НАЦИОНАЛНА КОНВЕНЦИЈА ЗА ЕВРОПСКАТА УНИЈА НА РЕПУБЛИКА СЕВЕРНА МАКЕДОНИЈА (НКЕУ-МК)

# INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITIES FOR PREVENTING AND COMBATING CORRUPTION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA: EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVES AND NATIONAL PRACTICES

3

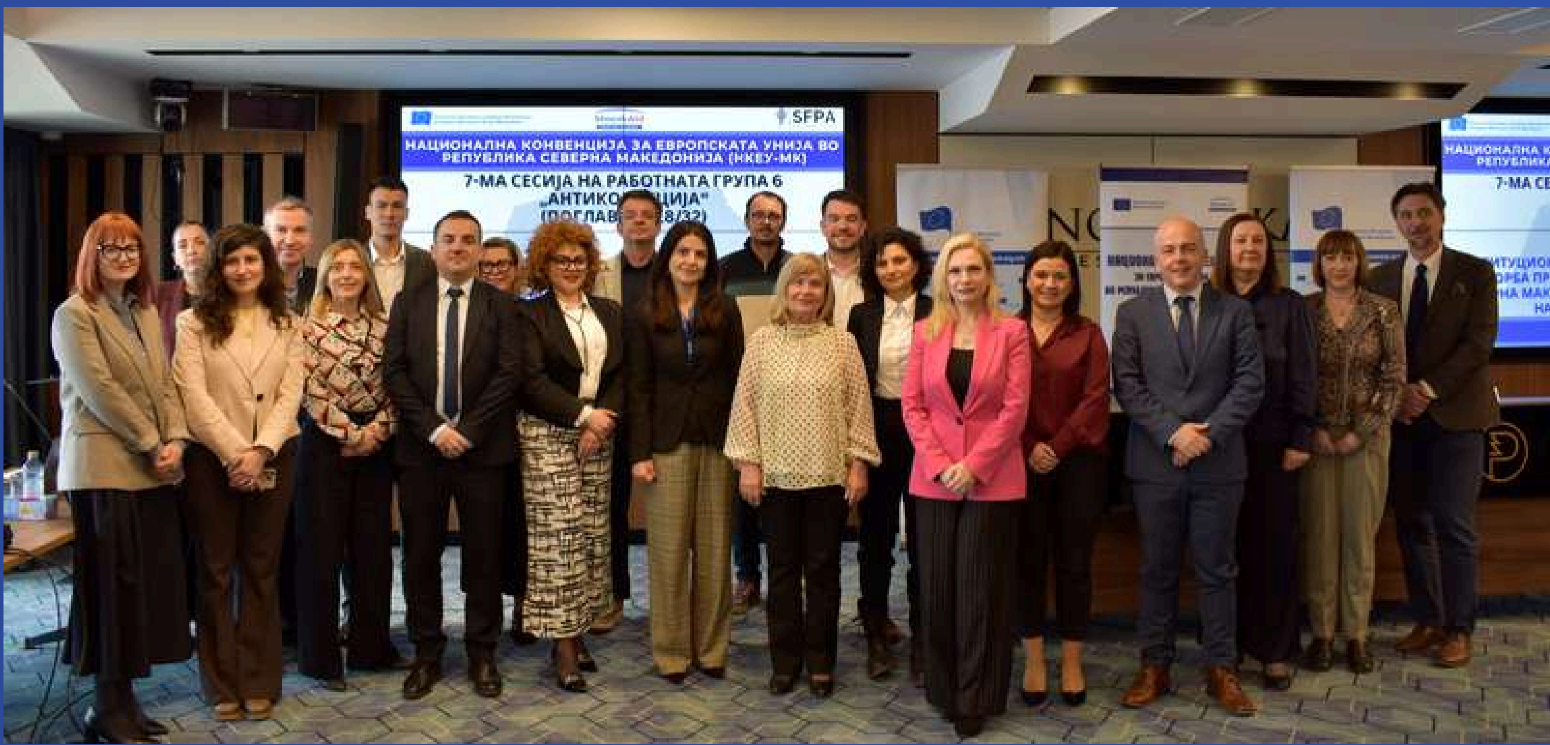
NEWSLETTER

## SEVENTH SESSION OF WORKING GROUP 6

## ANTI-CORRUPTION

## (CHAPTER 5/18/32)

At the seventh session of Working Group 6 (Anti-Corruption), within the framework of the National Convention on the EU, key stakeholders and international experts debated the future of the fight against corruption in Macedonia. The session, opened by the national coordinator Prof. Mileva Gjurovska, was positioned as part of the broader dialogue supported by international partners, with special emphasis on topics from Cluster 1 – "Fundamental Values." Although the country is making progress — with 17 out of 24 GRECO recommendations fully implemented, which is a relatively high level of compliance compared to other candidate countries — the message from all participants was clear: laws are only the beginning, and true success is measured through the experience of citizens. As Prof. Gjurovska pointed out, citizens do not measure reforms by formal documents, but by the quality of public services and their everyday lives. In this regard, the Director of the Financial Police Administration, Slobodan Ivanovski, appealed to the public, the media, and the civil sector for increased pressure on institutions, emphasizing that this is necessary to ensure non-selective treatment and to overcome the long-standing perception of impunity, which, in his view, is seriously damaged and creates a cycle of passivity.




Key takeaways from the session:

• Focus on the "big fish": The Financial Police Administration is shifting its course toward complex investigations of high-level corruption, with a record estimated damage of 3.3 billion denars in current cases.

• Digitalization as a shield: Following the example of the Italian model (ANAC), Macedonia aims for full digitalization by 2027, which will enable real-time detection of corruption.

• Integrity in the judiciary and municipalities: The State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption and the OSCE are working on new strategies and ethical codes, aiming for institutions to take the "driver's seat" in the reforms themselves.

• The bitter reality: Despite better legislation, data from December 2025 shows that as many as 36% of citizens still face demands for bribes.

