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CONTEXT

The lasting political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia manifested serious weaknesses in the political process. The lack of response of the institutions tempted deeper involvement by the EU and US which resulted in a political agreement (Przino agreement of 2 June 2015 and its Protocol of 15 July 2015).

In this conditions, EPI has been adapting its themes, priorities, as well as modes of communication and advocacy. We employed a strategy of focusing on EU accession process in Macedonia, while at the same time adopting to the contextual peculiarities. Thematically, we have focused on developing our democracy and rule of law program in parallel with the general accession monitoring and advocacy program, which in fact links all of the abovementioned contextual factors and is also a hub of expertise of EPI's staff. EPI's evidence-based "shadow monitoring" of the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities in the context of the EU accession process of the Republic of Macedonia through a structured input of Network 23 did provide an alternative view to the public – both domestic and foreign, as well as pressure on the policy-making bodies, as the project outputs were visible through the media (electronic media that are not under government control and social media).

Intense networking resulted in joint projects and advocacy activities thorough the national and regional networks, at national and EU level. Regional cooperation intensified, through the TEN network, as well as project and activities with other organisations from the region.

PROGRAMMES

The development of EPI's programs depended on the context of the Macedonian accession process. The front-loading of Chapters 23 and 24 in general in EU Enlargement strategy, coupled with the renewed focus on core democratic standards in Macedonia urged the emphasis on the Democracy and rule of law program, in parallel with the general Accession monitoring and Advocacy Programme. Instead of specific programs for certain areas of the acquis a general program for EU acquis and sectoral policies was created, which is largely driven by regional cooperation.

ACCESSION MONITORING AND ADVOCACY

The stalemate and backlash in the Macedonian accession process, coupled with the lack of dialogue and politicized media, urged us to continue put focus on the core criteria and principles of the accession process, rather than on specific policies on EU integration. Since July and the signing of the Przhino agreement we have focused extensively on its monitoring and analysis of the related instruments for its formal enforcement as well as the state of play on the ground.

While EPI had good cooperation with key state institutions and bodies in charge of EU integration, such as the Secretariat for European Affairs and the parliamentary bodies for EU integration (EU Affairs Committee, Council on European Integration), higher impact on the main course of the EU integration process was restrained, as the role and impact of these bodies decreased.¹ VMRO-DPMNE - the leader of the Government coalition – did not participate in EPI's events. While sporadic contacts with VMRO-DPMNE representatives were held, their attitude was one of ignoring, rather than attack.

The recognition of the quality of our monitoring of the implementation of the Przhino agreement since September 2015 by national and EU stakeholders has been instrumental in this respect. A supporting factor in this direction was the increased influence of the Network 23 EPI established with key civil society organisations operating in the area of chapter 23. A trend of increased readiness for cooperation has also been followed in the judiciary with active participation at EPI's events.

At the end of 2015 EPI has for the first time undertaken an advocacy trip to Brussels and held meetings with relevant stakeholders (including the European Commission, Council as well as member states representatives) and an open event discussing the state of play in the country.

Commentaries to progress reports

EPI's regular analysis and commentaries of the EC progress reports are already branded and recognized as a product. The publishing of the analysis elaborated after a unique methodology, which allows for comparability, immediately after the publication of the Report, accompanied by a short commentary makes it an attractive product for a wider audience: state officials, the civil sector, media.² In addition to the commentaries to Progress reports, following the demand especially by the media, EPI started publishing op-eds following more important events, such as the EU General Affairs Council Conclusions.³ As mentioned above, EPI has responded to the need for monitoring the implementation of the Przhino Agreement with extensive monitoring activities through monitoring briefs and policy papers.

¹ Since the elections in 2011, the portfolios for EU integration have been held by the Government coalition partner DUI (Democratic Union for Integration).

² http://epi.org.mk/docs/Zamrznata-preporaka_EPI%20eng%20final.pdf

³ See <http://epi.org.mk/docs/Od%20prosiruvanje%20nazad%20kon%20stabilizacija%20i%20asocijacija.pdf>

FORUM EUROPAEUM



Through the FORUM EUROPAEUM, EPI focused on a smaller number of high quality debates in general on EU accession issues.

On **30 March 2015** EPI hosted the Round table ***“EU and the current political crisis in Macedonia – leverage, involvement and perspectives”***, which took place in Skopje. The Conference provided a forum for discussing the prospect of EU involvement in the ongoing political crisis related to the wiretapping scandal from the academic and policy making perspective. It brought together more than 80 representatives from state institutions, political parties, the diplomatic corps, academia, civil society sector and experts – both foreign and domestic.⁴ The high and diverse profiles of the participants were a result of the comparative advantage of EPI as an organization that has invested extensively in maintaining its contacts with different groups of stakeholders concerned with the EU accession process in general. Arguments pro and contra deeper involvement of the EU in the current Macedonian crisis were presented, as well as options for addressing the crisis.

EU funded project Broadcasting Europe – Eurozoom (January 2014 – January 2015)

(Project budget: 122.381 EUR; Grant: 85.000 EUR; EPI’s share: 10.000 EUR; Donor: EU Delegation Broadcasting EU)

EPI was a partner to Eurovizi in the production and broadcasting of the most recognized broadcast on EU in Macedonia – Eurozoom. This series of Eurozoom was devoted to accession negotiations.

