

CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

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SAVE US BECAUSE OF YOURSELVES!

The first message on environment that I remember, addressed me from a "Nash Svet" calendar; an interesting, informative and educational reading for primary school students. There were photographs of various birds on each of the pages, and the message was "Save Us, because of Yourselves"! At those times, in the primary schools, as well as out of them, there was not much talk about the environment, but the editors of the magazine seem to have been one step ahead of the others.

In the quarter that we left behind us we marked the International Environment Day. Although the events this year were dedicated to fighting desertification, this is a good opportunity to also touch upon all other aspects of protecting the planet which is for now the only known home to humanity as we know it. The forests, waters, air, soil, all living being that inhabit the plant, the whole ecosystem deserves our daily attention and care; as we, the people, are the only ones responsible for its permanent destruction.

This is not a radical conclusion. This is shown by various scientific research that pertains to the disappearance of certain species, drying out of water sources, continuous increase of the average temperature, etc. For example, the analysis made by the Centre for Climate Change (CCC) when it comes to the changes in temperatures in the coming 40 years show that it is expected that the average temperature during the summer periods will be 6°C higher compared to now. The temperature increase if expected to cause more frequent temperature differences, extreme weather events, such as storms, hail, intense rains and floods as a result of the huge amounts of rain over short time periods, but also winds of bigger intensity. We could say that the future is our present.

Parallel to the concerning data on the destruction of the planet which are a result of our irresponsible behaviour, we witness various theories that are nothing else but an alibi for the current state of affairs. You would hear that

it is a natural process that has nothing to do with people, that climate changes are invented and that the planet would find a way to deal with this situation.

This conscious closing of one's eyes and mind when facing such obvious problems that concern us all is everything but a feature of the most aware species that inhabits the planet.

It is time that we asked ourselves which group we belong to: the one that is concerned about the crimes against the environment, the one of the so-called conspirators or the one of silent observers of the events. It is time that we asked ourselves what we do personally on this issue and it ends with social networks posts. No, I am not saying that it is bad, only that it is not enough, not any more.

CSOs are among the loudest when it comes to asking for responsibility, in raising the awareness of the whole public and offering solutions to the problems with the environment. However, we should move a step forward, we should take the personal, individual responsibility and lead with a personal example. We should ask ourselves, what do I do to decrease the bad influence, give personal example to others? Do I select waste, do I influence the others to do this, do I alarm when I notice a landfill, do I report, is there a reaction to my reporting, what if there is none, do I give up or do I continue? We can take numerous actions alone, on daily basis, together with the others or together with the neighbours from the community in which we live or broader.

Let us protect the environment because of us. Let is make a step forward, let us be the example that is worth following!

Have a pleasant reading!

Gonce Jakovlevska Civica Mobilitas National Coordinator for ICO

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Bowling to cooperation – "Youth policies fit for the young" project started



The young people of Pelagonija have "challenged" the politicians to a bowling competition! With the result uncertainty to the last bowls, in a dynamic and motivating game, the young people spent time with the mayors and municipal council members from the nine Pelagonija municipalities and they spoke how to create and adapt policies fit for the young together.

In the next three years, Pro Local, together with eight more local CSOs will work on practical involvement of the young people in the work of the municipalities. They will research the possibilities for cooperation that are attractive for the young people and they will respond to their needs in the places where they live; however, also if they can be

included in the Law on Youth. The mechanism for joining local resources for joint solution of youth challenges in the Pelagonija region will also be tested.

The mayor of the Municipality of Bitola, Toni Konjanovski, greeted the young people on behalf of the politicians and he stressed that the adults learn from the young. He hopes that after the end of this project, everybody will be able to boast together with the new youth policies fit for the young people, which will be implemented to make a real change in the local communities.

The project is supported by the Swiss government via Civica Mobilitas.

"Truth Matters" Regional campaign

The dangers of disinformation and hate speech are real challenges to democracy and social integrity. This was the reason or starting a regional campaign "Truth Matters", implemented by the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia and the six regional journalism councils.

"We try to inform the citizens from South-East Europe and Turkey on the serious consequences of these practices, both in on-line and off-line environments", say the people at CMEM.

The regional campaign was launched on 3rd May on the occasion of the World Media Freedom Day as part of the project "Building Trust in the Media in South-East Europe: Support to Journalism as a Public Good". The project is supported by EU and UNESCO, and it focuses on the countries from Western Balkans and Turkey.

The goal is to raise the awareness on the meaning of the media freedom and encourage the free expression in the region.

Within the campaign, there have been two videos made on the possibilities for reaction when it comes to hate speech or disinformation. These videos promote the importance of professional and ethical journalism as a foundation stone of each democratic society, especially in conditions of media abuse.

One of the most important aspects of the campaign are the "truth fighters" – journalists that persistently follow the principles of the code of ethics, striving to integrity, professionalism and responsibility in journalism

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The data that indicate the fact that false news reach the citizens six times faster than the real/true news, while at the same time 73% of them believe rumours more than the official information, are alarming and ask for immediate action.

Citizens who think that they are confronted with unethical reports in the media can address the Council of Media Ethics of Macedonia by reporting to info@semm.mk.

"Bostanie" Urban garden more and more tnteresting for the Citizens

Five years ago, the association Forum – Center for Strategic Research and Documentation (CSRD) created the social garden called "Bostanie" in Lisiche park, in the municipality of Aerodrom. Since then, "Bostanie" has become one of the favourite city locations for many citizens, who want to improve their quality of life, practice environmentally acceptable models of joint gardening in urban areas.

On 29th June 2024, Forum CSRD presented the results of the project "Education on Urban Farming for Sustainable Future", whose part was "Bostanie". During the event, the visitors and gardeners together cooked snacks from freshly harvested vegetables from the garden and other local produce, and they exchanged their culinary and gardening experience.

