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NATIONAL CONVENTION ON THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA THIRD PLENARY SESSION

Skopje, 26.09.2019



SFPFA
Slovak Foreign Policy Association



Европско движење Северна Македонија
European Movement North Macedonia

FIRST OFFICIAL SESSION OF THE PLENARY CONFERENCE



On the 26th of September, 2019 in the Assembly of Republic of North Macedonia, began the third Plenary Conference of the National Convention of the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The Conference started according to the Agenda, with the Official Opening Panel. The chair of the Conference, Prof. Dr Mileva Gjurovska – National NKEU-MK coordinator, acknowledged everyone present and expressed her gratitude to the speakers of the panel. In her speech, she explained in brief what the National Convention is, and the work they have done in the past two years. She underlined that unlike any other platform in this Country,

“NCEU-MK creates new value in the European integration process, developing and implementing a strategy for joint action of the all relevant stakeholders, such as the Government, relevant institutions, CSO’s, business sector, syndicates, Universities, local governments, farmers and ordinary citizens.”

The President of Republic of North Macedonia, H.E. **Stevo Pendarovski**, expressed that it is his honor to speak at the Conference, particularly on a topic that is of an utmost relevance for the Country.

“Corruption is a disease of society, and as any other serious disease if not treated on time, in the right manner, it can infest itself in all sectors of social life, and leave unforeseeable consequences on the democracy.”

According to him, we should understand that corruption is an issue in almost any country and society. Even those that have reached the highest level of democracy in their development are not immune to corruption. In the last GRECO report, we only received a "satisfactory" level of implementation of the last report, which indicates that we have not been successful in the fight against corruption. Right now, in North Macedonia, there is a need to systematically tackle corruption and establish a value system that is in line with European standards and criteria, which requires a clear expression of political will from all relevant actors in the country.

President Pendarouski noted that economic development and zero tolerance for corruption must be the top priorities for any government and that successfully addressing these challenges requires uniting the potential and support of all of us, the government, and the opposition, the business sector, civil society organisations, and the media. Citizens are losing the faith in the system. The judiciary must play their part and provide a timely and just response to the challenges before them, independent from political interference. He ended his speech by underlining that we should not wait for another day, we cannot afford the luxury of having a superficial or relaxed approach to corruption.



Eduard Kukan offered his personal views on the political situation in the Republic of North Macedonia and the decisions in the near future that will substantially affect the European integration of Macedonia to the EU. The former member of the European Parliament, stated that the National convention on the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia is a very successful project. It is an open, comprehensive forum for reaching a broad consensus for questions regarding the accession negotiation process.

“We are three weeks away from the middle of October, when the European Council will meet to discuss and adopt a decision about the future of North Macedonia.”

Kukan stated that everyone is speculating on whether there will a date for the launch of accession negotiations, but that his personal opinion is that we will receive positive news from Brussels. Three weeks in not a long time, but it should be used for hard work on the implementation and realization of many important issues. His advice is not to immediately start celebrating when receiving the date for start of the negotiations, mostly because the work is not done. The process of EU accession is a long and difficult path but in the end the membership of the EU will bring great benefits to the citizens of North Macedonia.

Nikola Poposki, Chair of the National European Integration Council at the Assembly stressed that the eurointegration is a serious and long challenge and it can serve as a possibility for a significant change in the country. The importance of the National Convention is the comprehensiveness and the potential for change of the culture. The selection of chapters is done right according to Poposki. The chapters 23 and 24 are essential to negotiation process, they are the first to open and the last to close.





Since the eurointegration is a process concerning everyone in the country, it is of great importance to involve not only government members, but also those who are willing and have knowledge to contribute to the process. Poposki noted that the member countries of the EU are making the decision by the political elite and the public opinion in each country. If they see us as problematic, criminal, destructive it is understandable that they would not want us in the EU. This is why we need to develop an image of a country with European values a European future.



The Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, **Andej Zernouski** invited us to question ourselves about where is North Macedonia and what have we have achieved so far. The accession to the EU is something that all of us want and we all should support and contribute to the process. For example, good neighboring relations are of a great importance and in that spirit, North Macedonia has done a lot to improve the relations with Greece and Bulgaria. Many reports on the progress of North Macedonia witness that we are making an improvement in many areas and that we are ready to handle all the challenges of one young democracy and the chapters 23 and 24.

We are ready to transform our society respecting European values and rules. Andrej Zernouski emphasized that,

“We have a fantastic chance, all of us together to demonstrate that the fight for justice pays off and that impunity is something that cannot continue.”

The USAID representative, **Erik Jankowski** expressed support on the North Macedonia path to eurointegration. He believes that completing the necessary reforms and meeting EU membership requirements will foster stability and unleash North Macedonia’s economic potential. Jankowski said that USAID is committed to working with the Government of North Macedonia and other partners in the country to meet the development goals necessary for this greater integration.

