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NEWS BY SELDI MEMBERS

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON MONTENEGRO: ANOTHER YEAR OF "TAPPING IN PLACE"

In its yearly overview, Institute Alternative's researchers summarize the key findings of the European Commission's report on Montenegro, providing useful numbers to track progress in the EU integration process. The European Commission's report confirmed that the much needed radical reforms are victims of political cleavages, sending a strong message for all stakeholders, especially political parties, to dedicate themselves to the European integration. The report's assessments shows that Montenegro achieved the lowest average assessment of progress in the last six years, higher in both 2015 and 2020. On the other hand, the state of play assessment, which refers to the overall situation in the areas covered by chapters, is the highest so far. The report identified only "limited progress" when considering the negotiations between Montenegro and the EU, despite the worsening of the Functioning of Judiciary assessment and the improvement rating of freedom of expression.

IA, 19 October 2021

A NON-SENSE CALLED MONTENEGRO WORKS

State-owned enterprises are not event on the margins of the public administration reform process in Montenegro. Key anti-corruption rules in terms of budget spending, management, merit-based recruitment, prevention of politicisation etc. do not apply to SOE (public companies). Establishment of the new state-owned enterprise Montenegro Works - one to rule them all, do not promise to tackle these particular issues, but bring the new ones in this area instead

IA, 21 October 2021

THE LAW ON THE PARLIAMENT TO RESPOND TO THE WEAKNESSES OF THE LAW DRAFTING PROCEDURE

In its new analysis "The Parliament passes the decisions, but what is the procedure like?", Institute Alternative provided an overview and recommendations on the legislative function of the Parliament. The research shows that the lack of impact assessment, financial estimates and appropriate public participation is an alarm for better regulation of the law-making process in the Parliament of Montenegro, especially when initiated by MPs. From September 2020, more than half of law proposals were introduced to the Parliament by the MPs, surpassing the share of those introduced by the Government. This trend, however, was not coupled with detailed procedures that would have ensured an adequately informed process of proposing legislation, necessary data and public participation.

IA, 4 November 2021

EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE TRANSLATED INTO A CONCRETE ACTION PLAN

Institute Alternative recommended to the decision-makers to articulate priority issues and recommendations from the EC's report into action-oriented plan of the Government, the Parliament and other responsible independent institutions. The plan must clearly outline the tasks, deadlines, accountability and the budget resources to be engaged for its implementation. Preparation and implementation of such plan would be a clear statement of political will and devotion to the EU integration process.

IA, 26 October 2021

MORE THAN HALF OF SERBIAN CITIZENS BELIEVE THAT CORRUPTION CAN BE REDUCED OR ERADICATED

Despite an increased trust in policy responses to corruption, Serbian citizens' acceptability of corruption has slightly increased from 2019, with many people considering corruption as an everyday occurrence. Employing SELDI's Corruption Monitoring System (CMS) methodology, the research conducted by the Centre for Contemporary Politics shows that the level of corruption involvement and corruption pressure decreased from 2019, despite almost one fourth of population still experiences them. In Serbia, both corruption pressure and involvement gradually decreased year by year until its lowest in 2016. Besides that, the research shows a slight increase in corruption acceptance, as 29% of Serbian citizens declared accepting corruption in 2021, while more than half of the population considers corruption pressure "very likely" or "likely" to happen. On the other hand, with a positive perception of policy responses, 51% of people believe that corruption can be reduced or eradicated, while 47% distrust their governments' abilities to address corruption.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 20 October 2021

THE QUESTIONABLE POLITICAL WILL FOR FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN SERBIA

Despite investigation for corruption and the changes in the anti-corruption legislative framework, in an interview for the EWB, Nemanja Nenadić, Program Director of Transparency Serbia questioned the Serbian political will for the fight against corruption.

