁹. Parliament has yet to confirm the candidates proposed by the Commission for Elections and Appointments in a plenary session. As of January 2025, the Ministry of Digital Transformation has transferred the overdue funds and the legally prescribed budget¹¹⁰ to the media regulator, increasing its financial independence and operational capacities¹¹¹. The Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services continues to receive positive feedback from media associations regarding its overall professionalism¹¹². The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) 2025 considers the independence and effectiveness of the media regulator to be an area of low risk, however, more efforts are needed in preventing party political influences in the appointments of members of the media regulator¹¹³.

The self-regulatory Council of Media Ethics continues its activities despite concerns about securing long-term sustainable funding. In 2024, the Council of Media Ethics presented a plan to address the sustainable funding of its activity¹¹⁴. It proposed a mix of financing, based on state funds and membership contributions by media organisations and/or journalists' associations¹¹⁵. The review of received complaints in 2024 shows a decrease in complaints related to hate speech compared to the previous year. The total number of complaints received in 2024 was almost one-third lower compared to 2023¹¹⁶.

The Public Service Broadcaster faces challenges, notably regarding its institutional autonomy, despite improvements in its funding. The Parliament has not yet appointed a

¹⁰⁶ Country visit North Macedonia, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law".

¹⁰⁷ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 34. Mainly because of a lack of political agreement, as a two-thirds majority in Parliament is necessary.

¹⁰⁸ 14th session of the Commission on Election and Appointment Issues.

¹⁰⁹ 360stepeni.mk (2025b). According to the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (Article 16), candidates must have at least eight years of professional experience in the field and must have distinguished themselves in the public in the field of communicology, journalism, IT, culture, economics or law.

¹¹⁰ According to Article 105, paragraph 1 of the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, "funds for financing the broadcasting activity, for the operation and development of the Macedonian Radio and Television, the PE Macedonian Broadcasting and the Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services are provided from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, in the amount of 1% of the realised tax revenues determined in the last adopted final account of the budget of the Republic of North Macedonia."

¹¹¹ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 55.

¹¹² Country visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹¹³ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025).

¹¹⁴ The Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia (CMEM) is a non-governmental, non-political and non-profit organisation.

¹¹⁵ Country visit, North Macedonia, meeting with stakeholders.

¹¹⁶ Council of Media Ethics (2025).

new Programme Council for the public broadcaster¹¹⁷, causing ongoing concern since these appointments have been pending since December 2018¹¹⁸. An agreement was reached between *Macedonian Radio Television* (MRT) and the Ministry of Digital Transformation to settle unpaid funds owed to MRT for 2023¹¹⁹. Funding for 2024 was transferred and in 2025 allocated to MTR, according to the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services¹²⁰. The public service broadcaster continued the modernisation plans to improve its professional standards, but obstacles remain in recruiting new personnel due to its limited administrative autonomy¹²¹. When it comes to the media sector overall, the MPM 2025 points to a medium-high risk, while the independence of the public service media falls within the category of medium-low risk¹²².

Challenges remain concerning transparency of media ownership. While the guidelines for ethical reporting of online news media¹²³ contain a provision for the disclosure of ownership data, many digital news media still do not comply with the guidelines or are not part of the voluntary registry managed by the Council for Media Ethics. The Ministry of Digital Transformation, collaborating with numerous stakeholders in the media sector, has prepared amendments to the law adopted in April 2025. The aim of the amended Law on Media is to update the legal framework and regulate online media¹²⁴. The MPM 2025 points to a medium-high risk regarding the transparency of media ownership and to a high risk for the plurality of media providers¹²⁵. There have been no changes during the reporting period regarding rules on media concentration. The Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services has no rules for assessing the impact of market concentration on media pluralism, and there are no legal rules to prevent the concentration of ownership in the digital media sector.

