

REFASHIONING: MACEDONIA'S NEW EUROPEAN STORY





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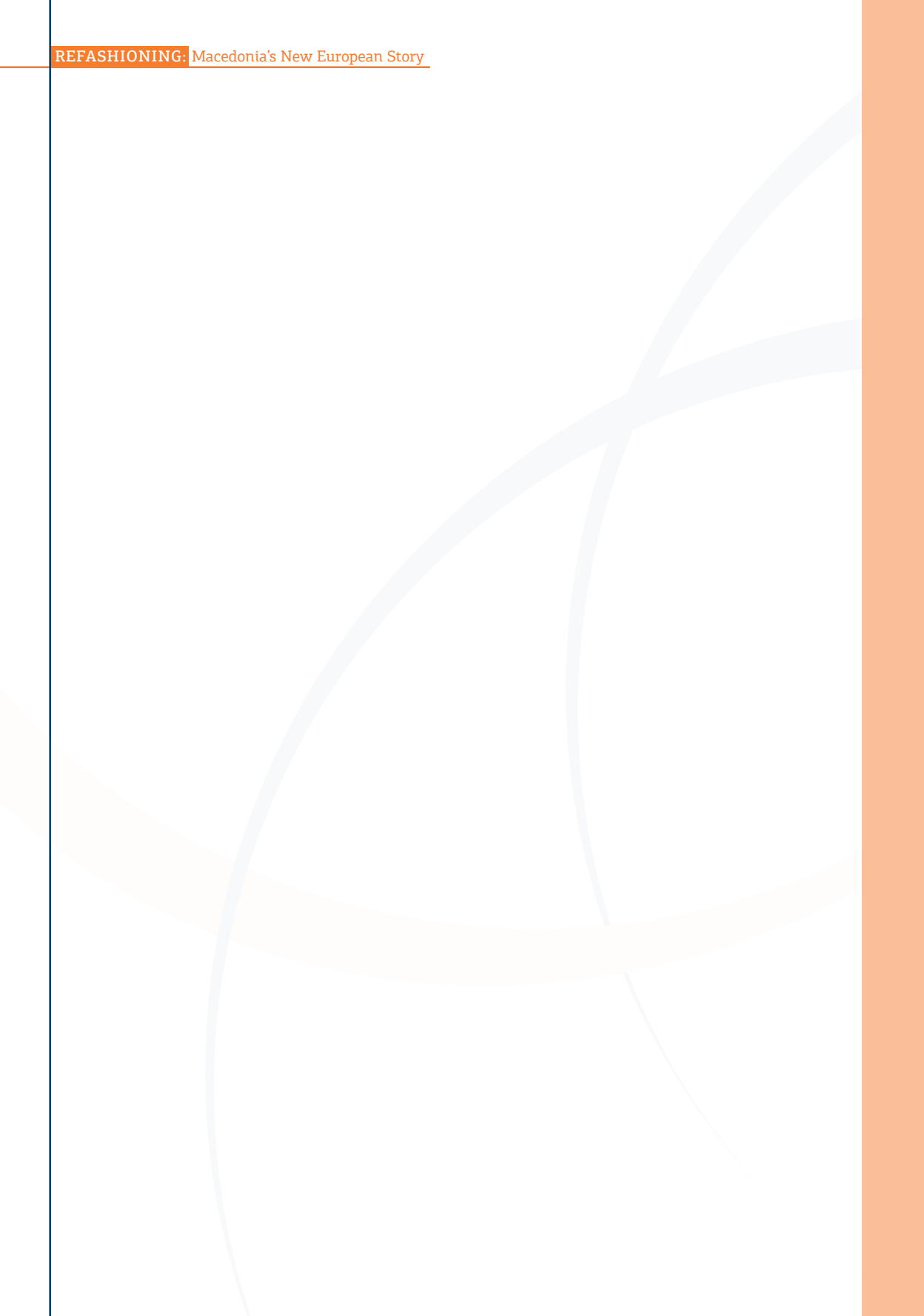
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1. INTRODUCTION

For several years, Republic of Macedonia's integration in the European Union (hereinafter: the EU) and, more importantly, Europeanization of the Macedonian political system and society, are in serious crisis. Lessons learned from recent enlargement of the EU witness that elites in new democracies are willing to make fast reforms and changes when conditioned by the EU. On this account, the fact that in last several years Macedonia is regressing in terms of key democratic is often interpreted as a consequence of standstill in the EU integration process.

Ruling elite in Macedonia is well aware that the rule of law is one of the key European values, and often calls to this principle in its international relations, hoping that the judgment of the International Tribunal in the Hague would be a sufficient reason for Greece to stop blocking the state's integration in the EU. Nevertheless, this has not prevented certain media outlets, known for defending government's official positions, to report only bad news from "Europe, which is about to disintegrate" and whose elections for the European Parliament, in the opinion of some pundits and anchors, "embraced the Fascists". In the recent years, spreading Europhobia, anti-Western sentiments and flirting with alternative models of international positioning and internal order have been intricately woven into the political folklore and are no longer considered news. Accession in the EU has become a synonym for the identity issues. The West is being accused of double standards in its relations with Macedonia, every time the state is criticized for particular undemocratic trends. Even minor remarks on the manner in which Macedonian authorities manage their domestic problems are perceived by the ruling leadership as "strategy to overemphasize problems", allegedly aimed at pressuring them to make concessions in the name dispute. In contrast, their approval is more open when the media unanimously report international community's praise for economic reforms and improved business climate.

On the other hand, the opposition and the critically-minded public in Macedonia, until recently, had great expectations from Brussels' role in internal/domestic matters. With a dose of naivety and faith in principles and values, they expected Brussels to demonstrate meaningful engagement instead of declarative efforts to defend European fundamental values in the country. Hence, sentiments in these social circles (large part of the critically-minded public in Macedonia) dramatically shifted, i.e. they became visibly disappointed by the European Union and Eurocrats steering the EU integration process. In other words, irrespective of the standpoint assumed, fact is that in the Macedonian political scene, the EU agenda is in deep crisis.

Results on the last elections for the European Parliament brought to the surface another, more dangerous, crisis. Europe is affected by actual leadership crisis and crisis of the idea for unification. Growing populism throughout Europe and consolidation of forces against Union's enlargement signal that change in management of EU matters is inevitable. EU's foreign relations are marked by a discrepancy between ideals for Europeanization and pragmatism whereby stability within is worthier, even at the price of democracy. The fact that within the Union there are states, such as Hungary, whose autocratic leaders laugh at values upheld by the EU, is an additional argument about the passive attitude in relations with candidate-countries and the neighbourhood.

Although the situation, due to various reasons, is frustrating for different actors, there are no political forces in the state that would bring under question the consensus built around the statement that "Macedonia does not have an alternative to EU membership". Public opinion polls in Macedonia are marked by declining support for EU accession, but this support remains the highest among all candidate-countries. However, we argue that poll results are more of a surprise than success. Despite the declarative consensus, political parties are avoiding this topic, not only in their political communications, but under their respective election programmes, in particular due to the dominant opinion that the EU accession is not a topic that guarantees electoral victory. 13 years after the signing of the Stabilization and Association Agreement, 9 years after being granted the status of candidate-country for EU membership, and 5 years after the first recommendation to start accession negotiations, Macedonian public is still unaware that EU accession is a matter of internal affairs and affects many areas of ordinary citizens' lives.

This study attempts to answer the question on possible manners in which practices of political actors related to communication of Macedonia's integration in the EU can be improved. Therefore, the project titled "**Refashioning: Macedonia's New European Story**" and the corresponding research study make an attempt to examine the modalities for making EU integration more attractive and re-defining this topic as top priority of key political actors in society.

For the purpose of presenting the broader context and formulating recommendation based on broad scope of evidence, this study has multifold objectives.

First, the study shows that the consensus on EU integration is neither given nor eternal. Historic overview of small, but important, part of political discourses, i.e. election programmes of the Macedonian political parties from 1990 to present, aims to show the manner in which this consensus has been built. In that, the focus is on the manner in which political parties accept “the EU” and “Europe” as positive references in their political activity.

Then, the study goes to prove that this consensus is not of monolithic contents. Consensus does exist, but its joint identifiers are less clear: what expectations do various actors have from the EU accession; what do political elites wish to achieve with the EU accession; how do different participants in the process understand key notions and what meaning do they attribute them. Actually, the study identifies, albeit with simplification, three dominant discourses used by political parties and other actors in their political activity, those being: discourse of values, discourse of benefits and discourse of standards. It also shows that such construed discourses serve the purpose of different political activity. In addition to political party programmes, the analysis relies on data obtained by means of semi-structured interviews with representatives of political parties, public opinion leaders and focus group of experts.

Third, the study addresses more specific aspects of Europeanization, i.e. manner in which Macedonian political parties are socializing within the broader political space in Europe. Interviews aimed to provide insight as regards political parties’ international contacts, as well as networking in European umbrella organization, including the manner in which they formulate their EU integration messages at organizational level. In short, we attempt to answer the question whether in addition to their declarative commitments, political parties are committed, through the available channels, to adjust themselves to the EU trends and political management practices.

Fourth, the study inquires about citizens’ views on the EU integration, i.e. examines the demand side. It is often heard that in the Macedonian public there is almost unanimous support for joining the EU. Analysis of existing databases compiled by Eurobarometer from 2007 to present and analysis of data collected as part of MCET’s survey (focus group discussions and survey conducted on a representative sample) enable us to deconstruct the myth about the unanimous support for EU membership and indicate a very complex and interesting situation that should be subject to further research and reconsideration.

Finally, based on the discourse analysis, interview information, focus groups and survey results, we develop a series of recommendations for the political parties aimed at improving communication of their respective messages related to EU integration and Europeanization. In that, the study makes a unique contribution to communication strategies of political parties in regard to the EU integration.

2. METHODOLOGY

This research study relies on combination of methods for data collection, processing and analysis. As regards the location and the type of activities, this study is based on desk research and field research (survey).

Desk research started with broad review of relevant primary and secondary literature, with focus on existing research studies addressing issues related to the political culture and values of Macedonian citizens and parties. On this account, the study includes a brief theoretical frame. Empirical portion of the study starts with an analysis of contents and discourse analysis of political parties' programmes. Initially, the plan anticipated analysis of election programmes developed and promoted by six political parties from 1990 to present, those being: Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (hereinafter: VMRO-DPMNE), Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (hereinafter: SDSM), Liberal Democratic Party (hereinafter: LDP), Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (hereinafter: DOM), Democratic Union for Integration (hereinafter: DUI) and Democratic Party of Albanians (hereinafter: DPA). However, due to objective reasons, such as non-continuity of political activity and unavailability of election programmes, our analysis focused only on VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM and their respective programmes, as well as DUI's programme for 2011 parliamentary elections. Of course, the scope of analysed programmed was limited only to programmes made available or disclosed as part of comprehensive search and direct contacts with the parties. As absurd as it may sound, some election programmes could not be found even at the archives of relevant political parties that had designed them in the first place or they were reluctant to disclose and share these documents in a transparent manner. For example, MCET's team was unable to obtain a copy of VMRO-DPMNE's programme for

1994 and 2002 parliamentary elections. In the case of SDSM, the team could not obtain this party's programme promoted during 1998 parliamentary elections. In our opinion, these election programmes are of crucial importance for identifying and analysing the EU integration discourse construed by the political parties, especially because these issues and topics are common features of their respective political bids at parliamentary elections.

Although we have anticipated a comparative analysis against programmes of political parties in the neighbouring countries (Bulgaria and Croatia), this study does not include such information due to unavailability of all programmes and due to methodological inconsistency if incomplete data are included in the research study.

Great attention was paid to analysis of results from public opinion polls conducted by Eurobarometer for Macedonia and the region, which in their unprocessed form (SPSS database) were obtained from the portal gesis.org. Analysis of these data is very important and enabled us to identify trends in citizens' support for EU membership from 2007 onwards. In addition to Eurobarometer data, MCET commissioned a survey on a representative sample comprised of 1194 citizens, conducted by *Reactor-Research in Action* in March 2014. This survey aimed at measuring citizens' positions, expectations and perceptions as regards the EU integration. Survey findings allowed us to identify and present particular nuances in citizens' opinions that the standardized questionnaires used by Eurobarometer are unable to detect.

Field research included semi-structured half-hour interviews with high level representatives from the political parties (vice presidents, MPs, secretaries for international cooperation/EU integration), as well as representatives of their respective youth branches. Interviews were conducted with representatives of all political parties and at all management level, with the exception of DPA, as they were unavailable and unwilling for such cooperation. Moreover, interviews were conducted with four public opinion leaders (columnists) and one representative of a European political foundation in Macedonia. In order to test the recommendations, we organized a focus group with the so-called "EU integration elite", i.e. representatives from public administration, think-tank organizations and universities, who closely follow EU integration issues. In addition, the team organized three focus group discussions with random selection of citizens, grouped according to their education background (completed primary, secondary and higher education), who made valuable contributions in interpretation and justification of survey results.

On the basis of knowledge and insights collected by means of above-indicated methods, the team formulated a series of recommendations aimed at improving the policies.

2.1 THEORETICAL GLIMPSES:

What is Europeanization and how is it researched?

Europeanization is a concept disputable in its ontology, especially in respect to definitions, scope (territorial, topical and methodological), research questions and scientific conceptualization used in the broad discipline of EU studies.¹ As regards the definition of Europeanization, there are myriad positions on how it should be defined and hence researched. Our analysis relies on two of them.

The first definition was established by *Radaelli* and resulted in broadened research focus on Europeanization as:

..processes of: (a) construction, (b) diffusion, and (c) institutionalization of formal and informal rules, procedures, policy paradigms, styles, “ways of doing things”, and shared beliefs and norms which are first defined and consolidated in the making of EU public policy and politics and then incorporated in the logic of domestic discourse, identities, political structures, and public policies.’

The second definition, proposed by *Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier*, refers to Europeanization as “process in which the states adopt EU rules”. More profoundly, under “rules” they subsume both, formal and informal rules, and inscribe two dimension to “rule adoption”: likelihood of adoption and forms of adoption. Former term refers to various degrees of adoption and the latter, more important for our analysis, refers to three different conceptions of adoption:² 1) **formal**, encompassing only the transposition (approximation) of the EU *acquis* and other norms in the national legislation, institutions and procedures; 2) **behavioural**, measured by the conformity of behaviour of crucial factors for Europeanization with the rules; and 3) **discursive**, encompassing the measure of incorporation of an EU rule as a positive reference in the political discourse among domestic actors. This reference might indicate that those actors are honestly persuaded of the EU norms or they just “hijacked” the political narrative and make use of the norm, strategically, as “rhetorical action”.

In terms of the methodological position on how Europeanization should be researched, our analysis inquires how studies on Europeanization, as a reference point or of domestic political action as a result, but not exclusively, of socializing interactions and policy production, modify the logic of political interactions at national level.³ In addition, particularly useful for our analysis are the so-called “creative usages of Europe” for political construction of Europeanization’s impact in the domestic

¹ See details on disputed nature of Europeanization in Vink and Graziano in Graziano and Vink eds 2007, 3; Ladrech 2010, 4-5; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier eds 2005, 5-6.

² Ibid 8

³ Muller quoted in Radaelli and Pasquier in Graziano and Vink eds. 2007, pg. 37

scene. This might render domestic actors both “filters” and “users” of the EU norms and rules, so they use explanations different than “Brussels said so” to explain the impact. In this sense, discourse on the EU and its politics takes different forms encompassing rhetoric and policy narratives, not only linguistic. It also represents set of *ideas* and *interactive* process (added emphasis). The ideational dimension might be cognitive activity enabling actors to create their own image of the reality and normative activity to assess the reality. The interactive dimension of discourse opts for examination of the impact in the arena of policy formulation, in the context of interaction among policy makers in the media realm of political communication.

The analysis is inspired by the so-called “*post-structuralist discourse theory*”.⁴ The latter concept is not very often one of the methods used to describe and explain the domestic political change in polity, policy and politics induced by the EU integration. However, discourse analysis itself is not alien to the methodological menu used by Europeanization students in their qualitative analyses.

Discourse theory emerged as a cross disciplinary attempt to integrate central insights from linguistics and hermeneutics with key ideas from social and political science. This theory has the underlying premises that “discourse matters” and “politics matter”. Recent definitions of discourse (*Foucault*) would also suggest that “rules of formation” regulating what, how and who can speak are in the centre of the discourse theory, attributing significance to “power” and “context”. This implies that discourse is constructed through power struggles but, once it becomes dominant, it produces power effects in the social order.

