

CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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NEWSLETTER NR.4





CSOS HAVE ONCE AGAIN DEMONSTRATED TO BE ADJUSTABLE TO EMERGENCIES

The two months of state emergency and a bit more to stop the spread of the new Corona virus have imposed new forms of communication, rules of behaviour, and ways of working. We all had to set new priorities in our private and professional lives. Nowadays, everything seems to start and end with Covid-19. Nevertheless, we all try to maintain a sense of normality in our environments when it comes to our activities, perceptions and expectations of our lives during and after Corona.

This issue of Citizens for Change has been prepared in this way. Initially, it was our intention to dedicate it to civic participation but, as almost everything else in our lives, it was overtaken by Covid-19. In the end, it appears in front of you as a combination of both, in scope (civic education, Corona) and in timeframe. It is also a bit bigger than usual.

CSOs managed to organize in this state of emergency and worked in the front lines to help the citizens, those that were most in need of help. The first response was humanitarian assistance to the elderly and disabled, homeless and other vulnerable people. However, the assistance consisted not only of the provision of food and hygienic products. Some organizations also provided or made protective masks, for health workers and then for other citizens. The Red Cross, Food Bank, True Acts of Kindness, Hera, LGBT United, Moon, Focus, Bright Future, Star-Star are only a few examples of CSOs that distributed humanitarian assistance. The close following of the decisions of the government regarding Corona, the dedicated fight to protect those whose rights have been violated also contributed to the victory of the coalition of 11 CSOs which convinced the government to change the decree which allowed for firing of workers from the companies using government subsidies for overcoming the economic consequences caused by the pandemics. "We continue to act together", said they in their press releases, "because it is the only way to build a more just and humane society based on solidarity". We are happy that four of these organizations are also part of the larger Civica Mobilitas community.

Civica Mobilitas also responded to the Corona crisis by providing information on civil society's responses to it, and opening up the small grant programme to CSOs wishing to roll back the Corona virus and combat Covid 19. Civica Mobilitas opened a special page on its website (e-Platform) reporting on CSO activities. This page now features more than 180 activities for humanitarian assistance where the assistance comes to hundreds of tons of food and hygienic products. This list called Covid-19 is updated on daily basis, and besides humanitarian assistance it also contains activities related to health, labour rights, children and youth etc. Everybody gives his contribution in his areas of expertise in order to help our country overcoming the Corona crises as painless as possible. By 30 April 2020, Civica Mobilitas has also granted 15 ad-hoc grants to CSOs that will implement activities related to Covid-19. We keep on motivating the CSOs to share their activities related to the pandemic, which are then published on the web page and in the extra issue of the newsletter. Information is important for such moments, not to brag that we have met the needs and demands of the citizens, but to make our activities even more accessible to those that need them.

This fourth issue of Citizens for Change also provides information on the Eurothink resource platform, which should provide continuous information and education on the EU integration process and the inclusion of citizens in it. The issue also informs you on the results of the research of the Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities dedicated to the polarization of our society, the inclusion of Roma demands in political party programs, the latest "Engage", the "Public Room" case, March for Women's Rights, Forum theatre as a way of awareness building against peer violence and many others.

Gonce Jakovlevska
Civica Mobilitas National
Coordinator for ICO



THEME
COVID-19

Red Cross Volunteers in the Field during Corona Virus



The Red Cross has been actively present since the occurrence of the Corona virus in our country, carrying out Corona prevention activities as well as assistance and support to the most vulnerable people.

The Red Cross established mobile teams in 15 cities whose task is to purchase the necessary medicines, food and personal hygiene means and deliver them to the homes of elderly persons living alone, chronically ill people, families of people with special needs, single parents and other vulnerable citizens.

The mobile teams are made up of professionals and volunteers educated on disaster response and people who are trained in providing primary medical assistance. Their services are free of charge; citizens should only pay for the products or medicines that should be purchased. The goal of this activity is to provide support to the people who need it the most but also to ensure that they stay home, and thus decrease the risk of spreading the Corona virus.

There is additional distribution of humanitarian assistance to homeless people, psychological help, as well as an awareness raising campaign by distribution of posters for hygiene promotion and protection from the Corona virus.

Red Cross Local Office	Contact Number	Work Timeframe
Bitola	047 236 019	08 – 12:00
Veles	078 254 729, 075 272 485, 075 247 637	08 – 18:00
Gazi Baba	071 243 078, 02 2529 153	08:30 – 12:30
Delchevo	033 412 010	09 – 13:00
Kavadarci	070 239 352	08:30 – 12:00
Karposh	071 349 230, 02 3068 806	08:30 – 12:30
Kisela Voda	071 349 225, 02 3211 417	08:30 – 12:30
Kichevo	045 225 324	08:30 – 12:00
Kochani	071 373 677	09 – 14:00
Krushevo	071 379 920	08 – 12:00
Ohrid	046 261 909, 070 315 309, 13 112 (скратениот телефонски број на Планинската спасителна служба).	08 – 16:00
Sveti Nikole	032 443 171, 074 600 171	08 – 13:00
Struga	071 398 424	08 – 12:00
Strumica	071 345 901	10 – 12:00
Tetovo	044 336 374	09 – 15:00
Centar	070 297 166, 02 3115 029	08:30 – 12:30
Chair	070 208 383, 02 2621 924	08:30 – 12:30
Shtip	074 203 030	08 – 16:00
Red Cross of the City of Skopje – Homeless Team	02 3096 227	08:30 – 12:30

Introduction of Measures against Dismissals from Work during the Crisis

The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights received information from a large number of workers that their employers had been abusing the state of emergency and announced cutting their salaries significantly or cancellation of the work contracts for entire groups of employees.

