



COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT

Accompanying the document

2026 Rule of Law Report

The rule of law situation in the European Union

{COM(2026) 900 final}	- {SWD(2026) 901 final}	- {SWD(2026) 902 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 903 final}	- {SWD(2026) 904 final}	- {SWD(2026) 905 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 906 final}	- {SWD(2026) 907 final}	- {SWD(2026) 908 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 909 final}	- {SWD(2026) 910 final}	- {SWD(2026) 911 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 912 final}	- {SWD(2026) 913 final}	- {SWD(2026) 914 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 915 final}	- {SWD(2026) 916 final}	- {SWD(2026) 917 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 918 final}	- {SWD(2026) 919 final}	- {SWD(2026) 920 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 921 final}	- {SWD(2026) 922 final}	- {SWD(2026) 923 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 924 final}	- {SWD(2026) 925 final}	- {SWD(2026) 926 final}	-
{SWD(2026) 927 final}	- {SWD(2026) 928 final}	- {SWD(2026) 929 final}	-
	{SWD(2026) 931 final}		

ABSTRACT

North Macedonia continued to implement the 2024–2028 Strategy for Judicial Reform, although challenges persist, notably inadequate cooperation between institutions. Interference and pressure from other State branches continue to raise serious concerns about respect for judicial independence. The independence of the judiciary and autonomy of prosecution are undermined by insufficient budgetary allocation. The dismissal procedure against the Chief Prosecutor exposed a risk of politicisation and shortcomings in the dismissal rules. The Government proposed amendments to the laws on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Parliament adopted new amendments to the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors to strengthen the autonomy of the prosecution service, but further revisions are needed. Parliament adopted a new Law on the Judicial Council with a view to align with European standards. The shortage of staff in the judiciary has worsened with no new candidates for judges and prosecutors undergoing initial training, and insufficient funding for supporting staff.

A new Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is envisaged to be adopted, while the implementation of the 2021-2025 Strategy continued to be low. Amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted, which presented several shortcomings compared with the previous framework, while a comprehensive reform is in preparation. Despite recent efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption, delays in court proceedings, infrequent final convictions and limited resources continue to impede the development of a strong track-record of high-level corruption cases. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption took steps to rebuild public trust in the institution while, the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is currently under revision. The effective oversight of campaigns and political party financing continues to be affected by inadequate legislation and a lack of resources in the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption. Whistleblower protection remains insufficient as the revision of the Whistleblowers Protection Law has not advanced. Corruption in public procurement and healthcare continues to be identified as risk areas.

Appointments of the new members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were made, while concerns regarding the financial independence of the Agency persist. Efforts are ongoing to modernise the Public Service Broadcaster, although challenges persist due to limited administrative autonomy and irregular funding. The implementation of the legal framework on access to public information remains inconsistent and there are ongoing efforts to revise it. Journalists face pressure from political actors, increased online violence and SLAPP threats, while their working conditions have not improved.

Parliament made several appointments to independent institutions, although concerns remain about merit-based selection procedures. There was no improvement in the financial and human resource situation of the Ombudsperson's Office or the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The Constitutional Court continued to improve its capacity to protect constitutionality and legality. The Government continued its efforts to strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations, while challenges related to funding for CSOs remain. Efforts were made to address shortcomings concerning evidence-based policy planning.

I. JUSTICE SYSTEM¹

Independence

The level of perceived judicial independence in North Macedonia continues to be very low among both the general public and companies. Overall, 21% of the general population and 19% of companies perceive the level of independence of courts and judges to be ‘fairly or very good’ in 2026². The perceived judicial independence has significantly decreased in comparison with 2025 both among the general public (28% in 2025) and companies (26% in 2025). The main reasons cited by the general public for the perceived lack of independence of courts and judges are the perception of interference or pressure from the Government and politicians as well as, cited by both the general public and companies, the interference or pressure from economic or other specific interests³.

North Macedonia continued to implement the 2024–2028 Strategy for Judicial Reform, although challenges persist, notably inadequate cooperation between institutions. The implementation rate of activities planned in 2025 stands at 57%, indicating a 14% increase compared with 2024⁴. The Council for Monitoring the Implementation of the Strategy⁵ met only twice in 2025 which hindered prompt follow-up and the adoption of corrective measures to address shortcomings within the judiciary. Other key challenges to implementing the strategy were limited funding and human resources⁶.

Interference and pressure from other State branches continue to raise serious concerns about respect for judicial independence. Elected officials and Government representatives have escalated their personal criticism against judges and prosecutors they accuse of corruption⁷ and statements from the highest levels of Government were issued about plans to clean up the judiciary and prosecution⁸. These statements risk to undermine the independence of the judiciary and the principle of separation of powers. Moreover, judges and prosecutors are experiencing increased pressure from public smear campaigns, both online and through the media, involving high-ranking executive officials and politicians⁹. The Judicial Council, Supreme Court, and Association of Judges have jointly issued a public statement expressing concern over persistent, unsubstantiated critiques of the judiciary, which they argue undermine judicial independence and violate democratic principles concerning the separation of powers¹⁰.

¹ An overview of the institutional framework for all four pillars can be found [here](#).

² Flash Eurobarometers 581 and 582 (2026). The level of perceived judicial independence is categorised as follows: very low (below 30% of respondents perceive judicial independence as fairly good and very good); low (between 30-39%), average (between 40-59%), high (between 60-75%), very high (above 75%).

³ Flash Eurobarometers 581 and 582 (2026); Flash Eurobarometers 554 and 555 (2025).

⁴ Ministry of Justice (2026b) Annual Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Judicial Reform. Of the 116 planned activities for 2025, 66 have been fully implemented, implementation of 50 is ongoing, and 105 were not implemented.

⁵ 2025 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 2 and Government of North Macedonia (2026), written input, p. 2. The Council's mandate provides a framework for a coordinated and strategic approach to judicial reform, ensuring coherence, continuity, and alignment with the EU integration process. The Council is chaired by the Minister of Justice.

⁶ Ministry of Justice (2026b), Annual Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Judicial Reform, p. 9.

⁷ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 27.

⁸ Media Information Agency (2025).

⁹ Judicial Council, Public appeal to journalists (2025).

¹⁰ Media Information Agency (2025).

The independence of the judiciary and autonomy of prosecution are undermined by insufficient budgetary allocations. The budgets of the judiciary and the public prosecution service remain below the legal minimum, and the 4.3% reduction in allocations in 2025 compared with the previous year added to a situation that undermines judicial independence and prosecutorial autonomy¹¹. Furthermore, the courts and prosecution offices still need formal approval from the Ministry of Finance for internal budget allocations, such as resource and staffing decisions, which does not allow them budgetary autonomy¹². The Government initiated legislative revisions of the laws regulating the salaries of judges, public prosecutors, members of the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors, with the aim of improving the status of judges and public prosecutors in line with the European standards¹³. However, in February, the Parliament amended the aforementioned laws on salaries of magistrates in a shortened procedure reducing the coefficients for calculating their salaries. The Association of Prosecutors published a statement, considering that insufficient remuneration is putting into question the independence of the Public Prosecutor's Office¹⁴. Furthermore, on 3 March, the Supreme Court and the Judicial Council recalled in a joint statement that the material and financial independence of the judiciary are not a privilege, but an essential element of the constitutional order and a guarantee for the rule of law¹⁵. The Constitutional Court, stressing that the financial independence is guaranteed by the Constitution, annulled on 8 April the amendments to the Law on Salaries of Judges, made on February 2026¹⁶.