When discussing Europeanization of the Macedonian society, a theoretical approach that must not be neglected is the one on identity building and transformation. To this end, we briefly refer to the condensed study by *Balalovska*⁵ on the contemporary transformation of Macedonian identity in light of the meaning of the terms “the Balkans” and “Europe”. Her study seeks to examine “*how one people views itself in the context of a perceived negatively constraining reality and a possible fresh aspiration to achieve a positive self-image. The people involved are the Macedonians, the negative reality of belonging are the Balkans, and the positive aspiration for their identity is European*”⁶. Comparatively speaking, as a regional phenomenon, studies on Romania and the former Yugoslavia have revealed the phenomenon of “nesting Orientalisms”, or “*of self-exemption on the basis of promotion of indigenous values and traditions, and of 'self-exoticising' as a mode of response to stereotypes [that] important others hold of oneself which, to a greater or lesser extent, plays on their*

⁴ Torfing in Howarth and Torfing eds. 2005, pg. 9

⁵ Balalovska K., 2004, “Between ‘the Balkans’ and ‘Europe’: A Study of the Contemporary Transformation of Macedonian Identity”, *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, vol. 12, No. 2, pp. 193-214

⁶ *Ibid*, pg. 193

*positive valences. In the absence of any political alternatives in such a context, and in view of economic advances, the only Macedonian path has been ‘towards Europe’.*⁷

Turning to Macedonia and the identity construction (or transformation) process, she claims that *“in trying to promote the above-defined Macedonian political interests, political elites have attempted to construct the regional aspects of Macedonian identity in two overlapping, although temporally consecutive dominant discourses. The first and main one focuses on a Macedonian exemption from the negative Balkan mould. The second attempts to promote a positive all-Balkan image of which Macedonia forms an integral part”.*⁸

⁷ Ibid, pg. 194

⁸ Ibid, pg. 195

3. DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF EU INTEGRATION MESSAGES

This section addresses **two crucial aspects of the discourse** pursued by the political parties in Macedonia about the EU integration and Europeanization in relation to their political activity.

1) First, we provide an **historic overview of discourse from the political programmes** promoted at parliamentary elections and designed by the two biggest political parties in the Republic of Macedonia, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, in the period 1990-2014. Of course, the scope of this analysis was limited only to programmes made available or disclosed as part of comprehensive search and direct contacts with the parties. As absurd as it may sound, some election programmes could not be found even at the archives of relevant political parties that had designed them in the first place or they were reluctant to disclose and share these documents in a transparent manner. For example, MCET's team was unable to obtain a copy of VMRO-DPMNE's programmes for 1994 and 2002 parliamentary elections. In the case of SDSM, the team could not obtain this party's programme promoted during 1998 parliamentary elections.

As regards the scope of contents, the analysis focused on political party programmes for parliamentary elections. In our opinion, these election programmes are of crucial importance for identifying and analysing the EU integration discourse construed by the political parties, especially

because these issues and topics are common features of their respective political bids at parliamentary elections.

As regards the scope of political parties subject to analysis, we focused on the two biggest political parties on the account of their continuity, consistency and contents in creating and communicating political messages for the constituency. Other political parties in Macedonia are not characterized by continuous existence from 1990 onwards and have not regularly developed and published political programmes for all parliamentary election cycles. Hence, for example, LDP and DOM sometimes participated in broader coalitions and did not develop independent programmes, but contributed in development and promotion of their coalition partners' election programmes. Such practices prevent establishment of continuity and evolution of party views and are therefore exempted from this analysis.

2) Second, we analyse *ethnic particularities in the EU integration discourse*, i.e. an attempt is made to identify *similarities and differences between the so-called Macedonian political parties and their discourse versus the so-called Albanian political parties and their discourse*.

3.1 HISTORIC OVERVIEW OF THE EU INTEGRATION DISCOURSE PURSUED BY VMRO-DPMNE AND SDSM

As regard the scope of political parties subject to this analysis, we primarily refer to the discourse led by VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM, in the Macedonian political block, and the discourse led by DUI, in the Albanian political block, being the most accessible sources of information. In addition, the analysis relies on secondary sources of information with a view to reflect divergent perceptions and discourses of respective political elites in the Macedonian and in Albanian block, to determine whether the EU integration discourse in the Republic of Macedonia is based on commonalities and to identify differences and efforts to address and overcome them.

In-depth reconsideration of messages underlying political programmes of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM in the period 1990-2014 resulted in identification of certain legalities in the manner in which EU integration and Europeanization is reflected in the political discourse. In that regard, the analysis identified three types of discourse being pursued by both political parties:

- **Discourse of values** (with two subtypes: construed and primordial) – Contents of this discourse includes reflections on the EU accession as the process of accepting and adhering to particular principles and tenants, which the state should achieve with hard work, and they serve as ideals or benchmarks of a European and democratic

society that Macedonia aspires to become. Examples of these *construed* values include: democracy, the rule of law, freedom of speech, independent judiciary, etc. They are called *construed values* due to the fact that the state, accepting them as discourse, must work on their attainment, i.e. for these values to be imbued specific contents in the construed discourse, their attainment is assessed on the basis of (more or less) objective and verifiable criteria.

On the other hand, *primordial* discourse of values defines the EU accession process as the civilized act of returning to the given (predestined) identity, meaning that, in civilization terms, Macedonia is inseparable part of united Europe and naturally belongs there. This discourse refers to the values as given, predestined and unsusceptible to changes or constructions, and refers to natural and civilizational belonging to Europe, presented as set of values, practices, states, cultures, etc.

- **Discourse of benefits** – Contents underlying the discourse of benefits from EU membership entails specific financial and other benefits which the citizens of Macedonia can enjoy once the state joins the EU. Examples of this discourse include data on pre-accession assistance funds (IPA) made available to Macedonia and intended for agriculture development, promise for visa liberalization and free travelling, youth mobility, and the like. This discourse aims to bring the EU closer to ordinary citizens by distancing the narrative from abstract values and grand topics, such as geopolitics and high politics. This discourse answers the question “What do (can) I gain from the EU?” In that regard, it allows citizens to see another specific (lucrative) aspect of the EU and helps them recognize personal and/or collective interests and benefits.

- **Discourse of standards (reforms)** – Discourse of standards, as distinguished feature of the EU system, concerns issues that should be viewed as reform instigators and drivers. This discourse applies a more bureaucratic approach to the EU accession process, interpreting EU integration as the process of adopting series of norms and standards established by the European states, which have ultimately transformed them into well organized, functional and prosperous societies. In that context, replication of these standards and rules in Macedonia is the only (or at least, the best) justified reform agenda with standards as its key determinant. Example thereof is identified in the commitment *to fully align the fiscal policy with the Maastricht criteria for the purpose of approximating national policies with the EU standards*, or the commitment *to liberalize foreign currency payment operations for the purpose of adopting the EU standards*.

The fact that both political parties use same sub-discourses to build the structure of the general discourse on EU integration does not mean that their discourses are necessarily identical. On the contrary, the detailed analysis provides a conclusion that the three types of discourse are used with different intensity and frequency and

are differently correlated and interlinked. Types of discourse used mirror political parties' different ideology, as presented later in this analysis. Below is the historical overview of political discourses, followed by arguments about their divergent concepts.

3.1.1 VMRO-DPMNE

3.1.1.1 United Macedonia in United Europe

VMRO-DPMNE's 1990 political programme accepts the discourse of values. Modest references to the EU integration are indicative of the primordial discourse being used in the programme, in particular the commitment that the party *will work on complete spiritual, political and economic unification of the disintegrated Macedonian people, as part of a future united Balkan (Balkan confederation) and **united Europe**.*

Discourse of values is recognized in the party's commitment to values that are firmly established in the Copenhagen (political) criteria. In that regard, VMRO-DPMNE declares its commitment to *freedom of speech, media freedoms, right to freedom of assembly, gender equality, justice for all and social justice.*

3.1.1.2 Macedonia – Civilized European State

VMRO-DPMNE's programme for 1998 parliamentary elections includes a much serious and broader political bid and brought this party's first electoral victory. In the introductory address, the party leader Ljubco Georgievski does not make direct reference to the EU, but the programme's introduction reiterates the fact that VMRO-DPMNE is the first political party to have raised the issue of Macedonia's membership in the EU and NATO. By referring to these facts, the party considers EU integration an important reference in their political activity and seeks recognition as the first party that has defined Euro-Atlantic integrations as key priority of state's foreign policy.

Discourse of construed values is primarily identified in the section on fundamental values upheld by the party and used as basis to develop the country's future: *civil society, freedom of speech and media freedoms, gender equality, sacredness of the property rights, right to freedom of association, freedom of religion, reintegration of Islamized Macedonians, care for Macedonians abroad, fostering and developing interethnic relations.* In this context, VMRO-DPMNE believes that Macedonia cannot be a democracy without guarantees for an important human right - freedom of speech. Final goal of VMRO-DPMNE's 1998 election programme is *Macedonia to enter the 21st century as a civilized European state.*

This point is further developed by primordial discourse of values recognizable in the programme's section on foreign relations, where VMRO-DPMNE clearly states that, *in civilization terms, Macedonia is identical to Europe and, therefore, our political future and the political future of our children should be sought there [in the European family].*

Nevertheless, unlike the situation observed with its previous programme, discourse of values is not the dominant feature of this programme. Namely, for the first time, VMRO-DPMNE's 1998 election programme uses discourse of benefits from EU integration, primarily identified in the commitment *to intensify diplomatic activities for abolishment of visas for the Macedonian citizens.* Discourse of standards dominates the programme's section on EU integration. In this section, VMRO-DPMNE elaborates tasks the state should implement with a view to accept European standards and to approximate with the EU acquis, demonstrating awareness that the process of joining the EU and NATO is difficult and complex and necessitates the support of the entire society. In this regard, the programme refers to the fact that **membership in the EU and NATO is our strategic goal**, whose attainment will be pursued by a series of measures, such as: *setting the highest European standards for development of democratic processes in Macedonia; accelerating the process of harmonizing the national legislation with the EU acquis; establishing adequate administrative structures for its implementation.*

3.1.1.3 Rebirth in 100 Steps – Towards the Ideal for Europe

At 2006 parliamentary elections, VMRO-DPMNE completely transformed its political doctrine and public relations strategy. This year marked the political party's visual rebranding from red-and-black to orange colour, and the promotion of its election programme called "Rebirth in 100 Steps".

Introductory address of the party leader Nikola Gruevski referred to the fact that *today, VMRO-DPMNE is completely prepared to make a leadership contribution in restoring the unity of the state, to be the promoter of its new development cycle, economic progress, to lead the new development stage in national and cultural life and identity as part of Europe and the European idea, to guide Macedonia towards building a system of true values and to bring Macedonia in the European Union and NATO.* By means of this conglomerate of values, standards and benefits, the political party sends the message that EU agenda will have an important role and will be integrated in all aspects of party policies. From this point forward, their political programme makes references to accession and membership in the EU as key determinants in all policy areas.

VMRO-DPMNE's use of discourse of values maintains a primordial overtone, emphasizing that:

... united Europe is the ideal that will secure long-term peace and economic wellbeing to all European nations, as well as cooperation based on equality and partnership. In civilization terms, the Republic of Macedonia is inseparable part of Europe; it is the cradle of Christian culture in Europe. Therefore, we do not have other alternatives, but full and complete integration in the EU. Republic of Macedonia belongs in Europe - historically, culturally and geographically.

Based on this quote, Macedonia's belonging in Europe is **given** and Macedonia's membership in the EU is the only alternative. To support its pro-European history, the party programme refers to the fact that *the previous government of VMRO-DPMNE has signed the Stabilization and Association Agreement with the European Union, which paved the road towards EU integration.*

As regards the values to be attained, VMRO-DPMNE's programme establishes that *the integration process should be based on the following values: the rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, social justice and responsibility, equal rights and opportunities for all, and solidarity.*

In this regard, the party makes an attempt to vest specific meaning to these values, defining them as standards that should be achieved to a level comparable with Europe. Therefore, the programme includes a picturesque statement, most probably for the purpose of criticizing the ruling government of SDSM:

To us, membership in the EU is not letting blue and yellow balloons. To us, membership in the EU means that Macedonian citizens enjoy a standard of living close to the European standard; rates of employment and unemployment are similar to those in Europe; judiciary, education and health care are as efficient as the corresponding systems in Europe; administration works like the administrations in Europe; democracy and individual freedoms are guaranteed, as is the case in Europe.

In terms of discourse of specific benefits, VMRO-DPMNE's programme enlists efforts aimed at *faster abolishment of visas for the Macedonian citizens.* Another important package of benefits is identified in the narrative on foreign investments and their definition as the highest priority for the entire period VMRO-DPMNE is in government (2006 to present). Examples thereof include:

Our goal is Macedonia to become the main exporter of software and regional outsourcing centre for the EU countries. In attracting this type of companies/ investors, we must succeed in "selling the story" that the Republic of Macedonia is not a market of 2 million people, but a market of more than 500 million people.

Set of benefits for citizens associated with membership in the EU (and NATO) includes numerous opportunities for farmers, i.e. *after having aligned the national legislation with the EU acquis, Macedonia will start benefiting from **the European Commission's** programme called SAPARD.* Under the section on defence and security policy, programme authors say that *membership in NATO will bring permanent security and stability. The idea for united Europe cannot be realized without the participation of all countries in the region and beyond.*

Nevertheless, the most powerful discourse in this programme is the one dealing with EU standards and rules that need to be adopted. More specifically, programme's discourse of standards is more detailed compared to the discourse applied under 1998 political programme, and the manner in which values and benefits are formulated is indicative of standards and norms (regulations, directives, etc.) to be attained by hard work, which will inevitably result in numerous values and benefits. This approach is best illustrated by the commitments whereby *in our opinion, there are no poor laws, only laws that are not implemented. Road to the EU includes actual implementation of the regulations, not demagogical commitments and empty promises.* This approach is most prominent under programme sections addressing economic growth, energy policy, foreign policy and neighbourly relations, good governance and fight against corruption, justice and internal affairs, education, environmental protection and political system.

3.1.1.4 Rebirth Will Continue, But...

2008 early parliamentary elections brought a complete transformation of discourse promoted by VMRO-DPMNE about issues related to the EU integration. The crucial event that has led to the announcement of these elections was Greece's veto for Macedonia's membership in NATO at 2008 NATO Summit in Bucharest. In the aftermath of this summit, finding a solution to the name dispute with Greece became an official condition for Macedonia's membership in NATO and, obviously, would become a requirement for opening accession negotiations with the EU. In Macedonia, the atmosphere of defeat resulted in announcement of early parliamentary elections, on the initiative of VMRO-DPMNE. These events are duly reflected in the discourse led during the election campaign.

Thorough analysis provides the conclusion that values, especially primordial values stressing that, in civilization terms, Macedonia belongs in Europe, are missing from the party's 2008 election programme. In truth, values are much less represented, notably because the programme is focused on the government's success in fulfilling standards set by the EU and EU-related benefits for the citizens.

Introductory remarks, i.e. Prime Minister Gruevski's address to the constituency,

imply that *the rebirth will continue with attempts and efforts for faster integration in the EU and NATO*. Membership in the EU and NATO is among the five priorities of the foreign policy, with the inevitable subtext that at the NATO Summit in Bucharest Greece vetoed Macedonia's membership in NATO. In this context, it should be noted that this position remains valid until 2014 and implies that VMRO-DPMNE would not agree to change of the Constitution, i.e. change of the country's constitutional name or change of the Macedonian identity and language.

New determinant in the party's foreign policy is that *the Republic of Macedonia will work on building friendship and partnership relations with **Russia** and **People's Republic of China**, both political and economic*. States that have advocated for Macedonia's membership in NATO during the Summit in Bucharest are enlisted as true friends of Macedonia, i.e. *in the last period, Republic of Turkey and Republic of Slovenia, on several occasions and by means of specific steps and policies, have confirmed that they are truthful friends and partners of Macedonia, and relations with them will be continuously developed*.

Discourse of benefits is again in the programme's forefront, with special emphasis on visa liberalization, accession funds, such as IPARD, environmental and infrastructural projects funded by the EU. Quantitative statements about benefits, expressed as amounts of funds available under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance and lists of specific projects that would bring benefits for the citizens are dominant features of this programme.

