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Education for Europe consortium research (ES-BAL MAE supported project) on education for decision makers in Western Balkans

DRAFT REPORT ON NORTH MACEDONIA

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CONTENT

Short history of the education system of North Macedonia

06

Mapping curricula for the decision makers in N. Macedonia

10

Conclusion and recommendations

26

SHORT HISTORY OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The tradition of the education system in North Macedonia is a continuation of the model and traditions established in the former socialist federation of Yugoslavia and, before that, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. The system in Yugoslavia was essentially emulating the continental model, the German and French with its “lycées” or “gymnasiums” of 4 years finishing with baccalaureates or Abitur (called “Matura” in all of the languages of the former Federation) and then, on the level of tertiary education, a minimum of 8 semester BA level studies [REF]. It is important to note here, that in spite of the country being a member of the Bologna process (European Higher Education Area, abbreviated EHEA) for 19 years now, and having adopted the 3+2 model, it still maintains the old tradition and the variant of 4+1 is still existing and highly popular, in particular at the public universities and their humanities departments. The oldest higher education institution is the University of Skopje “St Cyril and Methodius” (abbreviated as UKIM), established a bit over a hundred years ago with the establishment of the Faculty of philosophy and the departments of Classics and Philosophy at its inception. Sadly, a mass “exodus” of students, studying primarily in the former Yugoslav republics, now EU member states, Slovenia and Croatia more specifically, has resulted in a dramatically decreased number of enrolled students both at Skopje University, which has affected its international rank, as well as at the other universities.

The available statistics concerning number of students in the country are for the academic year 2021/2022 and the total of enrollments is 51.582.¹ In spite of the fact that this number is higher by 1.4% compared to the previous years, the drop of students is constant. For the sake of comparison, which is by 12.000 less compared to 10 years ago. North Macedonia has been a full member of the Bologna process since 2003 (or the European Higher Education Area), has reformed its system accordingly, employs the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) and is a full program member of the Erasmus+ Program. It is one of the 6 full members of the Erasmus program that are not EU member states, next to Serbia, Norway, Lichtenstein, Iceland, Turkey.² It

¹ Source, State Bureau of Statistics “Enrolled Students in the Higher Education Institutions in Republic of North Macedonia in the academic year of 2021/2022 (first study cycle) [“Запишани студенти на високите стручни школи и факултетите во Република Северна Македонија во академската 2021/2022 година (прв циклус на студии)”], available at <https://www.stat.gov.mk/PrikaziSooopstzenie.aspx?rbtxt=29>, accessed 23 October 2022.

² Source: Erasmus+ EU programme for education, training, youth and sport: Eligible Coun-

is integrated fully in the ENIC/NARIC system which allows an overview of all accredited institutions and performs recognition and equivalence of ECTS, diplomas and diploma supplements.³

Many of the private universities offer programs in English, and international collaborative programs or joint degrees, such as University American College Skopje which holds both national (EHEA) accreditation as well as American accreditation. Consider Euro-College which offers studies jointly with Metropolitan University from London UK, in addition to other examples which are, however, in decreased compared to 15 years ago when branches of NYC Educational Group, Sheffield and other international universities were active in the country. In spite of the pronounced international component, public universities are still more popular in N. Macedonia, and the vast majority of those enrolled in 2021-2022 are students at the public universities, namely 82.6 % of them.

tries, available at <https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/programme-guide/part-a/eligible-countries>, accessed on 23 October 2022.

³ ENIC-NARIC: North Macedonia: National Information Centres, Informativen Centar - Ministerstvo za Obrazovanie i Nauka Informative Center - Ministry of Education and Science, <https://www.enic-naric.net/page-North-Macedonia>, accessed on 23 October 2022.