Except in Macedonia, the project was also implemented in Croatia, Serbia and Bulgaria, via Forum CSRD partner organizations: Srbija Organika from Belgrade, Eco-Zadar from Zadar and the Bulgarian Policy School "Dimitro Panica" from Sofia, with the financial support of the European Union via Erasmus+ programme.

The project promotes possibilities for learning for the all generations of citizens, on basic life skills – how they can grow food themselves, how to increase the awareness about the challenges for the environment, and it even gives possibilities for earning money via urban framing.

By creating efficient and innovative educational materials, such as a manual and curriculum on urban gardening which can be applied both in formal and informal education, as well as educational video materials prepared by professionals in this area from the four South-East Europe countries, created within this project, there is improvement of the capacities of the trainers and education professionals on topics of urban and regenerative gardening, improvement of the quality of the soil and water, preserving the agrobiodiversity and increasing the green areas in the urban environments.

More information on the project "Education on Urban Farming for Sustainable Future" and the products of this project (study, manual, curriculum and educational video materials) can be found on the web page www.forum-csrd. org.mk, the FB profile and the You Tube.



Young girls and women learnt about civic engagement and inclusion in local communities



From 17th to 20th June 2024 there was a training in civic engagement held in Dojran, focusing on awareness raising and know-how on gender equality and women's activism.

The tree day training was organized under the motto "Empowered Women Empower the Community III" and it was organized by the Swedish foundation Kvinna Till Kvinna. 22 young girls aged 16-21 from the municipalities of Sveti Nikole, Veles, Negotino, Kavadarci, Delchevo, Kochani and Vinica participated at the training.

The participants had the opportunity to learn and share experience on topics such as gender equality, women's activism and community participation.

The goal of the training was to raise the awareness and engagement of young women in local communities when it comes to gender equality and their participation in local policies. The young people had the possibility to learn about women's human rights, activism and how to use the skills to improve their communities.

The participants also learned and practiced what they had learned by preparing projects on which they obtained feedback from the trainers after presenting them. The organisers expressed their satisfaction with the active participation of the girls and they believe that they would continue to be leading figures in their communities, supporting and protecting the rights of all women.

Awareness raising on mental health among the students from Kriva Palanka

Via interactive workshops and discussions, the students from the local school in the village of Konopica researched and learnt about emotional intelligence and they obtained skills to manage emotions and understand the emotions of the others.

Led by the experienced Nadica Skeparovska-Petkovska, MA, the students and the teachers talked about the importance of emotional intelligence and the consequences when it lacks in the school community.

The goal of the project is to improve the emotional and social competence of the students and increase the capacity of the teachers to proven and develop the mental health among children and teenagers. With these activities, the project has reiterated the importance of education for the mental health and supported the participants in building stronger and more sustainable relations in the school environment.

The innovative project "Educational and Creative Collage for Better Mental Health" has been implemented by "Spektar" Regional Cooperation Centre, in cooperation with "Ilinden" primary school from Kriva Palanka.

The project is part of the Regional Programme on Local Democracy in the Western Balkans 2—ReLOaD2, funded by the European Union and co-financed by the Municipality of Kriva Palanka, implemented by United National Development Programme (UNDP).



Thirty young people participated in Eco Logic's "Ohrid Camp"

The three-day camp organized by Eco Logic on civic science and environment ended on 9th June 2024. Two groups of 30 young participants each, including teachers from the high schools in Skopje and Kochani, as well as the champions of "Malina Popivanova" primary schools from Kochani, participated in "Ohrid Camp" that took place at the Ohrid Scout Centre, as part of the project "Researchers' Hub".

The participants were involved in an interactive search for specific plants in the camp, they conducted an experiment in soil pollution and they attended the short lecture "why and how" on civic science and experience learning.

Additionally, there were a workshop on activism and eco action planning organizes, as well as eco research initiatives, a session on eco and humane urban space, as well as a fast excursion and lecture on "Ohrid Lake lungs" – Studenichishko Blato.

The activities were led by Eco Logic representatives Dragan, Caci, Stojne, Nikola, Martina and Iva, and for part of them they were also joined by Kate from Ohrid SOS, Sasho and Viktor from Lihnid. Apart from this, they participated in actions for cleaning the Ohrid Lake with Nikola Paskali.

"We hope that this experience will stimulate the young people and the teachers to continue researching and care about the environment, by using scientific methods and sharing their discoveries with the communities", say the people from Eco Logic.

The organization expressed their gratitude to the principals and professors of "Orce Nikolov" high school, "Panche Arsovski" high school Skopje, "Vasil Antevski Dren", "Vlado Tasevski", "Marija Kiri-Sklodovska" — Skopje, "Gosho Vikentiev" high school from Kochani and "Malina Popivanova" primary school from Kochani, as well as the excellent team of young participants.

The camp was organized as part of the project "Researchers' Hub", supported by the USA Embassy in Skopje.



Women's group "Pchinja" lobbied for garbage containers for waste selection

Women's Group "Pchinja" and the humanitarian association "Mother" has been working for four years on finding solutions to the problems related to landfills and unorganized waste disposal in the Pchinja river.

"For three years we have been submitting requests to 'Hygiene and Greenery' public enterprise from Kumanovo, which finally resulted in placing garbage containers and organized waste collection, which has significantly improved the situation with the environment", said Lidija Ilijevska, the president of the humanitarian association "Mother"

In the beginning of this year, upon the initiative of the women's organization "Pchinja" there were containers for plastic selection placed, in cooperation with the private enterprise "Uno Product" from Kumanovo. The containers have been placed on three locations: in front of St. Spas church, at the info centre on Bislimska Canyon and at the entrance to the Bislimska Canyon. The village of Pchinja is a well-known tourist place at the north-east and the tourists that visit Bislimska Canyon pass through it. In this way, the tourists are also enabled to be involved in waste selection.