As regards the visa liberalization, depicted as the biggest benefit for citizens, VMRO-DPMNE reports that they have fulfilled the technical criteria for facilitated visa regime with countries from the Schengen Agreement, which entered in effect on 1 January 2008, and has started negotiations for complete visa liberalization, which are expected to be completed by the end of 2008, followed by EU's decision to abolish the visa regime.

Discourse of standards is a perfect match to VMRO-DPMNE's narrative that Macedonia has fulfilled all standards, but the name dispute is the obstacle that - in the long run - will keep our state outside the EU. In this respect, as was the case with discourse of benefits, the discourse of standards is also dominated by quantitative statements on the number of laws adopted, funds secured and projects realized. Reports on adoption of EU standards are abounding in self-praises, such as: *the government has adopted more than 140 EU-flagged laws and established the decentralized system for utilization of IPA funds*. It is said that the main goal is obtaining a date to open accession negotiations with the EU in 2008, by successfully fulfilling 8 benchmarks put forward by the European Commission.

Compared to VMRO-DPMNE's past programmes, in this programme, discourse of values has a small role and is given less contents. Namely, values are treated under the section on *democracy*, where it is said that *VMRO-DPMNE believes that the social dialogue, together with functional representation of interests of various groups in the society, and strong civil society, are the pillars for development of democracy and economic growth in the state. Principles of accountability and transparency are indispensable in the functioning of system institutions of any democratic society. The times when the institutions perceived the media as an obstacle in their operation are behind us. The public has the right to know!*

3.1.1.5 Brussels via the Hague

Frustration with the additional condition imposed by Greece, i.e. resolution of the name dispute to start accession negotiation with the EU, further strengthened the discourse of standards. In that context, Prime Minister Gruevski's introductory address included in the party's programme for 2011 parliamentary elections, reads: *today, the Republic of Macedonia has fulfilled all requirements for membership in the European Union and has attained all standards and criteria for membership in NATO.* Five strategic priorities defined for the period 2011–2015 include the Republic of Macedonia's integration in the EU and NATO.

Discourse pursued under this programme is heavily dependent on quantitative data about achievements in adoption of standards and facilitation of specific benefits for the citizens stemming from the EU accession. For example, in terms of agriculture, the programme emphasizes the fact that funds and credits are available under IPARD (3 million EUR non-utilized funds and fund of 4.5 million EUR for procurement of tractors, etc.), while the section on highways emphasizes the construction of the highway section Demir Kapija – Smokvica worth 270 million EUR.

As regards adoption of EU standards, VMRO-DPMNE's programme defines the following framework position: *we will continue to focus on the adoption of the EU acquis and its implementation, which is not necessary only as precondition for the Republic of Macedonia's EU membership, but also for the purpose of bringing the state closer to European standards and values and improving the standard of living for Macedonian citizens.* Judiciary is indicated as the area of reforms that have produces the best results and *revolutionary changes, by adoption of new 22 laws transposing the EU acquis.*

In order to disguise the fragile relations with the EU, as part of its programme, VMRO-DPMNE anticipates projects aimed at improving EU's image in the public and aimed at increasing citizens' knowledge and awareness about the EU. Concerns are raised about the effect of these projects in a highly polarized climate towards the EU and

its conditionality. However, the programme enlists several projects in this regard, those being: ***Hello EU, Learning about Europe without Borders, Macedonian Lobby in the EU, Learning about IPARD, etc.***, as well as other specific projects that will be co-financed with EU funds.

This time around, discourse of values is again limited to several principles that should define the state's democratic character and its foreign policy orientation. In this context, the programme indicates that *the core mission of the Macedonian foreign policy is affirmation and promotion of the Republic of Macedonia as modern and stable democracy, as well as protection of state interests and interests of Macedonian citizens abroad. Republic of Macedonia's membership in the European Union and NATO remains the main goal of VMRO-DPMNE's foreign policy and strategic priority of the state.* Again, main obstacle for membership in NATO and start of accession negotiations with the EU is identified in the name dispute. Reference is made to the judgment taken by the Hague Tribunal in favour of the Republic of Macedonia, which has not taken effect in finding a solution to the name dispute with Greece.

As regards democratic principles, it is said that ***our political party is firmly committed to the rule of law, judiciary's independence, market economy and interethnic tolerance, which are values shared by Macedonia and Europe.*** VMRO-DPMNE stresses that Macedonia has fulfilled the conditions for start of accession negotiations with the EU, and evidence thereof can be found in the two positive reports of the European Commission, i.e. 2009 and 2010 Progress Reports. **Reference is made to strategic partnerships and good relations with all neighbouring countries, as well as continued good relations with USA.** In addition, it is said that VMRO-DPMNE's government will engage in deepening friendship relations with the **Russian Federation** and **People's Republic of China** by signing agreements of partnership and cooperation. Furthermore, commitments are made to foster and strengthen good bilateral relations with **Turkey** and **Slovenia**, including **Poland**, which have recently proved to be true friends of Macedonia. Contrary to current practices and priorities, the programme implies expansion of the diplomatic network in **Brazil, Tokyo and Kazakhstan.**

Finally, content included under the section on democracy has been reduced to empty phrases void of clear definition and meaning of these principles in the Macedonian context. For illustration purposes, the programme establishes that *the right to freedom of expression is one of the highest values in a democratic society. Respect for pluralism of ideas and positions contributes to strengthened legal state, enable a system of checks-and-balances, defend and promote human rights, dignity and freedom.*

3.1.1.6 Family Cannot Be Renounced

VMRO-DPMNE's political programme for 2014 early parliamentary elections does not differ from the previous election programme in terms of its changed discourse on EU integration. Membership in the EU and NATO remain the party's top strategic priorities. Be that as it may, this programme's main determinant is the injustice made to Macedonia under the name dispute with Greece, despite the positive judgment taken by the International Tribunal in the Hague. VMRO-DPMNE's attitude towards integration in the EU can be summarized by the following quote:

As a country that respects the international law, Macedonia has motioned a lawsuit against Greece in front of the International Tribunal of Justice in the Hague. In December 2011, UN's highest judicial body took a judgment establishing that our south neighbour has violated its international commitments assumed under the Interim Agreement by vetoing Macedonia's membership in NATO in 2008. At the same time, the Tribunal has rejected all accusations against the Republic of Macedonia presented by our neighbouring country as evidence on justifying its violation of commitments made. In that, clear is that the international law is on the side of the Republic of Macedonia as concerns the unjustly imposed bilateral dispute that has been abused to prevent our country's integration in the EU and NATO.

In terms of discourse of values, the single novelty introduced in VMRO-DPMNE's 2014 programme is use of primordial values in response to the EU's injustice inflicted on Macedonia indicating that VMRO-DPMNE, *in spite of imposed barriers, remains strongly committed to the process for integration in the family where it belongs, politically, culturally and economically.* Use of the term "family" is indicative of Macedonia's primordial attitude towards the EU and the party's desire to reassure its constituency that, in spite of the barriers, it won't renounce "the family", notably because we are primordially related to Europe and naturally belong there. This primordial discourse is reinstated after it has been craftily avoided in the previous programmes, most probably as the only way to convince the constituency that Macedonia continues on its path towards the EU, despite the obstacles imposed.

All other issues related to the EU integration are framed within the discourse of standards and discourse of benefits for the citizens.

3.1.2 SDSM

3.1.2.1 We Are the Future of Macedonia's European Face

Unlike VMRO-DPMNE which, in 1990, started as new political party and developed its positions, practices and political programmes, at that time SDSM has not completed its transformation from the Union of Communists in Macedonia (SKM), i.e. the political structure that dominated the political and party scene for several decades. On this account, at the first pluralistic parliamentary elections in Macedonia held in 1990, SDSM presented its political bid under the name SKM with the suffix PDP, which stands for Party for Democratic Transformation. SKM-PDP carried a heavy political burden (and capital) from the single-party system and its new political bid under changed global and local circumstances needed to reflect the new age and the party's vision for Macedonia's development after the collapse of communism. The circumstances at that time played a key role in formulation of SKM-PDP's election programme and should be taken into consideration when analysing programme contents.

In this programme, SKM-PDP stresses its commitment for *radical abandonment of practices from the past*, while the introductory address of the party leader Petar Gosev conveys the message that the programme offers *politics that will guarantee democratic transformation of Macedonia* and transformation of the old system in compliance with the new emerged situation. Party ideology promoted under this programme is *social democracy, i.e. freedom, justice and solidarity*, supported by exclusively liberal narratives and calling to abandonment of old system and habits, followed by approximation to Europe.

Desire to distance itself from previous political programmes and approaches and present itself as political entity willing to transform the state is the common thread of all programme sections. In that regard, the programme is abounding in discourse of values, with a number of specific benefits. Discourse of standards maintains a certain level, but is not as specific as the discourse of values, which is in forefront and serves as evidence for the desired transformation.

Discourse of values and promise for democratic transformation are dominant features of this programme. For example, the programme states that *citizen is the main holder of the system; the legal state is the guarantee for democratic governance and free development of pluralist political life; nobody will be above the law; the power-sharing principle is the safeguard against dictatorship or anarchy*. On the other hand, it includes a dose of healthy self-criticism, indicating previous practices as erroneous and matters of the past. For example, it is said that *political culture and tolerance are preconditions for a democratic state (the state, from ideological creation, should be transformed into a system of institutions that guarantee*

human rights and freedoms); rational, efficient and professional administration is a precondition for modern state and satisfied citizens (depoliticization, civil services); SKM-PDP is committed to democratic protection of citizens' rights and against political police (modernization of the sector on internal affairs and trust-building), is strongly against harmful politicization with the Yugoslav National Army, and will fight closed municipalities and bureaucracy by establishing a modern system of local governance (against municipal state and against federation of municipalities).

In terms of establishing links between the EU integration and these construed values, SKM-PDP's programme refers to implementation of European standards and attainment of values shared by EU Member-States. For example, in the section called "European Macedonia – Macedonia in Europe" it is said that:

... [we need to] get closer to Europe so Europe will be closer to us (changes in the political and economic system, accompanied with cultural development of Macedonia, will guarantee European standard of living, and Europe will become our home). This goal cannot be immediately attained in all areas, but we can achieve fast approximation to European standards of living, on the basis of which our politics will be assessed. This necessitates thorough changes in all areas of our living.

A particularly interesting primordial tone is identified in the discourse used to support one of the biggest myths for unification of Macedonian people from all parts of Macedonia. Namely, the programme implies that *only through united Europe, we can achieve true cultural and economic links among all parts of the Macedonian people. It is in the interest of all Balkan nations to be connected on regional level, in preparation for the united Europe.* It should be noted that this particular argument dominates the discourse about EU integration in the Albanian political block (see below) whereby the Albanian people on the Balkan will be united within EU's cultural and economic space, where borders lose their meaning.

3.1.2.2 Stabilization and Normalization – One Step Closer to Europe

After four years in government, efforts to build the institutions of independent Macedonia, deep economic crisis, and warship in the neighbourhood, looming uncertainty in the region, the programme of the renamed party (from SKM-PDP into Social and Democratic Union of Macedonia – SDSM) is significantly different.

Unlike the previous programme, SDSM's programme for 1994 parliamentary elections does not include great promises and unattainable ideals. Programme's leitmotif is identified in key successes from their previous mandate in government include keeping the peace, safety and stability, while maintaining a level of normalcy under the circumstances. *Stabilization* is the key word used throughout the programme. Policy

priorities of the then-ruling government include international recognition of Macedonia, preserving the state's territorial integrity and name. Section on party commitments and past results includes information on radical steps taken to achieve economic and social stability, contemporary legislation, as well as long-term results. By doing so, SDSM tries to buffer citizens' dissatisfaction with hardship conditions and calls to patience.

Surprisingly, the programme does not include separate section on relations with the EU, and covers this issue as foreign policy matter aimed at international affirmation of Macedonia. In this section, commitment to EU integration is presented as a major goal that should be pursued gradually, by adopting numerous standards and adjustments (discourse of reforms and standards). More specifically, the programme assures:

*Our strategic goal is Macedonia to be fully engaged in European and global integration processes. For that purpose, SDSM's goal is membership in the EU. This goal will be attained by **gradual approximation**, first by signing the Cooperation Agreement, followed by associative membership in the European Union. These steps will be completed with full-fledged membership in the Union, **in the first decade of the next century.***

On this basis, the conclusion is inferred that SDSM is no longer euphoric and does not promise fast integration in the EU and European standards in all policy areas (as it has done in 1990).

Other issues related to the EU integration are reflected in democratization of the state and values which Macedonia aspires to adopt. For example, the section on democracy development and legal order relies on specific measures that will be taken to complete the legal system on safeguards for human rights (new criminal legislation, elimination of legal gaps, protection of the right to property, Ombudsman Office, strengthening the autonomy of civil society, as well as civil and political pluralism, etc.). All these efforts make direct reference to respect for values of individualism and liberal democracy underlying the political culture in the state.

3.1.2.3 Back on Track

SDSM's programme for 2002 parliamentary elections was designed in a post-conflict context, almost one year after the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, when Macedonia was deeply divided along ethnic and political party lines and when the government of VMRO-DPMNE entered an open conflict with the international community and the West, accusing them of supporting the armed conflict in the country. Therefore, key points underlying this programme include promises for better life, restoring the normal situation in the state and reconnecting with Europe and the world. Main assumption of programme's doctrine is that Macedonia is derailed and all policy areas are in shambles.

Discourse of values strongly resonates in SDSM's 2002 programme, which opens with a statement whereby SDSM members declare themselves "European Social-Democrats". From that position, they demand *consensus about the EU*, which means that Macedonia, *being a small country with big problems*, must have a joint strategy for the integration process. In this regard, SDSM views Macedonia as strongly connected with Western Europe and guarantees that in four years citizens holding a Macedonian passport will be able to freely travel throughout Europe.

This position is complemented under the section on foreign policy, where it is said that Macedonia is one of most isolated countries in Europe and has been compromised internationally. Solutions they offer include accelerated integration in the EU and NATO, cooperation with the neighbouring countries, stabilization in the region, restored security, promotion of broader regional stability, restored credibility of the state with the international community. Marked by a renaissance overtone, the programme calls to the fact that, at times of globalization, Macedonia must find allies and that, when elected in government, SDMS will not pursue state propaganda against USA, EU and NATO, obviously alluding to the practices of the then ruling government of VMRO-DPMNE.

This programme combines discourse of benefits and discourse of values, which are most prominent under the section on economic issues and state development. SDSM's commitments in this regard include: *advancing trading relations with "EU Member-States" as they account for more than half of total trade exchanges; project on financial support for agricultural development in compliance with the agreement signed with the EU; aligning national legislation on construction works with the EU regulations, standards and practices; use of cleaner, quieter and more economic vehicles and fuels in compliance with the EU acquis; technical inspection of vehicles in compliance with EC directives.*

3.1.2.4 Macedonia Is Needed in Europe

In the period 2002-2006, SDSM's government kept the "EU agenda" high on its list of political priorities, with key people from the party membership deployed to departments responsible for fulfilment of European standards and promotion of relations with the EU. Fast integration in the EU was their leitmotif for the 2006 election campaign, reinforced with the fact that Macedonia has been granted the status of candidate-country for EU membership in December 2005, which is the greatest success and acknowledgement of governmental efforts. Accordingly, SDSM's 2006 political programme is abounding in contents about EU at all discourse levels.

Namely, as part of his introductory address, SDSM's leader Vlado Buckovski, stated that *Macedonia is needed in Europe and has its doors open*, adding that the country is no longer part of the problem, but part of the solution for world peace. For the first time, SDSM's programme is characterized by primordial discourse of values according to which Macedonia is part of Europe, in civilization terms. Nevertheless, discourse of values dominates policy areas such as state stabilization and principles to be attained by Europeanization. For illustration purposes, the programme refers to the fact that *the state's EU perspective is a common goal; Macedonia has proved its respect for the system of values and norms that are cornerstones of the European Union; efforts for building a European Macedonia started from the ground-up; we have restored the country on its natural, EU track; symbol of the pro-European approach – positive, active and uniting*. Traditionally, any political party in government does not overly refer to discourse of democratic values, and consequently, this programme enlists these issues as very important, but does not elaborate on them (human rights, democracy and the rule of law for better, more prosperous and European Macedonia; human rights and freedoms, and open society; reformed judiciary for the EU and NATO).