As main causes of the high corruption in the region, Nenadić addresses the lack of state-provided services, the presence of political elites ruling the business environment, and international actors which do not enhance substantial changes despite promoting the rule of law in the Western Balkans. When facing corruption in Serbia, the issue is a decreased number of high corruption cases, even mentioned in EC reports, caused by many legal issues and the lack of independence of judges and public prosecutors. Although the amendments to the Law on Free Access to Information of Public Importance were improved from the one formulated by the Ministry's working group, and the one in 2018 and 2019, the Ministry of Public Administration and Local Self-Government failed to provide explanations when rejecting some of the proposals submitted during the debate. The level of cooperation between the government and CSOs is crucial in preventing and fighting corruption, however Serbia experienced cases where public authorities even actively discouraged the activities of the CSOs and avoided cooperation.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 4 October 2021

RAI SECRETARIAT PROMOTES EFFECTIVE WHISTLEBLOWING PROGRAMMES

The Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative participated at the Annual Meeting of the Regional Anticorruption Platform of Internal Control Departments, hosted by OSCE Vienna, and presented the Gap Analysis of Whistleblower Protection Laws in the Western Balkans and Moldova. Ms. Elmerina Ahmetaj Hrelja presented the methodology, findings, and recommendations of the Analysis, assessing that with effective whistleblower protection measures, whistleblowing could represent a powerful instrument to fight corruption.

RAI, 4 November 2021

CORRUPTION IN ALBANIA CAN HARDLY BE ELIMINATED, BUT IT CAN BE REDUCED



IDSCS and CEPRIS co-organised a closed hybrid workshop in Belgrade and online on 23-24 September 2021. The event covered the topics of "Judicial Self-Governance and Judicial Culture" and "Role of Higher Courts in Securing Uniform Application of Law" respectively.

The first day of the workshop was opened and moderated by Miodrag Jovanovic, Full Professor at the University of Belgrade and a Managing Board Director at CEPRIS. In addition, Marko Troshanovski, President of the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" – Skopje (IDSCS) and Bart de Bruijn, Regional Rule of Law Coordinator at the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Serbia addressed the participants in their opening remarks. The focus of the second day was placed on the role of higher courts in securing uniform application of law. The panelists included Mirjana Lazarova Trajkovska, Judge at the Supreme Court of North Macedonia and Dragoljub Popovic, Judge at the European Court of Human Rights, who discussed regional perspectives on the topic.

Through the two days of the event, multiple experts shared their views and perspectives on the topics. David Kosar referred to the lessons learnt from the Rise (and Fall) of Judicial Self-Governance in Central Europe, while Snezana Bjelogrlic, Member of the High Judicial Council and President of the Judges' Association of Serbia, and Radovan Lazic, Managing Board Member at CEPRIS discussed the challenges in judicial self-governance in Serbia.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 5 October 2021

BIH NEEDS TO CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT IN WHICH CORRUPTION IS NOT AN ACCEPTED BEHAVIOUR



As reducing corruption requires long-term solutions, BiH must create an environment which inhibits corrupt behaviours, stated Jasmila Pašić, Project Manager of Centre for Civic Initiatives.

The causes of corruption in BiH represent inadequate and vague legislation and the lack of a valid control system that does not monitor the implementation of appropriate laws. Public procurement, conflict of interest, human resource management, financial management and, in the pandemic period, the health sector represent the most problematic and vulnerable areas to corruption. The significant citizens' distrust in institutions, caused by using corruption allegations in political confrontations, requires strong anti-corruption activities, which are slowly beginning to appear.

Despite coordinating the activities and work of institutions with public authority, monitoring the effects of anti-corruption laws and publishing information on the state of corruption, the Agency for Prevention of Corruption and Coordination of the Fight against Corruption (APIK) is not able to prosecute those responsible for corrupt cases. The declared political will to fight corruption translated in only few concrete actions.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 8 October 2021

IN NORTH MACEDONIA CSOS SHOULD RELY ON CITIZENS WHEN FIGHTING CORRUPTION



Given the ambivalent political will to combat but at times defending corruption, Misha Popovikj, Research Coordinator at Institute for Democracy 'Societas Civilis' thinks that CSOs in North Macedonia must rely more on citizens in fighting corruption. The low score of North Macedonia for many years on the Transparency International CPI is a clear signal of its inability to improve, which will probably repeats itself in the following year.