The reintroduction of state-funded advertising has drawn criticism from media experts and civil society organisations. Civil society organisations, journalists' associations, media experts, and media regulators continue to have concerns about the reintroduction of state-funded advertising¹²⁶. The main identified challenges refer to increasing the risk of the

¹¹⁷ The Programming Council of MRT protects the public's interests by ensuring programming content remains free from political, commercial, and other influences and ideologies, and represents diverse societal views.

¹¹⁸ Law on audio and audiovisual media services, Article 108.

¹¹⁹ Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, Article 104.

¹²⁰ According to the amendments to the Law on Audio and Audio-visual Media Services (LAAVMS) from July 2023, the total funds for MRT, Macedonian Broadcasting and the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (AAVMS) are in the amount of 1% of the realised tax revenues determined in the last adopted final account of the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia.

¹²¹ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 36.

¹²² Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 26, underlines that "corrosive media-cum-political clientelist ties in North Macedonia are overwhelmingly present and persist".

¹²³ Council for Media Ethics (2021).

¹²⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 52; 360stepeni.mk (2025a). According to the Government, the amendments to the Law on Media are expected to eliminate the existing problems with internet portals in North Macedonia by establishing a legal framework that recognises them as media, with clear rules for their establishment and registration. The Agency for Audio and Audio-visual Media Services, as the competent regulatory body, will maintain the Register of Online Media Publishers.

¹²⁵ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025), p. 20; 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 36.

¹²⁶ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 18; 2023 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 31; 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 7, 36; Prizma.mk (2024): "SCPC President Dimitrovska warned that the latest regulatory changes have not solved this problem, and that online media receive significant funds from the state budget." Country Visit North Macedonia, RESIS, Metamorphosis Foundation.

potential misuse of political funds and creating a market disruption¹²⁷. Furthermore, if the sums are large, state advertising may lead to a situation where media outlets become dependent on the authorities for funding, possibly compromising their editorial independence and ability to produce quality content. To provide systematic support to media companies, professional media organisations and civil society groups continue to advocate for the creation of a media pluralism fund. This independent fund would support the development of projects and content that serve the public interest, fostering a more diverse, high-quality, and independent media landscape¹²⁸.

While the legal framework for access to public information is in place, its inconsistent implementation can pose challenges to the effective exercise of this right. Legislation on access to documents guarantees wide availability of information. However, inconsistent implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information¹²⁹ has continued, and several challenges hindering the effective exercise of this right have remained. This includes some public institutions¹³⁰ often rejecting requests or delaying delivery of the public information on arbitrary grounds¹³¹. Stakeholders have also raised concerns that personal data protection is frequently used as a blanket reason for refusing access to public documents, and the process of obtaining information is excessively lengthy¹³². To enforce the legal protection of the right to free access to information, North Macedonia has ratified the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents¹³³. The MPM 2025 confirms that while the legal protection of the right to information carries a medium-low risk, public administration is not sufficiently responsive in giving access to information in practice¹³⁴.

Despite some progress in strengthening the legal protection for journalists, their working environment has not improved. Within the Public Prosecutor's Office, four public prosecutors have been designated for coordinating and overseeing cases involving attacks on journalists. The *Association of Journalists of Macedonia* (AJM) is offering legal aid and support to journalists who encounter attacks and threats. AJM has also implemented a system

¹²⁷ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 36.

¹²⁸ Macedonian Institute for Media (2025), media associations, such as the Association of Journalists, Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers, etc.

¹²⁹ The Law is aligned with international standards and regulates the conditions, manner, and procedure of exercising the right to free access to information of public character disposed by state administration bodies and other bodies and institutions established by law.

¹³⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 57. Silence still represents a serious problem among Information Holders, and thus a major challenge for the Agency for Protection of Free Access to Public Information. This is evident from the number of complaints filed with the Agency in the past 2024, which relate to the silence of the administration, namely 246 complaints or 69.49% of the total 354 complaints filed.