The main activities of the project were preparation, filming, broadcasting and promotion of 26 episodes of the TV magazine Eurozoom. The scenarios prepared by EPI were designed to serve as a reminder of the priorities in the accession negotiations. The topics were selected jointly with the journalists in the manner to sensitize and attract the attention of the public and at the same time illustrate the structure and content of the specific negotiations chapter.

⁴ The final agenda of the conference is available at: http://epi.org.mk/docs/EPI_Final%20Agenda.pdf

The videos from the conference are available at:
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLZJgXt90s0kfcSYirwJR5qSivGc9mooGu>

EPI was in charge of the evaluation, carried out through two focus groups – in the middle and at the end of the broadcasting.. The evaluation and the final report were submitted to the EU Delegation on 17.04.2015.

Through the project the partners created synergy and managed to provide the wider public with an objective view on the accession process.

With the participation in this project, EPI gained visibility and experienced a new type of partnership with media, which is a valuable input for further development and implementation of its communication strategy.

Project Dialogues for Vision

(Project budget: 95.820 GBP; Grant: 95.820 GBP; Donor: British Embassy)

The purpose of the Project is Enhancing dialogue on key issues facing Macedonian society, through evidence based policy-making. The projects aims to strengthen capacities for evidence based policy-making and enhancing leadership skills among CSO's resulting enriched public debate.

EPI has conducted stakeholder mapping of the potential for conducting research among local civil society organizations and undertook an inclusive process of consultations and discussions for determining topics for the debates that were held as part of the project on the basis of analysis of public opinion polls, brainstorming session and focus groups in three towns in Macedonia. Through this project EPI also selected and is supporting research in three thematic areas (democracy and rule of law, socio economic development and social cohesion).

In addition, as part of the project, two trainings were held with representatives of CSOs in Macedonia identified as key stakeholders for the three thematic areas of the project (Democracy and rule of law, socio-economic development and social cohesion). The first training envisaged in dealing with the “Macedonian Institutional Context” and “Regulatory Impact Assessment” was held in early July. The training was attended by 33 participants from 13 different civil society organizations, including EPI. The purpose of this training was to increase the capacity of the civil society organizations and to identify the Macedonian institutions and communication and advocacy of policies. Through group work, the participants identified institutions for research and advocacy in their field of work, and also they got acquainted with the basic processes, procedures and practices of the Macedonian institutions, as well as the methodology for regulatory impact assessment. The second training on “Policy framework”, also with participants from local CSOs was held in September 2015 by two international experts. The idea behind this workshop was, with prior knowledge about the Macedonian institutions, how to have an impact on the policy making process. Through the stakeholder analysis mapping, i.e. how to influence policy and how to make it happen as well as how to track the process. 25 participants attended. According to the evaluations, 88% of the participants on the first training considered that the training will contribute to quality improvement of their ongoing work and projects. 93% of the participants on second training answered that they have greater understanding of the policy framework.

On the basis of an analysis of public opinion polls, brainstorming session and focus groups, EPI determined three key topics for the research that it was to support as part of the Dialogues for vision project. A call was published in November 2015 at which 27 high quality applications were received. In communication with the Embassy staff we selected six teams of researchers that are preparing background papers as structured evidence based input. The draft background papers have been prepared and two debates/dialogues have been held in January and February 2016. The debate in January was dedicated to the topic of Direct Foreign Investments and was researched by two experienced organisations. The second topic of checks and balances in the Republic of Macedonia was discussed in February 2016. Both events were attended by highly

relevant stakeholders and instigated fruitful debate on policy options and way forward. The third debate dedicated to the topic of inclusive education is to be held at the end of March 2016.

Within the project D4V, Developing a thematic resource base (www.d4v.merc.org.mk) was established with the purpose of facilitating the research in this project. We have compiled a preliminary list of relevant documents and resources and have already uploaded them in the database (including key publications from state institutions as well as CSOs resources), in order for the platform to be able to assist in the researchers of the project.

The Western Balkans and its EU integration – 2015 Comparative Overview: Follow up of EC country reports (independent analysis of TEN Network, November 2015 – February 2016)

Following EPI's regular analysis and commentaries of the EC progress reports and based on its unique methodology, the members of the TEN Network engaged on independent comparative analysis of the EC progress reports for the countries of the Western Balkans.. Having that a comprehensive objective analysis of the EU progress reports of the Balkan countries has been lacking this is the first structured attempt to provide an analysis of the EU Progress reports and their immediate follow-up. The comparative analysis was coordinated by EPI on the basis of a harmonised methodology and unique approach. It is the intention of the network to formulate this activity as a regional project and start fundraising activities in 2016.

In November 2015 EPI prepared the methodology for the regional comparative analysis and coding matrix for all the countries of the Western Balkans. In December 2015, the members of the TEN prepared the first draft analysis of the reports of their respective countries, while EPI prepared the draft regional overview. The analysis will be published by February 2016.

DEMOCRACY AND RULE OF LAW

The program gradually developed responding to the need for joint actions and advocacy for basic democratic standards, as the core of the current enlargement process, but even more due to the continuous backsliding of democratic standards in Macedonia. The projects developed were of diverse nature: while the MATRA project for improvement of implementation of mediation was clearly targeted at providing assistance to the Ministry of Justice, the Network 23 project is a genuine civil networking initiative for better monitoring and advocacy of policies related to the Judiciary and Fundamental Rights.