As Popovikj explained, CSOs have an important role in the fight against corruption, which authorities recognise as relevant actors with a certain level of engagement. Yet, they are largely dependent on the interest of officials despite the clear government procedures on consultation, thus requiring a higher involvement of their citizens.

According to Popovikj, education and training on anti-corruption are powerful tools to help pupils being more aware of the adverse effects of corruption and improving their knowledge about reporting tools and places. Currently, education is not set to achieve these goals, but it is necessary for many things in development, including democratization.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 13 October 2021

GOVERNMENT IN MONTENEGRO NEVER RECOGNISED CSOS AS RELEVANT PARTNER



CSOs in Montenegro have never been substantially involved by the government in the decision-making process, despite the EU integration process requires their inclusion, as addressed by Ana Đurnić, Public Policy Researcher at Institute Alternative. Despite its announcement, the new Government did not make any changes in the legal mechanisms for collaboration with CSOs.

Ranking the highest WB country on the Transparency International CPI, public procurement is among the most vulnerable areas to corruption, particularly in 2020. Its susceptibility to corruption was given both by the COVID-19 pandemic and due to the delayed beginning of the implementation of the new Law on Public Procurement. Applying the problematic regulations of 2017 during the initial COVID-19 crisis allowed contracting authorities to procure urgently with almost no restrictions in terms of providing transparency and competition. Đurnić concluded that political will should focus on reforms regarding the rule of law, in particular judiciary and prosecution.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 11 October 2021

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY TO HELP KOSOVO* IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

According to Visar Vokrri, Program Director of Riinvest Institute, the collaboration between Kosovo* institutions and the international community is crucial to fight corruption and improve its stagnating CPI results, and eventually achieve full democratisation.

The new government prioritised its anti-corruption efforts through its reform program, based on the vetting of law enforcement bodies as a prerequisite for strengthening the rule of law, and seems willing to mobilize its institutional capacities and create necessary synergies in combating endemic corruption. However, Kosovo institutional vulnerability, undue political influence and limited capacities represents a problem when implementing anti-corruption reforms.

CSOs and media should proactively monitor and signal irregularities to improve the public procurement processes, as well as provide concrete policy recommendations on improvement to ensure the compliance of practice with the law.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 15 October 2021

THE ASSEMBLY OF ZENICA-DOBOJ CANTON REFUSES TO SUPERVISE THE SPENDING OF PUBLIC FUNDS

For the Collegium of the ZDK Assembly, scheduled for 22 October 2021, the Centers for Civic Initiatives (CCI) invited the members of the Collegium to include audit reports for ZDK institutions published this year on the agenda of the upcoming session of the ZDK Assembly and enable all MPs to open a debate on this topic.

Ensuring a quality discussion about the audit reports requires also to consider the Plans for the elimination of irregularities and weaknesses identified in the reports, which audited institutions are legally obliged to prepare. In this way, conditions are created for the establishment of adequate supervision over the implementation of audit recommendations.

The three audit reports published this year did not receive a purely positive opinion, and more than half of the audit recommendations given were repeated from the previous period. The irregularities found by auditors relate to the spending of public money, which requires an urgent reaction of the ZDK Assembly to represent and protect the interests of citizens. Against the current director of the Health Insurance Institute, Omer Škalja, the ZDK Prosecutor's Office formed a case based on the findings from the audit report, which the Assembly does not want to discuss.

The session of the Assembly was held on 29 October and the audit reports were not considered on it.