MAPPING CURRICULA FOR THE DECISION MAKERS IN N. MACEDONIA

We have collected the curricula of all higher education institutions (abbreviated HEI) in N. Macedonia, offering education in Macedonian, Albanian and English, dedicated to the study of public administration, public policy or public affairs and good governance. We have been assembling literature and comparatively analyzing the curricula against the background of curricula of the same kind we gathered from universities in UK, Germany, France and the US. In parallel we have been conducting a survey with targeted informed respondents (professors, former politicians and decision makers, policy makers, think-tankers, experts, and graduate students), which helped us establish which curricula and HEI should be analyzed more closely. The most relevant were those offered by the Faculty of Law at the University St. Cyril and Methodius – Skopje (the biggest and most reputable institution in the country) abbreviated as UKIM, Bitola University “Kliment Ohridski”, University of Štip “Goce Delchev,” Tetovo State University (offering education primarily in Albanian but also in Macedonian), University of Southeast Europe in Tetovo, International Balkan University (studies offered primarily in English and Macedonian), University American College-Skopje (studies in Macedonian and in English), ISSHS (the institute producing this study) which is a graduate school next to being a scientific institution, and the only one in the country offering interdisciplinary policy studies instead of law with elements of administration studies courses. This is only to name a few, or the most relevant, whereas we have gone through practically all the HEI’s and the relevant courses and curricula. The list of the most relevant or those given a closer analysis can be found in the document “Mapping curricula” produced for the first seminar of EFe project, held in Belgrade in February 2022. Our analysis was placed in a separate 4 pages word document (instead of the excel produced for the meeting, even though we offered analytical comments in the excel too, except not in the separate column), which was not presented as such, as a delivery at the seminar, but shared with the consortium and whose findings we have transposed in this report. (It’s major analytical findings were presented in the PPR and the oral presentation for the Seminar in Dijon, in September 2022.) The central finding of the mapping of curricula, established through desk analysis and the survey feedback, is that the vast majority, and in particular the most respected HEI’s, teach public administration, affairs or public policy as essentially – if not exclusively – studies of law, under the heading of administrative

law. In spite of the program's heading being "administrative law", most of the subjects are quite simply courses of law studies one can find in any general program of studies of law with a minor adjustment to the theme of "administration." The most reputable institution in the country and its administrative law program, St. Cyril and Methodius-Skopje and its Faculty of Law "Iustinianus Primus" (holding the name of Iustinianus I the founding figure of Roman Law believed to have been born in the vicinity of Skopje, now village Taor),⁴ offers a course in "Comparative administration" which offers the following content: "the legal framework of administrative systems in Europe, administrative-juridical control and the clerkship system." The only exceptions that offer a more multi-layered, interdisciplinary approach, are the program offered by University of Mother Theresa which is presently available only in Albanian and the MA policy studies of ISSHS (in Macedonian and English): courses in law are in right balance with studies of public management, introduction in policy studies and theory of policy vs political studies, critical studies of globalism, political science, social theories, gender equity, inter-cultural relations studies, and cultural policy, studies of economics and finances, among other subject areas. These two programs are sadly exception, rather than the rule in North Macedonia. With this in mind, we have approached the qualitative part of our research intended to tell us what is behind the surface of the desk and quantitative approach.

Case study: UKIM, Faculty of Law, specific focus on the Program "Administrative Law" (Part 1 of the case study presentation)

Based on the Survey feedback and the interviews, as well as on the feedback receive through mapping, the case study we are presenting is that of the Faculty of Law "Iustinianus Primus," the Program of the Administrative Law more specifically, at the oldest, most reputable and public University "St Cyril and Methodius" (or simply: University of Skopje) abbreviated as UKIM. The reasons for the choice lies in the following: even though most reputable, even though most often recommended by the respondents in the Survey, it is also the most criticized for the lack of quality of the program, the teaching staff, and the reading materials. Our interpretation of this paradox consists in the

⁴ Consider the pages https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Justinian_I and <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tauresium>.

following realization: its reputation is too big to be sidelined in the recommendations, the bias toward private universities is too big still (even for the non-profit private, however far though less so)⁵ and it is still the greatest “incubator” of decision makers in the country (again data received through the survey).

Majority of the interviewed students have completed their BA level studies at UKIM out of which two at the Faculty of Law. Two of them have also defended MA theses in policy studies and gender studies (with focus on policy) at ISSHS, and that may introduce some “bias” in term of taking the side of interdisciplinarity, mostly western literature in English and insistence on standards of academic writing making of the “habitus”⁶ of their more recent cycle of study the “golden standard.” Virtually all of the interviewed teachers have studied at some point in their formation at UKIM – they all have both the critical glance as well as the positive attachment toward their *alma mater*, which may explain some of the – *only seemingly* – contradictory or incoherent responses (both praise, and criticism, serving as model but also subject to criticism). Out of all of the interviewed teachers only 2 remained professors at UKIM, 1 was at a point and then moved to other institutions, and the rest have move on to other institutions. All of the interviewed teachers have either degree at European and US universities or a certain level of education (part of their PhD studies) or a post-doc. All of the interviews have been conducted between May 2022 and July 2022, and outstanding two more student interviews were carried out in September 2022. The interviewers have degrees at UKIM, Bristol University, and Sci Po, EHESS-Paris and UC-Berkeley (combined). However, all of them except 1 have at least one completed cycle at UKIM. Thus, we believe we were well balanced to counter any risk of bias. We used 5 interviewers.