According to the agreement with "Uno Product", the money from the plastic buyout will go to the women to be used for the activities of the group. This initiative and action of the women is a positive example for advocacy for resolving the problems of the local community.



Committed protection of children is needed

Every year, 300,000 children go missing in Europe alone. In their memory, for those who have been reunited with their families, as well as for awareness raising about this global issue, 25th May has been marked as the International Day of Missing Children, since 1983.

The disappearance and kidnapping of children is everyday problem in every country. According to the First Children's Embassy in the World "Megjashi", Macedonia, as many other countries has not been treating this problem as a priority and has not developed appropriate mechanisms to find the missing children, who are in danger of being used for prostitution, organ trade, begging and other most severe forms of children abuse.

Systems such as "Amber Alert" are of essential significance for fast reaction in case of a missing child. Unfortunately, Macedonia has not implemented this mechanism yet.

Although the challenge is big, "Megjashi" appeals to the Ministry of Interior (MoI) to quickly introduce this system.

The Children's Embassy has been appealing for several years now to also establish the European number 116000 in Macedonia as well, which will provide more

efficient protection of the children facing kidnapping and disappearance. "By introducing this number, we will be even more accessible to the children and their parents in case of disappearance.

This initiative will not only help in fast recovery and return of the lost children, but it will also help in decreasing the abuse of children and the protection of their rights", stress the people at "Megjashi".

They have also requested Mol to separate the photographs of the missing minors from those of the adults at the official web page, thus presenting a clearer picture of the missing children.

It is equally important that the children learn how to protect themselves, how to be informed about the risks and dangers that they can face. In order to have all of this, parents and adults have to make some time and dedicate themselves to educating the children about the dangers that they might face, as well as about the ways in which they can help themselves in such situations. More useful information can be found at this **link**.

Round tables on environment protection and climate changes



From 28th June to 4th July 2024, CMA KRIK held eight round tables as part of the action research "From Difference to Justice — Equal in the Right to Healthy Sustainable Environment for Everybody"!

These activities were crucial for mapping the local needs for protection of the environment and resilience to climate changes in various regions in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The round tables took place in Skopje, Tetovo, Valandovo, Kriva Palanka, Negotino, Ohrid, Bitola and Berovo, including representatives of the local self-government, youth councils, social councils, public centres for social work, social services, CSOs and youth organizations,

alongside the team of enthusiastic participants. The main mission of KRIK representatives was to open the communication and share their experiences and ideas.

Together, they identified and mapped the local needs and the stakeholders on the issues for environment protection and climate changes, with a special stress on empowering of the young people as leaders of these activities.

At each round table there were 12-16 participants who shared their unique perspectives on the local environmental challenges and solutions. The discussions were inclusive, providing that every voice is heard and taken into consideration in the final recommendations.

The representatives of CMA KRIK have prepared reports from each round table with mapped findings, recommendations and conclusions specific for each region. The reports would be used as a basis for a national report that would serve as a guide for strategies for environment protection and climate changes.

"The participants are our inspiration in the fight for healthier and more sustainable environment. We are thankful to all participants and stakeholders that have made these round tables incredible", say the people at KRIK.

The project "Together for Green Advocacy to Protect the Environment" is supported by the Swiss government via Civica Mobilitas in partnership with the Centre for Youth Activism KRIK, the association Centre for Social Initiatives "Hope" and the Association of Social Workers of Macedonia – ZSRM.

The goal of the project is to introduce an environmental, so-called "green" perspective in the expert social and youth work, as one of the key perspectives for protection of the environment, but at the same time for building an inclusive and democratic society for all.

Rural Coalition joins Ana Lindh Foundation



By joining the Macedonian Network of Ana Lindh Foundation, Rural Coalition has become part of the global initiative for encouraging a dialogue among cultures from the Mediterranean. In cooperation with 14 other CSOs, Rural Coalition will start with the first activities this year, in order to improve the life in the local communities.

Liljana Jonoski, the Executive Director of Rural Coalition has been selected a member of the Executive Board of the network.

The Ana Lindh Foundation (ALDA - The European Association for Local Democracy) is an international organization established in 2004, which promotes intercultural and civic dialogue in the Euro-Mediterranean zone region. With more than 4,000 members in more than 40 countries, the foundation functions as a network of national networks, focusing on areas such as intercultural relations, cultural heritage, religion, research, human rights, democracy and community development, art, youth and education, gender issues, environment and sustainable development and media.

The goal of the Foundation is to empower the voices of the young, influence policies and unite the civil societies via dialogue and cooperation.

The Macedonian Network of Ana Lindh Foundation (ALDA Skopje) is part of the global ALDA network and it plays a key role in supporting the local democracy and civic participation in the country. With various projects and activities, ALDA Skopje works on improving the capacities of the local governments and CSOs, as well as on strengthening the mutual cooperation and dialogue among various cultural and ethnic communities.

All interested citizens and organizations are offered a possibility to participate in ALDA's activities, as well as a possibility for educational trainings and exchange of experience with international partners via ALDA network.

CIVIC PARTICIPATION

A Guide to Virtuous Politicians 2.0" - Report on Election Ethics



On 5th June 2024, the organization Forum for Reasonable Policies (FRP) presented the Report on Election Ethics "A Guide to Virtuous Politicians 2.0", prepared during the 2024 presidential and

parliamentary elections, by FRP team and experts: Gordan Georgiev, Ibrahim Mehmeti, Aleksandar Spasenovski and Jasmina Trajkoska-Naumoska.

The presentation was followed by representatives of the academic, media and civic communities. "We want to indicate the politicians and the bodies related to election organization that we expect a new step forward at the next elections", said Gordan Georgiev, FRP President in his introductory address.