¹³¹ The 2024 report of the Association of Journalists notes that information holders often prolong and abuse the maximum legal deadline of 20 days for responding to requests and recommends that institutions should provide up-to-date performance information and create a special section on their website with all data for exercising this right.

¹³² Country visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹³³ [The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents](#) (CETS No. 205), also known as the *Tromsø Convention*, entered into force on 1 March 2025. A revised draft Law on Free Access to Public Information has been prepared and published for public consultation. The revisions aim to align the Law with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, notably to improve the efficiency of the procedure for free access to public information, as well as strengthen the responsibility of the holders of public information. Government of North Macedonia (2025), p.8.

¹³⁴ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025); 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 26.

for recording and monitoring attacks on journalists¹³⁵. Effective implementation of the legal provisions for the protection of journalists remains challenging, particularly in cases of online harassment and gender-based violence targeting female journalists¹³⁶. Stakeholders reported concerns for a rise in online smear campaigns, intimidation and threats, targeting especially investigative journalists¹³⁷. Since the 2024 Rule of Law Report, one alert has been recorded on the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. It concerns intimidation of a journalist by destroying their private property¹³⁸. The Mapping Media Freedom platform has registered seven new alerts, including the above-mentioned incident and another incident involving damage to a journalist's private property, in addition to one harassment and four intimidation cases¹³⁹. The lack of specific anti-strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) legislation and the limited awareness of this issue among judges, lawyers, and journalists remain obstacles to effectively protecting journalists and public critics from SLAPPs. However, certain existing provisions could provide some level of protection in such cases¹⁴⁰. In the context of lawsuits concerning insult and defamation, data for 2024 shows that there were 15 cases involving journalists or media outlets as either the plaintiff or defendant. This represents an increase compared to 2023, when 12 such cases were recorded¹⁴¹. Shortcomings in journalists' working conditions persist, notably, the short-term or part-time contracts without health and social insurance coverage, unpaid overtime and low wages, which contribute to self-censorship and influence over editorial content by media owners¹⁴². The MPM 2025 reports a medium-low risk for journalistic profession, standards, and protection¹⁴³.

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

The Parliament is implementing the new Rules of Procedure, which were adopted with the aim of improving its oversight and efficiency. As previously reported, the new Rules of Procedure of the Parliament were adopted in November 2023, with a view to improve its functioning, notably concerning organising public hearings, the parliamentary calendar and its role in deciding on shortened legislative procedures. The newly formed Parliament convened on 28 May 2024¹⁴⁴, and its new Rules of Procedure entered into force¹⁴⁵. The rules have so far had a positive effect on the Parliament's operational efficiency; however, their

¹³⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 61. In 2024, the Association of Journalists registered 5 incidents: 1 was a case of unauthorised monitoring, recording, and distribution of video concerning a journalist, 1 as a destruction of property, 1 was online attack, 1 was a physical attack and 1 was arbitrary detention of a journalist.

¹³⁶ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 20; 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 20. With the reform of the Criminal Code in February 2023, journalists have been granted special protection by being recognised as a protected group, similar to public officials. This change allows the Public Prosecutor's Office to independently initiate proceedings when a journalist or media worker is attacked.

¹³⁷ Country visit, North Macedonia, Association of Journalists.

¹³⁸ Council of Europe (2025).

¹³⁹ European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (2025).

¹⁴⁰ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 20. The 2022 amendments to the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation significantly reduced the potential non-pecuniary damages imposed on media outlets and journalists in defamation lawsuits.

¹⁴¹ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 60.

¹⁴² 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 9, 37; Media Pluralism Monitor (2025).

¹⁴³ Media Pluralism Monitor (2025): "North Macedonia is free of killings or direct physical attacks of journalist.", p. 16; 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 36.

¹⁴⁴ The 10th legislature of the Parliament, which concluded its term in May 2024, became the first since 2006 to complete a full four-year mandate.