“The National Convention on the European Union with its four working groups is an excellent platform for all stakeholders in the country, from government to civil society to the private sector, to show a genuine commitment to furthering the EU accession agenda. It is of an utmost importance to transfer the recommendations from the working groups into action plans and real results.”





In the second phase of the project, there will be one significant change, the European Movement North Macedonia will be the main implementer of the project and SFPA will only be a partner. Since one of the goals of the project was to straighten and build the capacity of the local partner, the conclusion is that we have succeeded in this.

“We wish luck to the European Movement North Macedonia and we thank USAID for their support.”

The director of SFPA, Slovak Foreign Policy Association, **Tomas Strazay** stated that this plenary session marks the end of phase one from the project National Convention. Thankfully, with the help of USAID and SlovakAid, we will continue with the realization of the project in the next two years.

Strazay stated that the role of SPFA will be to find Slovak experts to convey their expertise in different areas. So far, the experts that were part of NCEU-MK have experienced a true dialogue and were very satisfied with the sessions and the professionalism and expertise on the local level.



PANEL DISCUSSION: HOW AGAINST CORRUPTION?



Prof. **Aleksandra Deanoska-Trendafilova** was the moderator of the second part of the plenary session titled “How against corruption?”. Prof. Deanoska noted that the chapters 23 and 24 that are usually the first chapters to open and the last to close, are the key to EU accession. Corruption is a serious phenomenon and it needs a deep and systematic approach. As a part of Working group 3 which works in the Chapter 23, Deanoska observed that the corruption was always part of the discussion, even when the subject was something else. This speaks to the broadness of the concept of corruption and the relevance to it in our country. After giving the introduction to the theme of the session, she invited the speakers to share their experiences and thoughts on this matter.

Mirjana Lazarova-Trajkouska, former judge in the European Court of Human Rights shared the experience from the ECHR in regards with the topic of corruption and more precisely, the confiscation of illegally acquired assets. Current research show that the confiscations is more effective measure compared to the prison sentence. Lazarova-Trajkouska stated that it is essential to seize the illegally acquired assets, so that they cannot be put back in circulation and used to criminally acquire new assets. Also, there is a fear that the illegally acquired assets can be used to expand the crime toward corrupting government officials such as judges, prosecutors, politicians etc. The reason behind confiscation is to establish the restoring to the original condition and to return the assets to those they belong to.



Having in mind that the right to property is one of the fundamental human rights, it is vital to protect it from injustice and violation by any judicial authority. It is necessary to provide proportional enforcement of the measure of confiscation in order to ensure that neither more nor less assets are being confiscated than those involved in the criminal activity. In cases where the possession of the assets has been transferred to another person, usually wife or husband, children or relatives, the confiscation is still a possible and desirable course of action. The message is that no one can keep the assets they acquired illegally.



Marion Langford, criminal justice advisor, shared the experience of Great Britain in the fight against corruption. Great Britain and especially London, as a global financial center can also be a center for money laundering. This emphasizes the need to diminish the possibility of organized crime to launder and hide money in the GB. Because of the new technology, it is becoming easier to move the money, which requires increased international cooperation for the fight of corruption as well as prevention to it. According to Langford, it is necessary not just to punish, but to develop a more systematic approach of the rule of law and the fight against corruption.

Ljubomir Jovevski, the public prosecutor of the Republic of North Macedonia said that,

“Corruption erodes the society and it is necessary to effectively address it, not only because of the EU but also for us, our citizens and our country.”

Confiscation as a measure to promote the idea that criminality is not something that pays off and as such it has significant effect on the perpetrators. Speaking about the confiscation in our country, he noted that even though we have adopted the law, we still have some problems with the practical implementation. Some of the problems they, as prosecutors are facing are that sometimes is extremely hard to prove the origin of the assets. Other problem is that unfortunately this institution is not equipped with effective tools for identifying and searching before the beginning of the criminal proceedings.



Vladan Joksimovic spoke about the RAI, Regional Anti-Corruption Initiative. In this initiative, many counties from South East Europe are participating, and they all share similar experiences in the cases of corruption. Previously, many speakers mentioned the need for international cooperation, and that is what RAI does, it ensures cooperation and information sharing between the counties in the region.

The Initiative is involved in the assessment of the risk from corruption and with the legislation in terms of reviewing the laws in order to detect and minimize the risk of future corruption.



Desislava Ćotskova is project manager of the regional project “Straightening the anti-corruption in South East Europe through improving asset seizure measures”. What the project does is easing the regional collaboration through straightening the role of the judges and prosecutors and developing their capacities for more efficient dealing with the problems with corruption. With this regional collaboration, the idea is to be able to share the good practices on the fight against corruption, so they can be used in the other countries from the region, as well as the bad practices, which can also be used to learn from the mistakes of others.

On the question How against corruption, **Biljana Ivanouska**, the president of the State Commission for prevention of corruption, says

“...starting from personal example, with personal integrity, ethical, transparent and responsible work performance.”