Discourse of standards, complemented with discourse of benefits (for example, *new status in the EU – new opportunities*,) dominates programme sections on economy, environment and health care. In this regard, emphasis is put on increased administrative capacity for EU integration (Secretariat on European Affairs, as recognized team of professionals), the campaign "The Sun, Too, Is a Star", but also on standards introduced in the area of competition, customs administration, banking regulations, food protection, etc. EU assistance funds are indicated as great opportunities, along with promotion of governing principles such as quality, continuity and consistency.

3.1.2.5 Success Is "Small" Step Away

In 2008, the context underlying the organization of parliamentary elections was utterly unfavourable for unconditional pro-European discourse. Once Greece vetoed Macedonia's membership in NATO, obvious was that solution to the name dispute will become a condition for start of accession negotiations with the EU. VMRO-DPMNE announced the early parliamentary elections in the midst of public's booming frustration with the defeat in Bucharest. SDSM's plan entailed the fact that, when elected in government, they will resolve the name dispute with Greece within 6 months and will take Macedonia in the EU within 48 months. On this account, the programme is more focused on political issues and discourse of values and opens with the statement: *Success is "small" step away*.

Discourse on stability and security, as key values and benefits, is reinstated on SDSM's political menu, implying that VMRO-DPMNE has derailed the country from its developmental path. In order to reflect the idea of EU integration, SDSM uses phrases such as *the family of the safest and richest; let's leave the insecurity and uncertainty behind us and start anew alongside the most advanced, most free and most successful; Europe appreciates our strengths; integration, not isolation*. This programme relies on ten commitments abounding in discourses of values and benefits. However, for the first time and in the context of benefits, the programme speaks of damages that the country might face if it abandons EU integration (commitments include: identity, political stability, NATO and EU membership, economic progress, standards, education, health care, pensions, agriculture, quality of life).

As part of discourse of (construed) values, SDSM is focused on growing problems faced by Macedonia, warning that democratic political institutions are prerequisite for attainment of general wellbeing in the society. Poor cohabitation between the Prime Minister and the President of State, the Parliament being transformed into a voting machine, serious pressure on the judiciary, public prosecution and the media, use of police and secret services to intimate political opponents, are enlisted as examples of problems in the society.

3.1.2.6 Macedonia Must Not Change Course before the Finish Line

In the aftermath of VMRO-DPMNE's landslide electoral victory in 2008, the political relations in the country were tensed and the political parties acknowledged the fact that the name dispute will affect the discourse on EU integration, meaning that the EU, as ultimately positive reference of political action, is under question, accompanied with declining support for this process that resulted in pro-governmental media labelling pro-European actors as traitors. Due to these reasons, in 2011 SDSM toned down its pro-European discourse and used values and standards as requirements for better life (benefits) as the key formula to promoting its political stands and bid.

Discourse of values is intensified, contrasted by the fact that they have been endangered by governing authorities, along with the need for these values to be protected and maintained. Hence, for example, construed democratic values are represented as *call to put an end to the politics that suffocates freedom, annihilates the country's perspectives and has brought fear and record-breaking poverty. Macedonia demands changes in order to break free from the firm grasp of people in power who rule by instilling discontent and division and want to control everything: from economy, the media, to our lives*. Endangered values are a much stronger motive for political action than commitments to EU membership, which has been labelled as undesired by the ruling authorities.

SDSM's programme section on identity and dignity promotes *establishment and respect for the Macedonian identity within the European identity, notably with Macedonia's integration in the European family of nations*, and commitment to *cultural competition with other states within the European family*. Discourse of standards plays a significant role in this programme, primarily in the manner SDSM treats specific policies and policy areas such as economic development, foreign direct investments, taxation policy, agriculture, environment, public administration, and respect for standards governing the right to freedom of expression and media freedoms, in compliance with the jurisprudence of the European Court of Justice in Strasbourg.

3.1.2.7 EU Integration as Matter of Internal Affairs

In 2014, new round of early parliamentary elections was announced. Relations between the government and the opposition hit bottom rock, which was duly reflected in their respective election programmes, and in the general pre-election ambiance. Additional polarization in the society was brought by the fact that regular presidential elections took place in parallel with early parliamentary elections

SDSM's programme for 2014 early parliamentary elections attempts to make two key changes in their political paradigm and the paradigm on EU integration. First, SDSM promoted its programme under the motto "Changes for New Beginning", in order to represent itself as a reformed party with new leadership, new candidates on the election lists, new programme, i.e. with a completely new political offer. Another interesting change of the paradigm is the fact that, for the first time, this party's programme states that *EU membership, as matter of foreign policy, will now become matter of internal affairs, because the reforms that need to be implemented affect all spheres of life*. In this context, the paradigm whereby the EU is part of the foreign, interstate policy, that we are rushing to join the EU and have to fulfil certain standards, is now replaced by the paradigm that EU reforms affect the entire society and are therefore inseparable part of internal affairs, i.e. national policies, implying internalization of the EU integration discourse.

Change of paradigm resulted in change of relations between discourse of values and discourses of benefits and standards. More specifically, discourse of benefits and discourse of standards are defined more realistically and do not imply great promises. More importantly, all benefits or standards (from implementation of standards of the European Court of Human Rights in the lustration process, to assistance for companies and universities aimed at easier access to EU funds for competitiveness and innovations) are presented in the light of the value-oriented process, i.e. Europeanization.

To this moment, Europeanization has not been referred to under political party programmes or at least not as crucial process (even as discourse of values) that unites other two discourses. Primordial discourse of values is absent from this programme. Evidence in support of these conclusions is identified in the programme's commitment whereby *Europeanization of the society will be pursued in parallel with the reform process*, and that *EU assistance will be put in the service of Europeanizing the state as a whole*. More specifically, SDSM's EU agenda is represented in the rational and specific process of Europeanization and implies acceptance of standards in given policy areas that facilitate benefits for the citizens and various target groups in the society.

3.2 ETHNIC PARTICULARITIES OF THE EU INTEGRATION DISCOURSE

Analysis of political party programmes and interviews conducted with representatives from the biggest political parties in the Macedonian and in the Albanian block provides the conclusion that there are many similarities, but also crucial differences, in their respective opinions and expectations about the EU accession process and in their understanding of Europeanization. In brief, differences are not seen in terms of setting goals, but in the manner in which these goals should be attained, as well as in definition of goals' contents and emphasis of particular aspects thereof on the detriment of others.

As regards political programmes of DUI, this analysis is based on their "Platform for Unity, Development and Integration" from 2011, as the only programme document we managed to obtain a copy of in direct contacts with party representatives.

This programme's introduction explains DUI's specific identity, i.e. the fact that it is an exclusively ethnic party. Furthermore, it is explained that the party is fighting majorization, discrimination and anti-democratic values which, in their opinion, are matters of the past. Party principles include partnership, political consensus and interethnic dialogues, as preconditions guaranteeing stability in the state.

Programme section dedicated to the EU integration is dominated by discourse of benefits. DUI merits itself with visa liberalization and EC's recommendation to start accession negotiation. As regards EU funds, specific benefits from Europeanization enlisted in DUI's programme are most prominent in the section called "European Union – Partner in Development", with special focus on explaining benefits from IPA funds and Union Programmes for economic development.

In general, DUI's programme has a broad understanding of the EU accession process. Namely, this political party is the only party whose programmes represent the EU accession as part of internal matters instead of foreign policy priority. This

programme heavily relies on the discourse of construed values, with Europeanization represented as an ideal that should be attained. However, the accession process is often interpreted as “solution to ethnic problems”. Example of such discourse is identified in the chapter dedicated to, as they call it, the Ohrid Peace Agreement, where authors argue that:

Ohrid Peace Agreement is the basic criteria for Macedonia’s integration in NATO and the EU. International integration perspectives are closely related to the success or failure achieved in terms of internal integration guaranteed with the principles and spirit of the Ohrid Agreement.

It should be noted that the chapter on “Euro-Atlantic Integrations” is actually incorporated in the bigger chapter on “Joint State and Consensual Democracy”. Programme authors use EU values to justify their proposals for new language policies: *our **language policy** originates in the motto of the European Union, i.e. unity in diversity.* Following quote from the programme is paradigmatic example that Albanians understand Europeanization as precondition for internal integration of ethnic Albanians in the society:

*To us, Europe is a joint home and ideal of our political engagement. Fact is that peoples of Europe have different cultural features developed throughout the history and under different political and social conditions. Nevertheless, fact is also that peoples of Europe have many shared cultural values that have brought them together. **As a result of this, to us, Europe is a diverse community that provides a joint perspective for all peoples in Europe.** We see Europe as an integrated region which should be developed in the future on the basis of mutual cooperation and understanding between the nations.*

As regards party messages to its constituency, shared during the interviews with party representatives, DUI’s positions are very different from those upheld and promoted by VMRO-DPMNE. Messages communicated by VMRO-DPMNE party members referred to the name dispute as the only problem preventing Macedonia to start the accession negotiations, stressing that justice is on Macedonia’s side, as confirmed by the judgment of the Hague Tribunal, but unfortunately that has not been sufficient for the international community to stand in defence of our state and exert pressure on Greece. Although their priorities are geared towards Macedonia’s membership in the EU, previous argument clearly indicates that this process is impossible in the current context. On the other hand, DUI views Macedonia’s integration in the EU as something that is of crucial importance for Albanians to finally start developing the feeling of belonging to the state and something that will bring Macedonians and Albanians closer. They are of the standing that if this process is not completed in the near future, ideological division between the two nations could be deepened and would be detrimental for the state.

Different views on the EU integration, i.e. divergent discourse pursued by the political parties of different ethnic prominence, were also stressed by a high representative of DUI:

When talking about European messages communicated to our constituency, one must distinguish between the discourse used in the Macedonian EU agenda and the discourse used in the Albanian EU agenda, which is pursued in parallel with the process on developing the feeling of belonging to the state among Albanians. We were successful in imposing this process with the promise for Macedonia's integration in the EU.

These seemingly contradictory differences and positions upheld by Albanians and Macedonians, i.e. different narratives about the accession process, are not coincidental. They are a consequence of the specific social and political context in the Republic of Macedonia. This phenomenon has attracted the attention not only of surveyors and political analysts, but of the expert public as well, in particular orientologists and anthropologists. Based on an empirical survey, in her 2008 study titled "The Balkans' Other within: Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia", American anthropologist Vasiliki Neofotistos speaks of two different ways of imagining "the West" used as synonym for "Europe".

On one hand, argues Neofotistos, Macedonians equate Europe with economic vigour and political tutelage. At the turn of the century and in the context of country's destabilization, "the West" connotes reconstruction of the monopoly of state power and preservation of a hierarchical status quo in Macedonia. President Gligorov is known for his argument that Macedonia is "oasis of peace", i.e. embodiment of European values on the Balkans caught in wars and destruction. Therefore, Macedonians construe their identity ("Self") with "the West" and locate the "Other" in different ethnic groups (Albanians) that they associate with "the Orient". Anthropologist Neofotistos calls this discourse "The Balkans' Other within". According to this narrative, Macedonia has the potential to become part of "the West", if given the opportunity.

On the other hand, Albanians tend to imagine "the West" and "Europe" as a political ideal symbolizing equal rights for all peoples, irrespective of their ethnic, national or racial identities. According to them, what stands in between Macedonia and "the West" and locks it in "the Balkans" is the backward, specifically Macedonian Other, who acts contrary to the European ways. Neofotistos calls it "The Macedonia's Other within". Accordingly, if Albanians are given the opportunity, this community has the potential to help Macedonia become a Western country, notably by creating a society where they are not second-class citizens, i.e. by creating a society where they enjoy equal political and civil rights and freedoms as the majority.

In addition to reproduction of stereotypes about the Balkans in local discourse, these narratives are illustrative of what Europe stands for, as political ideal, about different political actors, which is confirmed by results and findings presented in this study.

4. DISCOURSE ABOUT THE CURRENT STATUS OF MACEDONIA'S EU INTEGRATION

This section of the study addresses the views of political elites about the Republic of Macedonia's accession in the EU and about Europeanization as a multifaceted notion and phenomenon. As regards the methodology applied, the team conducted semi-structured interviews with representatives from the six biggest political parties from both blocks, i.e. the Macedonian and the Albanian political block. In the Macedonian block, interviews were conducted with representatives from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM - the biggest opposition party, as well as representatives from the smaller political parties such as LDP and DOM. As regards the political parties representing the interests of ethnic Albanians, contact was established only with the representatives from DUI, while all efforts to contact representatives from DPA did not yield results.

Successful interviews were conducted with party members at three management levels within the respective political parties: 1) the political party's youth branch; 2) party secretary for international cooperation/EU integration; and 3) high level party members, i.e. party vice presidents. In order to facilitate trustful environment and enable the otherwise prudent politicians to honestly and openly share their opinions, possible dilemmas and comments, all interviewees were guaranteed anonymity.

4.1. KEY MESSAGES ACCORDING TO THE PARTY MANAGEMENT

From its independence, Republic of Macedonia's accession in the EU has been presented as a top priority of all governments elected in power. Nevertheless, for a longer period the country's accession is in standstill, which was duly reflected in the manner in which political parties communicated their messages about the EU integration and the issues/matters they have defined as party priorities.

Furthermore, research studies in the new Member-States from East and Central Europe show that, for the benefit of political actors' consensus about their country's "place in the European family", expectations from the EU membership are becoming less clear. In the vocabulary of politicians, Europe, European Union, Europeanization are not clear concepts with strictly defined contents, but are identifiers that have been given certain meaning according to their worldview, ideology and political affiliation.

Therefore, the first question we addressed our collocutors with is: "What are the key messages about the EU integration you are communicating to the party's constituency?" Following is the summary of answers obtained on this question grouped per political party.

According to the statements made by interviewed representatives from **VMRO-DPMNE**, this political party is sending the message that Macedonia does not have another path and that EU integration is the **only alternative**. Party members at all levels unanimously stated that their priority is fulfillment of the Copenhagen criteria for EU membership, with a focus on complete alignment of the national legislation with the EU *acquis*. In their opinion, accession negotiations with the Union would have started long ago if it wasn't for the bilateral dispute with Greece, emphasizing that the positive outcome of the lawsuit led in front of the International Tribunal in the Hague did not compel the international community to exert sufficient pressure on Greece, which has ultimately led to the current standstill. In the opinion of some party representatives, recently Euroscepticism is on the rise among the citizens. Some of them went as far as claiming that the party is firmly set on its EU integration path despite the demands to do the opposite made by their constituency:

"In conversation with citizens, we are told that we should abandon (name talks with Greece and accession in the EU, N/A). Moreover, measures taken by the EU are not always popular and result in such reactions of the constituency. However, we should not abandon this process, as there are no better alternatives. Finding a solution to the name dispute and moving forward in the negation process will restore citizens' EU optimism".

In the opinion of **SDSM** party members, one of the key messages that should be communicated to the citizens at times of status quo is that EU membership must be the **Plan A** and that EU reforms would bring better standard of living for the citizens and would result in political and economic stability. Unfortunately, they add, Macedonia has lost the momentum in the last seven-eight years and the time lost cannot be compensated.

According to them, the EU can no longer be sold as “*fairy tale*” because the citizens need specific experiences about the benefits from EU membership. Examples thereof could be the successful stories from our country that are few in number, but do exist, and from other countries where certain categories of citizens, despite being the greatest Eurosceptics, after having benefited from EU membership were turned into Eurosupporters. In their opinion, the ruling authorities are fostering skeptical and negative approach to the EU integration process and justify the status quo with the name dispute. Representatives from this political party believe that the main reason for the declining trust in the EU should be identified in the insufficient information among citizens about the actual problems in Macedonia. Nevertheless, the EU can help in this regard, but only if it wishes to complete its mission in Macedonia, and will need to be more transparent in the public about the EU funds channeled to the country and how they are invested.

SDSM's representatives underlined the fact that often the EU is a synonym for better life, whereby citizens disregard other values reflected and upheld by the Union, i.e. they have a “**cherry picking**” approach to EU membership:

“Often, in their aspirations for better life, citizens perceived the EU as the shortcut to this ideal. Unfortunately, when speaking about the EU, the main focus is on better social protection, viable economy, more and better jobs, more money, better education, better health care, on the detriment and neglect of other values brought by EU membership. If you ask the citizens whether they understand the EU as a more tolerant society, better protection for the minorities, I am certain that a very small share of them would support this type of European values. Hence, the conclusion is inferred that we treat the EU as ‘à la carte’, picking courses one, two and five, and skipping other courses on the menu. It is exactly this type of behavior in society that would backfire and affect the economy and better life in the long run. Unfortunately, this is not only Macedonia's problem, but a problem present in the world and in the Balkan, in particular because ‘short-term gains’ are more appealing than ‘long-term gains’, and given the fact that we all live for the day.”