MATRA project: Monitor of the Urgent Reform Priorities

(Project budget: 17.522 EUR; Grant: 17.522 EUR; Donor: Royal Dutch Embassy)

The Project was implemented in the period 15 September – 31 December 2015. Within the project, six monitoring briefs and two policy memos were prepared and disseminated. Three policy forums were held. All publications were available in three languages: Macedonian, Albanian and English⁵⁵.

EPI has started a regular monitoring of the implementation of Urgent Reform Priorities with a common methodology among all of the members of Network 23 with the objective of impartial monitoring of this highly significant political process in the country. The **monitoring briefs** covered the following issues: Judiciary, Judicial and parliamentary oversight of interception of communications and Lustration under Rule of Law and Judiciary; De-politicisation of Public administration; Electoral reform and Media: Freedom of expression. Monitoring briefs focused on monitoring of the implementation of Urgent Reform Priorities, but also included monitoring of the implementation of the Political Agreement from June/July, as aspects of the reforms were discussed within the inter-parties negotiations. The two **policy memos** "Implementation of Urgent

⁵⁵ <http://www.epi.org.mk/newsDetail.php?nwsid=89>

Reform Priorities slower than the restoration of anti-reformist practices”, and the other “*A word is a word*” summarized the findings and provided recommendations for addressing the underlying issues. Moreover, although originally not planned, the content of the policy memos was visualized through two infographics: *Implementation of the URP* and *Timeline of implementation of the June/July Agreement*. All publications were disseminated to national stakeholders and civil society organizations, journalists and media representative, Embassies in the Republic of Macedonia and representatives of EU institutions. Furthermore, three **policy forums** “*The Agreement is dead, long live the agreement*”, “*Chatham house rules*” and “*Chatham house*” were held. These events were thematic-oriented, used to open discussion on a wider basis, between representative from targeted institutions themselves and civil society organizations.

As a conclusion, **the project accomplished its main objective** to contribute towards monitoring of the implementation of the Urgent Reform Priorities in the context of the EU accession process of the Republic of Macedonia through a structured input of Network 23. The project delivered its specific objectives since the capacities of CSOs for producing quality monitoring reports were further strengthened. Consequently, monitoring reports by the CSOs can have an impact on the decision making process if they are evidence based. Selection of the CSOs involved in this project, according to their primary focus of interest, capacity and experience with monitoring certain cases and institutions, significantly contributed to the quality of policy products.

In addition, we can conclude that the evidence-based “shadow monitoring” did provide an alternative view to the public – both domestic and foreign, as well as pressure on the policy-making bodies, as the project outputs were visible through the media (electronic media that are not under government control and social media). Finally, holding debates under “Chatham House” rules proved beneficial for a more constructive discussion on thematic issues.

Network 23 (May 2014 – July 2015)

(Project budget: 192.417 EUR; Grant: 158.858 EUR; Donor: EU delegation - IPA 2013 Civil Society Facility)

Since May 2014 EPI, as a lead partner, (in cooperation with the partners Macedonian Helsinki Committee and the Centre for Change Management, and the associates Foundation European Institute – Sofia, CEP – Belgrade and Institute Alternative – Podgorica) implemented the IPA Civil Society Facility grant – Network 23. The general idea of the project is to join efforts and raise capacities of CSOs active in the fields of Judiciary and Fundamental Rights at national and local level, so that the quality of independent monitoring and evaluation, as well as advocacy by CSOs in this crucial area is elevated and synergy of actions created.

The implementation of project activities leads to establishment of structured coordination among CSOs active in this area, particularly by increasing the capacity of CSO to act as watch-dog organizations in the process of monitoring and evaluation at national and local level. This was achieved through a concrete transfer of know-how on best regional and EU best practices through three workshops and mentoring. The final set of activities will focus on awareness raising on the implications of Chapter 23 on the overall progress of the accession process.

The project included a re-granting scheme for capacity building of local civil society organizations - the first re-granting scheme implemented by EPI. The re-granting scheme was launched through a public call for CSO’s, which encouraged applications focusing on monitoring and evaluation of a selected topic related to a specific issue under Chapter 23 by providing evidence-based policy analysis, including data obtained using bottom-up approach, case-study analysis, interviews with stakeholders on local level, focus groups and surveys on citizens perception etc. Following established criteria, 10 applications were selected through a thorough evaluation process.

Capacity building for grantees was realized through two workshops and mentoring. Moreover, partner organizations conducted tailor-made training (on the basis of grantees' project), including experiences, challenges and dealing with possible risks. The associates from partner countries shared their experiences of regional screening process and lessons learned during accession negotiations.

EPI edited and completed the work on **the Analysis on the Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights in the Republic of Macedonia**⁶, as first “shadow report” of the Macedonian civil organizations about the state of affairs in these areas. The Analysis incorporates the findings of the projects implemented by the civil organizations that were awarded grants within this project to conduct research on specific issues. Within this project, the Brochure “**Why Chapter 23 is the key to EU accession?**” was published.⁷ The main message conveyed was that criteria set by Chapter 23 are not 'just' part of the EU requirements, but have a direct impact on the life of citizens. The Brochure explains the content and approach of the European Commission to this chapter, key findings that are indicated for Macedonia and possibilities for active citizen participation.