Helsinki called for a moratorium of all announced salary cuts and contract cancellations. “We appeal to the employers not to use this difficult period for personal interests, but to get involved and if they can, help in overcoming the health crisis in the country. In these exceptionally unpredictable and hard times, remaining without salary for most of the workers means risk for their livelihood and therefore we need solidarity and unity. This is even more because “the individuals and legal entities who do not respect and violate the recommendations will have criminal liability according to articles 205 and 206 of the Penal Code”, says the announcement.

The announcement also appeals to the workers not to sign any agreement with their employers without prior consultation with a lawyer and/or attorney.



Everybody who faces a violation of his/her labour rights can report this at the State Labour Inspectorate at the phone number 151 31 or at the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights at the numbers 02 3119 073, 072 278 436, or via e-mail at helkom@mhc.org.mk

Together at Home group brought families together

The Facebook group “Together at Home”, managed by the First Children’s Embassy in theWorld “Megjashi”, has more than 2,500 members and more than 400 entertaining activities that parents and guardians practice with their children in order to stimulate a more creative and quality time spent with children who find themselves in self-isolation during the pandemic situation.

From “Megjashi” they say that the crisis has caused regeneration of the basic cell of the society that is the start of everything, and the group responds to the need of the parents. For families getting closer together is obvious in this period, which results in increased support, love, proper channelling and feeling of security.

The creative parents and children share different contents, such as physical activities, especially when it comes to the locomotive skills of the children, reciting poems, performing shows, art works, etc. Members of the group inspire each other, and the children obtain new skills and are free of concerns regarding the outside world and the state of emergency.

“Physical distancing in this situation can only root in good habit, manners and moral values in children”, adds “Megjashi”. They expressed their satisfaction that the group functions without a lot of effort on their side as creators and that the members have accepted it as a competition of creativity in their new reality.



Non-transparent process of urgent procurement

The Centre for Civic Initiatives has prepared an analysis of the urgent public procurement in the country in order to influence the increase of transparency, accountability and rationality of these procurements. The Public Procurement Law allows urgent procurement to be conducted with direct negotiations with the companies, i.e. without a public call; the institutions do not need previous opinion of the Public Procurement Bureau on this. The state of emergency, the general lack of necessary products and the speed with which the procurement is conducted increases the risk of corruption in the usage of this non-transparent public procurement procedure.

Findings show that in half of the urgent procurement agreements there were negotiations with a sole company. On the other hand, the prices of similar products are quite different depending on whether the institution negotiated with a sole supplier or chose the most favourable among more suppliers. Also, part of the published urgent procurement agreements does not contain a detailed description of the products that were procured, which does not allow checking the rationale for the purchase of these products.

CCI, a Civica Mobilitas institutional grantee, will continue to follow the urgent procurement related to the new Corona virus so that it timely detects certain weaknesses in the procurement process and help the authorities in overcoming them so that the country's limited public resources are rationally used.



Supplying assistance to the most vulnerable

WSS Effect Coalition against Hunger and Food Waste and the informal local Food Bank Kavadarci which is managed by "Eco Life" are fighting the consequences of the Corona pandemic. Therefore, they have modified their last year's action "Zero Hunger" which took place in Kavadarci and Skopje. The activities have also resulted in adjustments in the reception, packing and distribution of aid for the elderly and disabled, as well as for the socially vulnerable families.

Now the partners have announced expansion of their humanitarian activities in Veles. For the time being, they are

helping 1,000 beneficiaries with social packages. The donations that they collect are in tons, which means that the companies and individuals recognize their work in crisis and they entrust them with the available resources. From the Coalition, they recommend the individuals that want to be involved in these activities to first get informed on how they can do this. The organizations that are part of the Coalition remain open for partnerships, and they support joint actions, including a joint approach to food donors.



Scout spirit for easier self-isolation

A terrarium, protective mask, mini bivouac shelter, stamps, bookmarks and pancakes are only some of the interesting things that have been made these days by the scouts of the First Skopje Scout Brigade (PSIO). During these pandemic times, they have invented an on-line challenge for all scouts and designed a new scout emblem.

In order to take part in the challenge, the participants should wear a uniform, their scout scarf and make a video while they create some of the assigned challenges. Actually, the scout program is based on learning skills. After a scout obtains a skill, he should pass some rules set in advance and win an emblem that should be sewn to his uniform. In this case, the participants will be given the emblem “Do It Yourself”.

“It is hard”, says Ivan Velkovski from PSIO. “You also feel that nostalgia on the social networks. The scouts miss each other, they want to see each other, because we are one big family.”. He also says that the message of the scouts to young people is to start acting more conscientiously

and more responsibly act towards their fellow citizens and not expose them to the risk of getting infected by the Corona virus led by their own wish to be outside.





NEWS
**FROM CIVIL SOCIETY
ORGANIZATIONS**

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

New On-Line Resource for EU Integration Process

Eurothink – Center for European Strategies has created a comprehensive digital tool for information, education, monitoring and sharing of knowledge related to the EU accession process. Civica Mobilitas supported the creation of this tool with an action grant.

