



# Transparency of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia during the COVID- 19 pandemic

## ANALYSIS



### THE PANDEMIC REINFORCED THE DISTANCE BETWEEN THE PARLIAMENT AND THE PUBLIC

September 2021

Funded  
by the European Union  
and the Council of Europe



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented  
by the Council of Europe



Association of Journalists of Macedonia

**Authors:**

Aleksandra Micoska Mitevaska

Mefail Ismaili

**Editor:**

Dragan Sekulovski

**Translation:**

Kristina Naceva

**Cover design and Outline:**

AJM

**Picture:**

[www.sobranie.mk](http://www.sobranie.mk)

**Publisher:**

Association of Journalists of Macedonia

This publication was produced in the framework of the European Union and Council of Europe joint programme "Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Turkey 2019–2022" and its action "HF 37 - Freedom of Expression and Freedom of the Media in North Macedonia (JUFREX)".

The reproduction of extracts (up to 500 words) is authorised, except for commercial purposes as long as the integrity of the text is preserved, the excerpt is not used out of context, does not provide incomplete information or does not otherwise mislead the reader as to the nature, scope or content of the text. The source text must always be acknowledged as follows "© Council of Europe, year of the publication".

All other requests concerning the reproduction/ translation of all or part of the document, should be addressed to the Directorate of Communications, Council of Europe (-67075 Strasbourg Cedex or [publishing@coe.int](mailto:publishing@coe.int)).

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. The views expressed herein not necessarily reflect the official opinion of either party.

# CONTENT

Introduction	3
1. Constituting the Parliament without the presence of media in the hall	5
2. Committee sessions completely closed to the public	6
3. The term "attend" prevents online inclusion of MPs in sessions	8
4. The pandemic endangered the public work of the Assembly	9
5. The unavailability of some of the MPs	11
6. The briefings of the President of the Parliament	12
7. Other provisions of the Rules of Procedure that refer to the public in the operation of the legislature (from Article 228 to Article 234)	13
8. Conversations with journalists and MPs for exchange of experiences / The public through a journalistic prism / MPs' thoughts	14
9. Conversation with the President of RNM Talat Xhaferi. Announces several new projects for greater transparency	30
Conclusions	32
Recommendations	33
Used sources	34

---

# INTRODUCTION

---

The analysis of the transparency of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia during the COVID-19 pandemic was made based on a survey of journalists on various national televisions and online media, who followed the work of the Assembly for many years or decades and continue to be active. A survey was conducted with the coordinators of all parliamentary groups and with MPs who are not part of a parliamentary group, as well as with the President of the Assembly Talat Xhaferi. The Constitution of the RNM, the Rules of Procedure of the Assembly and the Code of Ethics of the Assembly of the RNM were also reviewed.

The transparency of the Assembly of North Macedonia continues to be partial, even within the 10th parliamentary composition. MPs' communication with journalists and the media became even more difficult at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Commission on Infectious Diseases Protocols for a period of more than a year, almost completely excluded journalists from the work of the legislature and they could not physically attend the sessions of the committees and the plenary sessions. Due to this, the journalists had more difficulties to be in contact with the MPs and the representatives of the parliamentary groups.

The journalists had big problems to provide the necessary information from the sessions of the committees, because only the plenary session and the session of the Committee on Finance and Budget go live, and only when there is a debate on the budget. In addition, none of the committees' sessions was broadcasted live on the parliamentary channel, nor was it streamed on social media. Thus, the journalists had almost no idea what was happening in the committees.

They could be informed only through direct contacts with the MPs, members of those committees, but the briefing with them is not complete information, because the MPs also briefed them according to own political convictions and interests. And the MPs and the coordinators of the parliamentary groups often did not answer the journalists calls. Especially when the topic does not suit them, they try to avoid the media by pointing out distinct reasons.

There were several requests from journalists to stream the committees' sessions on YouTube, Facebook, or other social networks, but this was not implemented, with explanations

that there is no budget to invest in necessary equipment and that this is not allowed by the Assembly's Rules of Procedure.

Apart from the fact that the journalists were not able to follow the committees' sessions, the citizens even less had the opportunity to be informed about what their elected representatives in the Parliament are doing. The circumstances created by the pandemic brought to the surface even more the problems of the Parliament with the transparency and accountability. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake activities as soon as possible to detect specific problems, but also to find the right way for the Assembly to be fully open to the public.

On the other hand, the public does not seem to feel the constraints imposed by the pandemic. Field survey conducted by the Program for Parliamentary Support for Citizens' Perceptions of the Work of the Assembly from February 17 to March 10 this year, showed that citizens are divided in terms of their insight into the work / performed work of Parliament in the period from August 2020 to January 2021.

A total of 51 percent of respondents said they were partially or fully aware of the activities of the legislature in this period, while 48 percent said they were little or not at all familiar with the performance of MPs. Also, 73% of the respondents believe that the Parliament plays a significant role in the political life in the country, which is six percentage points more than last year, which is understandable given that the previous parliament, due to the dissolution before the pandemic has not been in operation for more than five months.

# 1 CONSTITUTING THE PARLIAMENT WITHOUT THE PRESENCE OF MEDIA IN THE HALL

On August 3, 2020, the constitutive session of the 10th parliamentary composition began, which was elected on July 15, i.e., in the fourth month since the declaration of the global pandemic. The earlier parliament was dissolved on February 26, 2020, but the pandemic thwarted plans to hold early parliamentary elections on April 12.

After a break of more than five months, from February 26 to August 3, the 10th parliamentary composition held its first session outside the plenary hall, i.e., outside the hall in which the Macedonian Parliament has been sitting continuously during these three decades of independence. Instead, the MPs moved to the new “dome hall”, where the plenary sessions were held until July 8 this year or almost a year.

The speaker of the previous and current parliament, Talat Xhaferi, and representatives of the Commission on Infectious Diseases concluded that it is safer, from a health point of view, if the parliament sits in the “dome hall”, because of its spaciousness and the possibility to maintain distance more easily. But it also meant excluding the public from plenary sessions, so that journalists were prevented from following the discussions directly from the plenary hall.

In this case, the management of the Assembly and the representatives of the parliamentary groups, but also the Commission on Infectious Diseases did not consider the role of journalists in the Assembly, but only the safety of MPs and employees in the legislature. This restriction on the presence of journalists, but also the lack of will to find a way for journalists to have greater access to parliamentary and committee sessions, created a striking gap in communication between journalists and MPs, minimal opportunities to inform citizens about what is happening in Assembly, as well as the minimum transparency of the Assembly.