In the interviews of the students, the faculty (and the program, more specifically) is criticized for being outdated in topics that it covers, and one of the interviewees (student nr. 1) states that most of the topic simply do not belong in the 21st century, or to quote her: “We studied a lot of old materials and some of them are absolutely irrelevant nowadays. Some things that are literally a

⁵ ISSHS or University of Southeast Europe in Tetovo are not even perceived as private because of their non-profit status, and possibly because study fees are lower than those of the state universities, such as University of Skopje.

⁶ As in Pierre Bourdieu’s sense of the term

shame to learn in the 21st century. You do not get any knowledge about the modern development of law sciences in the world. And this opinion of mine is definitely shared by many of my other colleagues and that is why many of them have been diverted and do not work with the law at all.” Quoted student defended her MA in Gender Studies at ISSHS, so let us consider if she is biased due to being interviewed by one of her former professor: all of the other students corroborate or offer similar criticisms of this institution, department and the program directly or indirectly (public administration is studied as administrative law, and the same professors and the same approach to curricula creation is present throughout the programs offered by the institution, and its targeted Faculty/program. Another student (interviewee nr. 2) states, quoting her directly: “The University’s curriculum is a bit outdated, and does not explain a lot about what we need today. For example, there was no particular focus on the European Union’s role. EU studies would be helpful definitely. Professors have to be flexible and creative in the ways they provide feedback to students, which was not a case at the University of Law. Students lack the pragmatic awareness and the ability to apply the knowledge in the current context. Even at a basic level, many students have trouble with basic skills, for example writing with clarity.” On the other hand, interviewed teacher (3) coming from the same institution demonstrates no criticism toward either the program or the approach – she speaks of the richness of the program, resource faculty, mentions being active in the Erasmus mobility scheme, while stating that most of the students are from North Macedonia, and mostly Macedonian, hardly any international student. Compared with the information received from another UKIM department’s teacher, from an Institute offering only graduate level studies, we learn that in spite of the Erasmus agreements with advanced academic institutions in Europe and other agreements with US reputable HEI, most of the “international students” come from Kosovo, Serbia and other areas of former Yugoslavia. Neither of the professors mention the fact that students complain that they study from reading materials from the Yugoslav era – so even if there is a subject called “EU law” or “European studies” they seem to be “hanging” as incoherent appendages to what is considered the basics of law and administrative law, dating from a completely different system. The notion of governance that is the cornerstone of all the textbooks and studied content at that Faculty is authoritarian

and at odds with the European concept of good governance which is centered on the interests of the citizens (as per the European Charter of Fundamental Rights: The Preamble and right 41). Here is a quote from the textbook used at the faculty of administrative law: "Good governance is defined as "Executing governing. Thus, police are an unambiguous example of executing power with the purpose of ensuring public order. Power is practiced to ensure citizens' safety, peace and calm, and so on. Therefore, administrative [function] is to execute governing power in order to preserve the public interest. For this purpose, the administration concerns itself with aligning private interests with those of the common, public interest, allowing the citizens (and legal entities) to realize their rights and legal interests without undermining the public interest, the nodal point of any social group [community]."⁷ The authors are also professors of comparative administration at the program and faculty that is subject to this case study. The quote itself suffices to illustrate the source of authoritarian penchant in our governance and whence the persistent failure of N. Macedonia to step out of the ranking of a "partly free" (hybrid regime) country for decades, mas per the rankings of Freedom House.