Representatives from the ruling **DUI** claimed that Macedonia's accession in the EU is blocked and that the most important message they communicate to their constituency is that, despite the current predicament, the country **does not have**

an alternative to the EU membership. They are of the standing that Macedonia has most certainly fulfilled the conditions for start of accession negotiations, if not for EU membership, and the name dispute is the problem preventing the country to continue on this path. They also enlisted other benefits from EU membership, such as: dissolution of borders, greater trading opportunities and development of a world where *“we are different, but equal in terms of our rights and liabilities”*.

When sending Europeanization-related messages, DUI party members make a difference between the discourse underlying the Macedonian EU agenda and the discourse underlying the Albanian EU agenda. They are of the standing that Macedonia’s integration in the EU is pursued in parallel with the process on creating feelings among the Albanians that they belong to the state. According to the representatives of this political party, building the feeling of belonging to the state among the Albanians has been facilitated by the promise for Macedonia’s integration in the EU. Therefore, they warn, this feeling of belonging could easily evaporate if the “great promise”, i.e. EU membership, is not delivered. In the words of a high party representative:

*“Delaying the accession process could result in a particular form of fatigue whereby the people lose hope and start looking for other alternatives. This is primarily due to the name dispute and, in my opinion, this fatigue is more prominent among the Macedonians than the Albanians. These developments could be dangerous, as they might trigger division along strategic goals. It was the goal defined as EU membership that united the Albanians and the Macedonians in the country. We may have different opinions about other issues, but not about this issue. The current situation could be **fatal for the country**, and we need to exert pressure to solve the name dispute and prevent a situation like the one in Ukraine, where would have to divide ourselves along ideological lines”*.

According to representatives from **LDP**, **key message for their constituency** is the fact that the Republic of Macedonia **does not have another alternative to its EU membership** and that EU membership will result in greater respect for the liberal and democratic values advocated by this political party. Other values and principles brought by EU membership include market economy, where primacy is given to small and medium-sized enterprises, respect for human rights and freedoms, greater information for citizens and greater control over the government, i.e. a system of **checks-and-balances** among the judiciary, executive and legislative branch of government. In their opinion, Macedonia is running in the spot for a long period of time, and they indicated the populist politics led by the ruling authorities as the main reason for the status quo situation, in particular because the government had successfully imposed the discourse whereby “the only problem for Macedonia being

outside the EU is the bilateral dispute with Greece". Accordingly, they indicated populism as the main reason for the rise of Euroscepticism with the citizens. In this regard, a high party representative noted:

"Populism is on the rise, not only in Macedonia, but in Europe as well, and resulted in some liberal parties applying populist measures (France, the Netherlands). In my opinion, populism creates more results in the short term rather than the long term and is therefore harmful for the country".

From its establishment in 2006, **DOM** defined a clear position that Macedonia belongs in the European family. In the opinion of these party members, Macedonia cannot become a EU Member-State only by fulfilling the membership criteria and applying the *acquis*, but by creating a new, sustainable system that would assist and boost the country's development and growth. In their words, what distinguishes this party from the others is their awareness that Macedonia lacks sufficient natural and human resources and that the scarce resources available should be used in the most optimal manner in order to achieve **progress first within the state, and later beyond, i.e. within the EU**. Party representatives advocate for a sustainable system based on four pillars, those being: environment, economy, social policy and institutional set-up. *"Citizens accept our ideas, but due to their social predicament, they prefer to give their votes to other political parties."*

4.2. FORMULATION OF EU-RELATED POLICIES AND MESSAGES

Formulation of EU-related policies is a very complex process for the political party managements. Therefore, we asked them: "How do you formulate Europeanization-related messages and priorities and how high are these issues on their party's list of priorities?"

Representatives from the ruling **VMRO-DPMNE** briefly referred to the decision-making process within the political party which has been transparently defined in their Statute. As regards issues concerning the EU integration process, initial ideas are adopted at the level of international secretariats (International Secretariat of VMRO-DPMNE and Secretariat of VMRO-DPMNE's Youth Union responsible for matters related to international cooperation). Later, these ideas are presented at the Executive Committee and the Executive Youth Committee, where they are subject to detailed reconsideration and further development. Most often, ideas presented at these meetings are later integrated in the political party programmes. Messages crafted at the said meetings are discussed at the Congress, held every four years, and some of them are integrated in the party's official doctrine.

Representatives from **SDSM** **acknowledged the fact that** political party membership has a small role in formulating EU-related messages, which is also valid for the process on developing policy proposals. When developing their most recent programme, the party engaged in discussions with various target groups of citizens countrywide.

In addition, party representatives admitted that from 2008 onwards **EU-related messages do not represent the core of their political offer**, at least not “publicly”. Due to these reasons, they assumed a new approach to developing their party programme. Namely, inspired by the EU agenda, the programme methodology now relies on remarks put forward by the European Commission, which are used as indicators of policy areas that should be defined as priorities. They firmly believe that Macedonia has regressed in all policy areas and that reforms are **letters on paper**, which are not implemented in the reality. That is why they adopted the approach whereby EC’s comments are taken as guidelines for writing the political party programme.

SDSM decided to apply this approach due to the fact that on three occasions in the past (2005, 2006 and 2008) the light motif of their election campaigns was Macedonia’s membership in the EU and they have determined that this principle is not resonating with their constituency and the general public. For that purpose, they are making efforts for their party programme to reflect EU reforms as domestic reforms.

As is the case with other issues, decision-making process on EU integration and messages starts with ideas and proposals put forward by **domestic and international teams of experts**. Nevertheless, the strategic decisions are ultimately adopted by **the party president and the presidency**. According to their past experiences, party membership is consulted once the political party programme is defined, i.e. they apply the **top – down** approach.

At **LDP**, party members believe that a liberal party must have the issues related to Europeanization high on its list of priorities. They reported that the political party fosters an approach of continuous exchange of ideas, which is of great value to them, because such practices are not applied by the bigger political parties. Namely, ideas and messages come from the party management, but also from grassroot organizations. Decision-making processes concerning EU-related messages imply organization of target group seminars (adults, youth, women). At these seminars, party members make efforts to secure lecturers from EU Member-States who share their respective experiences in designing political party programmes. By doing so, party membership is able to learn directly about European values and how they function within the EU.

Members of LDP's Presidency are assigned specific topics/issues on which they work, and this is also the case with Europeanization. However, that does not mean that these members have absolute monopoly over the said topic or issue, but on the contrary, when other members present better ideas, they are duly reconsidered and implemented.

When developing the political party programme in respect to EU integration, **DOM** pays special attention to two very important policy areas, those being: tourism and environment. This party has established commissions (experts, volunteers, citizens) per issue/policy areas tasked to develop the specific parts of the political party programme.

4.3 VIEWS OF POLITICAL PARTY YOUTH BRANCHES VS THE VIEWS OF POLITICAL PARTY MANAGERMENTS

During the interviews with youth branches of respective political parties, we inquired about their role in the decision-making process, especially in regard to Europeanization.

According to representatives from the ruling **VMRO-DPMNE**, youth party members enjoy absolute independence in terms of formulating their messages about the EU accession process. In that, formulation of such messages is pursued at several levels. The first level is the Club of Political Analysts within VMRO-DPMNE's Youth Union, where many useful ideas are born. Secretariat for International Cooperation is the second level where new ideas are forged for the purpose of improving "the policy on international cooperation, including Europeanization". This Secretariat is comprised of six members and one Secretary General, who is also member of the Youth Union's Executive Committee. This Committee is the highest executive body within VMRO-DPMNE's Youth Union and is competent for decision-making on the formulation of messages related to Europeanization and other issues important for the political party.

SDSM's youth reported that their position in terms of formulating the political party's policies is marked by "trend of improvements" compared to the past practices. According to the interviewed members of this youth branch, their role has been significantly increased in the last several years. Moreover, the contribution of youth party members in the development of the last political party programme was invaluable and they were actively involved in this process.

Youth from **LDP** is of the standing that despite being a separate body within the political party, their role is very small. Most often, they work on projects affecting the youth in general, and indicated the project on free-of-charge transportation for youth as an idea they successfully advocated for. Although the youth section has

its own programme developed by means of meetings, working groups, formal and informal gatherings, the said programme is not formally adopted and has no practical weight. In their opinion, if their party is in power, they would be able to make more specific recommendations for the political party programme and contribute to their implementation.

Youth party members from **DOM** believe that there is space for working on the voice of political parties' youth branches on all issues, not just the EU accession process.

More specifically, DOM's youth organization (**MODOM**) is somewhat content with the influence it has exerted on decisions taken by the political party. They have separate management bodies such as Central Board, Executive Board, Supervisory Board, and separate commissions (Commission on Environmental Protection, Commission on Youth and Education, Commission on International Cooperation, Commission on Organizational Development, Commission on Antidiscrimination). MODOM's President is the only youth representative in DOM's Executive Board, which is the key decision-making body within the political party. As of recently, MODOM's Vice Presidents (four in total) are members of DOM's Central Board, which makes them hopeful that they will be able to exert greater influence on the decisions taken by the political party.

Youth from **DUI** reported that the party president is always open for discussion and exchange of views with them and has carefully reconsidered their opinions and recommendations, especially those concerning youth and policies on culture, education, sports, etc. They indicated numerous examples of their recommendations being approved and implemented by the political party bodies, but also by the state institutions.

4.4 POLITICAL PARTIES' RELATIONS WITH EUROPEAN POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL NETWORKS

Networking of Macedonian political parties with their relevant European counterparts is very important for their socialization within the European area. Contacts they establish when communicating with these parties can have positive effect on the development of the political culture in the Republic of Macedonia, Europeanization of their policies and the manner in which they operate. Based on the interviews with the five biggest political parties in Macedonia, the conclusion was inferred that their respective management structures are aware of the possible benefits from this type of cooperation. All four parties representing the ethnic Macedonian have clear ideological profiles. On the other hand, all interviewed parties are engaged in some form of cooperation and communication with the respective European political

parties. The next section provides a summary of answers provided by interviewed political party members on the question “How do you communicate with the European parties and do you have a system of regular communication?”

During the interviews with representatives from the ruling **VMRO-DPMNE**, it was reported that this political party belongs to the family of the European People’s Party (**EPP**), i.e. VMRO-DPMNE is a full-fledged member of this network. They are also part of the International Democratic Union (**IDU**), which operates on global level. Regular communication with these organizations is maintained by means of conferences (consultation meetings) organized four times per year. The said networks organize global summits every two years. These summits are always attended by the president of the political party and the high level management, while the conferences are attended by MPs and other members of the Secretariat. In terms of regional cooperation, VMRO-DPMNE members indicated they have established good cooperation with the Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ), United Regions of Serbia (URS) and Party for Democratic Actions (SDA) from Bosnia.

As regards the relevant youth branches, it should be noted that VMRO-DPMNE’s Youth Union is a full-fledged member of Youth of the European People’s Party (**YEPP**) with whom they have regular meetings every three months. They are also members of European Democratic Students, with whom they have frequent contacts.

In the respective interviews, representatives from **SDSM** indicated that this political party belongs to the family of the Party of European Socialists (**PES**) and the Socialist International, where they have the status of a full-fledged member. Several times a year, the Party of European Socialists organizes regular meetings for all its members, and special meetings dedicated to its relations with the Western Balkans. Once or twice a year, they hold meetings with the group of social-democratic EMPs, primarily focused on the enlargement strategy and EU-Western Balkans relations.

According to the party management at SDSM, these meetings are very useful primarily due to the fact that problems faced by Macedonia are similar to those their European counterparts have faced in the past, or are still facing. Sometimes, due to the specificity of problems faced by the Republic of Macedonia, members of sister parties cannot fully understanding the issues at hand, but they still believe that the meetings must continue and can be of great importance for strengthening the party and the state as a whole.

Moreover, SDSM’s youth branch (**SDMM**) is a full-fledged member of the Network of Young European Socialists (**YES**) and the International Union of Socialist Youth (**IUSY**), whereby SDMM’s representatives attend various events, seminars and training organized by these two networks. In their opinion, key benefits from these meetings include the fact that, together with their colleagues from the European

parties, they are the **future policy-makers** in their respective countries and should establish good relations with them. Main organizational body responsible for establishing contacts with the European networks is the International Secretary, appointed at the party level and at the level of the party's youth branch.

Liberal Democratic Party (**LDP**) is a full-fledged member of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (**ALDE**) and the Liberal International (**LI**). LDP's party member serves as the Secretary General of the Liberal International, which is very useful for improved communication with this organization. Regular communication and cooperation is pursued by means of numerous meetings, forums and training organized by ALDE and the Liberal International. On regional level, LDP is a member of the Liberal South East European Network (**LIBSEEN**).

LDP's youth branch (**LIDEM**) is a full-fledged member of the European Liberal Youth (**LYMEC**).

From 2008, **DOM** has regular communication and cooperation with the European Green Party (**EGP**). Its youth organization (**MODOM**) keeps regular contacts with the Federation of Young European Greens (**FYEG**). They participate in all major conferences held by the European Green Party and attend the general assemblies at senior and junior level, although they are not a full-fledged member, but they hope that they will be granted membership in the course of 2014. Among all networks, MODOM has regular communication with the Cooperation and Development Network (**CDN**), and have their member elected in the Executive Board. CDN is a full-fledged member of the European Green Party and therefore they are indirectly represented in the biggest European network of green parties.

DOM party members indicated that the cooperation is of great benefit for them as a small political party and that these contacts and exchanges help them develop their party, work in more organized manner and attract new members. As a green party, they believe they are the leaders on the Balkan because, together with the Green Party in Serbia, they are the only green party members represented in the respective parliaments, and in the executive branch of government.

As regards the two biggest Albanian political parties in Macedonia, DUI and DPA, we managed to contact only DUI's representatives.

During the interviews with DUI party members we noted a major contradiction in their positions and views. One interviewee, who is also a high party representative, reported that DUI has not profiled itself in terms of right- or left-wing ideology. Namely, he indicated that in the beginning the political party was goal-oriented, i.e. their primary goal was the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and that nowadays, when they have grown into a much serious political party, they will start dealing with issue of their ideology. On the other hand, the other party

member interviewed, also from the high party ranks, reported that although they do not belong to any political networks, they have regular communication with the two biggest European networks, but admitted that at the assemblies of the European Parliament, Council of Europe and NATO, they are seated with the group that is close to their ideological standpoint, i.e., among left-winged socialists. Nevertheless, they have cooperated on several projects with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, but are not formally members of this group.

Table 1. Political parties' membership in the European networks

Party	European Network	Full-fledged membership
VMRO-DPMNE	European People's Party (EPP)	YES
SDSM	Party of European Socialists (PES)	YES
DUI	No European Network	NO
DOM	European Green Party (EGP)	NO
LDP	Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party (ALDE)	YES
DPA	/	/

Table 2. Political party youth branches' membership in the European Networks

Party	European Network	Full-fledged membership
VMRO-DPMNE's Youth Union	Youth of the European People's Party (YEPP)	YES
Social Democratic Youth of Mafullcedonia (SDMM)	Young European Socialists (YES)	YES
DUI's Youth Forum	No European Network	NO
DOM's Youth Organization (MODOM)	Federation of Young European Greens (FYEG)	NO
Liberal Democratic Youth (LIDEM)	European Liberal Youth (LYMEC)	YES
DPA	/	/

5. WHAT DO EXPERTS THINK?

In order to establish the actual situation and draft recommendations for better communication of the EU agenda on the part of political parties, we organized a focus group discussion with experts on EU issues (public servants, think-tank organizations, etc.) of the younger generation.

The structured discussion within the focus group allowed us to summarize their positions around three key dilemmas in the public discourse. Therefore, the first question inquired whether the offer of political parties includes EU issues and to what extent, followed up by a question whether that is a result of the (non)existing demand.

In addition, focus group participants had to comment on the EU-orientation of political actors in Macedonia and whether the breakdown of pro-European and anti-European movements in the society reflects the political reality. Finally, we asked them to make suggestions for successful promotion of the EU agenda on the part of political parties.