In addition, summaries *of studies on Chapter 23* and *Collection of studies on Chapter 23* were published. These documents include integral versions of the research products by the civil society organizations that were awarded grants within this project and mentored by the EPI and the partners.⁸

Main policy outputs within the project Network 23 were disseminated at the Final Conference⁹.



The conference brought together more than 120 participants such as representatives from the governmental institutions, Parliament and CSOs, as well as representatives from the diplomatic missions. Conclusions and recommendations from the Analysis on Chapter 23 in the Republic of Macedonia, were presented on a press conference for journalists.¹⁰ Samples of the policy outputs were sent to the above mentioned stakeholders. EPI at the beginning of the project informed key national stakeholders on the project and requested contact points for

⁶ http://epi.org.mk/docs/Analiza_Poglavje23_en.pdf

⁷ <http://epi.org.mk/docs/Brosura%20mk.pdf>

⁸ <http://epi.org.mk/docs/Zbirka%20na%20dokumenti%20za%20javna%20politika%20Mreza%2023.pdf>
<http://epi.org.mk/docs/Collection%20of%20summaries%20Network%202023.pdf>

⁹ Held on July 9th in Hotel Holiday Inn – Skopje

¹⁰ Held on July 31st in Journalist's Club – Skopje

communication. The Conference was assessed through: electronic evaluation and external evaluation and discussion by the Project team with key speakers. Assessment of the relevance and impact of the Conference was high and it was assessed as exceptionally conducted, both logistically and conceptually, with attendance of relevant speakers and solid media presence. Moreover, it was assessed as highly relevant against the current political and institutional crisis, as dialogue among representatives of different branches of power, as well as with the civil sector is lacking.

Moreover, RM – EU Resource Centre (MERC) was enabled. MERC 23 presents a unique monitoring and policy advocacy platform on the EU integration process in this policy area, used by the project network, but also by other users. In addition, it will serve as policy bridging initiative encompassing policy products of Network's members after the finalization of the project, thus ensuring sustainability and presence. MERC (merc.org.mk) is web-based application and data base enabling categorization, cross referencing and elaboration of data related to EU accession of the country in relation to the areas of chapter 23 (judiciary, anti-corruption policy and fundamental rights). All of these areas contain subareas of which will be tackled. Each area, covering a criterion/sub-criterion of chapter 23 will be presented on a separate web page consisting of three parts: documentation, policy/analysis and visualization. The web page will be available in three languages: Macedonian, Albanian and English. The documents will be presented in the languages in which they are already available at this stage.

It must be noted, though, that the publications and events occurred in an especially sensitive time – when the implementation of the Political agreement of June/July was negotiated. The political crisis affected the possibility of holding advocacy meetings in that period. Immediately after the conclusion of the Agreement, EPI as coordinator of Network 23 and Platform for fight against corruption called on the political parties to assure transparent and participative decision-making process. Additionally, prior to the High Level Accession Dialogue held on September 14th 2015. Network 23 demanded moratorium on the appointment of judges and on employment in the public sector. This position of Network 23 was brought on a meeting with Commissioner Hahn.

Project: Equitable Representation in Public Administration (21.01.2015 – 20.03.2016)

(Project budget: 42.182 USD; Grant: 38.682 USD; EPI's contribution: 3.500 USD; Donor: USAID - Foundation Open Society - Macedonia)

This year EPI was able to launch a project on the implementation of equitable representation in the public administration, touching on the theme of inter-ethnic relations that was initially among EPI's priorities

With the application of the principle of equitable representation there is an increase of the number of employees belonging to non-majority communities in public administration in the country, thus contributing to the achievement of one of the objectives of the Ohrid Framework Agreement - promotion of equality of members of communities. However, the dominant view is that the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement in this important segment is mainly concentrated on the numbers, and most of the research is focused on the implementation of the principle itself. The implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as it was stated when submitting the application for membership in the European Union, has a central segment in meeting the political criteria for EU membership of EU officials. This thesis is still valid.

Since so far there is no research on what should follow employment, this project places focus on the integration of new employees in the workplace, management of diversity in the workplace, what are the challenges of the new recruits in the workplace and what problems they are facing in the integration in the public administration.

The project combines qualitative and quantitative analysis of data obtained through a survey on the perceptions and challenges of integration in the workplace of employees from different ethnic background in the public administration. The survey was conducted with 400 respondents in the period May – July 2015. In addition, 15 semi-structured interviews were carried with civil

servants in managing positions both in local self-government units and in central government. In addition, to complement this data, the same issues were discussed with civil society representatives during a focus group discussion. The preliminary findings were discussed at a round table held in November 2015 with 50 stakeholders representing both of the public service and the civil society sector.

The activities of the project coincided with the OFA review on social cohesion carried at national level. The program coordinator for acquis and sectoral policies Ardita Abazi Imeri (at the same time project coordinator) was contracted as a rapporteur of the working group on equitable representation. This group was one of the 6 groups responsible for revision of OFA for social cohesion. This was used as an opportunity to present the project and create closer bonds with the core group responsible for equitable representation in the country. Upon invitation EPI's director moderated one of the major events related to this working group.