The fight against corruption is not just a technical alignment with Brussels, but a battle to restore trust in the rule of law. Substantial progress will come when reporting corruption ceases to be a personal risk and becomes a civic duty.

## Mileva GJUROVSKA

National Coordinator of the National Convention on the EU – Republic of North Macedonia (NKEU-MK), Professor at the Faculty of Philosophy, Skopje, President of the European Movement.

Professor Mileva Gjurovska opened the session by welcoming those present and emphasizing the importance of the debate, pointing out that the topics being addressed require serious and well-argued discussion. She expressed gratitude to the participants and announced the speakers, including representatives from institutions and international experts, underscoring the importance of including different perspectives in the process of public policy creation.

In her introductory address, she positioned the seventh session of Working Group 6 – Anti-Corruption as part of the broader process of the National Convention on the European Union, stressing that it is part of a continuous cycle of dialogue supported by international partners. She placed special emphasis on topics related to Cluster 1 – "Fundamental Values," specifically public procurement, statistics, and financial control, as areas crucial for establishing a functional rule of law system.

Gjurovska reflected on the Convention's work so far, pointing out that the accumulated number of sessions and expert contributions represents significant intellectual and political capital. She emphasized that such a cross-sectoral approach is essential for building sustainable institutions, particularly in the context of alignment with European standards in the areas of judiciary, fundamental rights, and security.

Regarding perceptions of the rule of law, the professor noted that although public discourse is dominated by criticism, there are indicators of real progress. She called for a more balanced approach that would also recognize positive results, citing specific international assessments, such as the GRECO recommendations, where the country shows a relatively high level of compliance compared to other candidate states.

Nevertheless, she clearly underlined that the adoption of legislation must not be treated as an end goal, but rather as the initial phase of the reform process. According to her, the true measure of reform success is their practical implementation and the effect they have on the daily lives of citizens, who evaluate reforms through the quality of public services, not through formal documents.
At the end of her address, Gjurovska highlighted the importance of building a new legal architecture, one that is aligned with European values but also adapted to the national context.

She expressed confidence that the discussion would result in concrete recommendations for advancing anti-corruption policies and announced the further course of the session, emphasizing the need for institutional and civic balance in the process.
"Citizens do not measure reforms by the laws we pass, but by how they feel in their everyday lives."

## Slobodan IVANOVSKI

Director of the Financial Police

Slobodan Ivanovski, Director of the Financial Police Administration, began his address by thanking for the trust placed in him and by accepting the role of co-chair, emphasizing that he sees this position as an opportunity to deepen the reform processes and achieve more effective institutional action in the fight against corruption.

Within a conceptual framework, Ivanovski referred back to the classical definition of corruption, citing Machiavelli, who describes it as a "moral disease of society." According to him, corruption does not represent only a legal, but also a structural and value-based problem, which gradually erodes the state and undermines institutional capacities, especially when it remains unsanctioned.

He issued a clear appeal to the public, the media, and the civil sector for increased pressure on institutions, emphasizing that such pressure is necessary to ensure non-selective treatment. He pointed out that the Administration is already taking action against current officeholders, which, according to him, represents a key signal that institutions are beginning to function and establish accountability.

Central to his address was the issue of citizens' trust, which, in his view, has been seriously damaged due to the long-standing perception of impunity. Ivanovski noted that citizens often refrain from reporting corruption due to fear of repercussions, which creates a cycle of passivity and institutional inefficiency.

In that regard, he stressed that the fight against corruption requires not only legal, but also psychological and cultural changes, whereby public officials must develop responsibility toward the law, rather than fear of influential individuals. He assessed this aspect as one of the key structural challenges in the Macedonian institutional context.

Ivanovski spoke openly about the existence of systemic corruption in the past, which often relied on legal loopholes and insufficient evidentiary basis, making prosecution difficult. According to him, overcoming these weaknesses requires advancing the legal framework and more effective mechanisms for gathering evidence.

He placed special emphasis on the "Laskarci" case, which he cited as an example that highlights the price of institutional inaction. In this context, he pointed out that officials often face pressure from local power brokers, which further undermines the rule of law.

Regarding public procurement, Ivanovski emphasized that it remains a high-risk sector for corruption, particularly during the implementation phase, where evidence is most difficult to obtain. He underscored that timely documentation through pre-investigative measures is crucial for the successful prosecution of these cases.

Speaking about institutional coordination, he highlighted the role of the Public Prosecutor's Office as "dominant litis" in investigative proceedings, emphasizing that effective anti-corruption efforts require synchronized action by all relevant institutions.

A significant part of his address was dedicated to financial investigations, which, according to Ivanovski, must be treated as equally important to criminal investigations. He emphasized that tracking financial flows and confiscating illegally acquired property are essential for the proper sanctioning of corruption.

As an indicator of institutional progress, Ivanovski presented the Administration's results for 2025, showing a significant increase in the number of financial investigations and the amount of damage identified to the budget. He stressed that the new approach focuses on major cases with high financial weight, rather than on minor offenses, in order to achieve a greater systemic effect.

His address was rounded off with the message that measurable results, particularly in prosecuting influential actors and returning illegally acquired assets, are key to restoring trust and demonstrating that impunity is no longer an option.

"It matters less how high the sentence will be, if we do not return the money to the citizens – that is where the true fight against corruption is measured."

## Luca FORTELEONI

Member of the Board of the Italian National Anti-Corruption Authority

Luca Forteleoni, a member of the board of the Italian National Anti-Corruption Authority (ANAC), expressed gratitude for the invitation, emphasizing that cooperation with the countries of the Western Balkans represents a strategic priority for Italy and for the European Union. He stressed that such forums are key for the exchange of experiences and for strengthening regional anti-corruption capacities.

Forteleoni pointed out that Italy, through its anti-corruption institution ANAC, actively participates in numerous international initiatives, including EU twinning projects, through which expertise and good practices are shared with partner countries. In this context, he also highlighted the ongoing cooperation with North Macedonia as part of the broader effort for alignment with European standards.