Majority of participants indicated that political offer does not include EU issues and that implementation of the EU agenda is exclusively technical, i.e. lacks engagement in crucial and essential reforms. One participant provided a picturesque description that offering an EU agenda would be “*salto mortale* for the political elites” profiting from the manner in which politics functions today. As regards the political parties, one researcher provided a paradigmatic general assessment:

“VMRO has abandoned the EU integration process. SDSM sees EU membership as the salvation, but lacks proper commitment. DPA is on long vacation. DUI works on the issue, but does not have the capacity”.

Some focus group participants commented about the demand for EU issue, criticizing the citizens and civil society for their inability to stimulate such political demand. One Albanian analyst criticized the limited understanding of Europeanization among Albanians interested only in particular aspects of this process and undermining the others: *“Albanians see the united Europe as the only benefit of the accession process and are not interested in anything else”*. An analyst close to the opposition argued that there is political demand, but the election of VMRO-DPMNE in government has changed the public discourse. The current situation in respect to EU integration was explained by the fact that anti-European capitalists in Macedonia have succeeded in diminishing the attractiveness of EU membership through the media outlets they control. In his opinion, the political offer in the past was naïve but, nevertheless, important.

Underlying message of the focus group discussion was the fact that EU membership and EU reforms are not topics that guarantee election victory. However, participants agreed that, due to its importance, this topic can and should be better communicated to the constituency. Referring to past experiences of opposition SDMS, when the party membership constituted the core of the election offer, one participant suggested that political bids and offers should be focused on more tangible topics: *“The EU story should be commercialized and EU-related topics need to be more specific. Abstract concept of the EU is no longer attractive”*. Focus group participants were unanimous about the topics that should be avoided: identity issues, history and high politics (geopolitics, East-West divisions and the like). Specific topics proposed included social policy, youth mobility and judiciary reforms.

6. WHAT DO PUBLIC OPINION LEADERS THINK?

In order to provide a comprehensive image about the EU integration, we interviewed four columnists/journalists/public opinion leaders from the Macedonian political scene. Two of them are liberals/lefties who publicly criticized the Government's strategy and agenda for EU integration. Other two interviewees are Eurorealists, i.e. they are more critical about the EU agenda, do not have high expectations and support the governmental policies. For greater clarity and simplification, hereinafter we refer to the first two as lefties/liberals and to the second two as righties/conservatives. Key points underlying this debate contribute to the general impression about the EU integration process and its importance in the country.

This group of interviewees was asked to comment on the following thesis: **“Pro-European vs Anti-European? What lies in the essence of this dichotomy in public communications in Macedonia?”**

Lefties/liberals commented that Euroscepticism is **healthy for normal democratic societies**. However, they emphasized that Euroscepticism in Macedonia is not real, but serves the purpose of daily political struggles between power centres and is exclusively used as strategy for denying the actual problems: “When Doing Business publishes Macedonia's rating, ministers in the government are common feature in the media reports. On the other hand, when the EU stresses problems in the judiciary, on-call critics are there to remind us that the EU is about to disintegrate”. Hence, the conclusion that Euroscepticism is a primitive discourse used by the government to maintain the status quo situation or - in the words of one interviewee - “the socialist matrix that would have to be changed once European values are accepted”.

Righties/conservatives agreed as well that Euroscepticism in the country is not based on knowledge, but on emotions, adding that the political elites have an infantile approach to EU integration based on ideology instead of realistic assessment of advantages and disadvantages of this process. According to them, the dominant ideology in the state is pro-European, but not on the basis of realistic information. In their opinion, this ideology has been accepted “being pro-European is in fashion” and has been raised to the level of dogma. They believed that on the account of the state’s weakness and predicament, citizens identify with Europe as a synonym of stability.

Interviewees were asked to assess the manner in which the political parties communicate the EU agenda: “What is your opinion about the political parties’ communication of messages related to the EU integration? What is the difference in their respective approaches?”

According to liberals/lefties, communication of EU integration messages is shallow and demagogic. They suggest the focus to be put on the essence of this process by portraying its **cultural underlying values**. On the account of primitive and profit-motivated debates, citizens do not believe this process will change their mindsets and values, i.e. do not believe that EU integration will result in adoption of civilization values upheld by the European countries. In the opinion of these interviewees, citizens predominantly associate the EU with better life, higher standard of living and sense of belonging, but these do not comprise the essence of Europeanization which, again, is understood as acceptance of cultural and civilization values.

Righties/conservatives are of the standing that Europeanization presented to the citizens is dogmatic, i.e. as something that should be uncritically accepted and as something that “cannot be questioned”. In their opinion, experiences of new Member-States, such Bulgaria and Romania, do not allow uncritical understanding and accepting of matters and are indicative of unrealistically high expectations from this process. They made an illustrative point: “states from Vladivostok to Tirana are in the same league” irrespective of the fact whether they are EU Member-States or not, adding that this status should not be a reason for “fear or shame”.

Finally, interviewees were asked to make suggestions about the manner in which the political parties should communicate messages for Europeanization.

In the opinion of liberals/lefties, the reason behind citizens’ lack of information is the unfavourable situation in respect to media freedoms. Moreover, “communication of European values” necessitates tenacity, persistence and commitment on the part of political parties, civil society and institutions, especially with a view to explain and implement the package of civilization values characteristic for Europe, such as human rights, minority rights, democracy, etc.

Conservatives believe that the EU is depicted as synonym for greater opportunities and traditionally defined community. This, in turn, has resulted in lack of information among citizens about EU matters, Europe is perceived as abstract individual hope without clear contours, and there is general lack of *knowledge and debate*. In their opinion, the EU “bubble” has been burst, in particular due to the great expectations and the fact that it failed to ensure tangible benefits. In conclusion, they underline the fact that “at times when sovereignty is re-nationalized, only Macedonians remain Euroenthusiasts”.

7. CITIZENS' SUPPORT FOR MACEDONIA'S INTEGRATION IN THE EU: IS MACEDONIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU A GOOD THING AND WILL THE STATE BENEFIT FROM IT?

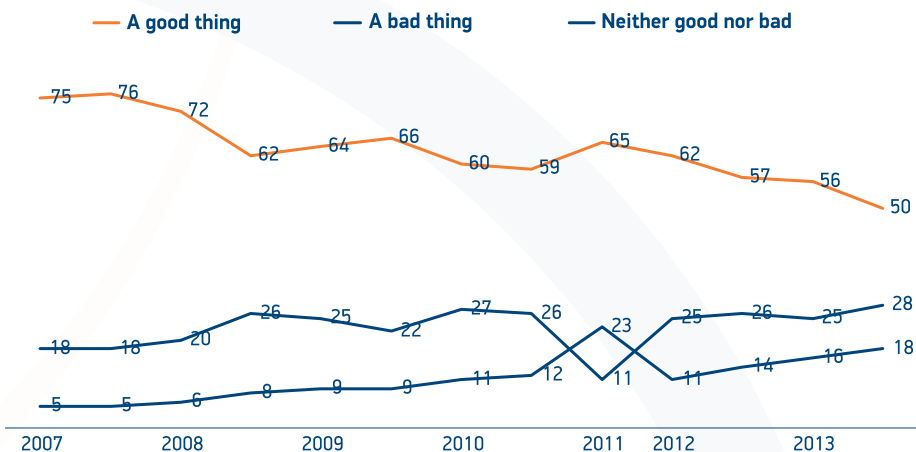
Public opinion polls conducted by the Eurobarometer within six-month intervals are aimed to measure the general public's support in the candidate-countries about the EU membership. More specifically, citizens' support is measured by means of two questions addressing two dimensions of the said support. The first question reads: ***“Generally speaking, do you think that Macedonia's membership in the EU is a good thing, neither good nor bad, or a bad thing?”*** This question measures the public's general judgment about EU membership. The second question is: ***“Taking everything into account, would you say that Macedonia would benefit or would not benefit from EU membership?”*** This question measures the public's “rational” judgment about the EU membership benefits for their country. Usually, majority of surveyed citizens are of the opinion that the country would benefit from EU membership and lower is the share of those who consider EU membership to be a good thing which – as shown in survey results – is also valid for the Republic of Macedonia. Eurobarometer's public opinion polls were taken from the GESIS database and were made available upon the request for database access addressed to the administrators of this database. Charts below represent the trends underlying citizens' support for Macedonia's accession in the EU from 2007 onwards.⁹

At first glance, obvious is that citizens' perception about Macedonia's membership in the EU as a good thing is declining. If in 2007, i.e. before the NATO Summit in Bucharest, after which the public was faced with a traumatic event, as high as three quarters of citizens (75% in 2007 spring poll and 76% in 2007 autumn poll) were of the standing that Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing, results from

⁹ This analysis does not take into consideration data from the 2011 autumn poll, since they are not available.

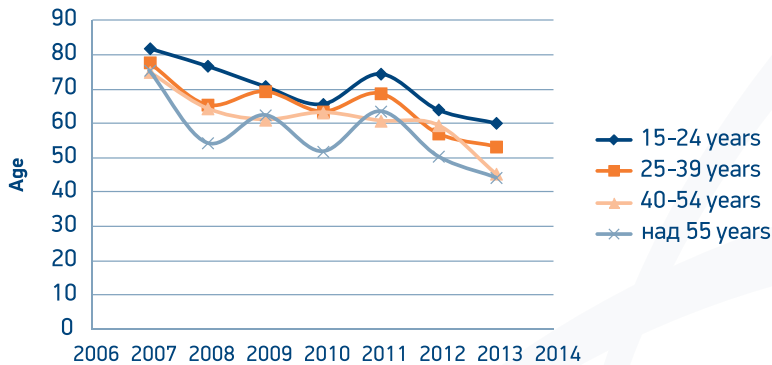
the last public opinion polls conducted by the Eurobarometer (the autumn of 2013) show that the general public's support has recoiled to 50%. Nevertheless, declining frequency of citizens' answers that EU membership is a good thing has not been transformed into negative perceptions, but resulted in increased number of citizens that assessed Macedonia's membership in the EU as "neither good nor bad" and increased number of citizens that do not have an answer to this question.

Generally speaking, do you think that Macedonia's membership of the EU would be?



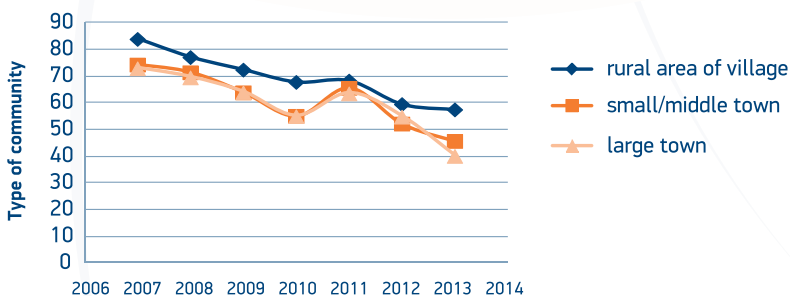
In terms of respondents' socio-demographic features, major differences in answers were observed according to citizens' place of residence. In November 2006, when citizens' support for EU membership was the highest, 83.9% of respondents from rural areas and 69.4% of respondents from big cities provided positive answers to this question. This trend continued in the next years marked by declining support for Macedonia's membership in the EU under all categories of respondents. According to data from the 2009 spring poll, 72.5% of respondents from rural areas and 60.6% of respondents from big cities supported Macedonia's accession in the EU. This trend was observed under public opinion polls conducted in the years that followed.

% of those reporting: membership in EU would be a good thing for Macedonia?



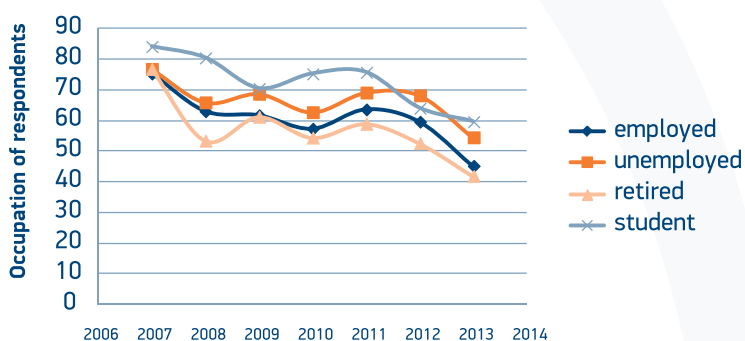
Differences in citizens' support for the EU integration process were observed also in terms of their **age group**. Support for Macedonia's membership in the EU is more prominent among young people aged 15 to 24 years. Namely, according to poll results from March 2008, 81.7% of respondents from this age group and 69.3% of respondents aged above 55 years supported the EU integration process. In May 2010, support for the country's EU membership accounted for 70.5% among citizens aged 15 to 24 years and 56.2% among citizens aged above 55 years. Such difference of opinions expressed by respondents from different age groups was reflected in the results from the public opinion poll conducted in November 2013 when 60.2% of respondents aged 15 to 24 years and only 44% of respondents aged above 55 years indicated that Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing. On the basis of these results, the conclusion is inferred that in the Republic of Macedonia young people are more supportive of the EU integration process compared to citizens from other age groups.

% of those reporting: membership in EU would be a good thing for Macedonia?



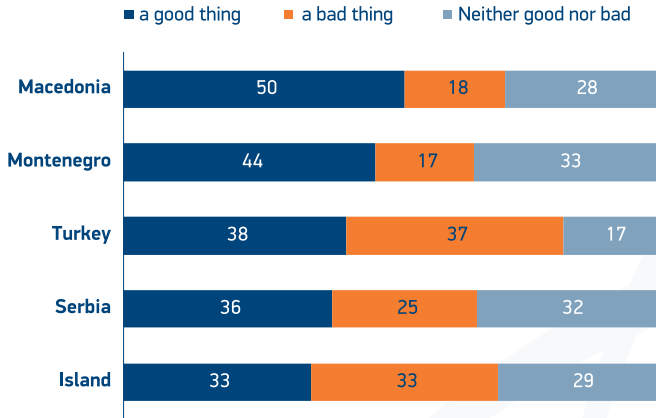
Citizens' labour status is an important factor that affects their answers to this question and results in difference of opinions. Eurobarometer classifies respondents into four categories: employed, unemployed, students and pensioners. In the period 2007 – 2013, almost all survey reports indicate that **students** are the most supportive of Macedonia's membership in the EU and that **pensioners** demonstrate lower level of support, which should not surprise, especially having in mind analysis findings presented the previous sections of this study. Moreover, unlike the employed respondents, unemployed people have more positive opinion, although the trend observed under both categories of respondents is indicative of continuously declining support. In March 2008, 75.9% of unemployed and 70.9% of employed respondents indicated that EU membership would be a good thing. Similar difference of opinions was noted in November 2010, when affirmative answers to this question were provided by 65.6% of unemployed citizens and 58.8% of employed citizens. Results from Eurobarometer's last public opinion poll (November 2013) reports the historically lowest difference in opinions given that 54.5% of unemployed and 45% of employed respondents indicated that Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing.

% of those reporting: membership in EU would be a good thing for Macedonia?



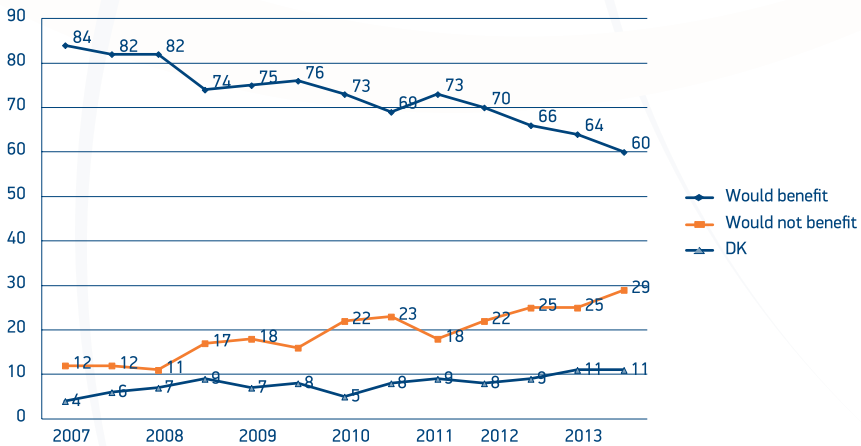
Despite the declining support for the EU integration process, citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are still champions in terms of having the most positive opinion about EU membership compared to citizens from other candidate-countries. Namely, according to the last survey results (the 2013 autumn poll) only 44% of Montenegrins, 38% of Turks and 36% of Serbs believed that their country's membership in the EU would be a good thing. Citizens of the Republic of Macedonia (18%) and citizens of Montenegro (17%) provided the lowest shares of answers whereby EU membership is assessed as bad thing. Nevertheless, the declining support for EU membership in the Republic of Macedonia raises major concerns, especially having in mind the nature of the recoiled support and the stable trend of declining support, which are analysed later in this document.