CCI, 22-29 October 2021



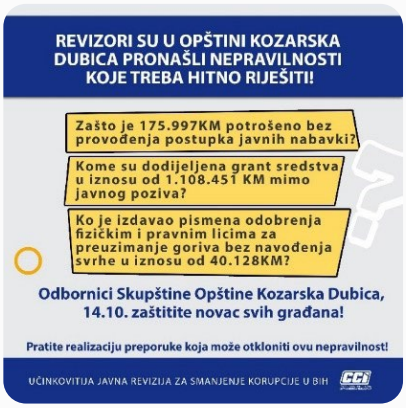




THE CAMPAIGN IN KOZARSKA DUBICA DUE TO AN ADVERSE AUDIT REPORT FOR THE THIRD TIME IN A ROW

The Municipality of Kozarska Dubica received adverse opinion for components of financial audit, for financial statements and for compliance with laws and other regulations. In addition, it is one of the few institutions that received an adverse opinion from all three previous Auditors General of the Republic of Srpska - Boško Čeka (for 2005), Duško Šnjegota (for 2016) and Jovo Radukić (for 2020). However, the Assembly session on 14 October did not reach a conclusion, which would ensure monitoring the implementation of recommendations given to the Municipality, in order to improve operations and overcome the worst assessment situation.

CCI, 13-14 October 2021







PROTEST ORGANIZED BY INFORMAL CIVIL MOVEMENT "VALTER" IN JELAH

Several months of water reduction and ineffective responses from authorities led to the protest organized by the informal civic movement "Valter", whose meeting sent out seven requests to the competent authorities. The organizer previously initiated an online petition for the water reduction in the Municipality of Tešanj and the irresponsible actions of local authorities in resolving the issue of water supply. The requests asked for a public apology to the residents for irresponsible and poor quality management of the water supply system and demanded responsibility and compensation for all damage caused to residents of the Municipality of Tešanj, based on the evidence and documentation provided by individual consumers or registered businesses regarding profits and disabilities. Citizens will continue the protest rallies if the demands are not met, aiming to reach to the institutions, the Utility Company and the Municipality

CCI, 18 October 2021



PETITION FOR THE LAW ON RIGHTS, OBLIGATIONS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF PATIENTS IN RS



In Banja Luka, the Association for the Development of the Society "Kap" and the Association of Citizens "Stop Mobbing", as part of the project "Virus for which there is a cure!", organized the signing of a petition demanding that the citizens and patients pass the Law on Rights, Obligations and Responsibilities of Patients in the Republika Srpska, in response to the growing violations of human rights in public health in BiH. The project "Virus for which there is a cure!" aims to encourage citizens to report cases of corruption in health care in order to influence the reduction of this scourge in BiH. At the same time, the signatures of citizens and patients are being collected in the Federation of BiH for an initiative demanding full implementation and respect for the existing Law on the Rights, Obligations and Responsibilities of Patients in the FBiH, adopted in 2010 but insufficient and often not applied in practice.

CCI, 13 October 2021

THE REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON ASSET RECOVERY



The Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative (RAI) and the AIRE Centre Western Balkans organized the Regional Conference on Effective Asset Recovery in Compliance with European Standards, within the project "Combating corruption and organized crime in the Western Balkans through strengthening regional cooperation in asset recovery". Judges, prosecutors and law school's representatives assessed the importance of asset recovery in strengthening the rule of law and the public trust in institutions, where cooperation at national and international levels between law enforcement agencies would be essential to tackle money laundering and recover stolen assets.

RAI, 5 November 2021

RAI'S ANNUAL REGIONAL MULTI-BENEFICIARY TRAINING ON WHISTLEBLOWER PROTECTION

The four-day regional whistleblowing event started with the regional meeting of public institutions' representatives of Western Balkans and Moldova. The peer-to-peer exchange of experiences and lessons learned for purposes of identifying best practice solutions and translating them into action leading to better whistleblower protection was in the focus of the meeting.

On November 17 and 18, the two-day Second Annual Regional Multi-Beneficiary Training on Whistleblower Protection took place in Sarajevo. The international whistleblowing experts Tom Devine, Thad Guyer and Mark Worth provided trainees - public institutions and CSO representatives from Western Balkans and Moldova with practical knowledge and tools relevant to enabling effective whistleblower disclosures and protection in general.

The final day of the regional whistleblowing event was dedicated to the civil society organisations, with the Annual Meeting of the SEE Coalition on Whisleblower protection, co-hosted by Foundation INFOHOUSE, a platform consisted of CSOs for discussion of common challenges, strategies, and solutions for improving the protection of whistleblowers.