A central thesis in his address was that the prevention of corruption, together with transparency and integrity, represents a fundamental pillar of democratic systems. According to him, these elements not only limit corrupt behaviour, but directly contribute to increasing public trust in institutions.

He presented the Italian anti-corruption system as the result of a long-term reform process, which over the past 15 years has transformed Italy from a country with significant challenges in this area into an example of innovative policies and practices. This process, according to him, has enabled the development of a specific "ANAC model" that is now recognized internationally.

In institutional terms, Forteleoni explained that ANAC's mission is focused on corruption prevention through a systemic approach, which encompasses transparency in public administration, oversight of public procurement, and regulatory guidance of the behavior of public officials. This multidimensional approach enables early identification and limitation of risks.

He further emphasized that the Italian model is firmly embedded in international standards and obligations, particularly within the framework of the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the OECD. In that regard, he assessed multilateral cooperation as a key instrument for advancing national anti-corruption policies.

Forteleoni also addressed the legislative framework, pointing out that the key turning point in Italy came with the adoption of the anti-corruption law in 2012, which established a coherent and stratified system for prevention.

In operational terms, he highlighted ANAC's powers, which include developing and overseeing the national anti-corruption plan, conducting risk analysis, monitoring implementation, and supervising inspections. Additionally, the institution can initiate investigations and request corrective measures in cases of rule violations.

Special emphasis was placed on the public procurement sector, which Forteleoni identified as the highest-risk sector for corruption. He presented the Italian system for digitally monitoring public contracts, which contains an extensive database and enables continuous oversight of procedures and their transparency.

In his concluding remarks, Forteleoni emphasized that digitalization and systemic regulation are key tools for prevention, particularly in the context of complex processes such as public procurement. He underscored that an effective anti-corruption system must combine legal, technical, and institutional mechanisms.

He concluded his address by thanking the organizers and participants, expressing support for the further work of the Convention and highlighting the importance of continued international cooperation in this area.

"Prevention, transparency, and integrity are not just policies – they are a prerequisite for trust and a functioning democracy."

**Adem ČUČULJ**

President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC)

The President of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, Adem Čučulj, began by reflecting on his own institutional position, noting that after his previous participation in another role, he is now taking on the position of president at a time when the Commission is facing serious staffing and organizational challenges.

He emphasized that the incomplete composition of the Commission represents a key limiting factor for its effectiveness, expressing the expectation that the Parliament will soon restart the process for selecting members with appropriate integrity. In this context, he underscored that institutional integrity is a prerequisite for credible action in the fight against corruption.

Čučulj pointed out that in the recent period, the Commission has functioned under conditions of institutional instability, which has redirected its work toward reactive activities, particularly responding to public and media inquiries, rather than toward systemic preventive policies. Nevertheless, key analytical and strategic activities have been carried out in parallel.

The focus of his address was the evaluation of the existing National Strategy for the Prevention and Fight against Corruption, which he noted, although methodologically well-prepared, had its implementation significantly limited. According to the data he presented, the level of implementation of measures remained at a low level.

He specified that in 2024, only 18% of the planned activities were implemented, while the total implementation over the first four years amounted to approximately 31%, indicating serious structural weaknesses in the implementation of reforms. The Commission's analysis identified several factors, including institutional instability, frequent staff changes, limited budgetary resources, and inadequately designed measures.

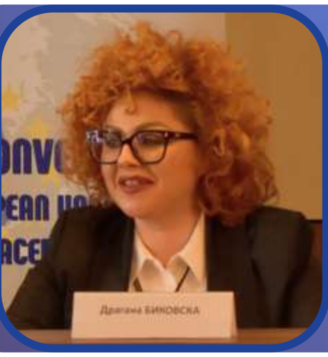
In response to these weaknesses, Čučulj presented the approach to developing the new five-year strategy, which for the first time will include a clear fiscal framework. This element, according to him, is key to ensuring real implementation, as it will enable the integration of anti-corruption measures into the budget planning of institutions.

He explained that the new strategy will be more focused and more consistent, with a reduced number of priority areas. In that regard, two horizontal areas were identified – public procurement and oversight of law enforcement – as well as five key sectors: judiciary, healthcare, urban planning, transport and infrastructure, and environment and energy.

Čučulj emphasized that the preparation process was inclusive, with the participation of institutions, experts, civil society organizations, and international partners, which enabled better mapping of risks and formulation of applicable measures. Additionally, experts were engaged for each sector to ensure a quality analytical foundation.

Beyond the strategy, he highlighted the advancement of the integrity system as a key preventive tool. In that regard, he informed that integrity policies are already being implemented in the judiciary, with the expectation that they will be fully accepted by the relevant institutions and will move into the phase of practical application.

In the concluding part, Čučulj addressed digitalization as a necessary condition for effective prevention, particularly regarding the monitoring of the property status and interests of officials. He warned that the lack of budget funds limits the sustainability of these systems, which is why the institution largely depends on international support.




**Dragana BIKOVSKA**

President of the National Commission for Financial Investigations and Asset Confiscation, Advisor to the Deputy President of the Government, responsible for good governance policies

Dragana Bikovska emphasized that anti-corruption is an essential element of the rule of law and of the European integration process, underscoring that without strong and functional institutions, sustainable progress in this area cannot be achieved.

She highlighted the importance of strengthening institutional capacities, pointing out that they encompass human, technical, and organizational resources, and are directly linked to the fulfillment of obligations from the accession process towards the European Union, particularly within the chapters concerning the judiciary, public procurement, and financial control.

Bikovska presented the role of the National Commission and the National Council as key mechanisms for coordination and monitoring of the implementation of the strategy for financial investigations and asset confiscation, emphasizing that for the first time, a structured two-tier system is being established – strategic and operational – which enables more efficient management of this process.

In substantive terms, she defined the fight against corruption and organized crime as the state's ability to identify, freeze, and confiscate criminal profits. According to her, confiscation itself represents the strongest instrument for dismantling the economic power of criminal structures and for protecting market integrity.