Generally speaking, do you think your country's membership of the EU would be...? (Autumn 2013)



Similar trends were observed under citizens' answers about the benefits of Macedonia's membership in the EU. According to results from the 2007 spring poll, vast majority (84%) of citizens in the Republic of Macedonia believed that the country would benefit from EU membership and 12% of them believed that the country would not benefit from EU membership, which is indicative of an almost plebiscite support. On the other hand, results from the last public opinion poll show that only 60% of citizens shared this perception, whereas one third of them (29%) believed that Macedonia would not benefit from EU membership. Answers provided to this question are characterized by an explicit trend of positive opinions being transformed into negative opinions, unlike the situation observed in terms of respondents' assessment of EU membership as good or bad thing.

Taking everything into account, would you say that Macedonia would benefit or would not benefit from EU membership?



8. MCET'S SURVEY: WHAT DOES MACEDONIA'S MEMBERSHIP IN THE EU MEAN TO THE CITIZENS?

MCET's survey inquiring about citizen's perceptions provided the same results, although the survey applied a different methodology. More specifically, citizens were asked to answer the following question:

“Expectations about Macedonia's membership in the EU are different. On the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means ‘strongly agree’ and 5 means ‘strongly disagree’, please assess the following statements.

- a) Overall, Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing.
- b) Macedonia's membership in the EU would mean prosperity and more economic opportunities.
- c) Macedonia's membership in the EU would mean fewer people leaving the country.
- d) Macedonia's membership in the EU would mean more democracy, individual freedoms and respect for the law.
- e) Macedonia's membership in the EU would mean more expensive life and lower standard of living.
- f) Macedonia's membership in the EU would improve co-habitation and would contribute to greater internal tolerance.“

For codification purposes, assessments 1 and 2 from the Likert scale were recorded as “disagree”, answer 3 was recorded as “neither disagree nor agree” and answers 4 and 5 were recorded as “disagree”.

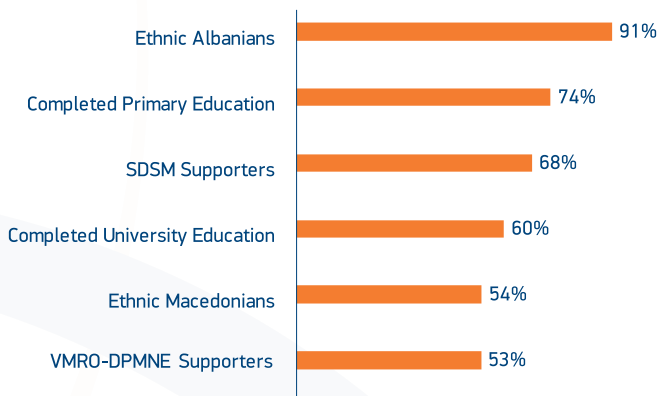
Survey results are similar to those obtained by the Eurobarometer: 62% of citizens agreed with the statement “*Overall, Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing*” compared to the Eurobarometer’s last poll when 50% of citizens indicated that Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing. Moreover, 18% of respondents indicated “neither disagree nor agree” (i.e. are neutral), compared to the Eurobarometer’s last poll when 28% of citizens indicated that Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be neither nor bad thing. Finally, 21% of respondents from MCET’s survey disagreed with the statement “*Overall, Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing*” compared to 18% of citizens from the Eurobarometer’s last poll which indicated that Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a bad thing. In conclusion, results from both surveys are almost identical and the insignificant differences can be explained by the measurement scales applied under the individual surveys/general opinion polls. Analysis of non-coded data further confirms the fact that both surveys have reached almost identical results.

Overall, Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing.	
Disagree	20
Neither disagree nor agree	18
Agree	62

Overall, Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing.	
Strongly disagree	14
Disagree	6
Neither disagree nor agree	17
Agree	13
Strongly agree	47
Don’t know	3

Cross-referencing MCET’s survey results with respondents’ socio-demographic data provides the conclusion that various social categories uphold different opinions. Hence, majority of ethnic Albanians (91%), respondents with completed primary education (74%) and SDSM supporters (68%) agreed that Macedonia’s membership in the EU would be a good thing, while lower frequency of agreeing assessments was observed among ethnic Macedonians (54%) and VMRO-DPMNE supporters (53%).

Overall, Macedonia's membership in the EU would be a good thing.



Analysis of citizens' opinion about the statements provided on the benefits of EU membership provides the conclusion that the survey respondents indicated the highest agreement with the statement that EU membership *"would mean more democracy, individual freedoms and respect of the law"*, with similar results obtained in respect to the statement that EU membership would mean greater prosperity and more economic opportunities. These results are not surprising, in particular because we obtained similar findings and conclusions from focus groups discussions. When asked about the characteristics of a European society, in addition to freedom of movement, majority of participants in focus group discussions indicated the rule of law or individual freedoms (better judiciary, improved legal protection, freedom of expression) or greater social and economic security (better economy, more jobs, development, improved standard of living). High share of focus group participants indicated that Macedonia's accession in the EU would bring major improvements in terms of democracy and freedom, while economic benefits would take longer time. In addition, focus group participants stressed the fact that EU membership would result in lower fear among citizens to freely express their opinion and would restore their trust in the institutions (judiciary, for example). Arguments provided in support of their statements were influenced by the perception that EU membership would imply **a form of tutorship** and **greater control** pressuring the domestic elites to change their

EU is the only solution for us. In my opinion, there will be many improvements, especially in terms of economic development, democracy and freedom. We live in a state where majority of young people are unemployed and leave the country, people are afraid to express their opinion and citizens do not trust the judiciary system. All these things will most certainly be improved once the country joins the EU.

(Baskim, 27 years, Skopje)

I think that EU membership has many disadvantages. First and foremost, democracy in the EU is not as high as presented in our country. Second, EU membership will increase prices of many commodities, especially the price of housing and, most importantly for us as a state, high number of young people will leave Macedonia, as was the case with the most recent EU Member-States, which suffered mass emigration after their accession.

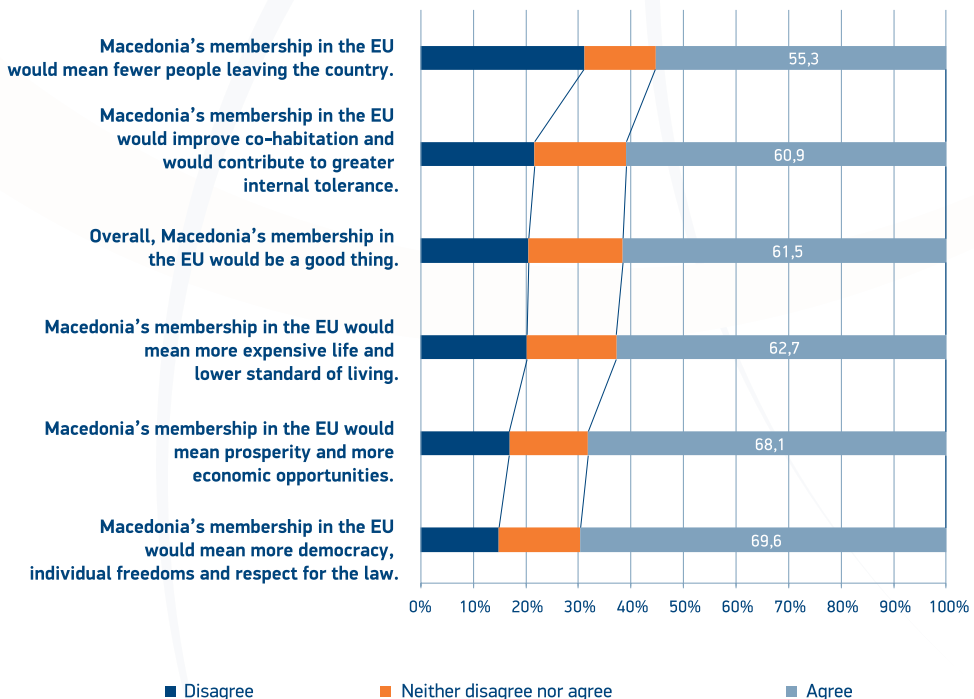
(Nadica, 46 years, Veles)

practices and behaviour, because – in the words of one participant - **“the Union would hold the state accountable”**.

On the other hand, the lowest frequency of agreeing assessments was noted in relation to the statement that EU membership would positively influence one of the biggest problems in the country, i.e. emigration. High share of citizens are aware that EU membership would mean higher prices and lower standard of living which is only apparently a contradictory statement. Nevertheless, the survey team drafting the questionnaire expected this type of

statements, especially having in mind the opinions shared by participants in **focus group discussions**. Frequently indicated negative aspects/consequences of EU membership include “many and various charges/fees”, “much higher debts compared to the present situation”, “higher taxes”.

Expectations about Macedonia’s membership in the EU are different.
Please assess the following statements.

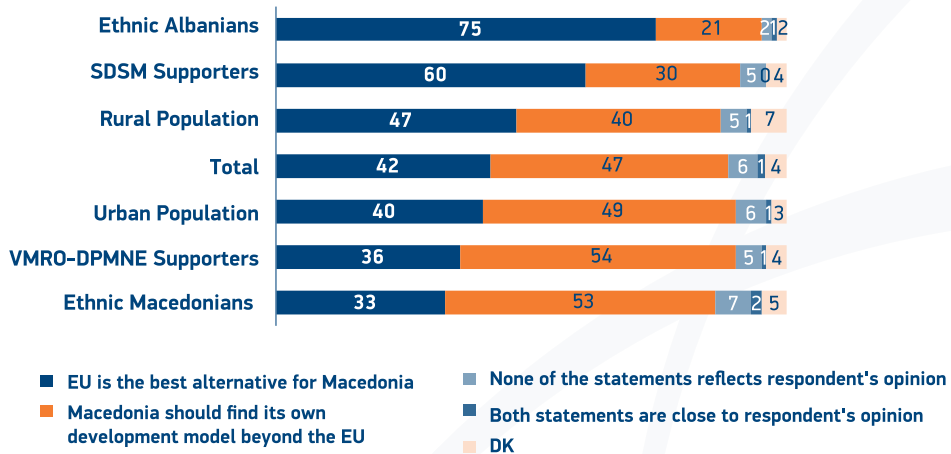


8.1 ROOTS OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND EUROSCEPTICISM

Charts below provide detailed insight in the roots/causes of citizens' declining support for EU membership and their expectations. The first chart provides an overview of respondents' answers to the question: *"Now, I'm going to ask you about a dilemma broadly present in the public. I'm going to read two statements and you should indicate which one is closer to your opinion".* 42% of the total number of respondents agreed with the statement that *"EU is the best alternative for Macedonia"*, while 47% of them indicated that *"Macedonia should find its own development model beyond the EU"*. Additional 6% of respondents indicated that none of the statements reflects their opinion, while 1% of respondents indicated that they find both statements close to their opinion. Nevertheless, answers obtained to this question vary significantly among different categories of respondents. Hence, ethnic Albanians were predominantly of the opinion that EU is the best alternative (75%), and this opinion is shared by a slightly lower share of respondents who declared themselves as SDSM supporters (60%). Respective shares of other respondent categories are much lower, whereas the highest shares of respondents who declared themselves as VMRO-DPMNE supporters (54%) and Macedonians (53%) were of the standing that Macedonia should find its own development model beyond the EU. Difference of opinions between Macedonian and Albanian respondents is most prominent under this question.

These results are also valid for the focus group participants, whose opinions were highly divided, even polarized. Those who claimed that EU is the only alternative for Macedonia also showed major concern about the possibility that Macedonia would be isolated if the countries in the region join the EU. Focus group participants with higher education background who claimed that there is no alternative to EU membership, qualified this course of action as chance **"to acquire European habits of living"** in the absence of which the Macedonian society would not be able to progress. On the other hand, participants who claimed that Macedonia should find its own development model beyond the EU perceive our country as Switzerland on the Balkan, i.e. they see Macedonia as a member of a future Balkan Union similar to Yugoslavia which, in the opinion of one participant, **"was the country where we lived the best"**. Focus group participants with completed higher education who believed that Macedonia's future is not within the EU claimed that the country **"can bring matters into order by itself"** and should not wait for somebody from outside to exert pressure.

Now, I'm going to ask you about a dilemma broadly present in the public. I'm going to read two statements and you should indicate which one is closer to your opinion.



Citizens were then asked to share their opinion about another dilemma, which has been often manipulated by the political parties in their political struggles. According to their answers, citizens' opinions are highly polarized in this regard. Hence, 47% of respondents were of the standing that Macedonia cannot join the EU because of the name dispute, while 34% of them believed that the Government is using the name dispute as an excuse for not implementing the reforms. Additional 11% of respondents indicated that they do not concur with neither of the two statements, while 4% of respondents reported agreement with both statements. The name dispute was indicated as the main reason for Macedonia's inability to join the EU by 76% of respondents who declared themselves as VMRO-DPMNE supporters, 55% of the total number of Macedonian respondents and 51% of respondents aged above 55 years. On the other hand, majority of young respondents (41% of those aged 18 to 34 years), SDSM supporters (65%) and ethnic Albanians (73%) were of the standing that the Government is using the name dispute with Greece as an excuse for not implementing the reforms. Public's divided opinion on these matters is more than obvious and is delineated by their political affiliation and ethnical background.

I think that Macedonia has only one alternative and path, i.e. EU membership. Unfortunately, recently we see people who are seriously politically engaged and claim that there are alternatives to EU membership such as closer relations with India, Russia and other countries. Culturally and geographically we belong in Europe and that is why there is no room for improvisations.

(Ivan, 30 years)

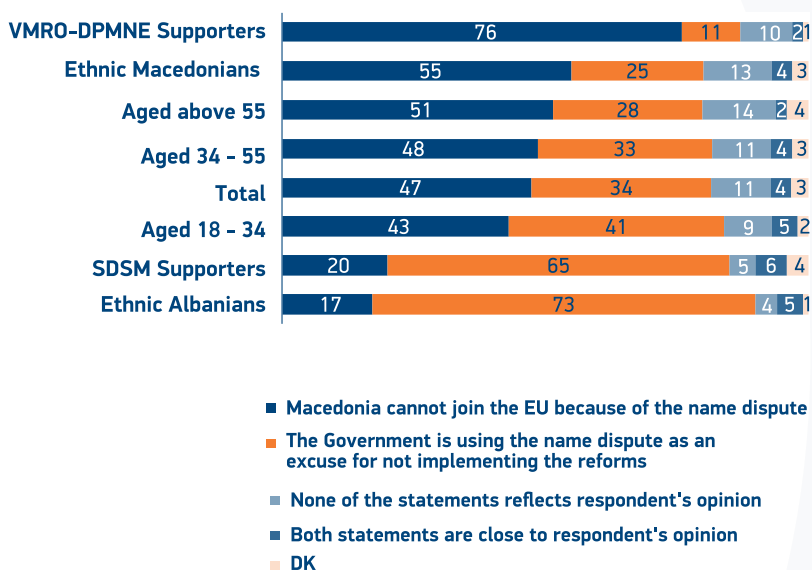
These results do not come as surprise having in mind the different and nuanced opinions expressed by focus group participants. Namely, high share of participants reported that the name dispute is the main problem

preventing Macedonia to join the EU and in that context referred to Bulgaria and Romania which, in their opinion, became EU Member-States without having fulfilled the membership criteria. Nevertheless, none of the participants described the necessary reform processes as “coercion” - an epithet exclusively used to denominate the demand for Macedonia to change its constitutional name – claiming that the conditions which Macedonia has to fulfil in order to become EU Member-State are “standard matter”. Focus group participants described Greece as “Europe’s pet” that was helped by the West to address and resolve its economic downturn. Small share of focus group participants with completed higher education were of the standing that the Government should be blamed the standstill in the EU integration process, notably because it used the name dispute as an excuse for not implementing the necessary reforms.