¹⁴⁵ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 22.

long-term impacts are yet to be determined. Moreover, the drafting of a new Code of Ethics started in March 2025, designed to prevent conflicts of interest while promoting trust and integrity. By May 2025, nine inter-party groups were established on anti-corruption, environment, rights of persons with disabilities, Club of Women MPs, Roma, the Crimea Platform, youth policies, the Berlin Process and the commitments under Growth Plan Reform Agenda, which creates the premises for advancing the legislative work in these domains¹⁴⁶.

Challenges remain regarding parliamentary appointments to independent institutions, which raise concerns about merit-based selections. The selection procedures in the Parliamentary Committee on Election and Appointment Issues presented shortcomings, as on several occasions candidates who were selected did not have relevant professional experience or did not meet the qualification criteria¹⁴⁷. Appointments procedures are at times significantly delayed, especially for the long-awaited appointments of Deputy Ombudsperson, or the Public Service Broadcaster's Programme Council.

Shortcomings remain in implementing processes for inclusive and evidence-based policymaking. While coordination between the Government and Parliament on legislative activities has been effective, a significant number of Government draft laws submitted to Parliament are not included in the original Government legislative plan and do not have supporting documents, such as Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA) reports, which impede an effective scrutiny and debate. Additionally, the use of policy monitoring and *ex-post* evaluation tools is not entirely effective in practice¹⁴⁸. The Single National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER) platform¹⁴⁹ is used for consultations¹⁵⁰, but it does not always host the final versions of documents approved by the Government. Monitoring the outcomes of the public consultations is sometimes ineffective, making it difficult to evaluate their quality or impact on policy design. The new Rules of Procedure of the Parliament strengthened the Parliaments' role to ensure that the required impact assessments are carried out by providing for the possibility to request lacking impact assessments for laws. However, it is too early to assess the effectiveness of this change in practice¹⁵¹.

Less than half of the companies surveyed in North Macedonia express high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. About 37% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts¹⁵². The main reason among companies for their lack of confidence is the concerns about the quality, efficiency or

¹⁴⁶ Country visit North Macedonia, representatives of the Parliament.

¹⁴⁷ Examples include the process for election of members to the Council of Public Prosecutors, to the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Services (see in detail above Pillar III), and to the Commission for Prevention and Protection Against Discrimination. At times, the Committee proposals were later withdrawn. Information received in the context of the country visit to North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹⁴⁸ 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, pp. 22, 24.

¹⁴⁹ The Single National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER) is the main tool for consultation on legislative proposals prior to their submission in Government procedure, with a deadline of 30 days for comments.

¹⁵⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 64, 79: Out of 193 draft laws drafted by the Government in 2024, 88 draft laws were subject to regulatory impact assessment. 30 draft laws (34%) were published on ENER, which represents a decrease of 17.39 percentage points compared to 2023 (51.39%). The total number of comments from stakeholders is 158, of which 21 comments are from civil society organisations (13.3%).

¹⁵¹ SIGMA (2025)

¹⁵² Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

the independence of the justice system¹⁵³. Further, 37% perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (State Commission for Public Procurement Appeals) as very or fairly good¹⁵⁴, while 31% perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (Commission for the Protection of Competition) as very or fairly good¹⁵⁵.

On 1 January 2025, North Macedonia had 18 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 5 compared to the previous year¹⁵⁶. On 1 January 2025 North Macedonia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 65% (compared to 71% in 2024; 35% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 3 years and 3 months (compared to 3 years and 9 months in 2024)¹⁵⁷. The oldest group of leading judgments, pending implementation for more than 14 years, concerns violations of the applicants' right to liberty on account of the lack of concrete and sufficient grounds for their detention¹⁵⁸. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2024 there were 2 cases in total awaiting confirmation of payments (compared to 9 in 2023)¹⁵⁹. On 16 June 2025, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had increased to 20¹⁶⁰.