She stressed that financial investigations are not just a legal tool, but also an economic mechanism, which has a direct impact on economic stability and trust in institutions. In that regard, the strategy for the 2025–2028 period aims to establish a coordinated, measurable, and efficient system for managing illegally acquired assets.

Bikovska emphasized that the new institutional architecture enables a transition from a fragmented to an integrated model of functioning, where institutions work in a synchronized manner, with clearly defined success indicators and information exchange mechanisms. This approach, according to her, strengthens the operational efficiency of the system.

Regarding implementation, she informed that concrete activities from the action plan are already being carried out, including the strengthening of the capacities of the Agency for Management of Confiscated Assets through new employments, which represents an important step toward institutional sustainability.

She emphasized that international cooperation plays a significant role, particularly through support from organizations such as UNODC, which provide practical tools for asset management and recovery. Additionally, she highlighted the importance of the Asset Recovery Office as a mechanism for cross-border information exchange.

Bikovska also addressed the results of the first implementation report, which shows moderate progress but also clear weaknesses, particularly regarding the lack of specialized staff, limited digital connectivity, and an insufficiently developed statistical system.

In that context, she underscored that establishing a credible statistical system is a priority, because only through systematic monitoring of the entire process – from investigation to confiscation – can a real evaluation of the effects of anti-corruption policies be ensured.

In conclusion, Bikovska highlighted the priorities for the upcoming period, including strengthening human resources, digitalization, specialized training, and increased transparency, emphasizing that true success will be measured through visible and measurable results in practice.

"The effectiveness of the fight against corruption is measured not by the number of cases, but by the ability to seize criminal profits and return them to the citizens."

**Русудан ТАБАТАДЅЕ**

раководителка на Одделот за владеење на правото и човекови права, Мисија на ОБСЕ, Скопје;

Rusudan Tabatadze, Head of the Rule of Law and Human Rights Department at the OSCE Mission in Skopje, began her address by emphasizing the importance of the expert debate, pointing out that those present represent a community of practitioners with deep knowledge of anti-corruption processes. She noted that instead of a theoretical overview, she would focus on the concrete contribution of the OSCE in this area.

Tabatadze emphasized that corruption prevention represents one of the OSCE's priorities, which is embedded in the organizational strategies and aligned with obligations toward the European Union and other international frameworks. In that regard, she informed that the support for North Macedonia is part of a three-year strategy for the period 2025–2027.

As a key foundation for OSCE interventions, she pointed to previous assessments, particularly the analysis of corruption in the judiciary from 2023, which identified the need to strengthen mechanisms for detection and risk management.

She emphasized that the integrity policies in the judiciary have already been adopted by the main judicial institutions and that their full implementation at the national level is expected. In the coming period, the focus will be placed on the practical application and monitoring of these policies in cooperation with the competent institutions.

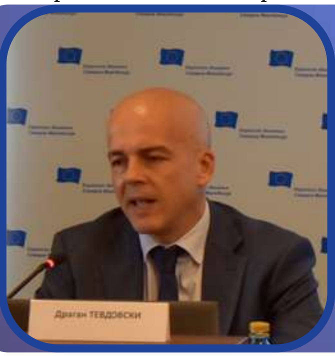
In the legislative domain, Tabatadze informed about the ongoing OSCE support in developing a Code of Ethics for the Parliament, aligned with international standards, which aims to strengthen the integrity and accountability of members of parliament.

She also addressed activities in the area of electoral integrity, where the OSCE cooperates with relevant institutions to advance oversight and transparency of electoral processes. Additionally, support for reforms in public administration was emphasized, particularly in introducing a merit-based employment system.

At the local level, Tabatadze noted that the OSCE has worked with approximately 80 municipalities on the development and implementation of integrity policies, with initial results indicating a positive impact on administrative practices.

She underscored that coordination among institutions is essential, particularly in criminal justice, where the OSCE supports joint trainings for prosecutors, investigators, and other actors, in order to strengthen practical cooperation and the efficiency of investigations.

In conclusion, Tabatadze emphasized that despite the importance of the legal framework, the key factor for success remains implementation, which depends on political will, the independence of the judiciary, and the provision of adequate financial resources for institutions.



**Драган ТЕВДОВСКИ**

експерт на НКЕУ-МК, професор на Економскиот факултет – УКИМ, Скопје

"The legal framework is the foundation, but the true fight against corruption begins with its consistent and independent implementation."

Dragan Tevdovski opened his discussion with a critical but constructive perspective, emphasizing that despite decades of efforts and numerous anti-corruption measures, the perception and experience of corruption remain high. He stressed the need for an "out of the box" approach, meaning a re-examination of the basic assumptions on which policies are built, rather than just accumulating new measures without a clear strategic direction.

In an attempt to explain the essence of corruption as a phenomenon related to the abuse of power, he referred to the Stanford prison experiment, conducted by Philip Zimbardo. This experiment shows that even individuals without prior deviant tendencies, when placed in positions of power, can develop authoritarian and abusive behavior. According to Tevdovski, this has a direct implication for the public sector and the need for institutional design that will minimize the risk of such deviations.

He also highlighted the importance of selection and "bias" in institutions, pointing to subsequent research showing that even the way job advertisements are formulated can influence what profiles of candidates are attracted. The key question, according to him, is how to create a system that will naturally attract and retain individuals of integrity.