Analytical Overview of the Context of the Case Study, Combining All Stages of the Research (part 2)

The interviews, as all qualitative research, were intended to uncover the meaning behind the prima facie responses which can sometimes be simply scant in information or create seeming contradictions (but not in substance or in fact, once approached through means of qualitative research). We are discussing here a short overview of all of the 12 interviews as juxtaposed to the information received through the Survey and the mapping process, but also through our consultation of relevant academic literature on the topic of educational policies and curricula approach in public affairs, administration, public policy studies, and similar areas. Due to reasons already elaborated, we had to explore the presence of law in curricula in OECD countries: in spite of law being present, and quite understandably so, the predominance of interdisciplinary policy studies, administration understood as governance and service as well as management and not [state] "power", as used in the quote

⁷ Borce Davidkovski and Ana Pavlovska Daneva, Administrative Law (Skopje: UKIM, 2018)

[Борче Давидковски и Ана Павловска-Данева, Административно право (Скопје: Универзитет „Свети Кирил и Методиј“, 2018] (a revised 3d edition), p. 1

above.⁸ The latter definition is best translatable through the Latin *dominium* or German *die Gewalt*, whereas English or French seem to fail to fully convey the meaning unless we resort to the French *autorité* keeping in mind this is the definition of good administration from the Macedonian textbook cited above, and nothing else, except the “functionality” or the administrative apparatus in the name of said *autorité*.

Going back to our initial question: Did the interviews shed light on the quantitatively received data, and what did they reveal to us?

Departing from the premise that most of the respondents in the survey carried out in N. Macedonia form a sample of informed opinion (think tankers, professors, decision and policy makers but also MA level students of policy studies or higher), one would expect more specific responses targeting the subject matter at hand. Conversely, we received responses that were too general and vague in other words, applicable to any other discipline and our tertiary educational system at large. Certainly, some pointed out to the absence of practical work or up-to-date literature, the dimension of interdisciplinarity, applicable to the subject matter of this study. However, the responses were framed in a general sense, to refer to the overall system in the country while targeting UKIM more specifically. The interviews revealed what is needed at the faculty of law in order to render it more competitive and up to the OECD and European standards of both education and decision making, with specific focus on administrative law (but not exclusive, considering most of our decision makers come from the faculty of law and do not have the specialization in administrative law).

For example, the survey revealed that the average grade of our higher education for the decision makers ranges between 4 and 5 on a scale from 0 to 8. The narrative responses, however, could be applied on any field in the country’s tertiary education system: improvement in Erasmus mobility, modular programs that would allow transfer or combination with another discipline (thus greater interdisciplinarity); only a small portion of the respondents pointed that the absence of policy studies, skills of stakeholder analysis, and similar. Let us see if the interviews gave us greater insight.

⁸ D.C. Dragos and P.M., *Law and Public Administration: A Love-Hate Relationship?*. In: Ongaro, E., Van Thiel, S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018) https://doi.org/10.1057/978-1-137-55269-3_54, pp.

The key conceptual problem, however, remains the following: reduction of studies of administration or policy (management) to law (administrative but not only), both according to our own analytical observation as well as that of some of the interviewees, both students and teachers (with the exception of 3 and 4).

The interviews point to the conflation of (administrative or otherwise) law and “studies of administration” whatever the discipline may be called (studies of public affairs, policy studies, administration and policy management) or studies intended for the decision makers.

Furthermore, most of them confirm that this conflation is flawed and unproductive as there is lack of interdisciplinarity and differentiation between politics and policy reality (summing up teacher 1, 2, 5, whereas 3 points to more variety but it seems it refers to the Faculty of Law and Political sciences as a whole, not the curriculum intended for policy makers – administrative law, which we could study in our preliminary desk research stage.)

It is important to note that teacher interviewee 1, who is both alumnus of UKIM and Sci Po-Paris, and teaches at a private university with focus on international recruitment (FON, but is also ISSHS visiting faculty) notes that not only interdisciplinarity in the technical sense (law and administration related skills and knowledge) but also in a more general sense is required for the decision makers, and it is missing from the studies of law at UKIM, insisting that humanities is key for vision and understanding of values. Teacher 1 and teacher 3 note of them note “general education” and knowledge of philosophy and humanities, teacher 3 adds theory and critical theory more specifically, are necessary for decision makers who should be able to see “the bigger picture” and grasp the complex socio-political and economic realities of their countries and their international contexts. Teachers 1 and 2 say the latter is a grave deficiency, whereas teachers 3 and 4 seem to imply that their programs do contain this dimension and that it is a positive thing, even though improvements are welcome; we would add that the Mapping of the curricula does not display the richness they describe so our conjecture here is there are referring to their institutions as a whole, and not the programs under scrutiny.