RAI, 16-19 November 2021





LOCAL ELECTIONS HANDBOOK 2021

The Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis – Skopje (IDSCS) and Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) office in Skopje present the first volume of the Republic of North Macedonia's 2021 Local Elections Handbook, available in English, Macedonian and Albanian language. The handbook provides an overview of the 2021 local elections, as well as the history of the country's local elections, the electoral system and the participants in the electoral process, while a second updated post-election edition will include the results and information about the entire campaign and the election process.

IDSCS, 15 October 2021

HOW TO INVEST IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION?

The state should strategically invest in the institutions holding key competencies in the fight against corruption, such as monitoring possible corrupt cases, conflict of interest and enforcing rules, inspecting services and repressive functions. Examples of these institutions are the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, the State Audit Office, the Inspection Council and the Commission for Protection of Competition.

In particular with the budget rebalances in the period 2016-2021, the distribution of funds varied considerably from year to year, thus influencing the institutions' performance. The last rebalance in July 2021 increased funds in all institutions, most notably in the Inspection Council due to the development of a software solution, with a small decrease in the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption. A stable and multi-year budgeting is recommended for greater predictability in their growth, as well as long-term planning. Investing in these institutions would not only help to reduce corruption, but also to create the conditions for economic growth, as well as saving budget funds and improving the state budget.

IDSCS, 25 October 2021

ANTI-CORRUPTION NEWS FROM THE SEE REGION

The current section of the Newsletter presents a summary of the latest anti-corruption news from the SEE region, based on consolidated information from multiple sources, such as media outlets and narratives received by the SELDI project partners.

ESTABLISHMENT OF NEW AGENCIES AIMED AT FIGHTING CORRUPTION IN ALBANIA

In its third mandate, the Government has taken the initiative to create several new agencies, which raised scepticism and contrast from the opposition and civil society. These agencies are:

- The Agency for Dialogue and Co-Government, a central public institution under the Prime Minister, responsible for co-government with citizens and increasing the responsibility and accountability of the administration state. The opposition raised concerns above its use for electoral purposes, while independent experts and civil society activists criticize its conflicting competencies of investigating, imposing of fines and dismissal of officials of state administration institutions.

- The Anti-Corruption Agency, an agency under the Ministry of Justice which will deal with all abusive cases in the administration and will cooperate with law enforcement agencies, carrying out preventive activity, reviewing the regulatory framework and practices with high levels of corruption, and developing a new anti-corruption strategy. Concerns have risen about its effective role and overlapping competencies with the National Anti-Corruption Coordinator, the Inspectorate for Declaration and Control of Assets and other institutions.

- The State Agency for Strategic Planning and Assistance Coordination, established by the Decision of the Council of Ministers on 29 October. The agency will be subordinated to the Prime Minister and will aim to coordinate foreign aid for development programs and projects. It has been strongly criticized by the civil society in Albania as it will concentrate donor funds in a few hands to be redistributed to the organizations and individuals closest to the government.

Agjensia Telegrafike Shqiptare, 20-29 October 2021

REVIEWING THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK OF SPAK AND EXTENDING THE VETTING DEADLINE IN THE JUDICIAL SYSTEM

The Albanian government has requested the extension of vetting's mandate in the justice system until June 2022. The Minister of State for Relations with the Parliament stated that this is a necessity, as due to the delays during this process, at the end of the mandate of the vetting institutions there will be 300 unfinished files left. The opposition's request in addressing the extension of the vetting mandates along with the constitutional changes has not been accepted by the government.

IA, 19 October 2021

THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY DEMANDED THE SAME VETTING CONDITIONS FOR POLITICIANS, JUDGES AND PROSECUTORS

From the rostrum of the Albanian Assembly, the leader of the Democratic Party Lulzim Basha described the amendments for the electoral reform, the territorial one and the vetting of politicians as absolute priorities to bring the country out of the crisis, as they will enable to eradicate corrupt and crime associated individuals from politics. On this issue, Prime Minister Edi Rama stated that the constitutional changes proposed should be discussed between the representatives of the Democratic and the Socialist Parties.