The dismissal procedure initiated against the Chief Prosecutor exposed a risk of politicisation and shortcomings in the dismissal rules, and ultimately led to the Chief Prosecutor's resignation. On 16 December, the Chief Public Prosecutor publicly resigned, ahead of the Parliament session tabling the Government proposal for his dismissal, based on allegations that he had harmed the judiciary's reputation¹⁷. The Council of Public Prosecutors reiterated its negative opinion on the dismissal proposal¹⁸. Stakeholders considered the dismissal process to set a negative precedent, with potentially significant implications for the autonomy of the Public Prosecution Office, raising substantial questions about the rule of law, the consistency of institutional procedures, as well as pointing out the lack of clarity on the factual and legal basis for the dismissal¹⁹. A new Chief Public Prosecutor, meeting the

¹¹ For the judicial system, instead of the legally prescribed budget set at 0.8% of GDP (Law on the Court Budget and Law on the judicial budget 2010) the 2026 annual budget allocated was equivalent to 0.28% of GDP. For the Public Prosecutor's Office, the budget expressed as a percentage of the total budget is 0.21%, instead of the legally envisaged 0.4%. Annual Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Judicial Reform.

¹² Country visit North Macedonia, Judicial Council, Public Prosecutor's Office, Association of Judges, Association of Public Prosecutors. [See section above on the "allocation of financial resources"]. Legislation on the judicial and prosecutorial services is in parliamentary procedure, prescribing that the procedure for recruitment of the staff will not be dependent on the consent of the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance would only be notified of the recruitment plans prepared by the Judicial Council and Public Prosecutorial Office respectfully. Government of North Macedonia (2026a).

¹³ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 13.

¹⁴ MKD.MK (2026) Statement of the Association of Public Prosecutors.

¹⁵ IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law" (2026).

¹⁶ Constitutional Court (2026).

¹⁷ 2025 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 3.

¹⁸ The procedure prescribes that the Council of Public Prosecutors provides a non-binding opinion on the dismissal request from the government, before it can be submitted for a vote to the Parliament. Country visit North Macedonia, Council of Public Prosecutors.

¹⁹ Blueprint Group for Judicial Reform (2025) European standards call for clarity on the conditions for the pre-term dismissal of the Prosecutor General, including an *ex-ante* opinion of an expert body as to whether there are sufficient grounds for dismissal, and a fair hearing of the Prosecutor General in dismissal

legal criteria, was elected on 18 March, ahead of the intended adoption of a new Law on Public Prosecutor's Office.

The Government proposed amendments to the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Parliament adopted new amendments on the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors to strengthen the autonomy of the prosecution service, but further revisions are needed. Following the Venice Commission opinion of October 2025²⁰, the Government proposed amendments on the Law on the Public Prosecutor's Office and the Parliament adopted a new Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors on 7 May. The draft law on the Public Prosecutor's Office is yet to be brought in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission to further specify the grounds for dismissal of the Prosecutor General and to introduce qualified majority voting in Parliament both for the appointment and dismissal of the Prosecutor General, which requires amendments to the Constitution. The amendments to the Law on the Council of Public Prosecutors do not implement yet the recommendations of the Venice Commission to ensure sufficient pluralism in the selection process of the lay members²¹. The authorities have announced that they intend to revise these laws further to comply with the outstanding recommendations.

Parliament adopted a new Law on the Judicial Council with a view to align with European standards. The law adopted on 29 December 2025 improved the selection process of judges and disciplinary procedures in terms of transparency and clarity. The Law now requires each voting member of the Council to provide an oral justification for each candidate in the process of electing judges. Furthermore, the Council's decision regarding election or non-election must be well-reasoned, individualised and based on comparable criteria²². Furthermore, the selection process of the non-judge members of the Council in Parliament, in line with the recommendations of the Venice Commission and the peer review mission from September 2023 to ensure pluralism were implemented, following a new revision of the Law on 11 June²³. In addition, the revised law details grounds for the dismissal of the President or Deputy President from their positions while remaining members of the Council²⁴. The authorities committed to revise the Law on Courts, notably to clarify the disciplinary offences that would lead to a judge's dismissal²⁵.

proceedings. Venice Commission (2010), paras. 39-40. The current grounds for a serious disciplinary violation, which can lead to the dismissal of the Chief Prosecutor, include unclear and broad definitions, such as 'improper behaviour that damage the reputation of the public prosecution office'.

²⁰ Venice Commission opinion (October 2025).

²¹ Venice Commission opinion (October 2025), paras 18 f., 39 ff. and 43.

²² Council members must vote individually on every candidate from the ranked list. The candidate elected as judge must receive the highest number of votes, with a minimum of eight votes from the total voting Council members. In cases where two or more candidates receive an equal number of votes, the candidate placed higher on the ranked list will be elected. If candidates have both an equal number of votes and the same ranking score, the voting process will be repeated until one candidate achieves a majority. Law on the Judicial Council.

²³ In terms of clarity, the law defines the terminology "distinguished lawyer" in clearer terms and established a public selection procedure. However, it does not include a scoring of the candidates by an independent expert panel as recommended by the EU Peer Review Mission or a qualified majority vote in Parliament as recommended by the Venice Commission (2014), para 67 and Venice Commission (2015), para. 63.

²⁴ Venice Commission Opinion (June 2025), para. 30.

²⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2026a).

Quality

The shortage of staff in the judiciary has worsened with no new candidates for judges and prosecutors undergoing initial training and insufficient funding for supporting staff. Severe shortage of staff is considered among the most critical problems for the judiciary²⁶. In 2025, 97 graduates from the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors' previous recruitment process, belonging to the eighth graduating class, were recruited to the Basic Courts, and to the Basic Public Prosecutor's Offices. The lack of implementation of the human resource strategies for the Courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office, adopted for the period 2020-2026, continue to pose significant challenges²⁷. The 2015 Systematisation of the Judicial Council sets out 636 judicial posts, while by the end of October 2025, only 432 of these positions were filled²⁸. Furthermore, the general shortage of support staff amounts to 63% according to the 2015 judicial systematisation²⁹. During its session on 25 December 2025, the Management Board of the Academy decided to cancel the admission process for the 130 candidates of the ninth generation, due to insufficient financial resources provided by the Ministry of Finance to support the recruitment and training of new candidates as well as the changes in the examination conditions due to amendments to the law³⁰. In this context, a new draft Law was prepared, passed the process of public consultation and now is in governmental procedure³¹, however, since there is currently no training of new judges and prosecutors, no new judicial candidates will be available before 2028³².