Project: Combating barriers for exit - Macedonian Roma at the borders

(Project budget: 77.970 USD; EPI's share: 32.640 USD; Donor: OSI Think Tank Fund - Roma Initiative office)

In November 2015 EPI in partnership with the NGO KHAM Delcevo was awarded a grant from the Think Tank Fund and the Roma Information Office for the project Combating barriers for exit. The Project started on December 18, 2016 and will last one year. The project examines how the visa liberalisation process as an instrument of Europeanisation has resulted in embedding policies that limit the freedom of movement of the Roma in the case of Macedonia. The project will provide a baseline analysis of the situation of the practices of returning Macedonian citizens (with a focus on Roma) from the border, identify the ill defined policies and practices, recommend policy change and raise awareness of the problem of returned Roma from the Macedonian borders.

Awarded projects – to start in 2016

Project: Monitoring and Evaluating the Rule of Law in the Western Balkans (MERLIN WB)

(Project budget: 29.960 EUR; grant: 29.960 EUR; Donor: European Fund for the Balkans (EFB))

In December 2015, EPI was awarded a grant by European Fund for the Balkans under the regional Think and Link programme. The project will be implemented in partnership with Belgrade Centre for Security Policy, Institute Alternativa – Podgorica and GONG – Croatia.

The proposed project aims to set up a regional coordinative mechanism for democracy and rule of law mirrored through the implementation of Chapter 23 – Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24 – Justice, Freedom and Security in Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. The expected policy advocacy impact is to determine common framework of pending issues regarding democracy and rule of law in the region by engaging national authorities.

IPA MONITORING PROGRAMME

The programme on the monitoring of the use of the IPA funds has been in the background in this reporting period. We have regularly updated the IPA database and have participated in the national activities of the IPA mechanism. The two new interns that have joined EPI under the Programme EU integration internships for the Roma are developing their own research agendas in this programme. A fellow under the Programme Young Professionals of the Think Tank Fund¹¹ has been employed in EPI for six months doing research on the Use of IPA funds Focusing on

¹¹ EPI applied and was selected to receive assistance under this programme in 2015.

Public Administration Reforms following a mixed methodology – including both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

EU ACQUIS AND SECTORAL POLICIES

Instead of specific programs for certain areas of the acquis a general program for EU acquis and sectoral policies was created, despite the limited field for *EU acquis* related research and advocacy in Macedonia. This program is largely driven by regional cooperation,

Project: (In) equality in social protection: multi-level analysis of inter-sectionality in social assistance provision - a comparative study (August 2014 - August 2015;)

(Project budget: 67240 CHF; grant: 65560; EPI's share: 34590 CHF; Donor: Regional Research Promotional Programme- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation-SDC)

As part of the RRPP project (In) equality in social protection: multi-level analysis of inter-sectionality in social assistance provision - a comparative study, EPI in cooperation with Analitika from Bosnia aims to uncover institutional biases in the social protection systems in Macedonia and Bosnia by applying intersectional analysis, and to put forward recommendations for addressing these biases from the perspective of users or ought to be users of the social protection system. This is the first multi-level investigation of inequalities in this context/region, and the first to look at social protection through an intersectional prism in the two countries. The research was mentored by Queen's University Belfast, with Prof. Dagmar Schiek as the principal mentor, also providing a stream of personal mentoring to the researchers of the project. The outputs of the projects are in the final phase of their preparation.

In the second quarter of the project implementation, EPI was working with the mentoring institution, Queen's University Belfast, and the principal mentor – Prof. Dagmar Schiek, in order to complete and submit to RRPP a mentoring application that will fully reflect our research project mentoring needs, but will also add a researcher development capacity building component which will extend beyond the research project itself. The data collection for the first phase – up to 35 interviews with social assistance recipients per country, was completed in the period January-February, 2015. Following this, the two research teams and the principal mentor met in Sarajevo with the aim to reflect on the data collection process and moving on with the analysis, to resolve any pending and/or newly arisen issues, but also to hold the first in-person activity of the mentoring project – individual meetings of the mentor which each researcher which served as ground for further developing the capacity building plan and the first series of in-person trainings. These trainings took place within the frame of the seminar which the mentoring institution is organizing for us in Belfast, June 15-19, 2015.

Performance Audit and Policy Evaluation: On the Same or Parallel Tracks? (July 2014 - September 2015; Regional Research Promotional Programmed for Western Balkans - RRPP)

(Project budget: 125775; Grant: 119415 CHF; EPI's share: 27005 CHF; Donor: Regional Research Promotional Programme- Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation-SDC)

The project, funded by the Swiss Regional Research Promotion Programmed is a joint endeavor of the Centre for European Policy (CEP) from Belgrade as the lead applicant, EPI, and the Institut Alternativa from Podgorica. The project analysed the relationship of performance audit and policy evaluation, make conclusions on their complementarity and opportunities of using audit findings for strengthening policy evaluation, consequently advancing the quality of policy making in the countries of the consortium. With the mentoring support of the Hertie School of Governance the project teams have produced a comprehensive comparative study encompassing 6 countries from the EU and the 3 consortium countries (Macedonia, Serbia and

Montenegro). The findings of the study were presented at an international conference in Belgrade, Serbia 9-10 September 2015. It was attended by relevant stakeholders (state auditors, auditors in the IPA bodies, state administration representatives as well as policy evaluators) and used for consultation of the findings.

In the framework of this project, EPI explored the link between performance audit and policy evaluation in one old (UK) and new (Slovenia) EU member state, as well as in Macedonia. The study gave an overview of the development and the current state of affairs and bring forth adequate recommendations based on an analysis of successes and missed opportunities in the EU in the light of their suitability to the specific needs of consortium countries. In addition, the project team also prepared and edited a conference proceedings volume from the papers presented at the event.