According to Article 70 of the Constitution of the RNM, the sessions of the Assembly are public. The Assembly may decide to work without the presence of the public by a two-thirds majority of the total number of Members of Parliament.

However, under pressure from health conditions, these provisions were, in a way, suspended, as the “dome hall” has no conditions for media coverage of the sessions, unlike the old plenary hall, where the gallery is “reserved” for journalists.

On this occasion the journalists were forced to follow the parliamentary sessions live on the parliamentary channel of MRT, which in many aspects, is not the most proper replacement for following the event on the spot. Thus, for example, the first voting in a special booth for a member of parliament suspected of COVID-19, which took place during the election of the Government on August 30, 2020, could have gone unnoticed in the media, if the Speaker of Parliament had not informed MPs about it.

The changed principle of voting in the new hall, with cards in three colours, was imposed as a barrier in relation to the openness of the legislature, while the electronic voting system remained in the old hall. Thus, the journalists were prevented from gaining insight into the outcome of the voting and the decision-making of each MP individually.

## 2 COMMISSION SESSIONS ARE COMPLETELY CLOSED TO THE PUBLIC

However, a special problem proved to be the impossibility of media coverage of the committee sessions, where, in fact, the main debates on the laws are conducted. The commission sessions, as a rule, do not go live, and are broadcasted on the Parliamentary channel a few hours after the end of the session, without informing in advance exactly and what time the broadcast will be. The broadcasts are often broadcasted in the afternoon, when most of the televisions have already finished the central news, and the newspapers are in print, so that the events of the commission sessions, at the height of the pandemic, remained largely uncovered in the media.

As there were no technical conditions to provide live broadcasts of the sessions, apart from the only spacious hall “Boris Trajkovski”, journalists were forced to be informed by MPs about developments in the working bodies of parliament.

Given the subjectivity of MPs, i.e., their party affiliation, as well as the limited scope of communication, given that not all MPs, members of a particular committee are willing to

contact the media, journalists were often forced to cope with it i.e., to provide as objective information as possible.

Due to the closure of the committee sessions for example, almost went unnoticed the adoption of the law on illegally constructed buildings, which the public found out about after it was voted on at the plenary session and which as it turned out later, was preceded by a "smooth" debate on the proposal (proposed by the Government and prepared by the Ministry of Transport and Communications) in the Commission for Transport and Communications, whose chairman is Vlado Misajlovski from the opposition VMRO-DPMNE. It was later understood that the reason for the "quiet" adoption of the law, in a situation where the parliamentary majority was constantly "bubbling" with a quorum, among other things due to opposition blocs, was a political agreement between SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI on a law that allows legalization of illegal constructions, who, after the media found out about him, was withdrawn from the procedure, under public pressure and with a "veto" from the President of the country.

There was also a lack of information on the debates on the citizenship law, proposed by the opposition in the Albanian political bloc, which was opposed by the Left, for which there was much criticism by VMRO-DPMNE.

There were several committee debates on this law, uninitiated committee sessions, submission of a thousand amendments to block the law, but journalists did not have access to the parent committee sessions and did not have the opportunity to convey the true picture of debates and disagreements among MPs. The situation was similar for the ID card law, submitted by Besa, which provides for the "ethnic column in personal documents", as well as for other laws, for which there was great public interest.

In a way, it created a space for MPs to feel free and have the opportunity to express themselves more freely with vocabulary and criticism of their political opponents at committee meetings, as if they were in a "closed private space", because there are no journalists and television cameras present in the hall.

Since the journalists did not have access to the committee sessions, it can be said that the reporting on the committees work especially when laws of great interest to the public were on the agenda, was with many shortcomings and incomplete. Journalists could be informed about the debates in these committees and convey information only when the

MPs who are members of the committee, agreed to give statements. But even in such cases, journalists often did not have the opportunity to be completely objective. If there was a debate on a law, and if opposition lawmakers appeared for a statement, it often happened that government lawmakers either were not available, refused to express their views, or answered the phone briefly that they were busy at that moment. And vice versa.

Such circumstances, as well as this attitude, prevented the journalists from being completely objective and being able to do their job in the most professional way.

A group of journalists, on several occasions, asked the Assembly leadership to allow the committee sessions to be broadcast live on the official Assembly social networks, for example on YouTube, Facebook ..., but the response from the Assembly was always the same - that they currently do not have technical abilities, that they do not have a budget, but also that they are in contact with foreign foundations and organizations to help with this request of the journalists.

# 3

## THE TERM “ATTEND” PREVENTED THE MPs FROM THEIR ONLINE PARTICIPATION

While the journalists were prevented from online monitoring of the events in the parliament with the explanation that there are no technical conditions for streaming, the parliamentary majority was ready to envisage the possibility for online participation in the sessions of MPs in isolation and to overcome the problems with quorum, which were an integral part of the pandemic, when many lawmakers were forced to quarantine.

According to the results of the field survey on the citizens' perceptions for the work of the Assembly, within the Parliamentary Support Program, two thirds of the citizens support the online work of the Parliament, while opinion of a small part of the respondents is that the Parliament does not need this type of work.





However, the Macedonian Parliament remained one of the few in Europe where an alternative to taking part in the sessions was not provided due to the opposition's dissent, which invoked to the Article 69 of the Constitution, according to which the Assembly can decide if a majority of MPs is present.

Specifically, the opposition interpreted term "attend" as an imperative for the physical presence of an MP in the plenary hall, so that, in the end, Speaker Talat Xhaferi withdrew from the procedure the proposed amendments to the Rules of Procedure that he proposed. The absence of alternatives for holding parliamentary sessions in conditions of COVID-19, further diminished the events in the legislature, which contributed to further reducing the direct contacts between MPs and the media.

# 4

## THE PANDEMIC ENDANGERED THE PUBLIC IN THE ASSEMBLY WORK

Although, in addition to the Constitution, the Assembly Rules of Procedure provide publicity in the work of the Assembly, this Rules of Procedure, by force of circumstances, was threatened in the wake of the pandemic, by preventing journalists from following events directly in parliament. In addition, the attitude of most of the MPs or the heads of the parliamentary groups, who, on several occasions, did not show willingness publicly to express their views in time, endangered the objective information, and reflected on the professionalism of the parliamentary journalists, who always tried to have the views of all parties in their articles / texts.