A key prejudice that was perhaps perpetuated explicitly or implicitly in the survey and some of the desk research and can also be detected in the gener-

al public discourse when it comes to the public/private education, has been unraveled and also unpacked thanks to the interviews.⁹ It is a widespread prejudice in the country [references will be provided in the final report] that public universities offer better education whereas the private universities are basically mills selling diplomas (as if education for a tuition is automatically corrupt). The latter is contradicted by both the interviews and the surveys that indicate corruption at the level of public universities (which are never in reality for free, and on graduate level are as expensive as the private universities). It appears that quality assurance is better maintained at some of the private universities (teachers 1, 2, 5 and 6) than at private universities. Students' feedback concerning the conceptual core of the program at UKIM but also two other HEI's allowing for comparative glance. Looking at the interviewed students' comments about the program/s 4 students seem to indicate that law is predominant at the program, and what is required for policy makers, decision makers is interdisciplinarity and the ability to grasp the bigger picture. Most of them indicate the advantages of curricula containing other disciplines (and not merely – administrative or other type of – law) like political science, philosophy, etc. The other two students that come from the faculty of computer sciences at UKIM, point out to the fact that their faculty of choice is at European level unlike the rest of UKIM (social sciences more specifically).

Regarding fees and the private/public prejudice concerning quality: Some private universities do charge far more than the public institutions on BA level (student 3), whereas some charge less than the public institutions (student 4) while the quality at both is assumed to be among the best in the country according to the interviews. Thus there is no uniform rule in spite of the uniform prejudice. We would like to cite a study here, done by three Macedonian scholars that debunks the prejudice about the private universities in N. Macedonia, a study pointing both to the financial struggles and precarity private institutions undergo, both faculty's precarious conditions as well as the owners struggling to maintain institutions that favor the public sector, but also to the higher quality and internationality that some of them bring into the academic scene.¹⁰

⁹ Daniel Evrosimoski, "What's Macedonian Diploma Worth?," [Koliko vrijedi makedonska diploma?] Al Jazeera Balkans (30 Jan 2016), available at <https://balkans.aljazeera.net/teme/2016/1/30/koliko-vrijedi-makedonska-diploma>, accessed on 28 September 2022.

¹⁰ Strashko Stojanovski, Jadranka Denkova and Dejan Marolov, "Higher Education in Republic

Internationalization of Education (Case Study and Other Institutions, the Context)

Some of the interviewed professors (at least 3 of them explicitly) point to the problem that Erasmus mobility is practiced only eastwards, instead of making proper use of the fact that N. Macedonia is one of the 5 non-EU member states that have the status of full members of Erasmus on equal footing with the rest of the EU member states and can thus make proper use of the intra-European bilateral Erasmus scheme. Effort in this respect lacks on the Macedonian, not the EU side – inertia is the main culprit (the latter comment comes from our desk-research, referring to a study produced by the Erasmus National Agency of North Macedonia in 2021). An exception to this rule is the UKIM in terms of existing mobility agreements, but in practice, as the NA report from 2021, again most of the movement is from and to the East of EHEA. ISSHS also practices mostly mobility with the full Erasmus states, which is implemented in practice but due to the size of the institution these numbers are rather small,

From the previous analytical report (combining desk analysis and survey responses), combining the findings of the survey and the qualitative research including desk analysis, we can conclude the following:

- (1) internationalization of curricula and of the educational practice itself is key to the increasing of the quality of education for decision makers; let us note again, N. Macedonia should be able to profit from its status of being a full member of Erasmus – its policies lead it to seclusion and improper use of it. (References from ISSHS, and the NA for Erasmus). The negative tendencies are due to twisting the Bologna principles due to the old habits of the system. One of the most worrying results is the mass brain drain (of students) on BA level; see: <https://www.isshs.edu.mk/de-capturing-academia-combating-brain-drain/>
- 2) Interdisciplinarity, general knowledge, philosophy and humanities but also skills of governance studied through mastering policy

research and management and other capacities of analysis – bringing forth a) the bigger picture but also b)) how it good governance is done and planned in practice.

3) Curricula and the educational practices for the decision makers are not to be reducible to law, including administrative law.