CP: How did you come to the idea to create the <https://eu.org.mk/>

Eurothink: The idea of the resource platform comes from the need for such a web page that would continuously produce information in the area of EU integration of North Macedonia. The inspiration came from neighbouring countries which are in the negotiation process and have negotiation pages. Its implementation had been a long-term wish and plan that was waiting to be implemented. The idea is to create an on-line resource that would help the society in the EU integration process with continuous information and education of specific target groups.

CP: What kind of contents can be found at the platform and how is it updated?

Eurothink: The web page contents is made of resources, links, videos, documents, games and simulations related to the EU and membership negotiations. The users can be informed about the functioning of the EU, the advantages of the entry of North Macedonia into EU, the EU program funds that can be used, as well as the experiences of other countries, such as Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. Eurothink will constantly update the “I and the EU” menu with topics and issues of the month that will be placed on the platform. There is also a link to the month, with the latest news or events concerning the EU membership negotiations. The menu also contains facts and figures about the EU which are useful and should be known; research information from EUROMETER and EU BAROMETER will also be published.

There are also regular updates from the latest events that have been organized by Eurothink, thematically related to the EU, with some sort of an EU stamp.

CP: What are your expectations from the platform? What changes do you expect with the users (citizens, decision makers, media, CSOs)?

Eurothink: We expect increased interest in the themes this portal will provide, better information and expanded knowledge with the citizens concerning the challenges and next steps in the EU negotiations. The portal will explain the positions and roles of the decision makers, channel and present EU negotiation process information from and for the media and also provide better information about the activities of CSOs on all EU issues.

We expect a bigger involvement in the negotiation process by all target groups, thanks to the information that will be available at this platform, because the accession process itself is quite complex and it needs involvement and efforts on all sides.

CP: What is next? Will the platform be upgraded and how?

Eurothink: The platform will be constantly filled with information and in the course of the next months, its extension will also be provided. This extension will be dedicated to Chapter 24 (dedicated to the justice, freedom and safety), via a project funded by the Balkan Trust for Democracy, which is thematically focused on EU integration, negotiations and chapter 24. As such, it is complementary to this project.

RESOURCES FOR CITIZENS AND MEDIA



The Radical Polarization Prevents the Adoption of Key Political Decisions

The political parties in the country constantly insist on deep social polarization because on one hand there is “us” who are always the real people, the real patriots or the real moral and virtuous citizens, as opposed to “them” who are projected and demonized with all kinds of potential negative features and are experienced as some sort of a threat. This was indicated by the results of the research “Polarized Discourse and the Impact on the Political and Social Polarization of the Macedonian Society” which was implemented by the Institute of Social Sciences and Humanities (ISSH-S), and it was presented on a round table. This activity was supported by Civica Mobilitas with an action grant.

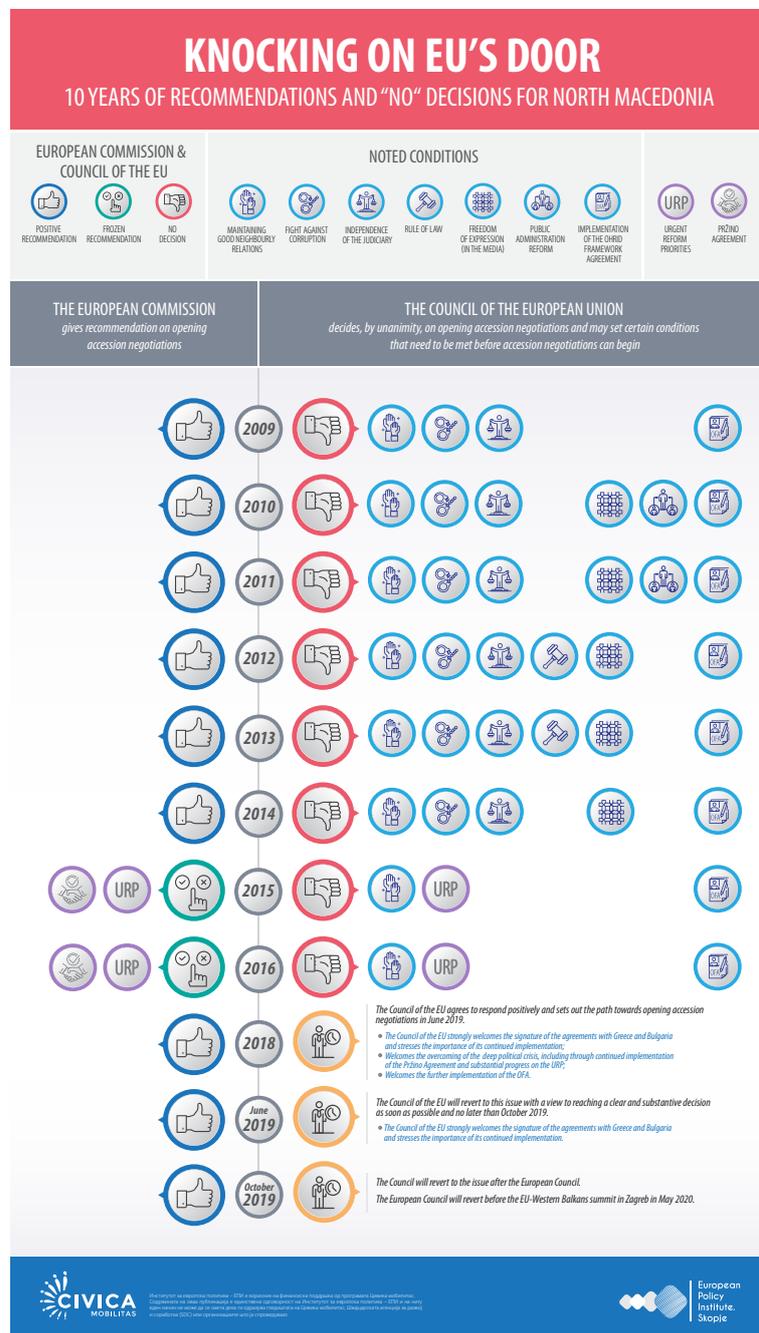
Ana Blazheva from ISSH-S explained that their research had tried to show the ways in which talking or speaking can contribute to deepening and expanding the phenomenon of polarization that is most broadly understood as “opposed views with respect to certain political and social issues and policies which are mutually exclusive and irreconcilable”.