The role of the Constitutional Court in the monitoring and enforcement of its decisions has been strengthened. In June 2024, the Constitutional Court amended its internal act regulating its functioning¹⁶¹. Among the changes, the Court is now enabled to specify the manner and timeframe for enforcement of the decision and provide guidance to the institution responsible for adopting the act in question. To avoid a legal vacuum, the Court can set a deadline to address the Court's guidance before a final decision to repeal or annul the act is taken. The Court's capacities to monitor the execution of its decisions have also been strengthened¹⁶². These changes are a significant improvement and have also been welcomed by civil society¹⁶³. In May 2025, the Administrative Court annulled a 2023 election of a Constitutional Court judge based on unlawful and erroneous selection procedure by the Judicial Council and election in Parliament.

Financial and human resource constraints continue to affect the functioning of the Ombudsperson's Office and of the Commission for Prevention and Protection Against

¹⁵³ Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025). 33% of the surveyed investors perceive the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about quality of law-making process as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

¹⁵⁴ Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

¹⁵⁵ Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

¹⁵⁶ For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

¹⁵⁷ All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2025. EIN (2025), written input, p. 2.

¹⁵⁸ Judgment of the ECtHR, 28169/08, *Vasilkoski and Others v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, pending implementation since 2011.

¹⁵⁹ Council of Europe (2025), p. 157.

¹⁶⁰ Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

¹⁶¹ Constitutional Court (2024).

¹⁶² Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 66-71. In case of non-execution, the Court may adopt a relevant resolution, and in such cases shall notify the public prosecutor's office with competence, as well as the authority responsible for appointing or electing the head of the body or institution that failed to implement the decision of the Court.

¹⁶³ Ministry of Justice (2023). Nevertheless, as stated in the Judicial strategy 2024-2028, strengthening the role of the Constitutional Court is a general objective of the Strategy, including through a potential reform of the constitutional framework of the Court.

Discrimination. The Parliament did not adopt the long-awaited amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson's Office, which is necessary to upgrade its 'B' accreditation status according to the Paris Principles. The Ombudsperson's Office lacks seven of the ten Deputy Ombudspersons, and five positions were vacant since May 2023. A new vacancy announcement for seven posts was published in April 2025¹⁶⁴. The Office continues to lack the financial and human resources needed to function independently and effectively. In 2024, no further staff was neither hired nor promoted due to a lack of budgetary approval. Of the 183 planned positions, only 85 are currently filled, and the institutions' budget declined from 2024 to 2025¹⁶⁵. Its operational budget continues to require approval by the executive branch, which negatively affects its financial independence¹⁶⁶. Despite these challenges, in 2024, the Ombudsperson's Office provided 743 individual recommendations to public bodies on eliminating established violations of the rights of citizens, which is an increase compared to the previous year. The acceptance rate by the public bodies concerned increased slightly to 74.8%¹⁶⁷. In December 2024, the Parliament discussed the 2023 Annual Report from the Ombudsperson's Office¹⁶⁸ and measures to address identified shortcomings; however, there have been no advances in follow-up by the Government¹⁶⁹. The Civil Control Mechanism¹⁷⁰ and the National Preventive Mechanism within the Ombudsperson's Office do not have the adequate financial resources, equipment, and offices¹⁷¹. As regards the Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, it has effectively handled a growing number of complaints. However, similar to the Office of the Ombudsperson's Office, the main challenges hindering the Commission's progress are its limited financial independence and a shortage of administrative staff¹⁷².

The Government initiated measures to enhance cooperation with civil society, while civil society raised challenges, including online hate speech. Civil society organisations function within a 'narrowed'¹⁷³ civil society space. Some civil society organisations working on sensitive areas have reported experiencing an increasing adverse environment, and in

¹⁶⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 75.

¹⁶⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025), written input, p. 72. Data refers to December 2024. In addition, two people had their employment terminated due to retirement.

¹⁶⁶ Country Visit North Macedonia, Ombudsperson's Office; 2024 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 34.