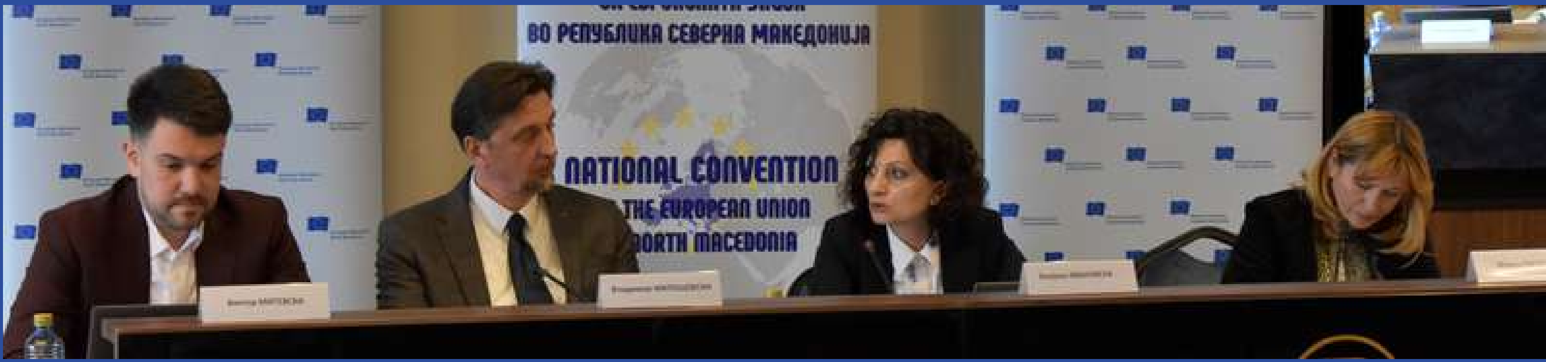
In that context, Tevdovski proposed several more radical but systemic measures. Among them is the complete digitalization and automation of the reporting of officials' property status, instead of self-reporting, as well as significant restriction or elimination of cash transactions, in order to ensure a trace for every financial movement.

Additionally, he advocated for increased transparency through the public disclosure of tax returns, arguing that persons who legally acquire their income have no reason to oppose such a measure. This, according to him, would contribute to the normalization of accountability and would reduce the space for abuses.

One of the most controversial but economically argued positions he put forward was the need for a significant increase in salaries in the public sector. He emphasized that low salaries create a negative selection effect, meaning they attract individuals who are ready to compensate the difference through corrupt practices, rather than motivating quality and integrity-oriented staff.

Tevdovski also problematized the dominant public narrative that corruption is exclusively a problem of the public sector. He emphasized that every corruption also implies an active party that offers the bribe, which opens up the need for systemic addressing of the private sector as a generator of corrupt relationships.

In that regard, he proposed the development of tools for full transparency of financial relations between the state and private companies, including the possibility of easily searching all entities that receive public funds. Additionally, he proposed the creation of indicators for measuring the degree of connection of companies with the state, as a potential risk factor for corruption.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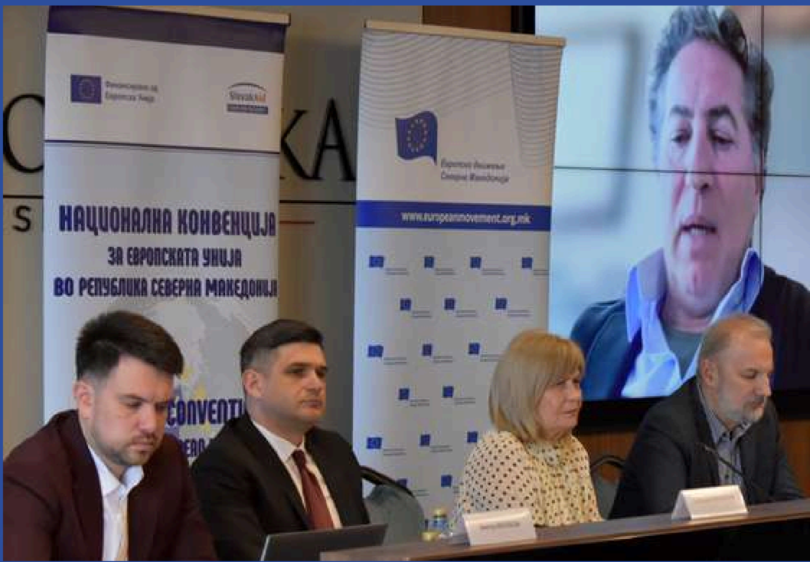
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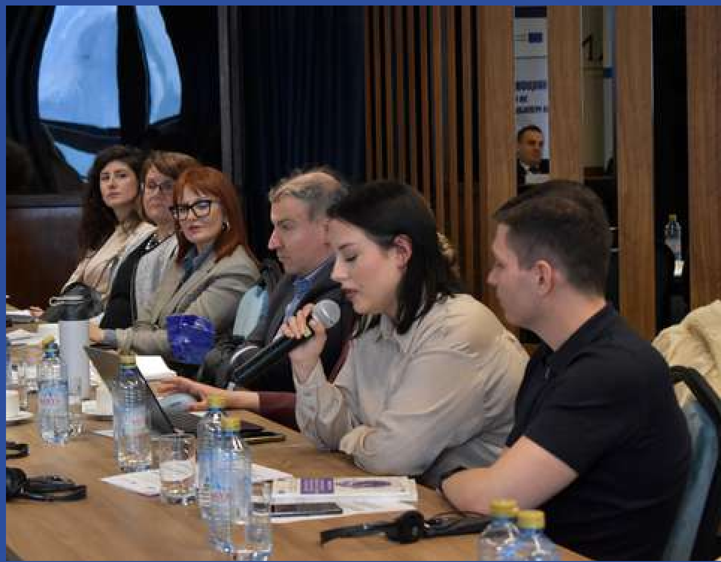