Examples of social polarization that had been analysed in the research, as indicated by her, were the hate speech after the victory of Vardar handball team, anthem singing and Eurovision results, where the existing polarizing discourse is even more radicalized. “On the other hand,” she adds, “this prevents the parties in the political dialogue and in order to stay ‘clean’ before their supporters they are prevented from making important, significant political decisions for the common good”.

The speakers invited to the round table were journalists, and effective tools for establishing norms and rules in the context of radical polarization of the society were presented and discussed; models for managing the growing polarization of the society were also discussed, as well as the role of the media in framing the decency of the discourse, (de)construction of the political enemy phenomenon, etc.

10 Years EU Rejection

European Policy Institute (EPI) has presented the process of accession of North Macedonia to the EU in the last 10 years by using an infographic. It indicates the recommendations of the European Commission for opening of accession negotiations, as well as the decisions and conditions set by the EU Council.



Draft Law on Games of Chance – Two Sides of the Coin

The “Anti-Gambling” movement from Tetovo has been undertaking various activities for a longer period, including protests, in order to have the Law for Games of Chance and Entertaining Games adopted as soon as possible. Their main demand for changes to the law refers to the places where the casinos, sport betting and other games of chance facilities can work. They ask the Assembly that they be at

least three kilometres away from populated areas, which means further than the children and the schools.

As opposed to them is the Association of Sport Betting of Macedonia (ASOM), consisting of the five biggest sport-betting companies (Mozzart, Sport Life, Zlatna Kopacka, Evrotip and Marbet), which issued a press statement warning that the draft changes to the law will leave

7,700 people jobless over night. According to them, the changes of the law are adopted without any previous analyses of the situation and the social and financial implications that they would cause. Apart from the lost jobs, the state would also lose EUR 253 million, which go into the national budgets on annual basis, based on taxes. ASOM stresses that the games of chance are not prohibited but rather regulated in a quality way in the EU member states.

“Map the Gap” Local Civic Participation Application

Sandra Stojanovska and Elena Ridova are the students at the Faculty of Information Science and Computer Engineering (FINKI) who designed the “Map the Gap” platform, which is used by CSOs, youth, the business sector and public institutions to solve problems in local communities.

The platform was presented at “Information Technology and Participation of the Youth in the Democratic Processes at Local Level” discussion organized by “Young European Federalists” (YEF North Macedonia).

The creators said that the main idea was to include all parties that are interested in social issues in a single social network. This will contribute to an easier communication among them, but they will also avoid “knocking on the wrong door”.

“The platform has four interfaces, and the interested citizen opens his call based on his profile and writes his problem. The publication will be seen by the other users and if some of them are affected by the same problem, they can support the publication. The platform will “bring to the surface” the problems that have the biggest support so they are visible for the institutions that are in charge”, says Ridova.

At the moment there is significant lack of the opinion and involvement of the young in local self-government, and youth do not have the feed-back that would show that their opinion is really meaningful.

“We want to use the momentum of the adoption of the Law on Youth Participation, to reiterate the support of the institutions to the inclusion of the young people in policy creation”, says Jelena Peroska, Secretary General of YEF North Macedonia, and project coordinator of Map the Gap project.

The “Anti-Gambling” movement responded that the fact that the betting companies are upset about the people that would lose their jobs is hypocritical, because they had not been concerned about the destroyed families before. The activists told the MPs to visit some of the homeless families that are victims to gambling and then decide on the issues of dislocation of these facilities.