According to the Rules of Procedure, the Assembly provides information to the public on the Assembly work and the working bodies, as well as the permanent delegations in international organizations. Article 226 stipulates that the citizens can follow the Assembly sessions and the working bodies from the galleries, in accordance with the regulations for the internal order. The representatives of the mass media, in accordance with the regulations for the Assembly internal order, as provided, can attend the Assembly sessions and the sessions of the working bodies in order to inform the public about their work...

None of this was possible at the height of the pandemic, when there were no activities in the Assembly as usual, i.e., Assembly sessions and the working bodies were often postponed, in most cases due to the inability to provide quorum when the majority MPs were in isolation. In addition to the provisions of the Rules of Procedure, the Code of Parliament also provides for the public to operate as one of the basic ethical principles, in addition to objectivity, responsibility and mutual respect and respect for the integrity of others.



According to the Code of Ethics, Article 5, the Member of Parliament performs his / her function conscientiously and responsibly and during the performance of his / her function is open to the media for all issues, unless the issues of interest to the Assembly are confidential or if it is information related to his or her private life or with the private life of others.



Even this parliamentary composition did not remain immune to the unavailability of some of the MPs. In particular, this composition which started work under special protocols and it was especially evident, because the parliamentary rapporteurs, practically did not have the opportunity to get acquainted with all MPs. Especially with those for whom this is their first term, and there are more of them - in the opposition camp due to the change of the VMRO-DPMNE helm, which happened in the period between two election cycles, and in SDSM and DUI due to the withdrawal of part of MPs and departure to the executive.



The members of parliament for whom this is their first term do not have much experience in contacts with the media, nor does every MP have the “authority” of his party to make statements, although, according to Article 62 of the Constitution, the MP represents the citizens in Parliament and decides on its own conviction.

Thus, in conditions of forcibly limited communication between the Parliament and the public, the contacts between the MPs and the journalists were largely reduced to press conferences of the representatives of the parliamentary parties on topics that favour the party headquarters, which often limited the opportunity for media representatives to ask questions of their interest, i.e., on other topics.

Also, no initiatives were taken by the coordinators of the parliamentary groups, to have a briefing or meeting with the journalists, to inform about the views of the parliamentary group on certain critical laws, but also for the journalists to get acquainted with the MPs with whom they had no opportunity at all to meet, regardless of whether the reason for that is the lack of interest of certain MPs to be more present in public or due to the limited mobility within the Assembly.

Despite the drastically changed working conditions of the parliament, the President of the Assembly Talat Xhaferi, all this time, did not give up on the "tradition" he set up in the previous term i.e., the regular briefings with journalists once a month. The only difference in this term is that for the most part, the briefings were held in another (wider) assembly hall, in accordance with the health protocols that provide keeping distance, wearing protective masks and disinfection.







With rare exceptions, Xhaferi's briefings are held on the last Thursday of the month, before the parliamentary questions session, and provide opportunity for journalists to ensure more information on the parliament's activities in the past month and plans for the following month.

However, it should be taken into account that the Speaker of Parliament is "first among equals" and that, in any case, he is a representative of one of the ruling parties, so that only his regular communication with the media is not enough to secure the positions of all parliamentary groups and parties represented in the Assembly.

Although Xhaferi's briefings were aimed at keeping journalists up to date with the work of the Assembly and the parliamentary speaker's plans for the work of the legislature in the next month, it often happened that these plans were not implemented or were partially realized due to disagreement by parliamentary group coordinators on specific issues.

However, the journalists were not fully and objectively informed about these disagreements as the heads of the parliamentary groups, especially in the last few sessions of the parliament, did not set up a practice for at least periodic, if not regular briefings with journalists once a week or at least once a month. Therefore, most often the journalists will receive information about the disagreements between the government and the opposition or the disagreements between the President of the Assembly or a certain parliamentary group, only on the day when the MPs decide that the "quarrel" should get public attention and when they decide to hold press conferences.

# OTHER PROVISIONS OF THE RULES OF PROCEDURE RELATING TO THE PUBLIC IN THE LEGISLATURE WORK

-  **Article 228:** The acts reviewed and adopted by the Assembly, the information and documentation materials on the issues reviewed in the Assembly and in the working bodies, the reports on the working bodies work and the minutes from the sessions are made available to the representatives of the mass media, unless the Assembly, i.e., the working body has decided to review a specific issue without the presence of the representatives of the mass media.
-  **Article 229:** The manner of exercising the rights, duties, and responsibilities of the representatives of the mass media in the Assembly are regulated by act adopted by the President of the Assembly.
-  **Article 230:** The Assembly and the competent working bodies may decide that the draft law or other general act that is being discussed in the Assembly, and which is of special interest to the public, to be published through the press or in a special publication.
-  **Article 231:** The Assembly and the working bodies may decide, in order to inform the public about the Assembly work to issue a statement for the media after the Assembly session or the working body held without the presence of the public, i.e., without the presence of representatives to the media, as well as in other cases when decided by the Assembly or the working body.
-  **Article 232:** The President of the Assembly, parliamentary group, working body or the head of the delegation that has stayed abroad, who also appoint a representative who will hold the press conference, brings the decision for press conference related to the work of the Assembly.
-  **Article 233:** The Assembly has a website on which general data on the Assembly, working bodies, the President of the Assembly, MPs, parliamentary groups, delegations of

the Assembly, adopted laws, sessions, and other activities of the Assembly, on the Service of the Assembly and other related data are published as well as for organization and work of the Assembly.



**Article 234:** (1) For the purpose of reporting on its work, the Assembly shall issue a bulletin and other publications. (2) The bulletin shall be submitted to all Members of the Assembly and shall be posted on the website of the Assembly.

## 8 CONVERSATIONS WITH JOURNALISTS AND MPs TO EXCHANGE EXPERIENCES

As the transparency of the Assembly was partial and the need for action in improving the conditions for the media is clear so that they have more opportunities to report transparently and objectively, we talked with the President of the Assembly, Talat Xhaferi, with the coordinators of all parliamentary groups, with MPs from smaller parties that do not have a parliamentary group, but also with journalists from different media, who report from the Assembly and have many years of experience.