The Rest of the Main Findings (Survey, Desk research, Literature Overview)

The trap of the post-authoritarian political culture, a very general analytical remark we would like to proffer here. The prevalence of law in the curricula, the spontaneous understanding that systems are governed by law and its implementation as if some sort of magical incarnation of the law (without other procedural and management steps), and as if nothing in between exists, we argue, is the remnant of the previous authoritarian system: nothing between law and practices is imagined nor imaginable, and the complete absence of notion of policy is poignant. Policies are not always laws, but also good practices, protocols, sometimes a matter of ethos, methods of governance or management which are simply absent from the minds of those who create the education for decision makers and from the minds of the decision makers themselves. Thus, due to the missing link as the result of the political culture, we are stuck in the vicious cycle of reciting: “the laws are good, the implementation is bad.” There is utter absence of the notion that implementation is also something conceptualized and studied (mainly as policy) and does not happen spontaneously, out of thin air and simply because there is a law on a piece of paper.

Within what started as the project ES-BAL (Etude des besoins et de l'offre en formation en matière de gouvernance), and is now titled Education for Europe (EfE) that reviews and identifies the dominant education profiles of decision makers, covering the Western Balkan (WB) countries, including North Macedonia. The team of ISSHS contributed to the regional and Sci-Po led electronic survey whose main goal was to collect informed opinions regarding the content, form and quality of the predominant forms of education among the policy makers. The aim was to identify the state of affairs, assess the needs and make recommendations for improving the curricula of the WB higher education institutions, focusing on the formal higher education, and not just skills-oriented training and other types of informal education.

The electronic survey included 29 people, policy makers, policy analysts, professors, public administration and think tankers from North Macedonia who gave their opinion on the matters at issue in this study. The majority of the respondents are employed in academic institutions (professor, researcher or administrator) or 52% of them, whereas 24% are working in NGO sector mainly in think tanks and/or policy analysis and advocacy oriented organizations. The remaining 24% consist of respondents working in the private sector (7%), civil servants (7%), 3,3 % (in simple figures: 1 respondent) working in international organizations, freelancing and independent research.

The respondents are partly satisfied with the quality of existing higher education programs for future politicians and civil servants/decision makers (in the private or public sector) in the country. On a scale from 0-8, the average grade is 4.4. Most of them, 24% gave a grade of 4, 17% gave a grade of 6, and 14% gave a grade of 5. The other grades are represented by 10 percent and less. Considering general trends during the last 10-15 years in this field, 36% of the respondents considered the situation more or less the same. Exactly the same percentage, i.e. 36% of the respondents, think that the situation has worsened. Conversely, 25% of the respondents think that the situation has improved.

Asking the respondents what the added value of the current education is offered for the future decision makers in the country, the respondents emphasize the tendency of a greater focus on modernizing the educational system, digitalization in education and intersection of disciplines (multidisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity), innovative studies and more knowledge and experience in research, scientific methods and policy analysis that enables policy making. Same number of respondents underlines the possibility to do research mobilities in other European universities, possibilities for informal education and fellowships, highlighting the inclusion of our country in the Erasmus + program as a program country in the full sense of the word (with an equal status to that of the member states), and the possibilities for students and professors that this program offers. Others mentioned the flexibility and possibility of educational opportunities in terms of changing the area of studying, or complementarity, namely after completing one type of study to move to another type (master, PHD), then the clinical study (practice) that has

been misunderstood or not fully implemented for a while. Some respondents link the idea of “added value” with the possibility of primary schools offering learning of multiple foreign languages. There are those who associate it with a theoretical background and theoretical depth in studies.

Almost the same number of respondents that commented on the added value of the current education offered for the future decision makers in the country said that there is no added value in the education system and pointed to the shortcomings and problems in that field of our educational system supplementing the question that was addressed to them with their own comment.

Criticisms were directed toward the system gaps, failure to update offered knowledge concerning the current political, economic, social and environmental trends as well as failure in developing critical thinking and out of the box ideas, a situation that has been predominant in the last 30 years.

Need of better curricula, more practical experience, better academic staff, were also mentioned, as well as European Studies (focusing on European integration), which is peculiar as these curricula were very present until almost 10 years ago but have been dying out in the past decade. There is also moralizing wishful thinking in the responses as some of the respondents seem to believe that educational programs can instill and strengthen the integrity of decision makers, an inclusive policy-making process, adherence to the principles of competence and ensuring high transparency. Some emphasized the need of greater practical skills and the need of inclusive thinking of all stakeholders, which should be also inclusive of professors in the decision-making process. We must comment that this idea of inclusivity sounds like missing the point of the value of inclusion – of those marginalized, that is – advocating for inclusion of academics who have anyway dominated the political scene (most of Macedonian highest ranking decision makers have been university professors).