He stressed that there had already been a step forward at these elections, especially if one takes into consideration the level of personal attacks, negative campaign and confrontations, and there was an expected peaceful transfer of power.

"We had a good election process within the Balkan standards", said he. Speaking about the basis of this report, Georgiev stressed that there was a big data base created, including 1,647 media reports, videos, articles, social media posts and a partial comparison of the political party programmes. The articles of 69 media were analysed, providing a broad spectrum of opinions and views.

The monitoring of the articles was done in the period of 4th April – 8th May, and the data of this monitoring can be made available to interested researchers and journalists.

According to Jasmina Trajkoska-Naumoska, the biggest task is to return the trust in the public institutions and politics. Therefore, it is important to channel the rhetoric to improving the democratic standards. "It is a big challenge to maintain criticism in the sense of constructiveness.

The elections should be a battle of ideas and visions, rather than smearing the other", said she. Trajkoska-Naumoska also spoke about the election culture of the voters who voted against and make no distinction between national and local elections.

For Ibrahim Mehmeti, one of the most striking occurrences was accepting the approach of the political party in the sense of vocabulary and values, which is then multiplied. "In this way, we do not contribute a lot to the ethics of the election process", said he.

The Forum for Reasonable Policies tea thanked all participants and media that recognized the importance of this topic, especially in critical periods such as elections.

Insufficient investments in science

The Forum for Reasonable Policies and BIRC – Institute for Media and Democracy have analysed the situation of the investments in science compared with the one in the developed countries. The analysis shows that the expenditures of the European Union when it comes to research and development reached 352 billion Euro for 2022 (according to Eurostat). This is 6.34% more than in 2021 when there were 331 billion Euro spent and 48.52% more than in 2012, when there were 237 billion Euro spent.

The highest investments in development and science have been noted in Belgium (3.44%), then in Sweden (3.40%), Austria (3.20%) and Germany (3.13%). On the other hand, 8 EU countries have reported development and scientific

intensity under 1%: Romania (0.46%), Malta (0.65%), Latvia (0.75%) Cyprus and Bulgaria (both 0.77%). They are followed by Ireland, Slovakia and Luxembourg with shares of close to 1%.

According to Eurostat data, the 2021 expenditures for research and development in Turkey amount to 1.1% of country's GDP. The Turkish intensity of research and development remains higher than the one of the Western Balkans. The highest level in 2021 was in Serbia with 1.0%. In Montenegro, the expenditures for research and development were 0.5% in 2018. In North Macedonia, the expenditures for research and development remained at around 0.4% of its GDP in the period for which data

is available, from 2015 to 2020. The expenditures for research and development in Bosnia and Herzegovina decreased as a GDO percentage from 0.3% in 2012 to 0.2% in 2020, according to available data. In Kosovo, the public expenditures for research and development are only 0.01% of GDP, despite the 0.7% goal set in the law. Albania spent 0.4% of its GDP for research and development in 2021.

How much is invested in scientific research in the Republic of North Macedonia? In the course of 2023, the Ministry of Education and Science said that they have spent more than 240 million denars for support of the work of the scientific and research staff and stimulation of science development. These funds were used to modernize the conditions in several laboratories at higher education and scientific institutions, accredited new work methods, and at the same time there were seven projects of special public interest funded in the seven public academic institutions

in the country.

It seems that with each year we have an increase of the financial support to scientific research, but it remains insufficient to achieve the level that some countries from the region and broader Europe have. Despite the announcements for increase in the budget for scientific and research projects, the 2022 increase was much smaller than expected. In 2022, there were 462 million denars spent for scientific projects, but there is a significant increase in the budget item on research and scientific projects.

The complete analysis can be seen at the following link.

Initiative for Women's Rights educated the citizens of Shuto Orizari and Kumanovo on health services



The association Initiative for Women's Rights organized civic forums in May and June in Shuto Orizari and Kumanovo. 45 citizens participated at the forums and they spoke about the 2023/24 Programme for Participation in Using of Health Services for Certain Diseases and Protection of Mothers and Babies in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The general conclusion is that people are not informed well about the Programme measures. In the discussion it was noticeable that the participants, primarily parents, are not informed and aware that some of the check-ups for their children and free of charge. The parents indicated that one of the reasons for irregular check-ups was the price that they could not afford. The moderator Salija Bekir Halim explained them in which way they could check if the office where they were being checked up had an agreement with the Health Insurance Fund. They also spoke about the check-ups with gynaecologists, which are unfortunately still a taboo topic for part of the girls and women. The moderator spoke about cases with bad outcomes for women who had not had regular gynaecological checkups. She invited them to contact the organization if the gynaecologists ask them for money for the services, Bekir Halim also spoke about the amount charged by the family doctors in order to fill in the forms for custodial care.

The moderator Bekir Halim confirmed that the field visits of the organization and the education of women on their rights had contributed to decrease the illegal charging in Skopje.

Part of the suggestions of the citizens were:

- Conduct education to eliminate all types of discrimination for health care workers;
- Overcome stereotypes and prejudices to Roma community with health care workers;
- Define a systemic package for services for women in reproductive period, as well as for pregnant women, especially for women at social risk to eliminate the illegal charging by some gynaecologists;
- Provide free of charge abortion for Roma women at social risk;
- Check-ups of children up to one year of age should be obligatory, accessible and free of charge;
- Provide visits of patronage nurses and increase the level of information on usage of contraceptives.

These are other recommendations will be part of the Analysis of the Participation Programme.

The forum was organized as part of the project "Improved Health Care Rights of Girls, Women and Vulnerable Groups", supported by the Swiss government via Civica Mobilitas. Its goal is to raise the awareness and participation of Roman in the health care, providing improved access and information on their rights and possibilities for free of charge medical services during pregnancy and delivery.