Despite some initiatives to improve digitalisation in the judiciary, challenges remain. The automated court case management information system (ACCMIS) and digital infrastructure for the judiciary are outdated and require updates or replacement in line with changes in procedural laws and with the new measures for complex cases³³. A key advancement in the digitalisation efforts was the digital interconnection between the Administrative Court, the Higher Administrative Court and other public bodies, enabling fast and secure electronic exchange of data and documents, improving coordination and reducing costs. According to the authorities, the prosecution service's new Case Management and Case

²⁶ IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law" (2026).

²⁷ The targets and timelines set out in the human resource strategies for the Courts and the Public Prosecutor's Office have not been met. Statistical data indicates that the gap between the projected number of judges according to the current systematisation and the actual number is widening over time, IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law" (2026a) *Report on the Implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for the Judiciary in North Macedonia* and *Roadmap for the Implementation of the Human Resources Strategy for the Judiciary*.

²⁸ Ibidem. This result in a shortfall of 32% of judges based on the 2015 Systematisation. Additionally, 84 judges would reach the retirement age by the end of 2028. Feedback from courts to the Judicial Council in October 2025 suggested that the total number of judicial posts should be 589.

²⁹ In several courts it was noted that in extreme cases, judges themselves are forced to perform clerical tasks, and essential court services are only maintained by relying on donors. IPA II Project "EU Support for Rule of Law" (2026).

³⁰ Board of Directors of the Academy for Judges and Public Prosecutors (2025). See also 2024 Rule of Law Report on North Macedonia, pp. 9, 10.

³¹ Government of North Macedonia (2026a). The draft Law keeps the Academy as a sole entry point for the judges and public prosecutors and maintains the duration of initial training at two years. The draft Law foresees the organisation of annual admissions to the Academy, determined by staffing needs identified by the Judicial Council and the Council of Public Prosecutors.

³² Country visit North Macedonia. In January the dissatisfied candidates challenged the Decision of the Managing Board with the Administrative Court.

³³ Ibidem. The system is currently not able to deliver adequate and relevant information needed for staffing, workload assessment, analysis of case complexity levels, and other judicial management data essential for making effective decisions to optimise resource use.

Tracking System, launched in 2025, is to be fully operational by 2028³⁴. The Ministry of Justice published findings from inspections in 15 courts on the functioning of ACCMIS, concluding that all cases are registered and processed exclusively through ACCMIS, including electronic assignment and reassignment, and that no manual distribution outside the system was observed, proving consistent application of procedural rules³⁵.

Efficiency

Overall, the efficiency of the justice system continued to decline, as the duration of proceedings increased in almost all case categories, with the exception of criminal cases. While the clearance rate for first instance administrative cases in 2024 remained above 100%, the situation continued to deteriorate for the second instance administrative cases, where the disposition time increased to 502 days in 2024 (up from 84 days in 2021) and the clearance rate fell to 72%, despite an 18% decrease in incoming cases between 2023 and 2024. In first instance civil and commercial litigious cases, the clearance rate was 94% in 2024 (93% in 2023). Performance also deteriorated for second instance civil and commercial litigious cases: in 2024 the clearance rate was 84%, (86% in 2023) and the disposition time increased to 346 days (a 34% rise compared to 2023). By contrast, performance increased for criminal cases in 2024: in second instance total criminal law cases, the clearance rate was 108%, (98% in 2023) and disposition time fell to 102 days (down 32% from 2023), while in first instance total criminal law cases, the clearance rate rose to 104%, (88% in 2023), and disposition time decreased to 212 days (down 5% from 2023)³⁶.

II. ANTI-CORRUPTION FRAMEWORK

The perception among experts, citizens and businesses is that the level of corruption in the public sector is high. In the 2025 Corruption Perceptions Index by Transparency International, North Macedonia scores 40/100 and ranks 84th globally³⁷. This perception has improved over the past five years³⁸. The 2026 Special Eurobarometer on Corruption shows that 92% of respondents consider corruption widespread in their country (EU average 71%) and 35% of respondents feel personally affected by corruption in their daily lives (EU average 30%). As regards businesses, 91% of companies consider that corruption is widespread (EU average 65%) and 60% consider that corruption is a problem when doing business (EU average 37%). Furthermore, 32% of respondents find that there are enough successful prosecutions to deter people from corrupt practices (EU average 38%), while 22% of companies believe that people and businesses caught for bribing a senior official are appropriately punished (EU average 31%)³⁹.

A new National Strategy for the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is envisaged to be adopted, while the implementation of the 2021-2025 Strategy continued

³⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 12. As of 1 January 2026, a new register was introduced to randomly assign complex and organised crime cases to prosecutors, ensuring balanced and fair case distribution within the Specialised Department for Combating Organised Crime and Corruption at the Basic Criminal Court in Skopje.

³⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 20.

³⁶ CEPEJ (2025), pp. 15-20.

³⁷ The level of perceived corruption is categorised as follows: low (above 79); relatively low (between 79-60), relatively high (between 59-50), high (below 50).

³⁸ In 2020 the score was 35, while, in 2025, the score is 40. The score significantly increases/decreases when it changes more than five points; improves/deteriorates (changes between 4-5 points); has been relatively stable (changes from 1-3 points) in the last five years.

³⁹ Data from Special Eurobarometer 573 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026).

to be low overall. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) reported in its annual report of 2026⁴⁰ on the National Strategy that, out of 137 activities planned for 2025, only 31 activities (23%) have been fully implemented, 46 activities (33%) are in the process of implementation, while 60 (44%) have not yet been implemented. Implementation of the strategy continued to be slow, indicating an overall lack of commitment and ownership across institutions. The SCPC identified limited human and financial resources, insufficient accountability and weak interinstitutional coordination as key reasons for the limited implementation⁴¹. The SCPC prepared a report on the implementation of the National Strategy for the period 2021-2025 and submitted it to the Parliament. The new 2026–2030 Anti-Corruption Strategy⁴², planned to be adopted by the Parliament was drafted with the involvement of CSOs, demonstrating transparency and inclusiveness of the process⁴³. The new Strategy identifies two horizontal priority areas – public procurement and oversight of law implementation from an anti-corruption perspective – and narrows its scope from 13 to 5 key sectors: justice, health, transport and infrastructure, urban and spatial planning, and environment, energy and natural resources. This new approach would allow resources to be concentrated where corruption risks are assessed as highest, rather than dispersed across multiple areas. Other improvements, compared with the previous Strategy, include determining the budgetary implications for implementing each activity and clearly defining the responsibilities of state institutions for implementing the various measures⁴⁴.