Project: Strengthening Consumer Protection Organizations for better Municipal Services in SEE – (February 2015-February 2016; funded by GIZ, implemented by TEN)

(Project budget: 310.120 EUR; EPI's share: 59.820 EUR; Donor: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH)

The core idea of the project is to strengthen the capacities of consumer protection organizations and bodies at the local and national level in South East Europe, especially in the context of the European integration. The project is expected to improve protection of the interests of consumers and to enhance mutual trust between consumers and service providers and thus to contribute to the quality of services..

Within the project, as part of the activity developing Regional study for **the challenges and obstacles for consumer protection with regard to municipal services and for Consumer protection organisations to act adequately” a draft study was prepared for Macedonia.** The study covers different levels of operation: local government administration, utility providers, central government, NGOs and consumers – end users of services. It addresses operation and cooperation between different levels, service delivery at local level of 5 utility services while also assessing whether the consumers enjoy their rights as users of communal services and if appropriate system of enforcing their rights is in place.

The study is based on legal analysis, as well as interviews with municipal inspectors, public enterprises and consumers' organisations in three municipalities: Skopje, Tetovo and Kochani, selected on the basis of size, level of development, administrative status, territorial allocation and ethnic composition. The interviews were carried in the period July – September 2015. In addition, during October 2015, three focus groups were organised in Skopje, Tetovo and Kochani. .

The kick off meeting of the project took place on 18th February 2015 in Belgrade. The second regional workshop was held in Budva, Montenegro, in the period between June 7 and June 11, 2015. As a follow up of the second workshop, and further assessment of capacities of the COs engaged in the project to join BEUC, on September 12 – 13, 2015 the third regional workshop was held in Skopje. The workshop was organized by EPI. The workshop was about the role, work, functioning and membership of BEUC – European Consumer Organization, in order the consumer organizations from the region get acquainted with the scope of work of BEUC and asses their capacities to potentially join BEUC. For this workshop, EPI engaged an expert from BEUC for moderation and realization of the workshop. The workshop “Role, work, functioning and membership of BEUC – European Consumer Organization” was attended by 15 participants from Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia.

Project: WeBER - Western Balkans Enabling Project for Civil Society Monitoring of Public Administration Reform (IPA II Multi - beneficiary CsFM, December 2015 – December 2018)

(Project budget: 1.3.411 EUR; Grant: 1.146.070 EUR; EPI's share: 190.000 EUR; Donor: European Union- IPA Multi Country Programme)

In December 2015, the TEN network was awarded a regional project by the European Union from the IPA II Multi Beneficiary Civil Society Facility and Media Programme.

WeBER is a three-year project, which is implemented by a consortium of seven think tank civil society organizations (CSOs), gathered through or partnered up with the Think for Europe Network (ten.europeanpolicy.org):

- European Policy Centre - CEP (Serbia)
- European Policy Institute (Macedonia)
- Institute for Democracy and Mediation (Albania),
- Foreign Policy Initiative (Bosnia and Herzegovina),
- Group for Legal and Political Studies (Kosovo),
- Institute Alternative (Montenegro),
- European Policy Centre (Belgium).

The overall goal of WeBER is to increase the relevance, participation and capacity of civil society organisations (CSOs) and media in the Western Balkans (WB) to advocate for and influence the design and implementation of public administration reform (PAR). In the long run, the WeBER should help prepare and empower the civil society in the WB to continue pushing for EU membership compliant PARs in these countries once they accede the EU and external EU conditionality is no longer the driving force behind these reforms.

WeBER will accomplish its goals through facilitation of civil society monitoring of PAR which will be based on evidence and analysis in the WB and through facilitation of sustainable regional and national level government-CSO consultation platforms, policy dialogue and quality media reporting on PAR. In addition, WeBER will enable local watchdog, grassroots organisations and media to work on local PAR issues and will improve organisational and financial sustainability and transparency of the CSO Think for Europe Network (TEN) and its member organisations.

NETWORKING AND COOPERATION

Main achievements in the reporting period were:

- Increased networking and created synergies in the area of democracy and rule of law at national level. Processes for articulation of positions of CSOs within the Network 23 established and applied.
- Successful implementation of more complex and demanding projects (EC Network 23, D4V);
- Successful implementation of regional projects (and applications for new ones);
- Diversification of the target groups;
- Increased mentoring of research – both EPI being mentored and mentoring smaller CSOs.

COMMUNICATION

As part of the Communication strategy, EPI was able to establish itself as a highly relevant, reliable and balanced hub on EU expertise. Through project results, research outputs and policy option, a demand among media was generated for EPI presence onto the public space. EPI's staff is usually interlocutors with distinguished analysts and experts on variety of issues concerning the EU agenda of the country.

In the reporting period the focus of the communication efforts remained on the domestic scene. However, target groups diversified and furthermore, they were approached jointly with other CSOs, through the networks formed during the reporting period (Network 23 established in July 2015, D4V networking activities). In addition to the parliamentary and government bodies in charge for EU affairs, communication and advocacy activities turned more to other branches – judiciary, as well as independent bodies. This was especially important in the context of the EC Report of the Senior Expert Group (“Priebe report”), which emphasised the role of these bodies.

In addition, EPI had rather intense communication with representatives of EU, EU Member States and US embassies in the context of consultation on the resolution of the political crisis and the implementation of the Political agreement of Przhino.