Parents' money in schools is spent in a non-transparent and unaccountable way

The Ministry of Education and Science (MES) being late with preparing bylaws that would regulate the way of procurement in the educational institutions which are not covered by the Law for Public Procurement has allowed the schools to be non-transparent and unaccountable when it comes to spending the money of the parents. This is one of the findings of the research "Lack of Procedures, Transparency and Accountability with the Procurements Funded by Parents' Money in the Schools", published by the Center for Civic Communications on 17th April 2024.

The 2021-2025 National Strategy for Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interests stipulates that the Ministry of Education and Science prepares these bylaws (rulebooks) in the first half of 2022, in order to decrease the broad possibilities for corruption and office abuse.

The research conducted in 96 primary and secondary schools in 8 municipalities in the country has revealed that the procurement of insurance, school uniforms, photographs, lunches, etc. was implemented in procedures without clearly defined rules that would enable selection of most favourable offers and best value for money. The public calls were published for excursions only, because the MES adopted procedures for them as early as 2014.

Most of the schools cannot explain the manner in which the selection of companies whose services are paid by the parents has been made. Even with the schools that have submitted the decisions for selection by the parent councils, it cannot be determined how the offers that have been reviewed were collected, i.e. who has decided to ask specific companies to make procurement offers.

In the Republic of North Macedonia, there are 966 primary and 129 secondary schools with around 254 thousand students. Based on the obtained data, one can assess that the annual value of these procurements is at least 10 million Euro. This is, of course, a huge amount of money, for which there is no systemic way of spending for the needs of the students.

This research has been prepared within the project "Safeguards against Corruption", funded by the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Skopje, and implemented by the Center for Civic Communications.

Humanity protection in digital landscape

The panel discussion on "Protection of Humanity in a Digital Landscape" organized by Metamorphosis Foundation opened the Internet Freedom Summit, which took place in Struga from 24th to 28th June 2024.

The discussion focused on the ethical impact on human rights online and human dignity when designing technological solutions based on algorithms and artificial intelligence, stressing the creation of "good technology" which respects privacy, promotes non-discrimination, transparency and truly meets various needs of all categories of citizens.

In their introductory addresses, Elena Stojanovska, expert in personal data protection and co-author of the Research of the Effect of New Technologies, with a Special Focus on Artificial Intelligence on Human Rights on Internet and Developing Ethnical Standards for Human Rights **Protection on the Internet in Automatic Decision Making** and prof.

Aleksandar Karadimche from "St. Paul the Apostle" University of Information Science and Technologies in Ohrid spoke about the findings of this research.

The message of the discussion was that by resolving these critical ethical concerns, one can work to a future where technology serves to strengthen and include, rather than marginalize or invade various segments of our society.



5th June – International Day of the Environment, What Can We Do for Renewal of the Land, Desertification and Increased Resilience to Draught?

The analyses made by the Center for Climate Changes (CCC) on temperature changes in the next 40 years show that the average annual temperatures will increase for around 2°C on average in the municipalities of Centar, Prilep and Demir Kapija.

It is expected that in the summer periods the average temperatures will be 6°C higher compared to now. This projection shows that in the future there will be even longer periods of droughts that will result in degradation of the fertile soil and affect the food production.

At the same time, taking into consideration this analysis, the risk and vulnerability assessments of the health sector show that only by 1 degree increase of the average temperatures in the summer months, 10% higher death rate is expected. Especially vulnerable are the chronically ill, people with cardiovascular diseases, socially vulnerable categories.

The temperature rise is expected to cause more frequent temperature differences, extreme weather occurrences such as tempests, hail, big rains and floods as a result of huge quantities of rain during short time periods but also winds with bigger intensity.

These events are expected to cause serious consequences and damages on the agricultural crops, critical infrastructure and other type of infrastructure (local roads), landslides, draught and desertification, fires, etc.

Therefore, climate action is necessary. In order to decrease the growth of global temperatures, but also to appropriately adjust to climate changes, we should use sustainable solutions in agriculture, forestry, energy and transport. It depends on all of us how much we will contribute to decreasing of climate changes!

Standstill in the Advancement of LGBTI Rights

The latest research of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights has revealed that despite some improvements, the overall situation with respect to the LGBTIQ rights in the country has remained concerning.

In May, the Agency published its third consecutive report on the research of the LGBTIQ rights, implemented in EU-27 countries, Albania, North Macedonia and Serbia, with more than 100 thousand respondents.

The report notes a slight drop of the percentage of LGBTIQ people avoiding public display of affection (74% in 2023 compared to 87% in 2020) and slight decrease of those who avoid certain locations in fear of attack (43% in 2023 compared to 50% in 2020). Nevertheless, these changes are not significant enough to indicate a real progress. Only 21% of the LGBTIQ individuals in the country are quite open or very open about their identity, which is significantly lower than the EU-27 average of 51%.

Despite the adoption of the Law for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination in 2020, the research notes high discrimination rate, with 39% of the respondents experiencing discrimination in at least one area. There has been a concerning decrease of harassment cases with almost two thirds of the respondents (63%) which is significantly more than in 2020 (41%). Additionally, one third of the respondents in the country (32%) have been subjected to "conversation therapy" in order to change their sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

The lack of implementation of the Law for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination, as well as lack of approximation of other relevant laws lead to constant marginalization and legal insecurity of LGBTIQ people.

RAINB●W/MAP 2024 C	ategories Global Scores North Macedonia
EQUALITY & NON-DISCRIMINATION	N 48.43%
AMILY	4.28%
HATE CRIME & HATE SPEECH	25.59%
LEGAL GENDER RECOGNITION	10.00%
INTERSEX BODILY INTEGRITY	0.00%
CIVIL SOCIETY SPACE	100.00%
ASYLUM	33.33%

Download date: 2024-05-22)

The number of those who believe that the government fights prejudice and intolerance efficiently has also dropped from 34% in 2020 to 14%.