Amendments to the Criminal Code were adopted, which present several shortcomings compared with the previous framework, while a comprehensive reform is in preparation. On 28 January 2026, the Parliament adopted amendments to the Criminal Code. As a result, the Constitutional Court terminated its initiative to review the constitutionality of the September 2023 Criminal Code changes. The adopted amendments are meant as a temporary solution while the Ministry of Justice prepares in parallel a comprehensive new Criminal Code⁴⁵ and a new Law on Criminal Procedure⁴⁶. Crucial aspects of the new amendments concern the offences of abuse of official position and authority⁴⁷ and criminal association⁴⁸, aiming to address the negative effects of the September 2023 amendments⁴⁹. Stakeholders highlight that compared to the previous legal framework,

⁴⁰ Annual Report on the Implementation of the National Strategy for Preventing Corruption and Conflict of Interest by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (2026). In line with the legal requirements, the 2025 report on the implementation of the Strategy was submitted to Parliament in March 2026 and published on the website of the SCPC.

⁴¹ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 32.

⁴² Given that the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption is a preventive body, the National Strategy for Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest contains only preventive measures. Repressive policies and measures fall within the remit of other institutions that form the repressive part of the anti-corruption institutional framework, such as the Public Prosecution, the Ministry of Interior and other law-enforcement bodies.

⁴³ 2025 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, pp. 8-9. The lessons learned following the implementation of Strategy for 2021-2025 were considered for the drafting of a new Strategy for 2026-2030.

⁴⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 29.

⁴⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 36. The stated goal is to create a new, modern and codified Criminal Code, fully incorporating all relevant international standards and instruments.

⁴⁶ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 37: Particular attention is given to provisions concerning confiscation and freezing of assets, electronic evidence, financial investigations, special investigative measures, detention, main hearings, appellate procedures and extraordinary legal remedies.

⁴⁷ Article 353 of the Criminal Code.

⁴⁸ Article 394 of the Criminal Code.

⁴⁹ 2024 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 9. Several cases had to be terminated at investigation or court phase, either because they became time-barred due to the reduction of statutory limitations, or because the specific offences had been removed from the Criminal Code.

the amendments restrict the application of the offence of abuse of official position to certain situations which are extremely rare in practice, resulting in the decriminalisation of other situations and creating legal uncertainty⁵⁰. In addition, compared with the pre-2023 version of the Criminal Code, the maximum penalties for more serious forms of the offence are reduced, which in turn shortens the statutory limitation periods and leaves less time for the investigation and prosecution of complex corruption cases⁵¹.

Despite recent efforts to investigate and prosecute corruption, delays in court proceedings, infrequent final convictions and limited resources continue to impede the development of a strong track record of high-level corruption cases. The track record in the fight against corruption, notably for high-level cases, remained stable. During the reporting period, the prosecution launched several investigations against both current and former high-ranking officials, resulting in indictments and ongoing trials. However, the inadequate legislative framework, notably the 2023 Criminal Code, insufficient human and financial resources, together with delays in court proceedings, hindered the development of a solid track record of anti-corruption cases. High-profile corruption cases rarely lead to final convictions which further contributes to a sense of impunity⁵². Despite initiatives in some courts to improve trial management and reduce procedural delays, and positive examples from some prosecution services in improving indictments, the tangible results remain limited⁵³. The efficiency of the Public Prosecutor's Office (PPO) and of the Public Prosecutor's Office for Prosecuting Organised Crime and Corruption (OCCPPO) in fighting corruption continue to be affected by the growing caseload combined with an insufficient number of public prosecutors, outdated technical equipment and insufficient financial resources⁵⁴.

The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption took steps to rebuild public trust in the institution, while the Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest is currently under revision. In July 2025, the President of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC) resigned after being indicted and one of the SCPC Commissioners resigned amid suspicions of a conflict of interest⁵⁵. These facts brought into question the credibility of the institution⁵⁶. On 3 December, the Parliament elected a new President of the SCPC, in a procedure described by stakeholders as transparent and merit based⁵⁷. Furthermore, the draft Law on the Prevention of Corruption and Conflict of Interest has been revised, with the aim to strengthen the level of penalties, in line with GRECO's recommendations, and is currently undergoing inter-service consultation within the Government⁵⁸. As for its activities, the SCPC continued to mainly focus on awareness raising

⁵⁰ Country visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations. See, public statement by Platform of Civil Society Organizations for Combating Corruption and the Blueprint Group for Judicial Reform (2025).

⁵¹ Country visit North Macedonia, Public Prosecution Office for Organised Crime and Corruption.

⁵² 2026 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 31.

⁵³ OSCE Trial Monitoring project (2025), p. 34. The analysis of the indictments showed some improvement, particularly in the more frequent identification of assets for the purposes of confiscation and/or compensation for damage.

⁵⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 38. Instead of the 18 public prosecutors stipulated by the Council of Public Prosecutors' Decision No. 02-144/4 of 19 July 2023, there are currently 13 public prosecutors, leaving 5 public prosecutor positions vacant.

⁵⁵ Following the indictment for disclosing official secrets and falsifying an examination process to obtain her security certificate. The case is currently in trial

⁵⁶ Country visit North Macedonia, meeting with CSOs.

⁵⁷ Country visit North Macedonia, meeting with CSOs.

⁵⁸ Government of North Macedonia (2026); (2026a). According to the authorities, in May 2026 the Ministry of Justice integrated into the draft Law suggestions from the Council for Cooperation between the

campaigns, oversight of election financing, the verification of asset declarations and integrity, and was less active in detecting and reporting alleged instances of corruption⁵⁹, and in addressing politically sensitive cases⁶⁰. Challenges persist regarding sufficient budget allocation⁶¹, the availability of specialised staff with investigative experience, and the interoperability of data management systems, all of which hinder the thorough verification of asset declarations⁶² and contributes to a growing backlog of cases. In the reporting period, a total of 4 300 declarations of assets and interests were submitted, compared with 3 620 in 2024. The number of systematic asset verifications of public officials increased to 42 in 2025, compared with 14 in 2024⁶³. Benefiting from EU funding, improvements continued in the software solutions for the activity of the institution⁶⁴.

The number of registered lobbyists in the transparency register remains low and a reform of the lobbying legislation is planned. The Ministry of Justice initiated, in June 2026, the process for amending the Law on Lobbying with a view to aligning it with relevant international standards⁶⁵. As of June 2026, there were only one lobbyist and three lobbying organisations registered⁶⁶. The limited number of registered lobbying organisations indicate low levels of transparent lobbying and point to shortcomings in incentives to register and effective enforcement⁶⁷.

The effective oversight of campaigns and political party financing continues to be affected by inadequate legislation and a lack of resources in the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption. The proposal made in June 2025 by the Ministry of Justice to amend the Electoral Code did not address significant aspects needed to ensure genuine enforcement of anti-corruption rules in elections. This is notably the case in relation to improving campaign financing oversight and monitoring of misuse of public resources in election campaigns, including limiting public spending and establishing clear mechanisms for dividing state budget for paid campaign advertising, as recommended by OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR)⁶⁸. Concerns were raised, notably by

Government and the Civil Society. GRECO (2025). Recommendations 17 to 23. 5th Evaluation Round, preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies.