### JOURNALISTS, THEIR PROBLEMS, AND CHALLENGES FOR PROFESSIONAL PUBLIC INFORMATION

In conversations with journalists, some of whom have been reporting on the Assembly work for decades, they talk about their daily problems that they face in order to reach information and to be able to inform objectively and professionally. We discussed six specific issues:

1. How do you assess the functioning of the parliament in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, in terms of transparency and openness to the public and the media?

2. In general, how much are you satisfied with the transparency and accountability of this composition of the parliament, compared to the earlier ones?
3. Do you have a problem with communicating and providing views and information from the MPs, especially with the President and Vice-Presidents of the Parliament, the Secretary General, and the coordinators of the parliamentary groups and the chairpersons of the committees?
4. In the last four years, have you faced pressure due to a published article / text regarding the work of the Assembly or the members of the Parliament?
5. Does the Assembly have sufficient technical conditions to enable journalists more easily to access information, to cover plenary sessions, committee sessions and other events? In addition, how do you assess the attempt by the Assembly to improve the technical guidelines and harmonize them with the working measures adopted due to the COVID19 pandemic?
6. In your opinion, what can be done to enable greater transparency of the legislature and easier communication between members of parliament, the parliamentary administration, and journalists?



The journalist **Julijana Lefkovska Peshevska**, who works for **Telma** Television, in response to the first question, says, *“The Assembly was partially transparent and objective during the pandemic. The media did not have the opportunity to follow the work of the committees.”* Regarding the comparison of this parliamentary composition with the previous ones, her opinion is that *“This parliamentary composition has greater accountability and transparency.”* Regarding the communication opportunities, Lefkovska answers: *“I have no problem with communication of the mentioned persons, they are open and available for cooperation, and I personally get the necessary infor-*

mation,” as well as that there was no pressure due to a published text. Regarding the technical conditions for free and professional information of journalists during the pandemic, she said, *“There are not enough technical services, we need to work on this plan to ensure online monitoring of all committees.”* On the last question, she recommended to the leadership of the Assembly *“to enable better technical conditions.”*



The journalist **Fatlume Dervishi** from **Alsat** Television, about the functioning of the parliament and the transparency during the pandemic, says, *“The Parliament, which in recent years has grown into the most open institution for journalists, spoiled this impression during the pandemic. Perhaps because the situation was unpredictable, lawmakers failed fully to adapt to the new working conditions and the level of transparency fell. For the most part, the journalists, but also the public, did not have access to the content of the debate that took place at the sessions of the working bodies or the committees, where there were discussions on important decisions. It was exceeding-*

*ly difficult for the journalists to set up verbal contacts with the MPs with whom they could no longer meet physically. Just as we as journalists lacked information, the citizens did not get enough information. When other institutions took other big steps towards changing access to the public, the Assembly was satisfied with small and probably insufficient steps.”*

To the question how satisfied she is with the transparency and accountability of this composition of the parliament, compared to the previous ones, she answers *“The difference, I would say, is technical, but essential. The lack of direct contact and the inability to meet with members of parliament while they were doing their day-to-day work has reduced transparency regarding the media and the public.”*

Regarding the problems with communication and providing views and information, she explains, *“The informal meeting of the President of the Assembly with the journalists each month is extremely valuable experience, which was not a practice before. Of course, the information from the informal meetings could be misinterpreted, misunderstood; it could*



*also be incomplete information. However, the policy of television, radio, and digital media is such that it requires as many voices (sources, people who speak) as possible, in order to make reporting as professional as possible, both in substance and in visual terms. What I want to say is that sometimes these meetings are a 'waste of time' if we do not bring a piece of sound with us in the newsroom on that working day."*

The journalist Fatlume Dervishi answers that in the last four years she has not faced pressure due to a published article / text related to the work of the Assembly or the members of the Parliament. As for the technical conditions with which the journalists were able to work, she says that *"The explanation for why the Parliament does not broadcast most of the work of the Committees, which were not available for journalists to produce news in real time, was that the Parliament does not have the necessary technical equipment for that and that there are no possibilities for inserting such an item in the public procurement plan. At least they told us this publicly. Moreover, whether this is true, no one is investigating. Several attempts were made, and technical conditions were provided for journalists to participate in press conferences, respecting the rules introduced due to the situation with COVID-19, but this is where it all ended."*

Dervishi proposes, *"The Assembly should provide all the conditions and the necessary equipment for online broadcasting of all the work in the plenary sessions and the sessions of the committees. With or without COVID 19, we are in a time when technology is perfect and the explanation that opening a YouTube channel requires a complicated public procurement procedure is ridiculous and illogical for the new generations of journalism. At a time when the information is news only in the first 30-60 minutes from the moment of the event occurs, to wait for a replay on the event a few hours after it actually happened, even without having a schedule when it will be broadcast on the Parliamentary channel, the replay of that event is absurd. Believe it or not, after many years we needed to reinstall Internet Explorer because it is the only application that can open live broadcasts of parliamentary sessions. Journalists should have access to the e-MP platform, same as the MPs, or at least access to all draft laws as soon as they enter the parliamentary archives. Parliamentary groups need to engage more of their people for establishing contact with journalists."*

---



Journalist **Mariela Trajkovska**, who writes for the online media **Plusinfo**, estimates that *“The coronavirus pandemic in any case made the transparency of the Parliament towards the media more difficult. This means that it was more difficult schedule statements from MPs, especially on camera. Journalists who worked from home provided statements over the phone, which is certainly easier, but this, in turn, is an obstacle for them, because they were not on the spot and did not always have insight into what exactly is happening in Parliament.”*

Regarding the difference between the current and the earlier composition of the Assembly, she replied, *“I do not see any significant difference in terms of the transparency of the current composition of the Assembly compared to the previous ones. It functions according to the already established practice and does not stand out in a positive or negative sense.”*

Regarding the problems with setting up communication and securing views from the stakeholders in the Parliament, Trajkovska answers that in this aspect she does not see a difference compared to the earlier views. *“Usually, the coordinators of the parliamentary groups answer the questions, whether it is a statement about a daily event or a certain topic. The president sometimes probably based on own assessment, and personally gives an opinion on questions or topics, but that does not mean that he is always available. If he decides to be silent about certain situation, then there no transparency. Communication with both the Vice Presidents and the Secretary General is similar. The President has kept the practice of holding a briefing with the media once a month, but I do not see any attempt on his part for greater transparency. He gives statement when he assessed that the public should hear the position of the Assembly.”*

She also replies that in the last four years, she has not personally faced any pressure from the Assembly for a published text. However, regarding the technical issues, she strongly believes that *“There is still work to be done for journalists to get information more easily. During the pandemic, the Parliament enabled online monitoring of the plenary sessions, but the committee debate, where the real picture is obtained whether a law will be passed and what the remarks are, remained closed online to the media, i.e., to the public.”*

In addition, she recommends, *“the Assembly should enable online broadcasting of com-*

mittee hearings. To broadcast the MPs statements online. For important topics, it is necessary to have greater transparency of the President of the Assembly, i.e., the team of the President to make an assessment that if an issue is of great interest to the public to schedule a press conference on a daily basis.”