The standstill of the LGBTIQ rights has also been noted in the latest Rainbow Europe Map and Index which are published by ILGA Europe at annual level.

North Macedonia is on the 31st place, implementing only 30.5% of the necessary reforms to advance the position and access to human rights for the LGBTIQ people.

Challenges of Western Balkan countries in the food and energy stability



On 30th May 2024, Finance Think organized the Economic Forum "After the Storm: Navigating Good and Energy Stability in the Western Balkans" where latest findings on the effects of the recent food and energy price crisis were presented, based on the Policy studies for the Western Balkans, focusing on four key aspects: household existence, company competitiveness, fiscal space and regional integration. At the events, there were additional discussions on the roadmap with following necessary measures and actions to provide self-sustainability and shock resilience for the Western Balkan countries.

The energy crisis has caused a dramatic rise of the energy prices in the Western Balkan countries. Unlike EU, these countries spend 50% more energy on producing equal GDP. In the last six years, the regional renewable energy capacities have grown almost three times slower than in the EU. This crisis which followed up the pandemic crisis has also affected the poverty in the region. In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the 17.4% increase of the electrical energy prices has contributed to a 4-percentage point increase of the poverty rates of the individuals and households, and the low-income households were especially affected.

In order to deal with the unfavourable effects of the crisis, the government of the Western Balkans countries have introduced anti-crisis measures for the households in an estimated amount of 3.5 billion dollars in the Western Balkans, which has deteriorated the already exhausted fiscal space. In North Macedonia, the electrical energy subsidies for the households have reached 3.2% of the GDP, significantly burdening the budget and potentially contributing to decreasing the expenditures for social and health care. The positive outcome of this period is the fact that the mid-term fiscal strategies of the Western Balkan countries plan bigger investment plans for energy sector development, which are crucial for preventing future shocks of this kind, as well as decreasing the additional pressure on fiscal policy.

Kristin Melsom, the Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Norway, covering North Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro stressed: ""The Western Balkans are currently facing a critical point, with food and energy security posing significant threats to the region's economic stability. The experts have stressed the Western Balkans need for investments in energy infrastructure and supporting institutions and policies to provide secure, accessible and sustainable energy. The main reasons for food insecurity in the Western Balkans come from economic instability, environmental challenges and social differences. Weather conditions and natural disasters additionally impact the food production and distribution. Resolving these issues asks for efforts to increase economic growth, strengthen agricultural resilience and promote social justice".

Dajana Cvetkovic, SMART Balkans Project Manager stressed that she was proud that the project recognized the importance of the project Perfect Strom: Food and Energy Insecurities Endanger Western Balkans Economies: "I am encouraged when I see many people interested in these topics and the role of the think-tank organizations joined in this project. The brilliant minds of this consortium are dedicated to generating proofs and encouraging a political dialogue on food and energy insecurity in the whole region", said she.

For Blagica Petreski, Finance Think Executive Director, in order to face the challenges on the way to recovery, one needs to focus on building resilient and sustainable economies: "We need a targeted social support and stabilization of the energy prices as critical measures to alleviate the negative effects of the energy crisis on households' livelihood", said she.

The economic forum was organised as part of the project "Perfect Storm: Food and Energy Insecurity Endangers the Western Balkans Economies", supported by SMART Balkans — Civic Society for Connected Western Balkans, with the financial support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Norway.

Civic monitoring of the accessibility of polling stations during 2024 Presidential and Parliamentary Elections

There were 35 polling stations in 18 cities in North Macedonia monitored in order to check if the people with disabilities can fulfil their right to vote by 8th May, when there was the second round of the presidential and parliamentary elections. This initiative was started by MCIC and the Commission for Prevention and Protection from Discrimination (CPPD) to determine if the government of RNM and the State Election Commission had acted according to the verdict of the Basic Court in Skopje, according to which they were supposed to take measures and enable the people with disabilities to fulfil their right to vote without obstacles.

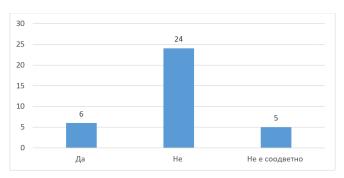
Unfortunately, this civic initiative showed that the state had not acted according to the verdict. The infrastructure and the area to and inside the polling stations had not been adjusted according to the Convention for Protection of the Rights of the People with Disabilities. This situation prevents the people with disabilities to fulfil their right to vote at election day.

The civic monitoring has shown that 27 polling stations had no appropriate parking marked with high contrast colour, although having additional parking space for the people with disabilities is of essential importance to that they can safely manoeuvre inside and outside their vehicles. Also, 12 of the monitored polling stations do not have an appropriate ramp that would ease the access to the polling station, and two third have a polling station that can provide entrance broad enough for the people who have additional accessory or a wheelchair so that they can easily enter.

"The polling station is at a location with stairs, therefore there is a ramp with a steep angle. The entrance door is too narrow (I assume 60 cm wide). However, if you do manage to overcome these obstacles, there is a new one, i.e. in front of the entrance door, where the ramp is, there are bookshelves, with an explanation that this library entrance is not in use. How discriminating and degrading feeling when after the end of the voting, although there is a ramp, one can still not enter the only city library", this was the experience of one of the monitors at the voting day.

Unfortunately, a big part of the polling stations (24) are in buildings with more floors for which there is no accessible elevator, which would enable these people to reach the room where the voting takes place.

Graph: If the polling station is not on the ground floor, is there an accessible elevator or platforms that are at stair level? A bit better case is the one with the screens placed at the adjusted (low) writing areas. The monitors reported that there was such protection of the secrecy of vote at 27 of the



polling stations. At 16 polling stations of the monitored ones, there was a pattern with Braille alphabet, and it was lacking at the same number of polling stations.