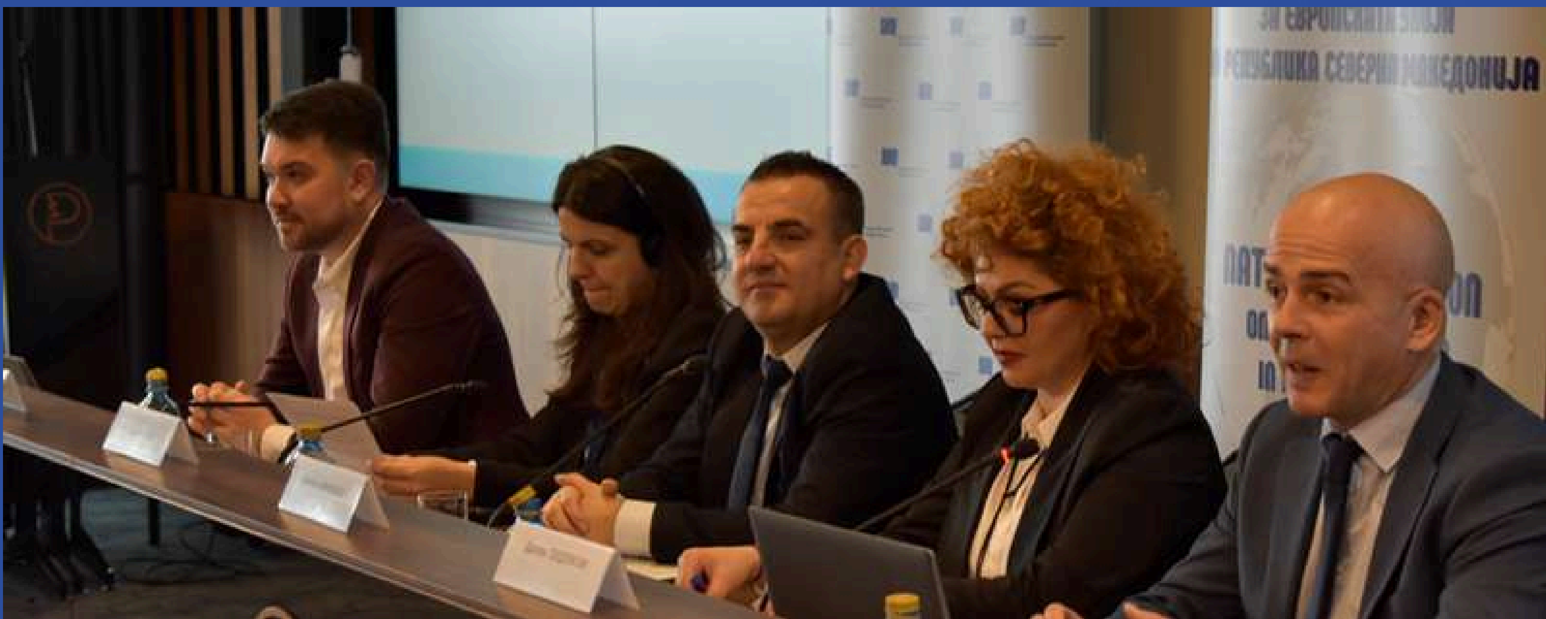
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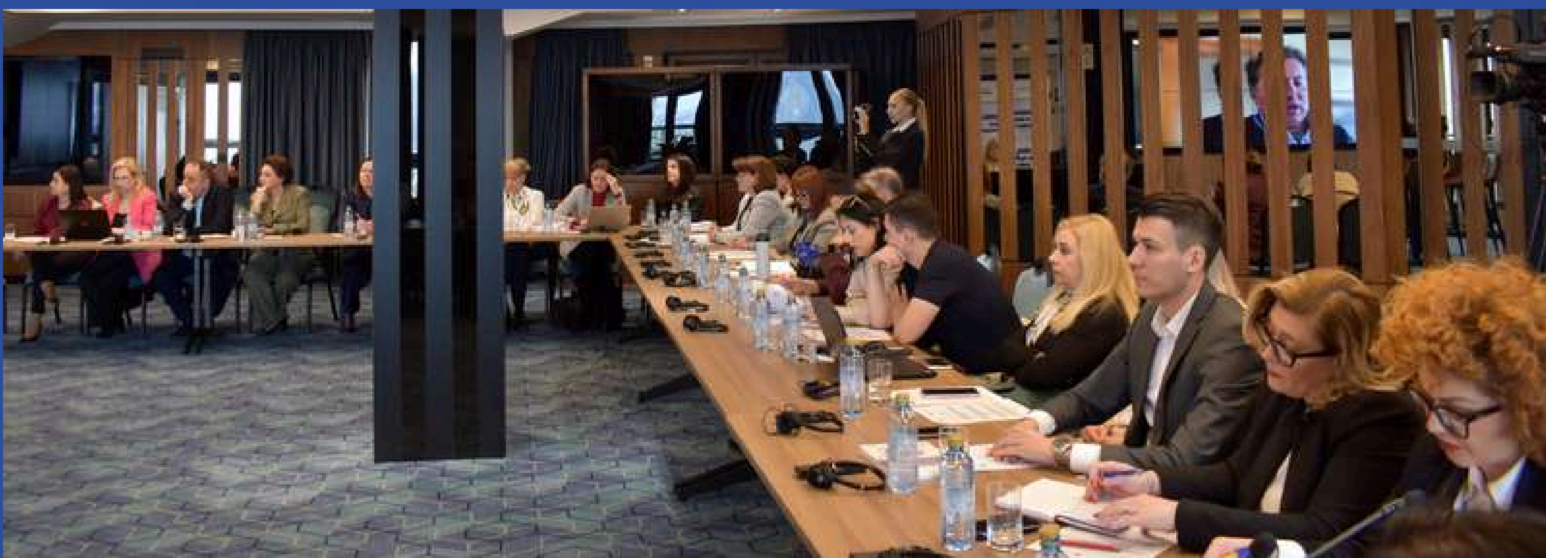


Debate after the first panel:

The debate after the first panel opened a wide range of issues related to the fight against corruption, the functioning of institutions, and the broader societal and value-based factors that influence it.

In the introductory part of the discussion, the importance of financial investigations and the confiscation of illegally acquired assets was emphasized as key tools for reducing the profitability of crime. It was pointed out that although legal frameworks, strategies, and institutional mechanisms exist, the challenge remains in their practical application. The establishment of an inter-institutional roundtable was also proposed, with the aim of developing trainings that would connect theory with practical skills in financial investigations.