⁵⁹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 45. In 2025, the SCPC initiated a total of 462 cases in the prevention of corruption area, of which 7 cases were initiated on its own initiative (1.5% of total initiated cases), in the areas of employment, health, disposal of official funds, and 455 cases based on a submitted report.

⁶⁰ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 32.

⁶¹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), pp. 39-40. In the reporting period, March-December 2025, no financial resources have been provided in the institution's budget for the implementation of the Annual employment plan for 2025. In addition, the Government reported that the financial and human capacities of the institution are a challenge in building and improving anti-corruption mechanism in the country.

⁶² Country visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations: The information disclosed in asset declarations and conflict of interest statements is currently limited to family members living in the same household. This scope should be expanded to include a wider circle of close persons, to better reduce the risk of corruption.

⁶³ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 40.

⁶⁴ An EU project was launched for upgrading the Electronic System for Filing a Declaration of Assets and Interests.

⁶⁵ This process is expected to draw on technical assistance provided through the “EU Support for the Rule of Law” project.

⁶⁶ Government of North Macedonia (2026a).

⁶⁷ Country visit North Macedonia. SCPC announced the organisation of a dedicated lobbying awareness campaign in 2026.

⁶⁸ The Ministry of Justice completed and submitted to ODIHR draft amendments to the Electoral Code (June 2025). ODIHR’s legal opinion provides both an assessment on the draft amendments submitted by the MoJ and a summary of all outstanding ODIHR’s recommendations (August 2025).

ODIHR and the SCPC on the oversight capacity of the SCPC as regards adequate resources, the necessary technical expertise and the necessary enforcement powers due to inconsistencies in the legal framework⁶⁹. The working group charged with the revision of the electoral legislation, composed by representatives across the political spectrum and chaired by the Minister of Justice, had its constitutive session on 9 March 2026⁷⁰. Furthermore, according to the State Audit Office's 2026 annual work programme, the institution plans to carry out 166 regularity audits in the election campaign for the 2025 local elections, which are yet to be published.

Whistleblower protection remains insufficient as the revision of the Whistleblowers Protection Law has not advanced. Although the process of consulting and revising the Law on the Protection of Whistleblowers with a view to aligning it with the EU *acquis* began in December 2023, and the draft law completed the stage of inter-agency consultation within the Government in March 2026, there is no clear timetable for adoption by the Parliament. Stakeholders note that the low number of reports from whistleblowers is linked to a lack of sufficient protection and support to whistleblowers and effective anti-retaliation mechanisms⁷¹.

Corruption in public procurement and healthcare continue to be identified as risk areas. The public procurement system remains a high-risk area for corruption. The competition in public procurement is perceived as limited, with incomplete anticorruption safeguards throughout the procurement cycle⁷². Public healthcare continues to be susceptible to widespread petty corruption^{73,74}.

III. MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

Appointments of the new members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services were made while concerns regarding the financial independence of the Agency persists. On 24 June 2025, the Parliament appointed the members of the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Stakeholders raised concerns about the selection process, particularly its lack of transparency and respect of eligibility criteria⁷⁵. On 22 August 2025, the Council adopted Rules of Procedure defining the Agency's governance and working methods, including appointments and dismissals, adoption of acts under the Law on Audio and Audiovisual Media Services (LAAVMS), licensing and supervision of media services, and register maintenance. The Agency's Director was appointed in December for a five-year term⁷⁶. The Council held its constitutive session on 3 July 2025, electing a Chairperson and a Deputy Chairperson. In

⁶⁹ ODIHR (2026) p. 36; SCPC (2026): Report on Established Conditions in the Financing of the Election Campaign for the Election of Mayors and Municipal Council Members.

⁷⁰ According to the Government the working group has met several times, reviewing OSCE/ODIHR recommendations and discussing input from institutions and civil society. Ministry of Justice (2026); (2026a). Government of North Macedonia (2026a)

⁷¹ Statement of the Anti-Corruption Civil Society Organisations Platform of 15 December 2025.

⁷² MCIC and SELDI (2025) Corruption assessment report on North Macedonia 2025. The new draft Strategy identifies the public procurement as priority area.

⁷³ Transparency International, (2026).

⁷⁴ In 2025, judges are perceived as the most corrupt profession (79%), followed closely by public prosecutors (74.6%) and police officers (69.8%). Political actors also rank very high in perceived corruption, with leaders of political parties and coalitions (66.3%) and Members of Parliament (64.9%) both well above the 50% mark. SELDI report of 12 February 2026.

⁷⁵ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 38; 2025 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 13.

⁷⁶ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 54.

2025, as in previous years, despite statutory provisions guaranteeing its funding⁷⁷, the Government continued to provide incomplete financing to the Agency, thereby undermining its planning and risking jeopardising its financial and institutional independence. The Media Pluralism Monitor (MPM) 2026 considers the independence and effectiveness of the media regulator to be an area of low risk, however, more efforts are needed especially with respect to the implementation of the procedures for the appointments of members of the media regulator⁷⁸.

Despite the positive role played by the Council of Media Ethics, the journalistic Code of Ethics is not systematically respected. The Council of Media Ethics contributes to improving media ethics and responsible journalism, despite the limited effectiveness of self-regulation, which is often undermined by political and business influence, particularly in online portals⁷⁹. While the Council still faces long-term financial challenges, it continues to provide education and raise awareness on the importance of media self-regulation⁸⁰. A review of complaints received in 2025 shows an increase, compared with the previous year, in complaints alleging breaches of the Code of Journalists' principle of publishing accurate, verified information from at least two independent sources. In total, 244 complaints were received in 2025 – the highest number recorded in a single year⁸¹.

While efforts are ongoing to modernise and improve professional standards of the Public Service Broadcaster, challenges persist due to limited administrative autonomy and irregular funding. The Parliament appointed a new Programme Council for the public broadcaster in June 2025⁸², resolving a delay pending since December 2018. In 2025, following a rebalancing of the State Budget, the funds allocated to *Macedonian Radio and Television* (MRT) were reduced by EUR 1 300 000⁸³. In the 2026 State Budget, the allocation for the public service broadcaster is also EUR 123 600 below the amount prescribed by the statutory provisions on funding⁸⁴. The limited administrative autonomy of the Public Broadcaster remains a barrier to recruiting new staff⁸⁵. To address this, the MRT Programme Council and other stakeholders are requesting a specific law on *Macedonian Radio and Television*. According to MRT, the best solution would be to adopt this separate law on the public service broadcaster, to clearly define its establishment and operation, especially as the public service broadcaster is currently undergoing a reform process, transitioning from a public broadcasting service to a public media service⁸⁶. When it comes to the media sector

⁷⁷ The Law on audio and audiovisual media services specifies that the amount of public funding for the public service broadcaster, the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services and the public broadcasting enterprise is to represent 1% of the realised tax revenues determined in the last adopted final account of the Budget of North Macedonia.