¹⁶⁷ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 73: In 2024, out of 743 individual recommendations, opinions and suggestions given on the manner of eliminating the established violations of the rights of citizens and other persons, 556 or 74.8% were accepted.

¹⁶⁸ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 62, 63. The Parliament proposed measures to implement the Ombudsperson's recommendations to address the issues outlined in the report and forwarded these to the Government on 27 December 2024.

¹⁶⁹ Country Visit North Macedonia, Ombudsperson's Office. The Ombudsperson's Office provides recommendations in its annual report to the parliament, which is tasked to develop measures and submit these to the Government. The government in turn should provide bi-yearly reports on the follow-up.

¹⁷⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 23.: In 2024 the Civil Control Mechanism handled a total of 25 cases (15 related to members of the prison police, and 10 to the police), six more than in 2023. Three cases were initiated on its own initiative.

¹⁷¹ Financial resources are lacking to employ the parliament elected representative from civil society to the Civil Control Mechanisms, thus, the mechanism is not functioning as intended but is only operational through employees by the Ombudsperson Office. Justice, Freedom and Security Subcommittee with North Macedonia (2025).

¹⁷² 2024 Enlargement report, North Macedonia, p. 9.

¹⁷³ CIVICUS (2025). Rating given on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

some instances attacks against them, especially on social media¹⁷⁴. Nonetheless, with input from civil society organisations, and in cooperation with line ministries and the Council for cooperation between the Government and Civil Society, the General Secretariat of the Government has prepared the new Strategy for cooperation with and development of civil society 2025-2028. Furthermore, in January 2025 the Government adopted a Decision regarding the allocation of state funds to civil society organisations¹⁷⁵. In March 2025, following a two-year boycott by civil society organisations¹⁷⁶, the Government appointed the members of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society¹⁷⁷, and they met for the first time in April.

¹⁷⁴ Country visit, North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹⁷⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), p. 79: On January 14, 2025, the Government adopted a Decision on the conditions for the allocation and use of funds for financing the programme activities of associations and foundations from the Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia for 2025 (Official Gazette No.11/25). The Decision establishes the conditions for the allocation and use of funds for financial support to civil society organisations from the budget of the Ministry of Inter-Community Relations, the criteria for assessing the quality of projects, the composition of the Commission for the allocation of funds and the manner of reporting upon the completion of projects.

¹⁷⁶ CSOs had been boycotting the Council's work since March 2022 as previously reported in the 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 24.

¹⁷⁷ Government of North Macedonia (2025a), pp. 80, 81.

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

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Annex II: Country visit to North Macedonia

The Commission services held virtual and hybrid meetings in March 2025 with:

- Academy for Judges and Prosecutors
- Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
- Agency for the Protection of Free Access to Public Information
- Association of Journalists
- Association of Judges
- Association of on-line media; RESIS Institute (Research Institute on Social Development)
- Association of Prosecutors
- Bar Association
- BIRN Macedonia
- Center for Civil Communication
- Center for Legal Research and Analysis / Центар за правни истражувања и анализи
- Coalition All for Fair Trials
- Constitutional Court
- Council of Europe Mission to Skopje
- Council of Media Ethics
- Council of Public Prosecutors
- European Policy Institute
- Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers;
- Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis”
- Institute for Human Rights
- Institute of Communication Studies - IKS
- Judicial Council
- Judicial Media Council
- Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation - MCIC
- Macedonian Institute for Media – MIM
- Meeting with the experts of the “EU Support for Rule of Law” IPA Project
- Metamorphosis Foundation
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Justice
- Ombudsperson Office
- OSCE Mission to North Macedonia
- Parliament
- Public Prosecutor’s Offices (PPOs)
- State Audit Office
- State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC)
- Supreme Court
- Transparency International – Macedonia

* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Amnesty International
- Araminta
- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy
- European Youth Forum,
- International Commission of Jurists
- International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
- JEF Europe
- Philea – Philanthropy Europe Association.
- Transparency International