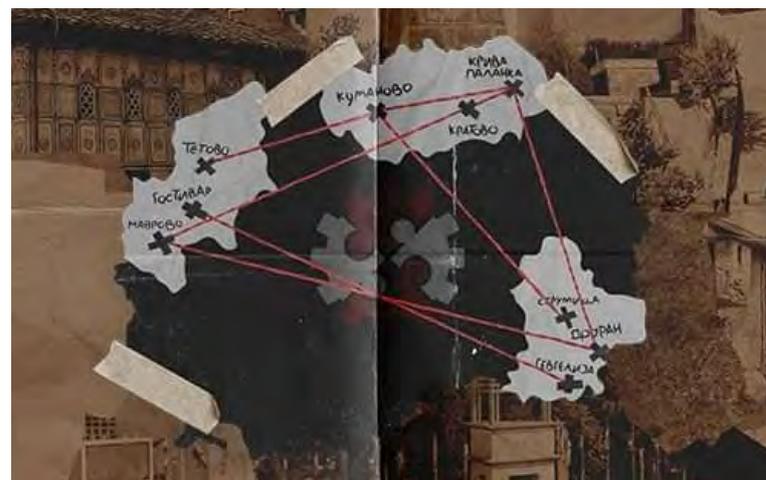
“Fight with Us” Open Day in Kriva Palanka

The citizens and associations of the Northeast planning region had the chance to talk to the president of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, Blijana Ivanovska, as well as with the Chief State Auditor, Maxim Acevski, during the open day of the Investigative Reporting Lab (IRL) in Kriva Palanka.

Sashka Cvetkovska from IRL stated that the idea was to encourage the citizens at local level to speak about the problems that they were facing. They started from the Northeast region because it had all the potentials for better life, but the reality was different.

“We are looking for the answers why there is no better life. The problems are in the area of the rule of law, corruption and, as the state auditor indicated, in lack of knowledge and skills that are a consequence of the three-decade long devastation of the institutions. We are here to scan what the problems are, why this is happening, why young people move out of Kriva Palanka and to all together fight for better life”, added Cvetkovska.

IRL has been cooperating with independent institutions on this activity, because the citizens have bigger trust in them.



Inclusion of Roma Demands in the Party Election Programs

Roma activists and intellectuals from the “Avaja” civic initiative promoted their new campaign “My Vote – Your Duty” in relation to the forthcoming parliamentary elections in 2020. They ask that the political parties include the priorities of the Roma community in their political programs.

“Avaja” representatives organized public hearings with the parliamentary candidate list carriers in the six electoral districts. According to them, this approach will contribute to improving the political culture of the Roma voters and they would make an informed choice that would be in the interest of the Roma community.

“Avaja has established structures in 17 municipalities that conduct consultations with the Roma community on what the problems and needs are. We have also organized meetings with the MPs of two biggest parties VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM who were presented our campaign. We are also conducting meetings with the ambassadors of different countries, where we stress the needs of the Roma community to provide support to their fulfilment”, said Albert Mehmeti, representative of AVAJA. “During the election activities, we will follow the complete process, via a monitoring team, which will report on all possible irregularities. In order to raise the awareness with the community and

the maturity with the political parties, we organize public debates between the Roma political parties and the civic activities to be held accountable for what they have done and thus contribute to an informed choice at the forthcoming elections”, he added.

“We remain dedicated to the demands of the Roma community and we will actively follow the process of implementation of the promises, using all democratic means”, added Elvis Shakiri, representative of AVAJA.



CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Solutions to peer violence with the help of Megjashi Forum Theatre

You will experience so much emotion watching the Forum Theatre of the First Children’s Embassy in the World “Megjashi” on the topic of peer violence. One feeling is replaced by another, your restlessness grows, you want to intervene, you want to shout “no, what you are doing is not good”... And actually, that is the idea of the Forum Theatre, which is also called “engaged theatre”, to show you a real situation and enable you to participate on its course, intervene in the solution and change the end of this situation.

The Megjashi Forum Theatre included high school students from the high schools “Kocho Racin” from Veles, “Nikola Karev” and “Shaip Jusuf” from Skopje. The audience consisted of fellow students and teachers. In the

first situation that took place in one of the classrooms, the audience clearly recognized the problem. The actors played it again and the audience was offered to intervene in some of the critical moments. The actors changed, replicas were added. The feeling of injustice gave way to the desire for justice. Hands were up in the audience and there were new interventions. Can an individual make a change? Maybe not alone, but he/she can encourage the others and create a critical mass that would then balance the power, giving voice to the victims, making them more visible to all.

According to Ana Bitoljanu from “Megjashi”, these are creative ways for the young people to express themselves. “The Forum Theatre is envisaged and wants to influence the social change, the things around us that we do not like.

Not to be only passive observers, nor those who will only see and criticize, but to try and find various solutions for the things that bother us”, says she.

Peer violence is a big problem that is not discussed as much as it should. UNICEF data for 2018 show that 42% of the students aged 13-15 reported to have experiences peer violence. How many are there that have not reported it? Apart from the physical violence, psychological violence is increasing, which is often done via Internet. The videos and photos of the victims published online in which peers are offended remain long online and they are a constant threat to the victims.

“Many of the schools try harder to cover up a certain case rather than to act immediately when the violence

happens, which means reporting and timely informing and indicating that yes, there was violence, but let’s see how to move forward”, says Bitoljanu. According to her, violence has been normalized in our society and it is rarely taken seriously, which means that unless something drastic happens, it goes by.

Therefore, we should constantly remind ourselves how important non-violence is and how big the responsibility is for all of us to deal with the violence.

Forum Theatre is part of the Peace Education program of “Megjashi”, whose annual plan is supported by Civica Mobilitas.

Ninth Issue of Engage

The social activism conference “Engage” has united activists from all over the world for the ninth time. They told about their stories and actions, all different, but with a common idea to make positive changes in the society. This year the event took place at the Youth Cultural Center in Skopje.

Some of the 15 activists who spoke were Sarah Mardini, refugee from the Syrian war and human rights activist; Ena Bendevska and Kalia Dimitrova from Medusa platform; Fejmi Daut, the cinematographer of the award winning “Honeyland” documentary.