The data obtained with this civic action indicate that North Macedonia is still far from establishing an equal treatment of the people with disabilities in order for them to fulfil their right to vote. The state should also provide de facto equal opportunities for the people with disabilities so that they can fully participate in the elections.

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88 CSOs working or advocating for the rights of the people with disabilities were contacted to be involved in this initiative. The representatives of these organizations were invited to participate in the monitoring of the accessibility of the polling stations while they fulfil their right to vote. Look at the complete monitoring report.





More focus needed on reporting about CSOs achievements



The communications of Civica Mobilitas and CSOs in general were the topic of the workshop that took place on 16th May 2024 in Skopje.

37 representatives of 32 CSOs discussed the challenges of communication in the time in which we live. The big inflow of information to the citizens, hate speech, false news, burden the process of information of the CSOs to their target groups and the public.

The participants agreed that one of the most important adjustments that should be made is to put focus on reporting about achievements as opposed to information about the activities. Of course, the latest should not be excluded, but it is crucial that CSOs inform about the changes that have happened thanks to their engagement.

Part of the people present shared their experience in communicating with the media, about how and why the space that can help in their further advocacy and policy influence should be used. The participants also discussed hate speech, especially on social networks and they spoke about how these comments should be treated.

Civica Mobilitas team presented the channels of communication that they have at their disposal and they offered them as addition to their and they encouraged them to share information among themselves, use hashtags and mentions to have bigger reach.

Besides this, when they spoke about the view statistics, the participants were recommended to try to understand the communication habits of their target groups better and to adjust to them. Although publishing on social networks is easier and faster, one should not neglect publishing on web sites,

The participants agreed that they would intensify mutual communication, and the Civica Mobilitas team will continue to support them and alleviate this process.





Civica Mobilitas awarded ten new grants

Civica Mobilitas Grant Selection Committee evaluated the received project proposals and recommended that agreements are signed with ten of them. The grants will be implemented 34 organizations (the list of the grantees/implementors is at the end of the text). The total budget for the awarded grants is about 55.5 million denars. The implementation will last from 24 to 28 months.

The grants are intended to increase the active involvement of the citizens in the planning and implementation of the projects and improve their involvement in the CSO management, With the financial support there will be specific activities implemented in order to engage the citizens in all eight planning regions.

At the call that was open until 12.04.2024, there were 57 project proposals of 184 CSOs. Out of them, 57 organizations were the implementors and 127 their partners. 49 of them met the administrative criteria and they were submitted to the Committee for assessment.

These are the grantees and the activities that they will implement:

Association Resource Environment Centre (REC) — North Macedonia, Skopje, in partnership with the Association for Protection and Promotion of the Environment EKO-LOGIC Skopje and the CSO Florozon-Centre for Environmental Democracy Skopje will implement the project "Civic Activism for Implementation of Circular Economy in Organic Waste Management".

Finance Think CSO — Institute for Economic Research and Policy, in partnership with the CSO Macedonian Centre for Civic Education MCGO Skopje; CSO Youth Educational Forum Skopje; CSO Centre for Development Promotion of Democracy, Media and Journalistic Standards and Freedom of Expression in the Republic of Macedonia 360 Degrees Skopje and the Macedonian Doctors' Association Skopje will implement the project "Civic Supervision: Bridging the Gap between Political Promises and Implementation in Four Development Areas".

CSO Helsinki Committee for Human Rights Skopje, Skopje in partnership with the CSO HOPS-Options for Healthy Life Skopje and the Coalition for Sexual and Health Rights of Marginalised Communities Margini Skopje will implement the project "Equality Now – Empowering the Marginalised Communities for Social Inclusion and Non-Discrimination".

Centre for Helping People with Mental Handicap Poraka Negotino, in partnership with the Association for Protection and Promotion of the Environment Eco-Life Kavadarci and the Association of People with Cerebral Palsy and Other Disabilities Veles will implement the project "Facing Challenges and Stigmatization".

Humanitarian Association Majka Kumanovo, in partnership with the association Regional Centre for Cooperation Spektar Kriva Palanka; Foundation for Small and Medium Enterprise Development Kumanovo and the Association Regional Centre for Sustainable Development Kratovo will implement the project "Active Women".

Association Centre for Development and Promotion Promo Idea Strumica, in partnership with the CSO Centre for Research and Analyses Novus Strumica and the Association for Improvement of the Quality of Citizens' Lives Kruna Plus Radovish will implement the project "Youth Network for Financial Literacy in the Southeast".

The Association for Protection of Workers' Rights Loud Textile Worker Shtip, in partnership with the Association EHO Educational-Humanitarian Organization Shtip and the Association Initiative of Unemployed Intellectuals Vinica will implement the project "With Women's Activism and Initiatives to Gender Inclusive and Responsible Municipalities".

Association for Democratic Initiative Gostivar, in partnership with the CSO Centre for Education and Development from the village of Tearce; Association Institute for Leadership and Public Policies Tetovo and the Association Institute for Social Change-InSoK Tetovo will implement the project "Empowering the Youth: Encouraging Civic Engagement and Entrepreneurship in the Polog Region".

Association Scout Poreche Brigade Krste Jon Struga, in partnership with the Association Centre for Sustainable Community Development Debar and the Association for Environment Protection and Sustainable Development Regional Green Centre Ohrid will implement the project "Let's Learn about Climate Changes!!!".

The Association Centre for Civic Initiative Prilep, in partnership with the Association for Legal Education and Transparency P.E.T. Station Prilep and the Multi-ethnic Association for All Ages from the village of Crnilishte, Dolneni will implement the project "Her Voice — Her Power: Empowering Marginalised Women and Girls in Pelagonija".