This is important, because the integrity of the person will transfer to the institution, he or she works in. As long as these values are bought for money, the fight has already been lost. That is why, it is crucial that everyone achieves victory over oneself what will enable them to lean on themselves and carry on the fight against corruption. Speaking about the situation at the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption, she explained the type of challenges they are facing in their work. Evidently, there is political will, to which testifies with the adoption of the new law which is harmonized to the EU legislation. Even though the situation needs improving, she ensured that the employees in the Commission will give their best to bring good results on the fight against corruption.



NCEU-MK CONCLUSION AND PERSPECTIVES IN THE CHAPTERS –
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Prof. **Blerim Reka**, was the moderator in the third panel of the plenary session. As a part of NCEU-MK working group 4 that operate in the Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security, he commended the project and the realization of it. Afterwards he invited the speakers to give their perspective on the subject of EU integration.

Shpresa Hadri, member of the Assembly and member of the Commission for European affairs in the Assembly of Republic of North Macedonia stated that the goal of the country is to become part of the European family. However, we still have a long way ahead of us in order to build a country with the European standards and European way of life. The fight against corruption should be primarily for us and then for the purpose of EU accession.

“Creating a society liberated from corruption should and must be a priority and imperative.”

Hadri acknowledged that adopting the new law on corruption is a big step towards more efficient fight against corruption. But, even though a good law on corruption is essential, some control mechanisms are needed to ensure the good rule of the law. She expressed the importance of this kind of open forum where we can all openly and constructively discuss the questions related to the Euro - Atlantic aspirations of our country.



Dragan Tilev, State Counselor for support of the EU membership, congratulated the National Convention on the choice of the chapters, as they are relevant and useful for tracing the path towards EU accession.

“We are a small country, and the challenge is enormous.”

That is why the synergy between the government institutions the CSO’s and all the relevant stakeholders is necessary. They should all be involved and work together in this long and complex process of EU accession. From the technical aspects, he emphasized the negotiation framework, which contains the conditions which we will have to comply in order to become a part of the Union, as incredibly important part. Speaking about where are we in the process of EU accession, Tilev said that we are ready to initiate the negotiations and we know how to prepare for the process. During the past 19 years, we have been implementing the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the EU, which brings us closer to the EU legislation. He once again stressed the importance of the Chapter 23 and 24 and that if in these Chapter there is not substantial improvement, the process of EU accession would not be able to continue.



Former chief negotiator for EU accession in the Republic of Serbia, **Tanja Miscevic**, shared her experiences although this time in the capacity of university professor. There are many sayings that the implementation of the EU legislative is the key for EU accession. Miscevic disagrees, she thinks that having a good work dossier that involves detailed plans how to tackle the challenges and a record of those already resolved is maybe even more important. This means that, yes, it is important to have a good law on corruption, but the assessment is going to include the number of cases that have been dealt with, for example the number of cases that were solved involving high corruption. According to Miscevic, there are a lot of experts in the CSO’s, and she called for bigger involvement of the civil society in the process of EU integration. An example of this kind of involvement is NCEU Serbia, which works with a lot of organizations, think tanks and local authorities altogether to the same goal and is even a part of the Committee of European Integration in the Assembly.

Francois Lafond is an advisor to the Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, a French expert that is here to help with the process of EU integration. Sharing his personal opinion, Lafond said that we have to understand that the EU has a lot on their mind other than the negotiations with North Macedonia, for example Brexit. This is a very sensitive subject, because even after three years since the Brexit started, we still don't know what is exactly going to happen. There is a great importance whether there is going to be an agreement or not. Either way, the exit of one country from the EU will have deep financial implications and the member states will have to compensate and give even more money to mitigate the absence of Great Britain. This is also important for North Macedonia, as those who are making the decisions are doing so accordingly to the budget of the EU.



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To close the session, **Mileva Gjurovska** addressed the guest, expressing appreciation to everyone that has been a part of the plenary session and all the previous sessions of the National Convention on the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia. She stressed that there should be more discussion as the one today in terms of more serious and technical debates related to the chapters and methodology of negotiations. NCEU-MK is the only civil society initiative that works in four chapters that are highly important.

“With great pleasure we can share the work that has been done in the NCEU-MK with the public, with the publication of the Book of recommendations.”

Once again Gjurovska acknowledged all members of the working groups and praised them for their good work and achievements. At the end, she gave a short overview on the four working groups, the topics they have worked on and the progress they have made so far.

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To close the session, **Mileva Gjurovska** addressed the guest, expressing appreciation to everyone that has been a part of the plenary session and all the previous sessions of the National Convention on the European Union in the Republic of North Macedonia. She stressed that there should be more discussion as the one today in terms of more serious and technical debates related to the chapters and methodology of negotiations. NCEU-MK is the only civil society initiative that works in four chapters that are highly important.

“With great pleasure we can share the work that has been done in the NCEU-MK with the public, with the publication of the Book of recommendations.”

Once again Gjurovska acknowledged all members of the working groups and praised them for their good work and achievements. At the end, she gave a short overview on the four working groups, the topics they have worked on and the progress they have made so far.