**TV 21** journalist **Besir Arifi** on the functioning of parliament and transparency to the public and the media during the COVID 19 crisis thinks, *“The Public Relations Office was opened to provide information. MPs were also accessible for statements. The fact that we were not able to be present at the committee sessions with cameras and that the committee sessions were not broadcast live and online was a big drawback.”*

He answers that he is *“Partially satisfied”* with this composition of the Assembly. Regarding the problem with communication and the provision of views and information, Arifi adds, *“Generally, it did not happen to me to have problems. They were open to communication, except in situations where there was a ‘hot’ topic and there were major disagreements and perhaps even within the coalition itself. In such cases, party representatives avoid speaking in public.”*

He explains that in the last four years he has not faced any pressure due to a published article / text regarding the work of the Assembly or the members of the Parliament. Regarding the sufficient technical conditions and the attempt of the Assembly to improve these working conditions for the journalists, Arifi says, *“No, the lack of live broadcast of each committee in real time is a big mistake. I have not noticed any attempts to sort out or correct the situation in this direction.”*

Regarding the measures to be taken, he proposes, *“Faster updating of the website with information and documents, draft laws that are being discussed in the Assembly. Creating live channels for the committees and the plenary session, which will provide opportunity for replay while they go live to watch again those moments from the session that were missed, as well as the material of the sessions to be downloaded through internet.”*



**Katerina Neshkova**, a journalist at **Sitel** Television, when asked how she assesses the functioning of the parliament during the period of COVID-19, answered, *“if you need a grade from 1 to 5, then 2. Completely closed parliament ... infrequently scheduling of sessions, information on Agenda and current work we received 5 minutes in advance. Many of the Assembly regular activities i.e., most of the parliamentary committees, cannot be monitored either live or online.”*

Regarding the transparency and accountability of this composition of the Assembly, compared to the previous compositions, she says that she is *“less satisfied.*

*The president’s office is reduced to one person providing technical information, without the opportunity to comment and answer questions. Parliamentary groups are reduced to coordinators who are not always available to journalists.”*

Regarding the communication with the MPs and other officials in the Parliament, Neshkova says that there should be a problem and that *“Their official mobile phones are still not public, and the e-mail addresses, if any, are not working.”* Moreover, on the possible pressures for published article, she responds *“Yes, but only initial pressure, after which they withdrew.”*

Regarding the current technical conditions and attempts to improve them, journalist Katerina Neshkova says, *“There was a modest attempt by the services in the first months of the pandemic, then it all came down to adapting a crystal hall as a press room as it is larger. But this hall is without windows and without ventilation. So, instead of protection, there is only a higher risk of spreading the infection. At beginning there were disinfectants and later there were no. No attempt was made for the technical conditions and on-line monitoring, and it remained unanswered why there could not be a separate YouTube channel for live monitoring of each assembly hall (each hall is equipped with cameras and producer, so only internet connection is needed), which is free.”*

The journalist Neshkova estimates that in the future the Parliament should hire *“public relations persons and not to save on transparency costs. The pandemic should not be used as an excuse to schedule sessions in halls where there is no access for live monitoring and to exclude the public.”*



**Sonja Delevska**, a journalist in the online media **SDK.mk**, about the functioning of the parliament and transparency during the pandemic estimates that there was *“Poor organization and reluctance to facilitate the work of journalists, especially when it comes to quick information on materials, laws, draft laws, amendments to laws, number of amendments, content of amendments, submitters. Excessive and intrusive harassment of journalists with events and protocol meetings of the President of the Assembly, vice-presidents, and parliamentary groups for which journalists are not interested in, the press conferences not on topics asked by journalists and not by MPs they insist on appearing but about topics or party squabbles that they consider important to the public.”*

*“Poor organization and reluctance to facilitate the work of journalists, especially when it comes to quick information on materials, laws, draft laws, amendments to laws, number of amendments, content of amendments, submitters. Excessive and intrusive harassment of journalists with events and protocol meetings of the President of the Assembly, vice-presidents, and parliamentary groups for which journalists are not interested in, the press conferences not on topics asked by journalists and not by MPs they insist on appearing but about topics or party squabbles that they consider important to the public.”*

On the issue of transparency and accountability, journalist Deleska said, *“The transparency and accountability of this parliamentary composition is at the lowest possible level so far. The period under the dome of the Parliament will be especially negatively remembered, when the public did not actually have points of contact with the MPs, to the extent that we are not sure if there is a parliamentary session that day and if the MPs are really at work or have previously made a feature film and broadcasted on the Parliamentary Channel. There was no way to research and write on a topic from the legislature, communications were on Viber through personal acquaintances with MPs, often without success to get the other party of the story.”*

Regarding the problems for contact with the MPs but also the transparency, she estimates that *“communication is the biggest problem and at the same time it is the most dangerous. If you manage to talk to them, I emphasize, on Viber or WhatsApp, not on a regular line, and you write a text, then they will call you and tell you: ‘I did not say that, you should change it.’ I did not have physical contact with any MP.”*

When asked if she faced pressure for a written text, journalist Sonja Delevska answered, *“apart from a request for correction of their statements given to me by MPs, depending on how much they scolded them in the party, I had no other demands. Nor denials.”*

As for the technical conditions and the attempts to improve them, she estimates that *“Parliament not only does not have technical conditions for normal monitoring of work, but also has a slow obsolete site, outdated and outdated browser (Internet Explorer) to monitor the sessions, which on the new computers cannot be even installed. If it is considered the unsuccessful request of the Speaker Talat Xhaferi to change the Rules of Procedure and to introduce an online work of the Assembly that will be accessible and visible to the whole public, there was no other attempt. The only bright spot is the chief of staff of President Talat Xhaferi, who is regularly available to journalists when she is not on vacation, but she is only responsible for the information about her superior and cannot push MPs to provide us with information and answer our questions and dilemmas.”*