In relation to Brussels as a communication target, the main effort was the organisation of the visit to Brussels in December 2015, supported by TTF and OSI Brussels office. On the occasion, EPI together with the Institute on Social Sciences and Humanities published a one-pager *The EU revisits Macedonia: chances for a new approach*¹²?

EPI continued with its efforts to further consolidate its target audience and to achieve better dissemination. In addition to continuous growth on-line (utilization of social media tools such as Facebook and Twitter), EPI was able to achieve further media penetration on traditional media (TV). Still, Additionally, EPI website is constantly updated (www.epi.org.mk). In addition to news and update of documents, op-ads were published and disseminated. These tools are also used for promotion of events organized by EPI, and events which EPI representatives attended. In the reporting period, as part of the indicators for measuring communication impact we provide the following:

- **Media mentions:** Regarding the political crisis in the period May-November, EPI was significantly present in the media. In this context, EPI immediately before the signing of the Political Agreement and in terms of crisis in its implementation 29 times expressed its opinions in the media. Moreover, representatives from EPI participated in 10 TV debates. EPI in the media can be accessed on: http://www.epi.org.mk/epi_media.php
- **Number and type of publications:** In 2015, EPI published 2 analyses, 2 conference reports, 2 policy reports, 2 papers, 2 monitoring briefs and 1 brochure.
- **Citations by national institutions:** EPI participated at two consultation meetings with representatives from the Secretariat for European Affairs and was part of the judiciary working group under the High Level Accession Dialogue.
- **Events:** In the reporting period, EPI organized one national conference on the final results of Network 23. Furthermore, 2 training workshops were held under Dialogues for Vision, 1 workshop under Strengthening Consumer Protection Organizations for better Municipal Services in SEE , 3 policy fora under Network 23: Urgent Reform Priorities Monitoring and 1 Round Table on the Equitable Ethnic representation Project.
- **Digital traffic and engagement:** Social media following, audience penetration and numbers of shares are followed. <https://www.facebook.com/EPI.Skopje>: 4813 likes and 27990 post reach.

Participation at international conferences

- In April 2015 Dr. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova participated in the Mid-term Conference in Istanbul, in her capacity as a member of the Advisory of the FP7 MAXCAP Project. The conference was an opportunity for exchange of opinions and presenting preliminary research of a large scale research project evaluating the effects of European enlargement on the internal and external capacity for integration. On the same occasion, Dr. Simonida

¹² <http://epi.org.mk/docs/EPI-ISSH%20one-pager.pdf>

Kacarska presented work from her doctoral research at the Young Researchers Conference at Sabanci University, Istanbul.

- The participation of the Research Coordinator Simonida Kacarska in the Workshop for Managers of civil society organisations (Sarajevo, 18-21 October 2015) was highly valuable for sharing experience with other think tanks in the region.
- TACSO Podgorica 12 and May 13 - Malinka Ristevska Jordanova
- People to people, TACSO visit to Brussels on judiciary and fundamental rights (12-16, July 2015)- Aleksandar Jovanovski
- Dr. Simonida Kacarska attended a meeting of the RRPP team with the TEN network in Belgrade for consultations on project outputs.
- TTF RIO meeting in Budapest from 9 to 10 June - Simonida Kacarska attended this meeting as part of the pre-selection process for the project Combating barriers for exit EPI started to implement in December 2015
- Meeting with mentoring and partner organization in the mentoring institution- Simonida Kacarska, Elena Anchevska and Biljana Kotevska (Queen's University Belfast, 14-19 June 2015) Meeting was devoted to revising project results.
- Civil Society Forum in Vienna from 25 to 28 August - Malinka Ristevska Jordanova
- Study visit to Budapest on 27-30 September as part of the project "Democratic Development - Civil De-De" implemented by the PIU Institute.- Laposava Ognjanovska
- Sixth annual conference organized by ReSPA in Danilovgrad, Montenegro, was held from 13 to 14 October 2015-Aleksandar Jovanovski
- Workshop on the management of civil society organizations held in Sarajevo from 18 to 21 October 2015- Simonida Kacarska
- GIZ regional conference held in Sarajevo from 16 to 18 November 2015- Simonida Kacarska presented on the panel for reform of the public administration
- Brussels advocacy - November 30 to December 2, 2015 Malinka Ristevska Jordanova and Simonida Kacarska
- RCC conference in Sarajevo from 17 to 19 December 2015- Ardita Abazi Imeri

STRATEGIC DEVELOPMENT OF THE ORGANIZATION

EPI has not changed its basic structure, established by its Statute. Several amendments were introduced – the more important ones being those enabling setting up of a subsidiary and introducing three instead of two members of the Supervisory Board.

The Assembly held two sessions. Most of the Assembly members participate in the work of the Assembly and in the team buildings elaborating the strategic development of the organization. EPI's team building held in November 2015 was devoted to the new plan for the strategic development of EPI, as well as strengthening research capacities.

As the first terms of office of the Chairperson of the Assembly, the Director, members of the Management Board and the Supervisory Board ended in March, at the Annual assembly session held on March 17, 2015, the Assembly made the following appointments:

Chairperson of the Assembly:

Arbenita Ismani

Members of the Management Board:

- Dr. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova – Director
- Dr. Simonida Kacarska – Member
- Ardita Abazi-Imeri – Member

Members of the Supervisory Board:

- Verica Hadzi-Vasileva Markovska – Chairperson
- Mate Gjorgjievski – Member
- Dijana Rusi – Member.