Democracy, environment and human rights were the main themes of this year’s conference. Alina Afleailor from “Greenpeace Romania” stressed that the organization wanted to encourage the people so that they are empowered because civil society is not only the CSOs but also all people in the society. She encouraged the people present to choose a cause that is close to their hearts and go out.

Kiril Przho Arsovski explained the relationship between the forest fires and global warming, Katarzyna Pruskevich shared her experience as an undercover journalist who had spent six months at a troll farm in Poland, Besijan Mehmeti spoke about modern architecture and how the schools of the future create new possibilities for a more quality education.

The other speakers focused on artificial intelligence, DNA engineering, corruption, democracy, and the event was closed by Antonio Mihajlov from “Skopje Pride”.

For the first time this year, Engage also organized a youth stage (ENGAGE Youth) where young activists and innovators shared their experience from their work so far.

This conference of Engage was supported by the National Endowment for Democracy, organized by the Youth Educational Forum and Radio MOF.



CSO Reactions to “Public Room” Case

The case with the Telegram closed group “Public Room” became known when the broader public found out that there had been explicit photos and videos of girls from the whole country, part of them minor, being shared there. Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoI) announced a thorough investigation, and the administrator and creator of the group were summoned for questioning.

Many CSOs reacted to this issue and indicated that these activities were no surprise to them because they considered this behaviour a result of bad systemic solutions, ignoring by the “adults” and the educational system.

“The parents address us more and more in panic, asking for support because they are not ready to react to the

problems that are everyday reality of their children. It is not rare that the teachers also ask for opinion and help with respect to these themes because they are still not trained and have no sufficient knowledge to act in these complex situations. This is just another sign that we need an urgent introduction of comprehensive sexual education (CSE)", says HERA association indicating the importance of education in the prevention of these kinds of violence.

According to Uranija Pirovska from the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights, the prosecution should have a stronger reaction this time. "I think that we need to exclude all

assumptions if it is a minor, it should be found out what the motives were, whether there is maybe an adult behind this minor who made him or told him what to do. There is of course the danger of a paedophile network. In any case, the victims here are the girls", says Pirovska.

Megjashi also points out the possibility that there are adults among the members of the group that can abuse the shared photos and blackmail the victims.

When Shall We Start to Donate the Surplus of Food?

The food shop owners are not aware of the possibilities and know little about the regulations on food donation. This is one of the finds of the research conducted among the companies working on food distribution and sale, as presented in the publication "Don't throw, donate! Food is a limited resource" which was introduced by the associations Kindness and Journalists for Human Rights on 26 February 2020 in Skopje.

The research was made in the period from October to December 2019 and it concludes that one of the key problems is the absence of legal regulations to use the surplus of food. According to the finds, our country does not have a strategy to achieve Sustainable Development Goal 12.3 that states that every country should halve the food waste by 2030, and at the same time there is no empathy or desire to make it a reality.

Apart from the institutions, private companies and citizens also had low awareness about the need to donate the surplus of food and food waste.

According to the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), North Macedonia is on the eighth place in the world when it comes to amounts of food waste per capita. The data that are publicly announced say that there are huge quantities of food that are thrown here and they have the potential to feed around 13,000 citizens with three meals per day. On one hand, there is a high percentage of the so-called food surplus, and at the same time there are more than 400,000 citizens who have a problem accessing food.

The Citizen Association for Help to Homeless and Socially Endangered Families and Individuals "Kindness" from Skopje is a beneficiary of a Civica Mobilitas institutional grant.

COOPERATION

Free Legal Aid Campaign

The coalition "Margini" and the Association for Emancipation, Solidarity and Equality of Women (ESE) started a campaign to promote the Law for Free Legal Aid to the citizens who do not have enough means to start a legal procedure to fulfil their rights.

If you are facing a legal problem and you do not have sufficient financial means to resolve it, you have the right to a free legal aid.

The campaign slogan "Don't Give Up, Ask for Justice!" calls

the citizens to ask for protection of their rights and seek justice in an institutional way.

The campaign states that the country can provide economic growth and development, gender equality and overcome poverty only if there is access to justice and initiatives for legal strengthening.

In the videos there are groups of people facing legal problems that cannot be resolved due to their poor economic background, lack of confidence in the institutions and/or

systemic discrimination. The campaign calls for access to justice in an institutional way.

Watch the videos:

<http://www.pravnozakni.mk/barajpravda/?fbclid=IwAR38UeYMMfWuO46288V8dBRsXzCeBudUdwBvCUTJtoyA1ibGMm-05weDmCE>



March for Women’s and Female Students’ Rights

On the International Women’s Day (8th March), there was the fourth March for Women’s Rights, traditionally organized by the Platform for Gender Equality and the activists for women’s rights, and it was for the first time preceded by the Female Student March. This year the protest was dedicated to gender-based violence victims, under the motto “It’s not Your Fault!” and the female students from UKIM marched as a separate group under the slogan “It’s not Female Students’ Fault”.

In the presence of hundreds of participants that gathered at Philip II square, the activists read this year’s proclamation, which was a result of the “Public Room” case described above.

“We are not safe! We are not safe on the streets, at home, not even on-line. The whole public was recently shocked by Public Room Telegram group where 13,000 members have shared, watched and made fun with materials, photographs and videos with sexual contents on specific women and girls without their agreement. [...] This is an extremely radical form of gender-based violence whose consequences are long-term and serious”, says the proclamation.

