

## CONCLUSIONS

From the informal meeting of the members of the program councils of the National Convention for the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia

19 July 2022, 12:00-13:30

Meeting hall, Faculty of Philosophy - Skopje

The topic under discussion was: "Challenges and dilemmas of the current steps for membership in the European Union: From the perspective of the National Convention for the European Union in North Macedonia".

1. In its five years of operation, NCEU-MK, has established itself into a continuous platform of structured dialogue whose general goal is the democratization of the European integration process through the active participation of various stakeholders (Government, relevant institutions, representatives of civil associations, the business sector, worker's organizations and unions, employers, academia, and others professionals). In addition, NCEU-MK has a specific goal to involve the professional public in the reform processes, to affirm European standards and practices, contributing toward progress in the negotiation process for EU membership.

2. In its previous work, NCEU-MK often emphasized that its role and importance will increase once the country officially starts negotiations with the EU. The fact that the negotiation process begins in extremely complex political and economic conditions in the European Union (and beyond), only emphasizes the importance of the basic message of NCEU-MK: "European integration is the work of all citizens".

3. Regarding the negotiation framework itself, various participants at internal and informal NCEU-MK meetings, have expressed different opinions, which in itself is not contradictory to the nature of the Convention. The very name Convention indicates an environment for conducting an open debate among representatives of different (functional) parts of society. Thus, there were attitudes of concern expressed due to the uncertainty of the negotiation process, which for the first time in European negotiation practices includes a bilateral protocol, but also opinions that define the "momentum" and argue for the need to advance in the European integration process. In NCEU-MK, the different opinions are not determined by value (as positive or negative), rather the Convention seeks to approach them through an argumentative professional dialogue.

4. NCEU-MK concluded that the negotiation framework, expanded with bilateral issues, is extremely complex and as such opens up serious challenges. The members of the working groups believe that in NCEU-MK there is considerable expert potential, and now even greater motivation and willingness to be involved in finding solutions for vital issues in the negotiation process.

5. NCEU-MK supports the Government's statements for greater transparency and involvement of all stakeholders in the screening process, in the phase of fulfilling the first condition for the official start of negotiations, as well as in other phases of the negotiation process. NCEU-

MK members who were present at the joint consultative meetings during the period of the Negotiating Framework debate, will further recall the promises of government representatives to maintain more frequent coordination with the civil society sector, which were pointed out as too rare.

6.NCEU-MK members actively followed the debates on historical and identity issues that were conducted in the past few months. Interest in these issues will continue in the direction of seeking solutions through good European practices and knowledge sharing for building good neighborly relations.

7.According to members of NCEU-MK, the European Union is not necessarily rightly portrayed to the Macedonian public. Representations of the EU are general and the political discourse overshadows any public discussion. Consequently, the citizens place excessive expectations from the European Union. It would be beneficial to increase activities for greater focus of the public on the reforms, as well as more detailed information on the way the EU functions - especially on the principles of the European market economy where the law of competition rules.

8.NCEU-MK will make further efforts to strengthen the regional approach, i.e. cooperation with other National Conventions in the Region (Albania, Montenegro, Serbia) for the purpose of exchanging regional practices aimed at greater regional cooperation for progress in the negotiation process.