The future is in democratization of citizens’ awareness. Only in this way we can achieve economic growth. The future is not in geographical or political associations. We must first re-examine the resources available and what we can do with them. There is no point in EU membership if we cannot revise our policies. Take, for example, Bulgaria and Romania which are EU Member-States, but are far from attaining the democratic model of the Scandinavian countries. If we look at Switzerland and Norway which are not EU Member-States, obvious is that they have highly developed democracies. Therefore, it is not only a matter of whether we should join the EU or not, we should start with changing ourselves first.

(Vasko, 27 years)

Which of the following statements is closer to your opinion ?



We are much better than the most recent EU Member-States, with the exception of Croatia. Maybe due to the poor economy, the EU is toying with us. When a country is a poor player and heavily dependent, it can be easily conditioned. In my opinion, even if we solve the name dispute, the EU will find another problem to condition us.

(Gordana, 37 years)

In my opinion, the name dispute is not a problem for Macedonia's accession in the EU. We have other problems, such as violation of constitutionally guaranteed human rights and freedoms, corrupted judiciary, imprisoned journalists, lack of independent media, and poor education system. These are much greater problems than the name dispute. If we solve these problems, the name will not be a problem for accession in the EU.

(Kiril, 34 years)

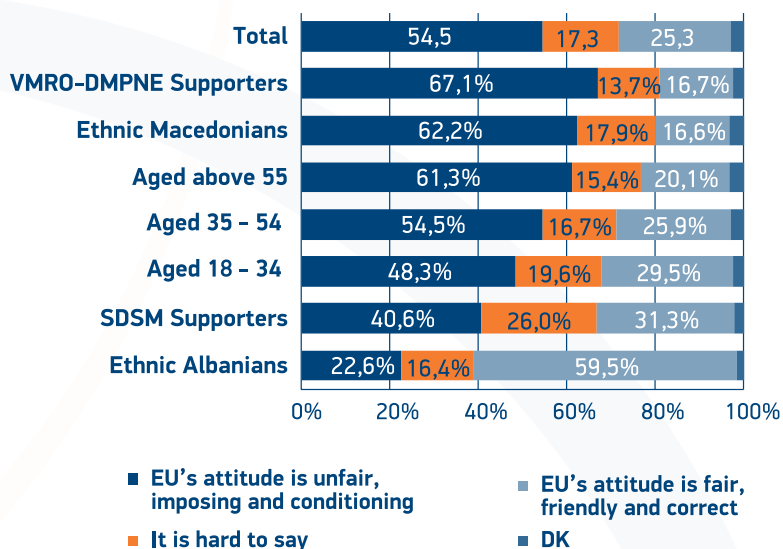
I believe that the EU has no problem in accepting Macedonia into membership, but the only problem is the name dispute with Greece which is EU Member-State for a long period now. If we take the examples of Romania and Bulgaria, obvious is that we were always better than these two countries in all aspects, even nowadays when they are EU Member-States. Clear is that the name dispute is the only problem preventing us to become EU Member-State.

(Milco, 54 years)

As already established, despite the trend on declining support for the EU membership, citizens in the Republic of Macedonia are comparatively higher Euroenthusiasts than citizens from other candidate-countries. Moreover, according to their expectations, Macedonian citizens are more positive in terms of the benefits from becoming an EU Member-State. Nevertheless, as shown in the two charts below, majority of citizens believed that Macedonia should look for a development model beyond the EU, in particular because they perceive the name dispute as a major barrier on the country's path to Brussels. Obvious is that these opinions do not originate from the perception that Macedonia would not benefit from the EU or that EU membership is not so good, but from the emotionally charged stance about the identity dispute and their disappointment with the attitude demonstrated by the EU, which is unable to discipline one Member-State. This perception has been additionally fuelled by negative media reports and articles. Therefore, asked to assess EU's attitude towards Macedonia on the scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means "EU's attitude is unfair, imposing and conditioning" and 5 means "EU's attitude is fair, friendly and correct", majority of citizens (54.5%) provided

low assessments.¹⁰ As regards the breakdown of assessments according to different categories of respondents, most critical stances against the EU were expressed by VMRO-DPMNE supporters, ethnic Macedonians and respondents above 55 years. Positive assessments were reported only by ethnic Albanians (59.5%).

Please assess EU's attitude towards Macedonia.



¹⁰ For the purpose of this analysis, assessments 1 and 2 were coded into "unfair, imposing and conditioning attitude", assessment 3 into "neutral" and assessments 4 and 5 were coded into "fair, friendly and correct attitude".

9. ROOTS OF DISAPPOINTMENT AND EUROSCEPTICISM: MONITORING MEDIA COVERAGE AND REPORTS ON MACEDONIA'S INTEGRATION IN THE EU IN 2011 AND 2012

More information on the context in which citizens' support for Macedonia's membership in the EU is declining can be found in the monitoring reports on media coverage of the EU integration process prepared by NGO Info-Centre, in cooperation with MCET, in the course of 2011 and 2012.

According to these reports, dramatic decrease of quality and quantity of media information about Macedonia's integration in the EU has been observed as early as 2011, when media outlets and journalists abandoned their pro-active role in setting EU issues high on the agenda. Other factors in society, such as the political opposition, did not remain immune to the declining interest for the EU integration process. In particular, during the 2011 election campaign, the opposition did not pay sufficient attention to these issues. On this account, the said monitoring reports anticipate that continued trend of low-quality media reporting will result in increased Euroscepticism and change of public opinion. In the autumn of 2011, following the publication of EC's Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia, the monitoring activities of this organization showed that all key remarks from the Progress Report, such as judiciary's independence, public administration reform, media freedoms and fight against corruption, have been in the shadow of the debate led around EC's failure to use the adjective "Macedonian" in the Progress Report. In the absence of rational debate about the key remarks put forward by the EC, the media shaped the debate in a manner in which the main topic discussed in the public was "Manifesto of the Makedonium", an initiative raised by group of intellectuals, associations and public figures to expressed their discontent with "the renaming of the Macedonian language" in the Progress Report. More specifically, once it was established that the EC used the adjective "Macedonia" only on several occasions in the Progress Report, this issue became the flavour of the month. Moreover, in that period, the media paid greater

attention to Prime Minister Gruevski's interview for the Macedonian Information Agency (MIA), where he made an attempt depict EC's attitude towards Macedonia as inconsistent, politicized and led by the interests of Greece. In addition, the media supported Prime Minister Gruevski's serious attacks whereby criticism expressed by Stefan File, EU Enlargement Commissioner, about Macedonia's shortcomings were interpreted as "*strategy to overstress the shortfalls*" in order to pressure the Macedonian Government into changing its position about the name dispute.

In 2012, Macedonia started the so-called High Level Accession Dialogue. Overall goal of this instrument was to inject new dynamism in implementation of reforms in key policy areas and overcome Macedonia's deadlock. 2012 media monitoring showed that the public debate around HLAD was led in a completely erroneous manner. Namely, many media outlets represented this instrument as **the start of EU accession negotiations**, i.e. reward for the Government's track record in reform implementation. By doing so, the media supported the agenda pursued by the governing authorities whereby HLAD is represented as Macedonia's greatest success in its EU integration process. **Not a single media outlet subject to monitoring has published articles or commentaries to expose this manipulation.** Paradoxically, the key difference compared to the period prior to the publication of EC's Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia in 2011, is the tune played by pro-governmental media, which no longer represented the EU in a negative perspective, but as a partner that positively assessed the governmental efforts. According to the monitoring findings, the media's uncritical and selective transposition of statements made by politicians resulted in further solidification of the impression created by the ruling authorities whereby HLAD will inevitably result in start of accession negotiations. Such reporting and coverage unjustifiably fuelled citizens' expectations. In 2012, EC's Progress Report for the Republic of Macedonia again occupied the media attention. What was specific for 2012 media reports on EC's Progress Report is the absence of any analyses of Macedonia's progress under different policy areas covered by the Progress Report. Most media outlets actively supported the government's agenda to represent EC's 2012 Progress Report as the most positive one, where media articles and stories were abounding in messages and statements made by politicians from the ruling parties. Media debate about EC's failure to use the adjective "Macedonian" was focused on praising the President Ivanov, who merited himself with "*reinstating this adjective in EC's Progress Reports*".

10. CONCLUSIONS

1. Political parties in the Republic of Macedonia have always carefully selected their EU integration messages, due to several reasons. First, these messages reflect citizens' great hopes for a better future and, on the other hand, they are also intended for foreign political actors. Second, there is normal and broad consensus in the society about Macedonia's membership in the EU, which most citizens (voters) associate with a promise for better life. Political parties cannot and should not undermine these aspects. Nevertheless, their respective communications are marked by a trend on "commercializing" the EU agenda. In other words, they emphasize specific short-term benefits from EU membership and the status of candidate-country for EU membership, and undermine the equally important value-oriented dimensions of Europeanization and the crucial changes brought by this process. In the course of time, accession in the EU is less represented in political parties' bids during the election campaigns, in an attempt to "avoid" this topic.
2. Combined discourse of values (primordial and/or construed), benefits and standards (reforms) dominates the communications of the two biggest political parties, demonstrating particular legalities in the use of such discourses. When a political party is in opposition, it tends to use discourse of construed values and standards to be achieved, indicating that EU accession should imply broader democratization in the state and change of political actors' behaviour. On the contrary, when a political party is in government, it focuses on discourse of benefits and discourse of standards, marked by formal approach to Europeanization and excessive use of bureaucratic vocabulary to demonstrate its achievements and success. Exemptions thereof were identified only under VMRO-DPMNE's programmes for 2011 and 2014 parliamentary elections where the dominant discourse is based on the primordial attitude towards the EU which is not depicted as source of values that the state aspires to adopt, but rather as a family where the state naturally belongs. Main reasons behind this interpretation of the accession process include the EU integration crisis, regress under key democratic parameters, and government's inability to demonstrate progress in this area, accompanied with justifications that the name dispute is the only source of injustice and the only obstacle on path towards the EU.
3. Networking of domestic political parties within party and think-tank umbrella organizations at EU level is far from satisfactory. Some political parties, perceived

as leaders of the EU integration, demonstrated surprisingly poor and campaign approach to networking with political parties at EU level and ideological confusion. This is indicative of their isolation from international trends and absence of strategic approach to partnership-building.

4. In Macedonia, the fact that 90% of citizens support the state's membership in the EU is replayed like a mantra. However, the longitudinal public opinion polls, such as Eurobarometer, indicate stable and continuous trend on EU's decreased attractiveness among Macedonian citizens. This trend raises additional concerns, having in mind the growing gap between Macedonians, who are increasing viewing the EU negatively, and Albanians, who demonstrate almost unanimous support for EU integration. This phenomenon is anything but naïve, especially due to the specific narrative of ethnic Albanians whereby the EU membership is equalized with their integration within the state.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Political parties in the Republic of Macedonia need political **education on what Macedonia's accession in the EU and Europeanization, as a process, actually mean**. Moreover, they need to be more engaged in ideology-based networking at EU level and at all party management levels. Socialization at EU level improves knowledge and contacts, and has positive effects in terms of Europeanization of political parties.
2. Different interpretation of the notions related to EU integration is common feature of political narratives throughout Europe. Therefore, a broader debate on all issues in the society should be encouraged and fostered; otherwise the narrow space for public and open debate would transform arguments into frustrations and brutal struggle for hegemonic position of particular party discourses, void of rational interpretations of the process, values, benefits and standards.
3. EU integration needs to be restored on political party agendas, accompanied with further politicization of this topic for the purpose of identifying differences in the standpoints of key political actors, according to their ideological (left-centre-right or liberal-conservative) and societal position (government-opposition-civil society-media-business).
4. Serious intellectual engagement is needed on the part of all socially-engaged factors (civil society organizations, universities, individuals) with a view to open the debate about the specifics of Macedonia's EU integration and the similarities with other enlargement waves and types of Europeanization that have occurred in different contexts. The media have an important role in this debate and, therefore, media workers need additional training on covering Europeanization-related topics.
5. Systemic dissemination of information for citizens is needed, together with their participation in political discussions about the acceptance of EU values, practices and standards as positive references for political activity.
6. Public and political debates need to balance the "great narrative" about EU (where is the state and society going) i.e. the discourse of values, with the discourse of benefits for the citizens, represented as specific gains, projects, budgets and

EU standards affecting particular categories of citizens. Such balance was often missing in the past, meaning that the great narrative overshadowed the specific benefits from EU membership. In other words, narratives about personal, both positive and negative, experiences prevent us to see the big picture about where the society should be in five, ten or fifteen years and how to get there.

7. Development of civil and ethnic identity of citizens in the Republic of Macedonia would, undoubtedly, be influenced by the course of the state's integration in the EU. For too long, Macedonia has promoted the narrative about being different from the Balkans and has emphasized its belonging to Europe. Bringing Macedonia's EU integration under question will affect this self-perception and will inevitably lead to its redefinition in unknown direction and with unknown, but serious consequences. This must be taken into consideration by the political factors influencing the political processes in the state.

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- » Respondent No. 2 SDSM - 12.12.2013
- » Respondent No. 3 SDSM - 28.11.2013
- » Respondent No. 1 VMRO DPMNE - 25.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 2 VMRO DPMNE - 25.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 1 DUI - 13.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 2 DUI - 23.10.2014
- » Respondent No. 3 DUI - 16.01.2014
- » Respondent No. 1 DOM - 12.11.2013
- » Respondent No. 2 DOM - 07.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 1 LDP - 12.11.2013
- » Respondent No. 2 LDP - 18.12.2013
- » Respondent No. 3 LDP - 10.12.2013
- » Respondent No. 1 (opinion makers) - 28.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 2 (opinion makers) - 19.02.2014
- » Respondent No. 3 (opinion makers) - 18.09.2013
- » Respondent No. 4 (opinion makers) - 12.03.2014

Focus groups:

- » Focus group held on 17.12.2013
- » Focus group held on 18.12.2013
- » Focus group held on 07.05.2014
- » Expert focus group held on 17.12.2013

Election programs:

- » 1990 – SKM – PDP Izborna programa “So nas idhinata zapocnuva denes”
- » 1990 – VMRO DPMNE - Statut
- » 1994 - SDSM - Izborna programa
- » 1998 - VMRO DPMNE – Izborna programa “Promeni”
- » 2002 – SDSM - Izborna programa “Ima nadez za Makedonija”
- » 2006 – SDSM - Izborna programa “Makedonija napred, ne nazad: Ekonomija, Edukacija, Evropa”
- » 2006 – VMRO DPMNE – Izborna programa “Prerodba vo 100 cekori”
- » 2006 – DOM – Izborna programa “Obnova – sostojbi, prioriteti I merki”
- » 2008 – VMRO DPMNE - Izborna programa “Prerodba vo 100 cekori: Nadgradena I prosirena”
- » 2010 – DOM - Izborna programa “Zelenoto e zrelo – zelena programa”
- » 2011 – LDP - Izborna programa “Ima izlez”
- » 2011 – SDSM Izborna programa “Za tvojata idnina”
- » 2011 – VMRO DPMNE - Izborna programa “Manifest za reformi I razvoj”

- » 2011 – DUI - Izborna programa “Platforma za edinstvo, razvoj i integracija”
- » 2014 – SDSM - Izborna programa – “Promeni za nov pocetok”
- » 2014 – VMRO DPMNE - Izborna programa “Provereno: Proekti koi sto dokazano se ostvaruvaat”

Secondary literature:

- » Balalovska, Kristina. 2004. Between `the Balkans` and `Europe`: A Study of the Contemporary Transformation of Macedonian Identity. *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 12(2), 193-214.
- » Graziano, P. and Maartenn P. Vink (eds.), 2007. *Europeanization: New Research Agendas*. Hampshire, and New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- » Howarth, D. and Jacob Torfing, 2005 (eds.). *Discourse Theory in European Politics: Identity, Policy and Governance*. Hampshire and New York: Pagrave Macmillan.
- » Neofotistos, Vasiliki P. 2008. “The Balkans’ Other within”: Imaginings of the West in the Republic of Macedonia. *History and Anthropology* 19(1): 17–36.
- » Schimmelfennig, F. and Ulrich Sedelmeier (eds.) 2005. *The Europeanization of Central and Eastern Europe*. Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press.

Datasets:

- » Standard Eurobarometer, 2007 – 2013, http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm / gesis.org
- » Survey “Evrometar” conducted by the Macedonian Center for European Training in March 2014, database available at the request of mcet@mcet.org.mk