⁷⁸ Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p.13.

⁷⁹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 54.

⁸⁰ Country visit, North Macedonia, Council of Media Ethics.

⁸¹ *ibidem*.

⁸² The Programming Council of MRT protects the public's interests by ensuring programming content remains free from political, commercial, and other influences and ideologies, and represents diverse societal views.

⁸³ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 57.

⁸⁴ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 57. The Ministry of Digital Transformation paid the full amount stipulated by law for 2024. In addition, funds for 2023 were paid retroactively, in instalments, through an out-of-court settlement, as the legally prescribed amount had not been fully allocated in previous years. The funds envisaged for 2025 will also be disbursed.

⁸⁵ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 38.

⁸⁶ Country visit, North Macedonia, Public Service Broadcaster.

overall, the MPM 2026 points to a medium-high risk, while the independence of the public service media falls within the category of medium-low risk⁸⁷.

Challenges still persist regarding transparency of digital media ownership. The revised Law on Media⁸⁸ extended its scope to online media and created a legal basis for establishing an electronic Register of Online Media/Internet Portals under the supervision of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. Registration is voluntary and includes information on ownership and ultimate beneficial owners of online media that meet the criteria laid down in the Law on Media and the relevant secondary legislation⁸⁹. The Agency also maintains separate registers of the ownership structures of television and radio broadcasters, which are regularly updated to ensure transparency and accessibility⁹⁰. In addition to these regulatory registers, the Council for Media Ethics maintains a separate voluntary self-regulatory registry of professional online media, which does not include all digital news media outlets. According to the authorities, the preparatory work for the alignment with the European Media Freedom Act had started in December 2025⁹¹. The MPM 2026 points to a medium-low risk regarding the transparency of media ownership and to a high risk for the plurality of media providers⁹². Journalists' associations and media experts continued to raise concerns about the legal provisions on state-funded advertising and the potential for misuse⁹³. Moreover, there have been no changes during the reporting period regarding rules on media concentration.

The implementation of the legal framework on access to public information remains inconsistent and there are ongoing efforts to revise it. The inconsistent implementation of the Law on Free Access to Information has persisted, and several obstacles to the effective exercise of this right remain⁹⁴. Stakeholders underlined that certain public institutions are frequently rejecting requests on arbitrary grounds⁹⁵ or excessively delaying the release of public information⁹⁶. The Agency for Protection of Free Access to Public Information identified “administrative silence”, the failure to respond to information requests within the legal deadlines, as a serious and systemic obstacle to transparency and institutional accountability⁹⁷. Since the expiry of the mandate of its Director in mid-December the Agency did not review requests, nor replied to appeals or performed monitoring and the overall functioning of the institution was hampered, until a new Director was appointed mid-April,

⁸⁷ Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 37.

⁸⁸ Official Journal No. 87/2025 of 29.04.2025.

⁸⁹ Country visit, North Macedonia, Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services. 60 publishers had registered in 2025. The Register contains data on ownership, editors-in-chief, company details, domain registration and staffing. To ensure compliance, the Agency adopted the Rulebook on the format and content of the application form.

⁹⁰ Ibidem. In line with the standards of the European Media Freedom Act (EMFA), and on the Agency's initiative, five nationwide terrestrial television broadcasters have published on their website information on their ownership, editor-in-chief and advertising revenues from public bodies.

⁹¹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 53. With the support of the IPA project “EU Digital and Media Acquis Harmonisation and Digital Transformation Skills Development”.

⁹² Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 22, 23; 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 38.

⁹³ Country visit North Macedonia.

⁹⁴ Country visit North Macedonia, meeting with civil society organisations.

⁹⁵ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 38.

⁹⁶ Country visit North Macedonia, Association of Journalists notes that information holders often prolong and abuse the maximum legal deadline of 20 days.

⁹⁷ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 92. The most common reason for complaints was administrative silence, accounting for 187 complaints (74.8%). Most of these cases concerned information that public authorities were legally required to proactively publish on their websites, in line with the Law on Free Access to Public Information.

allowing it to resume work on a backlog of complaints⁹⁸. Following ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents⁹⁹, the Law on Access to Information is being revised, and the draft is currently at the stage of inter-agency consultation within the Government. According to the authorities, the draft amendments aim to make access to information more practical by shortening deadlines for handling requests and strengthening the obligation of authorities to publish information proactively¹⁰⁰. The MPM 2026 confirms that while the legal protection of the right to information carries a medium-low risk, public administration is not sufficiently responsive in giving access to information in practice¹⁰¹.

Journalists face pressure from political actors, increased online violence and SLAPP threats, while their working conditions have not improved. Difficulties in journalists' working conditions persist contributing to self-censorship and enabling media owners to exert influence over editorial content¹⁰². Implementation of legal provisions for the protection of journalists remains ineffective, particularly in cases of online harassment and gender-based violence targeting female journalists. Stakeholders reported a rise in online smear campaigns, intimidation and threats¹⁰³. Since the 2025 Rule of Law Report, three alerts have been recorded on the Council of Europe's Platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. They relate to attacks on journalists' physical safety and integrity, as well as harassment and intimidation through the destruction of private property and coordinated online abuse targeting women journalists¹⁰⁴. The Mapping Media Freedom platform has registered nine new alerts¹⁰⁵. The absence of dedicated anti-SLAPP legislation, coupled with limited awareness of the issue among judges, lawyers and journalists, remains an obstacle to effectively protecting journalists and other public critics from SLAPPs¹⁰⁶. In 2025, there was one case related to SLAPP lawsuits against journalists and 40 lawsuits for insult and defamation involving journalists, compared to 15 cases in 2024 signalling a negative trend in the protection of journalistic freedom¹⁰⁷. The MPM 2026 reports a medium-low risk for journalistic profession, standards, and protection¹⁰⁸.

⁹⁸ In addition, employees have received no salaries since December 2025. Furthermore, there were severe issues with access to electricity, and Internet. Country Visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations. Government of North Macedonia (2026a).

⁹⁹ The Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents (CETS No. 205), also known as the *Tromsø Convention*, entered into force on 1 March 2025. A revised draft Law on Free Access to Public Information has been prepared and published for public consultation. The revisions aim to align the Law with the Council of Europe Convention on Access to Official Documents, notably to improve the efficiency of the procedure for free access to public information, as well as strengthen the responsibility of the holders of public information. Government of North Macedonia (2025), p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 33. Country visit North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹⁰¹ Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 16; 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 32.

¹⁰² 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, pp. 38-39 Country visit, North Macedonia, Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers; Association of Journalists of Macedonia. The difficulties include short-term or part-time contracts, lack of health and social insurance, unpaid overtime and low wages.