Agjensia Telegrafike Shqiptare, 27 October 2021

NO SURPRISES FROM THE REPORT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION ON NORTH MACEDONIA

The presentation of the enlargement package in the Foreign Policy Committee by Commissioner Varheji was overshadowed by the blocked accession process of North Macedonia and Albania and the inability of the member states to decide on the start of negotiations. In these circumstances, the Commission remains confident of the already known main findings and recommendations regarding the opening of negotiations.

In the Conclusions of this year's Enlargement Strategy, the Commission reiterates that EU credibility is affected by the postponement of the start of negotiations with both countries, thus priorities should be given to resolving bilateral issues between Bulgaria and North Macedonia, completing the discussion on the negotiating framework for the member states and organising the first intergovernmental conference before the end of this year. The assessment shows that the country has met the conditions for holding the first intergovernmental conference, as it constantly implemented reforms especially regarding the rule of law and the fight against corruption and organized crime.

Institute of European Policy, 20 October 2021

CALL CENTERS OPERATING IN ALBANIA INVESTIGATED FOR FRAUDULENT ACTIVITIES



Following an international investigation request from Germany, SPAK investigated 13 call center companies suspected to commit fraud using systems to extort money from European citizens, sending informative letters to European counterparts in Germany, Italy, and some Nordic countries to locate and identify headquarters, bank accounts, phone numbers and identities behind the system. Despite the report in the past three years by investigative media and civil society in the country, no action has been taken on this issue until now.

Panorama, 2 November 2021

THE GOVERNMENT IS MOST RESPONSIBLE FOR FIGHTING CORRUPTION



Sirma Gjorgjieva Antonijevic, anti-corruption expert, remarked the low scoring of North Macedonia in country corruption indicators, inviting citizens to work together in fighting corruption.

She also stated that different reports and analyses found the bribery in North Macedonia is perceived as something normal, with most of the citizens ready and willing to accept to give a bribe. In countries that are already in the EU, this perception is different, especially in the Balkans. In this context, the government must take its responsibility as it represents the starting point of fighting corruption. A truly committed government would eventually lead to a successful fight against corruption, concluded Sirma Gjorgjieva Antonijevic.

Sloboden Pecat, 25 October 2021

RUSKOVSKA AND GESHEV SATISFIED BY THE NORTH MACEDONIAN AND BULGARIAN PPOS COOPERATION

The Basic Public Prosecutor Vilma Ruskovska hosted the Chief Prosecutor of the Republic of Bulgaria Ivan Geshev and the Public Prosecutor and spokesperson Sijka Mileva at the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecution of Organized Crime and Corruption offices.

The meeting focused on the fight against international organized crime and corruption and on the prevention and suppression of terrorism, addressing the importance of a swift international legal cooperation to contrast transnational crime. The Prosecutors of both countries were satisfied by the cooperation level between the two Prosecutor's Offices, hoping that it will continue in the future.

Nova TV, 28 October 2021

THE SCPC EXPECTS PROACTIVITY FROM THE INSTITUTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA IN THE FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

Biljana Ivanovska, President of the SCPC, stated that anti-corruption work is not enough to tackle corruption, pointing out the lack of initiative and proactivity from other institutions as some cases opened by the Anti-Corruption Agency, such as the public procurement in the SEC and the detailed urban plan, have been stuck in the Public Prosecutor's Office for months. The Anti-Corruption Agency says that their recommendations for changes in the way of electing directors and members of the management boards were ignored, and the institutions remained deaf to the request for less powers of the responsible persons who decide on someone's employment.

Sitel, 25 October 2021

"STALKING" AND "SEXUAL HARASSMENT" ARE BEING INTRODUCED AS NEW CRIMES IN NORTH MACEDONIA



During the European Day of Justice, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev announced that the government is committed in working to create the highest standards for the rule of law and the independent judicial system, marking important steps on the European path which will bring European standards and a better life.