For the future, the journalist Sonja Delevska recommends and proposes, *“The public relations service in cooperation with all professional parliamentary services and the MPs and the President, must be in constant contact for the needs of the public (journalists). In the 21st century, it is inadmissible to wait for days and weeks for information from the Assembly and in the end not to receive it in 90% of the cases. The Assembly is currently the most lazy and non-transparent institution in the Republic of North Macedonia. MPs must not ignore the parliamentary services and spokespersons when a journalist requests information, footage, TV report. In the name of transparency, the highest office in the country, the MP position should set an example for availability to journalists and the public. At least during working hours, and to set up a system for fast and transparent information on every issue. The gallery in Plenary Hall 1 is small, the promised additional balconies have not been built. One of the basic omissions, of course, is that there is no microphone to hear the questions asked by journalists, so the citizens, the audience listen to the press in the press room only the answers of MPs, who knowingly often manipulate and talk about a third issue, instead of directly answering the question.”*

---

## THE ATTITUDE AND OPINIONS OF THE MPs

---

The representatives of the Assembly answered specific questions, as follows:

1. How would you assess the functioning of the parliament in terms of COVID-19, in terms of transparency and accountability, as opposed to the need to respect health protocols?
2. How often do you communicate with the journalists who follow the work of the Assembly, do you regularly answer journalists' calls and questions?
3. Do you prefer certain journalists or media when sharing information and presenting posts of your parliamentary group?
4. Have you had a conflict with a journalist in the past year and have you faced a situation where you felt that your statement or information concerning you or your parliamentary group was inappropriately conveyed??
5. What do you think can be done to enable greater transparency of the legislature and easier communication between members of parliament, the parliamentary administration, and journalists?



**Vice President of the Assembly, Goran Misovski** believes that *“even during COVID-19, the Assembly was maximally transparent in its work. All health protocols were respected and made every effort to make the work of MPs accessible to the media, media workers and citizens.”*

On the question about the contacts with the journalists, Misovski explains *“because I am a Member of Parliament for several terms, one of my priorities was and remains the availability to the media and constant communication with the media representatives. Communication is almost always on a daily basis, in*



order to be better informed about the work of MPs.” He says, “I have always been equally accessible to all media and all media representatives” and for possible conflicts with journalists he adds, “I have never had a conflict with any media or media representative, and I think that so far everyone conveys my views correctly.”

Regarding the necessary needs for greater transparency in the future, the Vice President of the Assembly, Goran Misovski thinks, “communication with the media is at a professional level. The transparency of the institution, however, is a perception and can be interpreted differently by the citizens, the media, and their representatives. In addition, there is the latest public opinion poll, according to which 51 percent of respondents say they are partially or fully familiar with the activities of the legislature in the past, while 48 percent said they are little or not at all familiar with the performance of MPs.”



**The coordinator of the parliamentary group of SDSM, Jovan Mitrevski**, when asked about the evaluation of the functioning of the parliament in terms of COVID-19, in terms of transparency and accountability replied, “COVID-19 in terms of prescribed health protocols, as everywhere caused certain obstacles in the functioning of the Assembly. However, thanks to the parliamentary services and the parliamentary management, I believe that adequate way of functioning has been provided, so that the public was prompt informed through the media about everything that was happening in the Parliament and what is the work and obligation of the MPs. I think that even in such condi-

tions of functioning, transparency and accountability were preserved. Parliamentary reporters, journalists, who helped the information to reach the citizens in time, also have a significant role in that.”

Asked how often he communicates with journalists, he said, “Communication with journalists is on a daily basis, often on an hourly basis, on days when there is more dynamics and when various topics of interest to citizens are opened. In a large parliamentary group like ours, there is always an MP who communicates with journalists on a topic that is of interest to the journalist. There is no question that was asked to our parliamentary group or a certain MP, and it was not answered. I am confident that this will continue in the future.”



As for whether he prefers certain journalists with whom he will share the views of the parliamentary group he leads, Mitrevski says *“No. The sharing of information is usually through scheduled press conferences for which we send an invitation through the parliamentary services to all media. Additionally, outside the scheduled press conferences, when there is a question asked by a journalist, we answer as we receive it without any preferences.”*

Asked if he had a conflict with journalists, Mitrevski replied *“There were insignificant situations when some information was inaccurately conveyed, which provided different understanding of the position of the parliamentary group. We have resolved such situations with additional explanations, which have clarified the information. There was never a conflict between an MP from our parliamentary group and a journalist. Our only request to all journalists has been and will be that the information, statements, speeches of the working bodies and the plenary hall be transmitted in a balanced way by all parliamentary groups, so that the citizens could clearly see the views on certain issues and thus judge for the work of a certain parliamentary group or MP.”*

Regarding what should be done by the Assembly to enable greater transparency of the legislature, the coordinator of the parliamentary group of SDSM says, *“The reform of the parliamentary channel that is happening will lead to easier communication, but we can always do more and better to facilitate communication following the development of information technology and technology. This is something that I expect to happen in the next period because the parliamentary management is strongly focused on this issue working on many projects with organizations that provide both expert and financial support for their implementation.”*

---



**The coordinator of the VMRO-DPMNE parliamentary group, Nikola Micevski,** on the transparency and accountability of the Assembly during the pandemic with COVID-19 thinks, *“Transparency could have been at a slightly higher level, especially in the part of physical monitoring of sessions and committees by journalists and that journalist were hindered at a certain stage.”*

Regarding how often he communicates with journalists, Micevski adds, *“I have regular and correct communication with journalists in the Parliament and very often, I almost always answer phone calls.”* He adds that he does not make a difference and does not

divide journalists, but *“everyone is treated equally.”*

For a possible experience with a conflict with journalists or inappropriately conveyed information, the coordinator of the parliamentary group of VMRO-DPMNE says, yes, there was such an experience *“on two or three occasions there was an incorrect / incorrect transmission of position, after my reaction, the title was corrected but I’m not sure if the news was accidentally conveyed incorrectly.”*