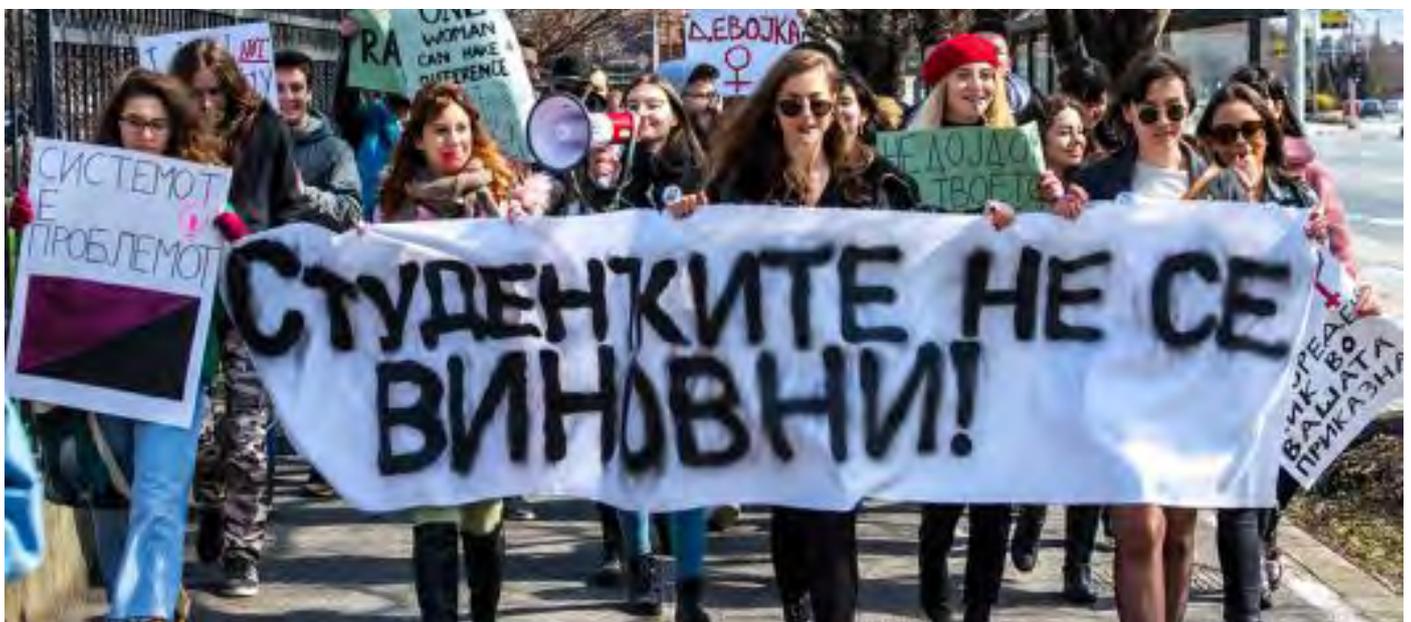
Some of the demands of the activists are comprehensive sexual education in the country, as well as adequate, timely and efficient prevention, protection and support of the

victims of gender-based violence by all institutions that are part of the system, as well as strict sanctions for each action.

The March for Women’s Rights ended in Women Fighter Park where the activists had a closing performance, with an adaptation of the song “The Rapist Is You!” which has turned into a world anthem for the injustice and gender-based violence against women.

The student protest came one day before the prison sentence to three professors and one teaching assistant at the Faculty of Economy for bribe and asking sexual services from students to grant them grades.

“We cannot ask for full inclusion of woman in the society as equal, as human if her educational process is constantly endangered, from primary up to high education. It is time that we stand together and oppose all those who allowed themselves to cross the borders of their authority, it is time to oppose all of those who think that women are at their disposal for purely esthetic reasons and all who think that we are in no position to say “NO”. It is time to reach out to our colleagues, join them in their fight and help them so their voice is heard”, says the message of the 8th March student march.



ENABLING ENVIRONMENT

Civil Society Regional Forum for the Western Balkans and Turkey

“The civil sector should be much more open to the needs of the citizens, and not be only focused to donors”, recommended Nicola Bertolini, the Head of the Cooperation Section at the EU Delegation in the country at the Civil Society Regional Forum of West Balkans and Turkey which took place in Skopje on 22 January this year.