In that regard, it was emphasized that without effective asset confiscation, crime remains economically profitable. Participants pointed out that tracking criminal money flows is a complex process, particularly due to their layered transformation through companies, financial transactions, and international channels. Institutional representatives noted that there is progress in coordination between the police, customs, the financial police, and the public prosecutor's office, as well as an increased focus on the value of confiscated property proceeds. Nevertheless, it was emphasized that financial investigations remain highly complex and require continuous capacity building.

A particular part of the debate concerned internal control mechanisms and institutional integrity. The role of internal financial control as a preventive mechanism within institutions was highlighted, alongside external control and investigative bodies. It was emphasized that corruption prevention must function as a system, and not rely solely on individuals.

Furthermore, the question of public administration was raised, particularly regarding salaries, the merit system, and the attractiveness of the public sector. One viewpoint emphasized that low salaries and the lack of career progression increase vulnerability to corruption and reduce the quality of staff. Another approach pointed out that the problem is not only in the size of the administration, but in its inefficiency, duplication of institutions, and politicization.

Within this framework, it was emphasized that the public sector is becoming increasingly less attractive for quality staff, which creates serious challenges for the implementation of reforms and European integration.

Part of the discussion also focused on the value system in society. It was pointed out that corruption is not only an institutional, but also a cultural and social phenomenon, related to the way success, wealth, and legality are perceived. There was discussion about how social norms sometimes normalize illegal gains and influence the behavior of individuals.

At the same time, there were different views regarding the role of citizens in corruption. One view emphasized that corruption is a two-way process involving both institutions and social actors, while another view stressed that strong and professional institutions would reduce the need and opportunity for citizens' participation in corrupt practices.

Towards the end of the discussion, it was emphasized that the fight against corruption requires consistent application of the law, regardless of whether it concerns former or current office-holders, as well as the strengthening of institutional independence and integrity. It was concluded that long-term progress depends on a combination of a professional and well-paid administration, effective institutions, coordinated action, and a broader change in societal values, starting from the earliest age.

**Билјана ИВАНОВСКА**

поранешна претседателка на Државната комисија за спречување на корупција (ДКСК)

Biljana Ivanovska began her address with a strong normative framework, invoking the stance of Rigoberta Menchú that without ending impunity, all anti-corruption efforts remain ineffective. She put forward the thesis that institutional integrity is a fundamental prerequisite for functional institutions, and that its absence, together with political influence and lack of transparency, directly fuels corruption.

Ivanovska defined integrity as acting in accordance with moral norms and the public interest, emphasizing that it is inseparable from ethics as the "moral compass" of institutions. According to her, integrity is not an abstract value, but a practical category that manifests through legality, impartiality, accountability, and transparency in the daily operation of public administration.

The central question she raised was the staffing structure in the public sector – whether the "right people" are in the "right positions" and to whom they are truly accountable: to the institution or to party structures. Her answer implicitly pointed to a systemic problem of politicization, which undermines the professionalism and independence of the administration.

In reviewing the work of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), she noted that over 160 measures were included in the national anti-corruption strategy, but implementation remained at about 30%, indicating a serious gap between planning and implementation. Additionally, the Commission initiated over 60 procedures for establishing responsibility among officeholders and an equal number of initiatives to the Public Prosecutor's Office, as well as an analysis of the abuse of discretionary powers with concrete recommen-dations.

She also highlighted the system for monitoring integrity policies, which had been adopted by over 100 institutions, municipalities, and judicial bodies, assessing it as a positive instrument, but with potential for further improvement through stronger indicators for measuring effectiveness.

Regarding legal reforms in public administration, Ivanovska acknowledged that they establish a foundation for professionalization and transparency, but warned of significant remaining risks. She particularly singled out the selection process, where despite digitalization and formal procedures, the interview – as a key phase – remains insufficiently controlled and subject to subjective influences.

As an illustration of systemic weaknesses, she described a concrete case of corruption in the Administration Agency, where an organized group manipulated the employment exams for the public sector, enabling unqualified candidates to obtain jobs through bribery. Despite the seriousness of the offense, the sanctions were relatively mild, which once again raises the question of impunity.

Ivanovska pointed out that the problem is not partisan, but systemic – interests transcend political differences and create a continuity of corrupt practices. She also highlighted the failure to adopt a law on senior management structure as an indicator of the absence of political will for genuine depoliticization.

Through data analysis, she argued that the public sector is overburdened with employees, yet simultaneously inefficient, which she linked to clientelism, nepotism, and the abuse of temporary employment. She was particularly critical of the use of temporary employment agencies and work contracts as mechanisms for circumventing legal procedures and introducing party-affiliated staff.

In conclusion, Ivanovska emphasized that low citizen trust is a direct consequence of low institutional integrity. She proposed concrete measures: limiting temporary employment, increasing transparency, clear criteria for the selection of managerial staff, reducing discretionary powers, and full digitalization of processes. Additionally, she stressed the importance of ethical education from the earliest age as a long-term investment in a society resistant to corruption.

**Владимир МИЛОШЕВСКИ**

Обвинител, Вишото јавно обвинителство Скопје

Vladimir Miloševski, a prosecutor at the Higher Public Prosecutor's Office in Skopje, highlighted the significance of impunity as one of the key factors undermining the fight against corruption. He invoked the view that when society becomes accustomed to impunity, anti-corruption efforts lose their effectiveness and meaning.

He further placed the institutional perspective as the central framework of his address, emphasizing that strong institutions cannot exist without institutional integrity. According to him, the absence of integrity, together with political influence, lack of transparency, and impunity, represents a key driver of corrupt practices.

Miloševski explained in detail the concept of integrity, defining it as consistent action in accordance with moral norms, laws, and the public interest.

In his address, it was emphasized that ethical and integrity-based behavior implies legality, independence, impartiality, accountability, and transparency. These principles, according to him, are the foundation for protecting the reputation of institutions and strengthening citizens' trust.

He raised a fundamental question about whether institutions are managed by the right people in the right positions, and above all, to whom these individuals are accountable – to the institutions or to political structures. He used this question as an introduction to the analysis of the situation in the public sector.