Asked what should be done by the Parliament for greater transparency, Micevski said, *“Change of the website with live broadcast of more committees, greater coverage of the sessions by journalists, permission for journalists to attend the committee sessions. Completion of the reconstruction and modernization of the new assembly studio. In addition, specialized journalists with more knowledge should follow the work of the Parliament on the work of the Assembly and of the procedures in the functioning of the Assembly. Entering into the Parliament and reporting without journalists knowing the procedures does not give the desired effect.”*

---



**Arbr Ademi, Coordinator of the DUI parliamentary group**, said, *"Despite the restrictions imposed on us by the COVID-19 pandemic and the obligations to protect personal and collective health, my personal assessment is that the Assembly remained transparent in its work and accordingly, accountably. Namely, the competent services of the Assembly in cooperation with the competent institutions for protection of public health prepared protocols that enable the MPs to inform the public about their activities, a press conference room is equipped, respecting all necessary protocols for protection from COVID-19 to both MPs and officials and journalists. As the public was in-*

*formed, the Assembly sat in the 'dome hall', again for the observance of all protocols for health protection, and after the successfully completed immunization process, first the service and then the MPs, the Assembly was allowed to continue with work in the plenary hall. We must not forget that as MPs, we have a duty and obligation to be in constant communication with the citizens, and that process is especially facilitated by the active use of social media that allows prompt transmission of the message and accurate news to citizens and the public."*

When asked about the communication with the journalists, he answered, *"The communication with the journalists is on a daily basis. Personally, I always respond to calls and emails from every journalist who has contacted me."* Asked whether he prefers a journalist or a media outlet to share information or views of the parliamentary group, Ademi replied, *"In my career I have always been guided by the principles of professionalism, impartiality, transparency and responsibility - both to the shared news and statement and to the transmission of the same. Hence, I am not inclined towards a certain media or journalist in my daily work, but on the contrary, I especially respect all media representatives, be they journalists, cameramen or photographers."*

Regarding possible conflicts and misunderstandings with the journalists, the head of the DUI parliamentary group said, *"I do not remember such a situation. I believe that any information received directly is appropriately and accurately conveyed. Accredited journalists in the Parliament are present at the press conferences of my parliamentary group and from there they convey the information directly."*

Regarding what can be done to enable greater transparency of the legislature, Ademi says, *"I personally believe that the communication between the Parliament and the media representatives is at high and transparent level. Many of the journalists who work in the Assembly on a daily basis know the MPs and officials personally and very often address them personally outside the established official protocols for convening press conferences. It may be proper to make additions to the website of the Assembly and for each MP to have his / her own link on the website where he / she will present his / her work and two activities in detail and on his / her own initiative. Of course, I would appeal to colleagues to use social media more, especially at this time, when the main sources of news, especially for young people, come from social media."*

---



**Skender Rexhepi, Coordinator of the parliamentary group, Alliance for Albanians and Alternative**, on the transparency and functioning of the Parliament in conditions of COVID-19, estimates, *"In general, the Parliament took care to respect the preventive measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic. These measures have often been abused for political purposes in the interest of the parliamentary majority, especially to the detriment of transparent information and political decisions, and this fact will remain a black spot on the work of the Assembly."*

Regarding the communication with the journalists who follow the work of the Assembly, Rexhepi says, *"The communication with the accredited journalists in the Assembly is at the necessary professional and democratic level. As for me, there were no calls or questions that I did not answer."*

When sharing information and presenting the views of the parliamentary group, the AAA coordinator said, *"There is no difference between journalists, with the exception of those journalists who spread misinformation, intentionally or unintentionally."* Regarding whether there was a conflict with a journalist in the past year and whether he faced a situation when he considered that his statement or information was inappropriately conveyed, he said no. However, he added, *"There have been cases of misinformation."* Regarding what the Assembly can do in the future for greater transparency, Rexhepi suggests,

*“To provide greater professional conditions for equal participation of all media within the Assembly, so that any omissions in the field of transparency will be reduced to a minimum.”*

---



**MP Kastriot Rexhepi from the BESA Movement for the transparency of the Parliament thinks,** *“Even in terms of COVID-19 protocols, the parliament is transparent by broadcasting the sessions on a parliamentary channel and has easy access to the media to download materials from them. Also, the planned activities and decisions made are published on the website.”*

*Regarding how often they had communication with the journalists, the MP Kastriot Rexhepi, informs, “As far as communication with the media is concerned, we are always ready to answer their requests or questions. Unfortunately, requests from the media are not frequent because they are focused on representatives of parties or coalitions such as SDSM, VMRO DPMNE, DUI, Alliance and Left. Even though we give our opinion or have an address, it is not conveyed, so social networks remain the main tool for conveying opinions.”*

*As response to the question whether they have preferred journalists or media to share information, the BESA MP said, “We do not have media preferences, because we still do not have much room for choice. Also, at the request of the opposition from the Albanian parties, we have no invitations for debate shows, because otherwise they will not attend them. With that, we are deprived without space to express our views and debate. This violates the fair representation in the media space of MPs from the Besa movement.”*

*On the question whether there were conflicts or misunderstandings with journalists, MP Kastriot Rexhepi says, “Guided by the rule that one should not enter into a conflict with a journalist, and we do not engage in conflicts, although there has been a tendentious conveyance of our views, by distorting or placing a headline that does not correspond to the text of the introduction. Given that most people only read the headlines, it hurts us. For one case, we reacted, and it was corrected, but it was already taken over by several media. There was a case when on the national media my statement was presented on the*

main news with the name and surname of another MP and another party, for which I contacted the editor-in-chief.”

As for what should be done to improve the transparency of the Assembly, MP Rexhepi thinks, “It is a two-way street. The Assembly enables presence through accreditations, but the journalists should also have contact and give an opportunity to all MPs from the parliamentary groups, but also to those who are not organized in parliamentary groups, because they also have a mandate and are MPs. The views and speeches should be conveyed, albeit in a time percentage. Otherwise, they will be silenced and discouraged to be even more active.”

# 9

## CONVERSATION WITH THE PRESIDENT OF THE ASSEMBLY OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA, TALAT XHAFERI



In a conversation with the President of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, Talat Xhaferi, on the topic “*Transparency of the Assembly in the period of the COVID-19 pandemic*”, he explained, “*As everywhere, the pandemic affected the functioning of the Macedonian Parliament, especially the physical presence of MPs and the media.*” However, he added, “*efforts are now being made to overcome the weaknesses we have noticed, so that several public procurements are under way.*”

He says that public procurements are underway in order to provide technical preconditions for greater transparency of the Assembly, so that several halls should be equipped with the necessary equipment to provide an opportunity for journalists and citizens to follow the committee sessions livestream.