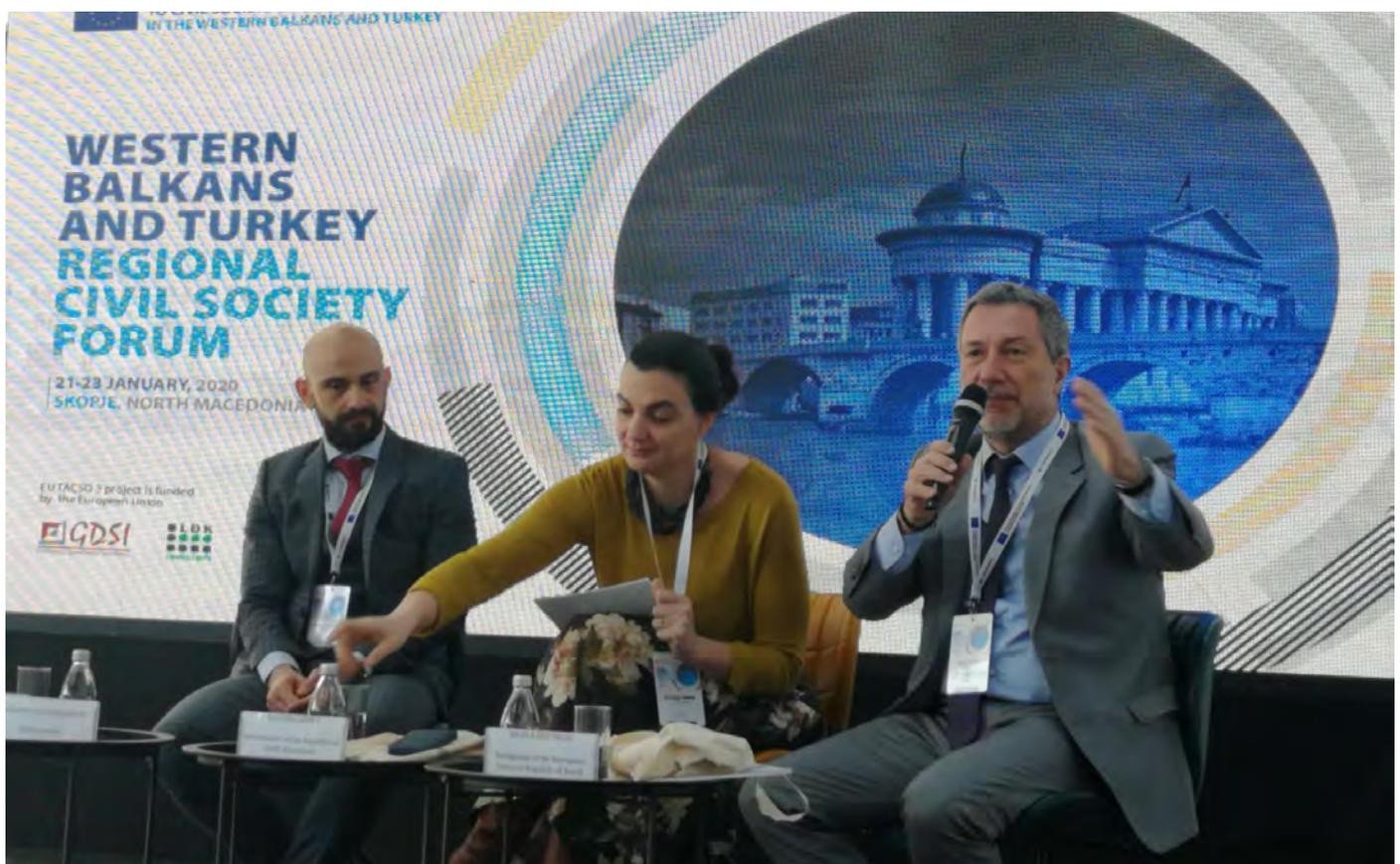
He also stressed that there is a need for strengthened cooperation with the local authorities and that there should be more work on state funding. “Our goal, the goal of the donors is not to be needed here anymore”, he added.

Kalinka Gaber, the State Secretary at the Secretariat for European Affairs said that no society can flourish nor have any progress without a strengthened and efficient civil society and that the governments should understand this. She indicated the establishment of the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society and she stressed that the civil sector regularly participated in the work of the government bodies.

At the forum, there were participants from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, as well as high representatives from the European Commission and public institutions.

The results of the “Report for the Assessment of the Need to Create Enabling Environment and Capacities of the Civil Society” against the “Directive of the European Union for the Civil Society in the enlargement countries” were presented at the forum. The structure of the forthcoming Instrument for Pre-accession Aid (IPA 3) for the period 2021-2027 was presented. At the event, the start of the three-year EU TACSO 3 project was also marked.

The activities of TACSO 3 include partnership and network promotion between project beneficiaries and stakeholders, sharing of lessons learned and best practices in developing civil society capacity, development and monitoring of guidelines, positioning TACSO web portal as a main regional information repository for civil society actors, training and training of trainers, and others.



Networked CSOs Acting Locally

The establishment of the Local Democracy Network is one of the main results of the three-year project “Civil Society Organizations in the Service of Local Democracy” which is implemented by the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA) – Skopje, the Association of Financial Workers in the Local Self-Government and Public Enterprises (ZFR) and the European Movement of North Macedonia.

The implemented activities have created legal and financial conditions for the CSOs at local level; they have encouraged and developed sustainable mechanisms for cooperation between the civil society and local authorities; and they have also strengthened the local capacities of the associations in order to be part of the civil dialogue and decision making at local level.

More than 70 representatives of CSOs and local self-government participated at the closing conference “Local Democracy – An Ideal or Practice” where the experience of the project, its achievements and lessons learnt were shared.

Ivana Petrovska, project coordinator, stressed that the need for this action comes from the fact that the CSOs registered in Skopje most often function at central level, while the civil sector in the rest of the cities is not developed sufficiently. “We have also enabled networking of the CSOs at local level because we have seen that most of them act isolated within their areas”, added she.

After it has been seen that most of the municipalities financially support the CSOs at local level, they asked that there is standardization of the support, in order to make it in the best possible way and have the desired effects on the local population.



CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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