¹⁰³ Country visit, North Macedonia, Association of Journalists.

¹⁰⁴ Council of Europe (2026). The Government of North Macedonia responded to the alerts, underlining the efforts made by the investigators and the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office for efficient investigations and sanctioning of perpetrators.

¹⁰⁵ European Centre for Press and Media Freedom (2026).

¹⁰⁶ 2025 Rule of Law Report, North Macedonia, p. 17. Certain existing provisions could provide some level of protection in such cases. The 2022 amendments to the Law on Civil Liability for Insult and Defamation significantly reduced the potential non-pecuniary damages imposed on media outlets and journalists in defamation lawsuits.

¹⁰⁷ Country visit, North Macedonia, Association of Journalists.

¹⁰⁸ Media Pluralism Monitor (2026), p. 16; 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 36.

IV. OTHER INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES RELATED TO CHECKS AND BALANCES

The Parliament continued implementing its Rules of Procedure and improved its efficiency, while a significant number of laws were adopted under a shortened legislative procedure. The oversight role of the Parliament was reinforced by the organisation of monthly question-time sessions, with two-hour slots dedicated to queries from opposition parties¹⁰⁹. In 2025, the Assembly adopted 237 laws: 42% under the regular procedure (100), 51% under the shortened procedure (121) mostly proposed by members of Parliament, and 7% as ratifications (16)¹¹⁰. There was a decrease of 30% in 2025 compared to 2024 in the number of draft laws submitted by the Government to the Parliament under fast-track procedure, while members of Parliament continued to frequently propose legislation under this accelerated process. On 15 June the Parliament adopted a new Code of Ethics designed to strengthen the integrity, accountability and reputation of the institution¹¹¹. In August 2025, the Secretary-General adopted new rules on internal organisation and the systematisation of the Parliamentary Service and established a unit to assess the regulatory impact and implementation of legislative drafts submitted by members of Parliament¹¹².

Parliament made several appointments to independent institutions, although concerns remain about merit-based selection procedures. The Parliament made several key appointments, notably the Ombudsperson, the President of the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, members of the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination, the Council of the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, the Public Service Broadcaster's Programme Council, members of the Judicial Council and of the Council of Public Prosecutors¹¹³. However, several challenges persist, notably as regards the quality of selection procedures in the Parliamentary Committee on Elections and Appointments, including concerns about merit-based selection, slow procedures, and insufficient transparency¹¹⁴.

Efforts were made to address shortcomings concerning evidence-based policy planning. The General Secretariat of the Government made efforts to ensure effective evidence-based policy planning and coordination, notably by setting-up a register and improving quality control of all national strategies. In addition, it also increased its overall capacity¹¹⁵. The methodology for conducting regulatory impact assessments was improved, extending their use to laws adopted under the shortened procedure¹¹⁶. The data shared by the Government indicates a modest improvement in transparency and consultation in the legislative process, with a small increase of the share of draft laws published on the Single National Electronic

¹⁰⁹ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 21.

¹¹⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2026), pp. 61-62. The Parliament adopted 17 laws under the "EU flag" procedure, normally reserved for the alignment with EU *acquis*: 15 under the regular procedure and two under the shortened procedure. EU flag procedure was used consistently in line with the rules, indicating the EU *acquis* that is being transposed in national law. 2025 Enlargement report, North Macedonia, p. 23.

¹¹¹ Government of North Macedonia (2026a).

¹¹² Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 60.

¹¹³ See the details in Pillars I & III.

¹¹⁴ Country visit, North Macedonia, civil society organisations.

¹¹⁵ SIGMA Report (2025); 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 23. In December 2024, new Rules of Procedure of the government were adopted. The deadline for publishing draft laws and accompanying RIAs was extended from 20 to 30 days. However, the quality and impact of public consultation remain weak.

¹¹⁶ 2025 Enlargement Report, North Macedonia, p. 23.

Register of Regulations (ENER) platform¹¹⁷ compared to 2024. However, only around one third of draft laws subject to regulatory impact assessment are published on ENER, and civil society organisations account for 10% of submitted comments. The potential of ENER and other mechanisms for inclusive, evidence-based policymaking is still underused¹¹⁸. Furthermore, a new unit was established in August 2025 to carry out *ex ante* reviews of draft laws proposed by members of Parliament and *ex post* reviews of laws adopted over last year.

Less than half of the companies surveyed in North Macedonia express high levels of confidence in the effectiveness of investment protection. 32% of companies are very or fairly confident that investments are protected by law and courts, a figure which has decreased in comparison with 2025¹¹⁹. The main reason among companies for their lack of confidence is the concerns about the quality, efficiency or the independence of the justice system¹²⁰. Further, 20% perceive the level of independence of the public procurement review body (State Commission for Public Procurement Appeals) as very or fairly good, a number which has significantly decreased in comparison with 2025 (37%)¹²¹, 20% perceive the level of independence of the national competition authority (Commission for the Protection of Competition) as very or fairly good, a figure which has significantly decreased in comparison with 2025 (31%)¹²².

On 1 January 2026, North Macedonia had 21 leading judgments of the European Court of Human Rights pending implementation, an increase of 3 compared to the previous year¹²³. At that time, North Macedonia's rate of leading judgments from the past 10 years that had been implemented was at 61% (compared to 65% in 2025; 39% remained pending), and the average time that the judgments had been pending implementation was 3 years and 9 months (compared to 3 years and 3 months in 2025)¹²⁴. The oldest group of leading judgments, pending implementation for more than 15 years, concerns violations of the applicants' right to liberty on account of the lack of concrete and sufficient grounds for their detention¹²⁵. As regards the respect of payment deadlines, on 31 December 2025 there were

¹¹⁷ The Single National Electronic Register of Regulations (ENER) is the main tool for consultation on legislative proposals prior to their submission in Government procedure, with a deadline of 30 days for comments.

¹¹⁸ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 67: According to the Draft Report on the consultation process in the preparation of draft laws, and on the use of the ENER and other mechanisms for cooperation with civil society organisations in 2025 out of a total of 133 draft laws determined by the Government in 2025, 74 were subject to regulatory impact assessment. Of these, 27 draft laws (36.5%) were published on ENER, representing an increase of 2.5 percentage points compared with 2024 (34%). Stakeholders submitted a total of 199 comments, of which 20 (10.1%) came from civil society organisations.

¹¹⁹ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

¹²⁰ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025). In 2026, only 15% and 7% of the surveyed investors respectively perceive concerns about quality, efficiency or independence of justice the frequent changes in legislation or concerns about the quality of the law-making process as a reason for the lack of confidence in investment protection.

¹²¹ Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

¹²² Flash Eurobarometer 582 (2026) and Flash Eurobarometer 555 (2025).

¹²³ For an explanation of the supervision process, see the [website](#) of the Council of Europe.