*"As it was announced in many earlier briefings, a public procurement was announced for additional equipment for the completion of the website and the E-parliament, that procedure has been completed, and now the editing of the halls, i.e., the committees, is in progress. Additional equipment will be needed for the halls, it is another special procurement so that the work can be technically monitored, and in final phase, before signing an agreement we are to equip the plenary hall with a new electronic system of work, so that not only journalists teams that are present in the Parliament and beyond, so that the citizens can get involved and follow the work of the Parliament online" Xhaferi said.*

The President of the Assembly explains, *"The upgrade of the website and the E-Parliament will enable the journalists and the citizens to find all the sessions and all the speeches of the MPs in the plenary sessions but also in the committee sessions, in real time."* Xhaferi thinks that the transparency of the Assembly has improved a lot compared to the previous compositions, but adds that we should always work on improving the transparency. Therefore, he informed that additional funds would be added to the budget of the Assembly. In the light of greater transparency, he informed that the Assembly plans to establish a TV studio in the Parliament, where debates between MPs could take place, which would function through the Parliamentary channel of MTV.

Xhaferi says he is generally satisfied with the transparency and accountability of the Assembly over the past four years, since he has been heading the legislature.

*"There is no question that something has not been answered promptly, and which has been submitted in accordance with the Law on Access to Information of Public Interest and during my term a practice of regular monthly briefings with media representatives was established, which should be a motive for all parliamentary groups for regular communication with journalists. Also, information boards are placed in front of the Assembly, on which information about the work of the Assembly is published so that the citizens can be informed at any time about the events of the Assembly, and what is currently being discussed in the Assembly," Xhaferi said.*



He emphasizes that he generally did not have major problems in communicating with the media. *"There were inaccurate or not precise news and where necessary, we have denied it. But I do not advocate for favouring or ignoring certain media. I have not avoided any media. But also, the media should not have favoured and unflavoured politicians," Xhaferi said.*

# CONCLUSIONS

- ◆ The COVID-19 crisis further highlighted the weaknesses in the functioning of the legislature in the area of transparency, accountability and communication with the media, which was previously hidden behind the constitutional and rules of procedure for openness and publicity in the work of parliament.
- ◆ The tenth parliamentary composition began its mandate in restrictive conditions, which proved to be a limiting factor for communication with the media, especially for MPs who have their first term.
- ◆ The restrictions in the parliament, imposed by the COVID-19 protocols, were a limiting factor for the journalists, who in many cases found it more difficult than usual to reach comprehensive information and positions of all relevant factors on a certain topic, thus denying the audience the opportunity to see, hear or read all aspects of a particular issue of public interest.
- ◆ One of the weakest links was the functioning of the committees, whose openness was reduced to a minimum, given that, unlike the plenary sessions, no technical conditions were provided for live broadcasts of the committee hearings.
- ◆ Regular monthly briefings of the President of the Parliament are mitigating circumstance for parliamentary rapporteurs, and especially helped in the wake of the pandemic, but cannot compensate for the limited communication with representatives of all parliamentary groups, whose positions often clash over issues of high public interest and often differ from the positions of the political option represented by the first Member of Parliament.
- ◆ The Website of the Assembly does not provide in real time and in the fastest possible time the videos from the Assembly Sessions and the Committee Sessions. Does not allow video material to be downloaded in real time. Not all draft laws and other public materials that are important to journalists are posted quickly.
- ◆ The Assembly does not have its own channels on social networks where all committee sessions can be broadcast live. Old applications, which are almost obsolete, are still used to follow the live sessions of the Assembly.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

-  It is necessary to analyse all possibilities for opening the committees to the public, primarily with the physical presence of journalists, for which the option of establishing a precise schedule for the committee sessions can be considered, so that each commission can be provided with a session in a hall where distance between attendees can be maintained. When this is not possible, a manner should be found to provide the necessary technical conditions for live broadcast of parliamentary debates through the Parliamentary channel or for streaming.
-  To consider proper trainings for parliamentarians for public relations, for which internal debates can be organized between MPs and journalists, especially at the beginning of the mandate of a new parliamentary composition and for MPs for whom this is their first term.
-  To consider the possibility of setting up a practice for periodic / regular briefings of the coordinators of the parliamentary groups with the journalists and each parliamentary group to appoint a person for contact with the journalists.
-  It would be desirable within the process "Jean Monnet", which is ongoing and whose main topic is the amendments to the Rules of Procedure, to open a debate on possible changes that would contribute to greater accountability and openness of the Assembly, so that in this aspect of the dialogue would include journalists covering the work of parliament.
-  An Assembly website with better quality is needed, on which it will be easier and faster to get videos from the plenary session of the Assembly and from the committee sessions. After efficient website and as soon as possible to upload all the new draft laws and other public documents necessary for the journalists to be able to report more accurately and in detail.
-  The Assembly to open new channels on social networks, such as "YouTube", where all committee sessions will be streamed. Either the sessions are streamed via streaming to Facebook or a similar application. In these applications, the option should be available for the video materials from the sessions and press conferences to be downloaded and used in the media.

# USED SOURCES

- ◆ Interviews with the coordinators of the parliamentary groups in the Assembly and with MPs on pre-asked questions.
- ◆ Interview with the President of the Parliament Talat Xhaferi.
- ◆ Interviews with journalists on pre-asked questions.
- ◆ Constitution of RN Macedonia.
- ◆ Rules of Procedure of the Assembly of RNM.
- ◆ Code of Ethics of the Assembly of RNM.
- ◆ Survey on the perceptions for the functioning of the Assembly of RNM.

This publication was produced with the financial support of the European Union and the Council of Europe. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of either party.

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Member states of the European Union have decided to link together their know-how, resources and destinies. Together, they have built a zone of stability, democracy and sustainable development whilst maintaining cultural diversity, tolerance and individual freedoms. The European Union is committed to sharing its achievements and its values with countries and peoples beyond its borders.

[www.europa.eu](http://www.europa.eu)

Funded  
by the European Union  
and the Council of Europe



EUROPEAN UNION

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Implemented  
by the Council of Europe



Association of Journalists of Macedonia