The internal organization developed as EPI grew as an organization. The posts of one research coordinator (Simonida Kacarska) and 2 program coordinators (Ardita Abazi-Imeri and Aleksandar Jovanoski) were introduced.

While the overall responsibility for the management of the organization currently remains with the Director, the Research coordinator takes over the responsibility for ensuring quality of research products. The Research coordinator also deputizes for the Director. Program coordinators take over higher responsibilities for the projects under their portfolio. This internal structure should contribute to smooth leadership transition process.

In terms of **internal management** the focus was on a) putting into operation the new organisational scheme with coordinators taking on responsibility for the relevant programs/sectors; b) development and implementation of human resources management tools; c) strict implementation of the financial procedures.

During the reporting period EPI had changes staff wise and now counts 10 employees. The new employees are: the two interns engaged since August/September 2014 were employed as of July 2015; the intern engaged since February 2015 was employed in October 2015. One new employee was hired as of July 2015. Under the Program “Making the most of EU funds for Roma” two interns are engaged in EPI for a period of one year. Under the TTF – RIO project Combating barriers for exit more person will be engaged in EPI as a policy fellow starting December 2015 for 12 months. In addition, as of January a researcher will be joining EPI under the Think Tank Young Professionals Programme¹³. Consequently within each project up to 2 new persons are engaged with fixed term of employment. Furthermore, an additional researcher has been continually contracted under several projects. One of the researchers (Biljana Kotevska) left due to admission to PhD studies in UK. The new employees have been accommodated in all three programme areas of EPI and are under the supervision of the respective program coordinators.

Current EPI’s staff (regularly employed) is the following:

- Malinka Ristevska Jordanova – Director;
- Simonida Kacarska – Research coordinator;
- Ardita Abazi – Imeri – Program Coordinator;
- Aleksandar Jovanoski – Program Coordinator;
- Dejan Ristovski – Financial Officer;
- Vaska Ristovska –Officer Manager;
- Iva Conevska – Project assistant
- Lea Ognjanoska - Project assistant
- Mariglen Demiri - Project assistant
- Angel Mojsovski - Project assistant/researcher.

¹³ EPI applied and was selected to receive assistance under this programme in 2015.

The Internal procedures introduced performance appraisal. To this end, a manual on performance appraisal, decision and templates/forms on performance appraisal were prepared and adopted by the Management board in October 2015. The manual provides instruction on the work appraisal conduct. The document sets the objectives, the medium-term objectives, assessment of the key skills, a summary of the assessment and personal development list. In addition, a new Rulebook on internal organization and systematization was prepared that enables for a systematic categorizations of EPI's working position and conditions for filling these positions. It provides clear guidelines for the management, the conduct of work, number of employees, including the description of the positions.

Internal training **on improving the quality of research was held** in Berovo on 20-23 September 2015. The training was organized with two aims: a) to introduce a manual on research methodology; b) to familiarize the junior staff with the research process. As EPI's team has been continuously growing over the summer, the training was highly useful. The first part of the training was coordinated and delivered by EPI's research coordinator, with significant input on research experiences of the program coordinators and project officer. The programme coordinators also introduced the key research tools they use to the new and less experienced staff (elite interviews, surveys as well as interviews with vulnerable groups). Specific attention was paid to the ethics of research, storage of information and proper referencing. As a result of the training forms for approaching the potential interviewees as well as consent forms for the interviewees have also been drafted. At the training the Director presented the methodology for analysis of the progress report developed and used by EPI. This preparation was of crucial importance both for junior and senior staff, considering that the analysis of the Progress Report is one of EPI's main products and in light of the then soon approaching release of the progress report.

Considering development of internal capacities, the **internal training: Web site and internal databases updating** was held on June 5th to involve the junior (as well as middle management) staff in the overall communication activities of EPI. Aleksandar Jovanoski and Ardita Abazi Imeri delivered presentations and presented the instructions on updating the EPI's web site (www.epi.org.mk) and main databases: IPADATA (www.ipadata.mk) and Macedonian-EU Resource Center (MERC 23: www.merc.org.mk). The training was intended for explaining the rationale and the outreach purpose of these tools. All enabled databases are internal part of EPI's operation, thus their maintaining and functionality is of key importance for advocacy efforts. Web application MERC, along with the publications, presents major source of project/programme sustainability, as a seized opportunity for promoting viable advocacy impact and a web platform and database providing insight in documents relevant to the Chapter 23 of the accession process – Judiciary and fundamental rights.

Additionally, an internal training on implementation of Internal Working Procedures was held.

In addition to the trainings planned and implemented within the organisation, EPI staff delivered and participated in a number of trainings, on the initiative of other organisations.

In the reporting period attention was paid also to **monitoring, evaluation and learning practices** of EPI. A capacity assessment for MEL was carried and monitoring & evaluation matrix on organisation level was prepared following completion of a course on MEL on policy influence by Ardita Abazi Imeri (program coordinator for acquis). The course was organised by Politics and Ideas and supported by TTF. The capacity assessment revealed that there are monitoring systems in place. Regular annual reporting and review of achieved policy/programme objectives is in place, in addition, monthly reporting was established. However, the maintenance and implementation is still not consistent.

The performance appraisal process was established and launched.