Implementing "Integrity Islands" to start in september

The preparations for designing of the training "Islands of Integrity" which take place under the guidance of the foreign expert Ana Vasilache from Romania are coming to their end. They started in May this year, and they were finalized at the workshop that took place on 18th and 19th June 2024 in Skopie.

This training, intended for Civica Mobilitas grantees, is part of the plan for capacity strengthening of the CSOs. It is based on a proven methodology for strengthening the personal feeling of integrity with individuals; it has functional tools for joint leadership and a proposal of systemic and organizational changes in order to end corruption.

The methodology on which the programme is based has been successfully implemented in the previous years in a number of European countries, by certified anticorruption experts. Apart from Vasilache, four more associates of Civica Mobilitas from Macedonia will be included in the implementation of the training.

12 CSOs will be selected for the first training cycle, following four workshops that will take place from September to November this year. Civica Mobilitas team plans to repeat the training for the organizations that will not be part of the first group.



First monitoring visits to current grantees finished



In the beginning of June, Civica Mobilitas team visited the active grantees. The purpose of the visits was to hear about the experiences from the project implementation, find out about the challenges that the organizations face and eventually give recommendations where necessary.

Civica Mobilitas strongly emphasizes encouraging the cooperation among CSOs and consolidating the achievements in various thematic areas in order to maximise the collective impact.

Civica Mobilitas partners had the chance to hear about the experiences with digital transformation at local level. The introduction of interactive digital platforms enables the

citizens and the local government to communicate directly and jointly contribute to improving the situation in the municipalities where they live.

The free mobile and web applications enable the citizens to communicate easily and directly with the employees in the municipalities, via their mobile phones or computers. This results in bigger impact on the activities of the municipalities and faster reaction in problem solving.

Part of the colleagues who are grantees shared their experiences about activities related to green agenda, inclusive development, health rights of vulnerable categories of citizens, especially women and girls, fight against corruption, etc.

Part of the monitoring team was also Petrus Theunisz, Civica Mobilitas Senior Expert. He stressed the synergy among the civil society entities and stressed the importance of these visits where via "face to face" discussions one comes to information that is beyond the formal reports.

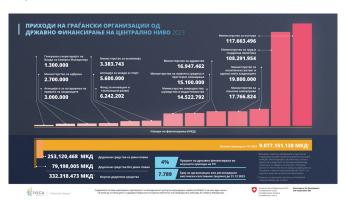
They depict human stories, motivation, as well as resilience in overcoming the obstacles during the implementation of the project.

Funding for civil society organisations from the central budget remains cemented at only 4% of their total revenue

In 2023, civil society organisations (CSOs) received 332,318,473 denars from the central budget. Of these funds, 253,120,468 denars were allocated through public calls, while 79,198,005 denars were awarded without such calls. As in previous years, only 4% of the total revenue of civil society organisations in 2023 came from the central state budget. Compared to the previous year, the share of central funding remains roughly the same, amounting to around 5.4 million euros. Looking at specific budget users, there was a notable decrease in funds allocated by the Ministry of Health, which granted about 24 million denars in 2022, compared to approximately 17 million denars in 2023.

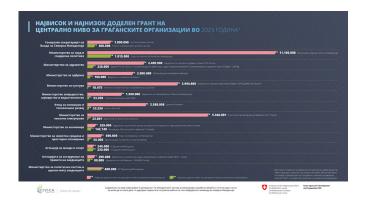
In contrast, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy increased its funding by around 57% compared to the previous year. Other ministries, such as the Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Local Self-Government, and the Agency for the Realisation of Community Rights, also saw an increase in funds allocated to CSOs in 2023. However, no significant changes were observed in the funding provided by other state administration bodies.

Although in 2023 a working group led by the Ministry of Justice met several times to discuss amendments to



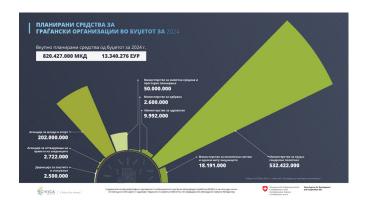
the Law on Associations and Foundations, the political will to pass the changes was lacking. This prevented improvements to the enabling environment for civil society development. Unfortunately, the most significant setback in implementing the Government's Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society 2022-2024 remains the reform of state funding for CSOs. This reform is expected to introduce greater transparency, accountability, and efficiency in the use of funds that support citizens' rights at both local and national levels in Macedonia. The targets set in the Strategy, which aimed for 30% of CSO revenues to come from state funding, remain unrealised.

In 2023, the smallest grant awarded to a civil society organisation from the central budget amounted to 18,475 denars, given by the Ministry of Culture to the Committee



for Byzantine and Medieval Studies. In contrast, the largest grant of 11,165,000 denars was awarded by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy to the National Union of the Blind.

In the 2024 Budget of the Republic of North Macedonia, 820,427,000 denars (approximately 13 million euros) have been planned under budget line 463 – transfers to



non-governmental organisations. This amount does not include funds allocated by the Ministry of Justice, as most funds under line 463 are directed to political parties, nor does it include the Ministry of Culture, which allocates CSO funds under budget line 464.

It remains to be seen whether these funds will change with the upcoming budget revision announced by the new Prime Minister. With the announced budget revision, we expect no reduction in the already planned funds, which for 2024 are lower than those planned for the previous year.

Moreover, we anticipate that the new government will focus on passing the proposed amendments to the Law on Associations and Foundations, which will be consulted with stakeholders and contribute to positive changes in the civil society sector.

We advocate for a reform in state funding for civil society organisations!

CITIZENS FOR CHANGE

Editor-in-Chief: Gonce Jakovleska

Editor: Karolina Gjurkovska

Translator: Elizabeta Bakovska

Newsroom address: Nikola Parapunov str., no. 41a, PO Box 55, 1060 Skopje

Telephone: ++ 389 (0)2 3065 381

E-mail: helpdesk@civicamobilitas.mk



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