As written in his Facebook profile, North Macedonia is making strong steps in the fight against corruption and organised crime and in the rule of law, marking that the reforms and the implementation of European standards are on the right track. The reformed Judicial Council had introduced significant changes, especially including new criminal acts of "stalking" and "sexual harassment" in response to the misuse of Internet communication channels, while the judiciary and citizens' services are being digitalized, legislative changes significantly increased protection of women from violence and against attacks on journalists, and prisons are being continuously reconstructed.

Libertas, 25 October 2021

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

CONFERENCE "INTEGRITY POLICY IN MONTENEGRO"

SELDI's member, the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, is organizing a conference on integrity policy in Montenegro on 30 November 2021 in Podgorica. The conference will bring together all relevant actors in order to encourage and maintain dialogue between different parties of the political spectrum and the professional community on the state of integrity of the public sector in Montenegro, the effects of current anti-corruption policy and necessary steps for further improvement.

Center for Democratic Transition, November 2021

REPORTS AND ANALYSIS

EUROPEAN COMMISSION`S PROGRESS REPORT ON MONTENEGRO

In the latest progress report on Monetnegro, the European Commission indicates that political elites pursued political parties' interests of religious communities, ethnicity or partisan interests, and lost focus on public interest and the European integration process. This leads to political polarization, tensions and mistrust which are hindering the political criteria. As also pointed out by the Center for Democratic Transition (CDT), the report warns about the rise of right-wing extremism and ethnonationalism, increased ethnically and religiously motivated attacks, hate crimes and hate speech, and addresses the electoral reform issue, considering crucial the "genuine inclusiveness, strong political commitment and willingness to find cross-party consensus". Curbing the effects of disinformation, online harassment, hate speech and extensive involvement of foreign media from the region represent key issues which could be addressed by establishing a Parliamentary Committee on Foreign Interference, modelled after the European Parliament`s INGE Committee, as CDT remarked.

As expected, the Commission observes that the judiciary and the prosecution did not undergo key reforms and are still vulnerable to political interference. Lastly, the report remarks the need of depoliticization, optimization and managerial accountability in the public administration, as the Law on Civil Servants and State Employees lowered the requirements for merit-based recruitment, competence and independence of civil servants.

Center for Democratic Transition, October 2021

POLICY BRIEF: DEREGULATION INITIATIVES IN NORTH MACEDONIA COULD HAVE A NEGATIVE IMPACT ON THE RULE OF LAW

In the policy brief "The Controversy of 'more (economic) freedom'. Can liberalisation in North Macedonia cause more problems than benefits?", published within the "WB2EU Network", the authors explained that implementing the three liberalisation and deregulation policies without transparency and stakeholders' consultation could negatively impact citizens' equality, the rule of law and the EU accession process of North Macedonia. In particular, North Macedonia has limited capacity to ensure a secure cannabis production, given the economic, political and social challenges that its society is undergoing. Moreover, the policy brief recommends improving transparency by starting deep consultations with stakeholders, inform the public and opening the debate over the Law on Legislation of Illegally Constructed Buildings. Indeed, the legislation raised criticism over its environmental impact and the endangerment of the country's sovereignty, as selling state-owned agricultural lands could lead to constructing buildings or exploiting its natural resources to the detriment of food production.

Centre for Contemporary Politics, 9 November 2021

POLICY BRIEF: A JUDICIARY SENTENCED TO ENDURING POLITICAL GAMES

The Prime Minister Krivokapić identifies independence, professionalism, efficiency, and responsibility of the judiciary as highly problematic areas, remarking the current Government's policy focus on the functionality of the judiciary, despite the low effort to prioritize the judicial reform and address the previously reported issues. The amendments to the Law on the State Prosecutor's Office, which enabled changes to the composition of the Prosecutorial Council, have yet to pass their practical application, given the ample room that open for political influence on the Prosecutor's Office. Certainly, the law delayed the urgency of dialogue and agreement on the status of the Supreme State Prosecutor, which may be prolonged indefinitely, further hindering constitutional changes that require a qualified majority to elect holders of the highest judicial office. As underlined by the Prime Minister, the former convocation of the Parliament failed to provide a majority for critical nominations in the judicial system, resulting in key functions being performed in the acting status and leaving space for potential abuse.

Center for Democratic Transition, October 2021

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