¹²⁴ All figures calculated by the European Implementation Network (EIN) and based on the number of cases that are considered pending at the annual cut-off date of 1 January 2026. EIN (2026), written input, p. 1.

¹²⁵ Judgment of the ECtHR, 28169/08, *Vasilkoski and Others v. the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, pending implementation since 2011.

no cases awaiting confirmation of payments (the same as in 2024)¹²⁶. On 17 June 2026, the number of leading judgments pending implementation had increased to 23¹²⁷.

The Constitutional Court continued to improve its capacity to protect constitutionality and legality. The number of decisions in which the Constitutional Court repeals or annuls laws and other regulations has increased in 2025, which, alongside a reduction in the number of pending cases older than three years, indicate an improvement in the efficiency of the Court's work. Progress has been noted in the area of institutional capacities, in particular through the preparation of a new organisational software system and an increase in staffing from 57% to 76% of the envisaged posts¹²⁸. However, in some cases, the deadline set by the Constitutional Court to amend and/or supplement legislation in line with its interpretative decisions, was not respected by the Parliament¹²⁹. In his annual address on 26 December 2025, the President of the Constitutional Court publicly called on the Judicial Council to propose a candidate for constitutional judge and on Parliament to elect two new constitutional judges¹³⁰. The Parliament elected two new judges in March and April 2026.

There was no improvement in the financial and human resource situation of the Ombudsperson's Office or the Commission for Prevention and Protection against Discrimination. The Parliament elected a new Ombudsperson on 23 January 2026, however, it did not elect the remaining 8 Deputy Ombudspersons for the regional offices and Skopje¹³¹. Furthermore, Parliament still has not discussed the amendments to the Law on the Ombudsperson's Office, which are necessary to upgrade its current 'B' accreditation status in line with the Paris Principles¹³². During the reporting period, both the Ombudsperson's Office and the Commission for the Prevention and Protection against Discrimination (CPPD) continued to operate with insufficient financial and human resources, directly limiting their capacity to fully implement their legal competencies¹³³. In the case of the Ombudsperson's Office, out of 183 planned positions, only 81 are currently filled. The total amount of the institutions' budget increased by 7% from 2025 to 2026, however the approved amount for salaries and rent is still not sufficient, according to the Ombudsperson, for the needs of the Office¹³⁴. For the CPPD, although 46 posts are authorised, only 17 (36%) are filled, and the budget mainly covers salaries, with no funds for development, field work, or technical upgrades¹³⁵. The three CSOs elected by the Parliament to take part in the Civil Control Mechanism have not started their participation due to insufficient funding¹³⁶.

The Government continued its efforts to strengthen cooperation with civil society organisations, while challenges related to funding for CSOs remain. Civil society organisations continued to function within a 'narrowed'¹³⁷ environment according to Civicus.

¹²⁶ Council of Europe (2026), p. 163.

¹²⁷ Data according to the online database of the Council of Europe (HUDOC).

¹²⁸ Annual Implementation Report of the Strategy for the Judicial Reform (2026).

¹²⁹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 62. See the details in Pillar II on Criminal Code.

¹³⁰ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p.63.

¹³¹ 2025 Enlargement report, North Macedonia, p. 34. There are 10 envisaged deputy Ombudspersons.

¹³² Ibidem. The Ombudsperson's Office assumes the function of the National Human Rights Institution.

¹³³ 2025 Enlargement report, North Macedonia, p. 35.

¹³⁴ Country visit, North Macedonia, Ombudsperson's Office. The budget increase for 2026 is due for the increase of the budget for the sub-programmes: national preventative mechanism, civil control mechanism, human trafficking and illegal migration, children and people with disabilities.

¹³⁵ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 63.

¹³⁶ Government of North Macedonia (2026), p. 64.

¹³⁷ CIVICUS (2026). Current score 69/100. Rating given on a five-category scale defined as: open, narrowed, obstructed, repressed and closed.

On 8 July 2025, the Government adopted the Strategy for Cooperation with and Development of Civil Society for 2025–2028. From April 2025 to January 2026, the Council for Cooperation between the Government and Civil Society held eight sessions focusing on improving the environment for civil society, legislative reform, and monitoring the implementation of Government’s civil society Strategy. Key topics included challenges in public funding and financial sustainability of CSOs, use of the ENER system for consultations, review of draft indicators for monitoring the Strategy, and improving communication with CSOs¹³⁸. On 25 September 2025, the Council adopted new Rules of Procedure and a Work Programme for 2025–2026. Following public calls, the Council also nominated 13 civil society representatives to various governmental advisory and working bodies¹³⁹. Civil society organisations noted that consultations with the Government are sometimes conducted on short notice, without clear agenda and largely nominal¹⁴⁰. Furthermore, some CSOs working on sensitive issues have reported gender-based hate speech, including threats against women human rights defenders, particularly on social media¹⁴¹.

¹³⁸ European Policy Institute, Quarterly Brief October–December 2025.

¹³⁹ Government of North Macedonia (2026), written input, p. 66. Including the National Development Council, the Interdepartmental Body for Coordination of Anti-Corruption Activities, the Sectoral Commission for Arts, the Sectoral Working Group for Local and Regional Development, the Steering Committee of the EU-funded project “Support to the System for Ensuring the Quality of Social Services”, and the Working Group for the Development of the Transparency Strategy 2026–2029.

¹⁴⁰ Country visit, North Macedonia, meeting with CSOs.

¹⁴¹ 2025 Enlargement report, North Macedonia, p. 40.

Annex I: List of sources in alphabetical order*

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Annex II: Country visit to North Macedonia

The Commission services held virtual and hybrid meetings in March 2026 with:

- Academy for Judges and Prosecutors
- Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services
- Agency for the Protection of Free Access to Public Information
- Association of Journalists
- Association of Judges
- Association of on-line media; RESIS Institute (Research Institute on Social Development)
- Association of Prosecutors
- Bar Association
- BIRN Macedonia
- Center for Civil Communication
- Constitutional Court
- Council of Europe Mission to Skopje
- Council of Media Ethics
- Council of Public Prosecutors
- Independent Trade Union of Journalists and Media Workers;
- Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis”
- Institute for Human Rights
- Institute of Communication Studies - IKS
- Judicial Council
- Judicial Media Council
- Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation - MCIC
- Macedonian Institute for Media – MIM
- Meeting with the experts of the EU funded projects & “EU Support for Rule of Law” IPA Project
- Metamorphosis Foundation
- Ministry of Interior
- Ministry of Justice
- Ombudsperson Office
- Parliament secretariat
- Public Prosecutor’s Offices (PPOs)
- State Audit Office
- State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC)
- Supreme Court

* The Commission also met the following organisations in a number of horizontal meetings:

- Civil Liberties Union for Europe
- Civil Society Europe
- End FGM EU
- European Civic Forum
- European Partnership for Democracy

- Human Rights Watch
- ILGA-Europe
- International Federation for Human Rights
- Philea - Philanthropy Europe Association
- Transparency International EU