He went on to address the results and challenges of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption (SCPC), pointing out that of the significant number of measures foreseen in the national strategy, only a small portion have been implemented. This, according to him, indicates weaknesses in implementation, despite the formal existence of policies.

He noted that the SCPC has submitted dozens of initiatives to the Government and the Public Prosecutor's Office for establishing accountability and criminal proceedings, as well as produced analyses and recommendations regarding the abuse of discretionary powers. Nevertheless, the effects of these activities remain limited.

Miloševski also highlighted the importance of the integrity policy monitoring system, which has been applied in a large number of institutions, municipalities, and judicial bodies. He assessed that this system represents a good foundation for improvement, but that further strengthening of indicators and monitoring mechanisms is needed.

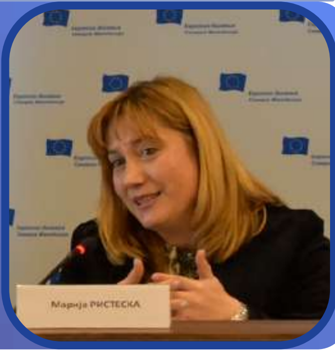
He further addressed the risks in public administration reforms, particularly regarding employment. Although the new legal solutions introduce transparent procedures and digitalized testing, he pointed out that critical points remain, especially in the interview phase.

In his concluding remarks, he highlighted the case of abuses in the Administration Agency as an example of systemic failures, emphasizing that such cases demonstrate a long-term organized practice of corruption. Additionally, he problematized the system of temporary employment and its transformation into permanent positions without clear procedures.

In conclusion, Miloševski proposed a series of measures, including the abolition of abusive forms of temporary employment, increased transparency, digitalization of processes, and limitation of discretionary powers. He also pointed to the need for ethics education from the earliest age, emphasizing that only a systemic approach can lead to a real reduction in corruption.

**Марија РИСТЕСКА**

Извршен директор, Центар за истражување и креирање политики (CRPM) – Скопје



Marija Risteska, Executive Director of the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) in Skopje, began by thanking the panelists for their presentations, emphasizing the need for their systematic connection and joint reading within the broader framework of public policies and anti-corruption measures. She positioned her center as a "think-and-do tank," which not only analyzes policies but also actively participates in their implementation.

Risteska explained that CRPM works long-term in the areas of rule of law, good governance, and anti-corruption, with a special focus on evidence-based policies. She emphasized that the civil sector is often perceived as an external observer, but in fact has a role as a partner in the creation and implementation of public policies.

She pointed out that the organization is part of a platform for fighting corruption, with specialization in the informal economy, undeclared work, and tax evasion. In her address, she made connections with previous speakers, particularly regarding digitalization and institutional capacity as tools for suppressing corruption.

As a key argument, Risteska emphasized that institutions must not only have a legal framework and capacity for law enforcement, but must also be "responsive" – meaning adaptive, fast, and functionally aligned with the real needs of the market and citizens. According to her, institutional sluggishness is one of the factors that encourages the informal economy and corruption.

She gave a concrete example from the agricultural sector, where analyses show that there is a significant volume of undeclared seasonal work. According to the data she presented, about 80,000 people annually work undeclared in seasonal engagements, while only a small portion are formally registered through existing legal mechanisms.

Risteska explained that although there is a legal framework for seasonal work, it is not sufficiently used in practice due to the inflexibility of procedures. She cited as problems the administrative barriers, short registration deadlines, as well as the lack of alignment with the real dynamics of seasonal work.

Additionally, she pointed out that many of the individuals who could be formally registered belong to vulnerable categories – the unemployed, social welfare beneficiaries, or pensioners – who would lose some of their existing rights if their work were formalized. This creates a strong incentive to remain in the informal economy.

She also highlighted as a structural problem the fact that short-term engagements do not provide significant insurance coverage, which further reduces the motivation for formal registration. She assessed that the existing system does not adequately balance social protection and labor market flexibility.

In the concluding part, Risteska presented the solution developed by CRPM – a model for occasional and seasonal work engagements, which was adopted as a legal solution and digitally implemented as of January 1st. This model enables quick registration and deregistration of workers, flexible engagements, and proportional insurance.

She concluded that the essence of anti-corruption policies is not only in increasing control and penalties, but in restoring trust in institutions through functional and user-oriented systems. According to her, corruption decreases when institutions create value and positive incentives for citizens to remain within the formal system.

**The discussion after the second panel focused on corruption as a systemic and multidimensional problem, which is not limited only to the public sector, but is also significantly present in the private sector. Data on "envelope wages" and the informal economy were highlighted, as well as the growing volume of informal work, indicating that existing measures are not producing sufficient effect.**

**Participants emphasized that corruption cannot be understood solely through institutional weaknesses or salary levels, but is strongly linked to social norms, values, and culture. Special emphasis was placed on young people, among whom research shows a high level of perception that corruption is widespread and "normalized," creating a sense of hopelessness and distrust in the system.**

**The discussion raised the question of the role of education and the need for early education on ethics, integrity, and civic responsibility, as well as for a greater role of psychological and value-based education in schools. At the same time, it was emphasized that punitive measures alone are not sufficient, but that positive behavior should also be incentivized.**

**A significant part of the debate concerned distrust in institutions and the low rate of reporting corruption, due to fear of consequences and the belief that the system does not respond effectively. The need for strengthening the protection of whistleblowers, better legal regulation, and more effective mechanisms for investigations and confiscation of illegally acquired assets was highlighted.**

**Additionally, the importance of better inter-institutional cooperation, digitalization, and interoperability of data systems was emphasized, as well as more efficient monitoring of officials' assets. It was also pointed out that the media and political narratives significantly influence the perception of corruption, often more than personal experience.**

**In conclusion, the discussion emphasized the need for a combined approach: institutional reforms, educational measures, cultural change, and building trust in the system, with the aim of long-term reduction of corruption and its normalization in society.**