Respondents emphasize the corruption in the university administration present, expressed in grading, academic appointments and promotion, thus creating a system producing irresponsible and incompetent students.

Other respondents argue that the problem lies in the criteria for appointing public administrators and political decision makers: apart from the basic

knowledge, they argue, decision makers should develop critical thinking concerning the functioning of institutions; they also pointed to the absence of critical thinking, of a broader political education and general culture. Again, the same type of a naïve laymen's moralism was displayed in comments such as - discourses should be promoted that instill the idea that the public good is more important than personal success.

Regarding skills, respondents pointed Macedonian decision makers need to be better at lobbying, networking, creating partnerships, stakeholder analysis and stakeholder management, reasoned advocacy, field practice, developed ethical standards and social responsibility. They must learn to build gender sensitive policies, socially inclusive policies when it comes to the marginalized categories of citizens, they should know, the respondents argue, how to be responsive to the citizens' needs and what kind of policies are important to be taken, as well as proper implementation of the policy making process. Obviously, when it comes to formulation of educational needs in terms of skills respondents offer more down to earth and realistic responses.

About the typical educational road to a successful career of a decision-maker in public affairs, 48% of the respondents think that the largest public university - Saints Cyril and Methodius in Skopje – is the most common (or the best) choice. State school institutions have a better image not because of quality but because of people's perception. Of those 41% who think differently, some pointed to some private non-profit educational institutions such as ISSHS and University of SEE-Tetovo, whereas others bitterly conclude that the typical profiles of decision makers depends on the involvement in the "right political party," regardless of the level and quality of higher education – "total clientelism," is the point they are making.

Out of all of the respondents, 93% believe that studying abroad (for longer, diploma-seeking programs, not only exchange programs like Erasmus) adds value to the competences of decision makers. According to the respondents, there are plenty of reasons why education in a developed (European) country is important for the training of future decision makers. Mostly, they come down to the simple facts of better quality of education and gaining more experiences in policymaking practice from more developed countries. Aside

of the quality, as they say, they will be exposed to peers and professors and researchers that are “at the thick of it” when it comes to decision making. Also, they will get greater self-confidence and independence, gain better understanding of the international context, personal development, improved language skills, knowledge about new cultures and perspectives.

Most of the participants in the survey support the multidisciplinary (and interdisciplinary) approach to this type of studies, but they don't see it fully or truly present in the offers of the educational institutions. The country needs mechanisms to regularly analyze and monitor emerging skill gaps at national, regional and local levels and develop policies aimed at acquiring human capital and skills, in the formal education system and particularly outside the formal education system which should be strengthened.

Practice and decision-making oriented education seem useful for the respondents, and they don't see it very present in the current offer of the higher education system in North Macedonia. Practice is pivotal for the quality of formal higher education. Unfortunately, most of the higher education institutions have curriculums which are “theory” based but even this theory is not really theoretical as critical thinking is dramatically absent, as noted above (thus even “theory” is simply about reciting of dead letters on paper, mostly outdated textbooks republished more recently either as revised or not changed a bit to simply count as more recent). In other words, there is utter lack of understanding what is theory and, consequently, inability to distinguish between law and other types of education relevant for decision making (policy studies, poly management, public affairs, etc.) Many of them are borrowed from the neighboring countries, Bulgaria or Serbia, with almost translated pages from the cited textbooks produced in the region. We are making this remark based on our desk research comparatively complemented to the responses from the survey.

Internationalization principle (expressed in curricula, beginning with BA level, stimulates students' ability to work in an international and multilingual environment, includes a compulsory relevant experience from abroad, etc.) is highly respected and recommended by the respondents. It is important to note that the respondents see it as neither absolutely absent from the system nor fully and efficiently implemented in it.

Respondents note that there is a strong brain-drain in North Macedonia, which we discuss above in the overview of the Case Study and qualitative part of the research. Any activities stimulating international experience are readily consumed by students (in which they are supported by their families and societal values - going abroad is success), but only as a springboard to immigrating abroad later on. Internationalization, in particular state-funded scholarships, must be strongly conditioned with the graduates' return to their home country.

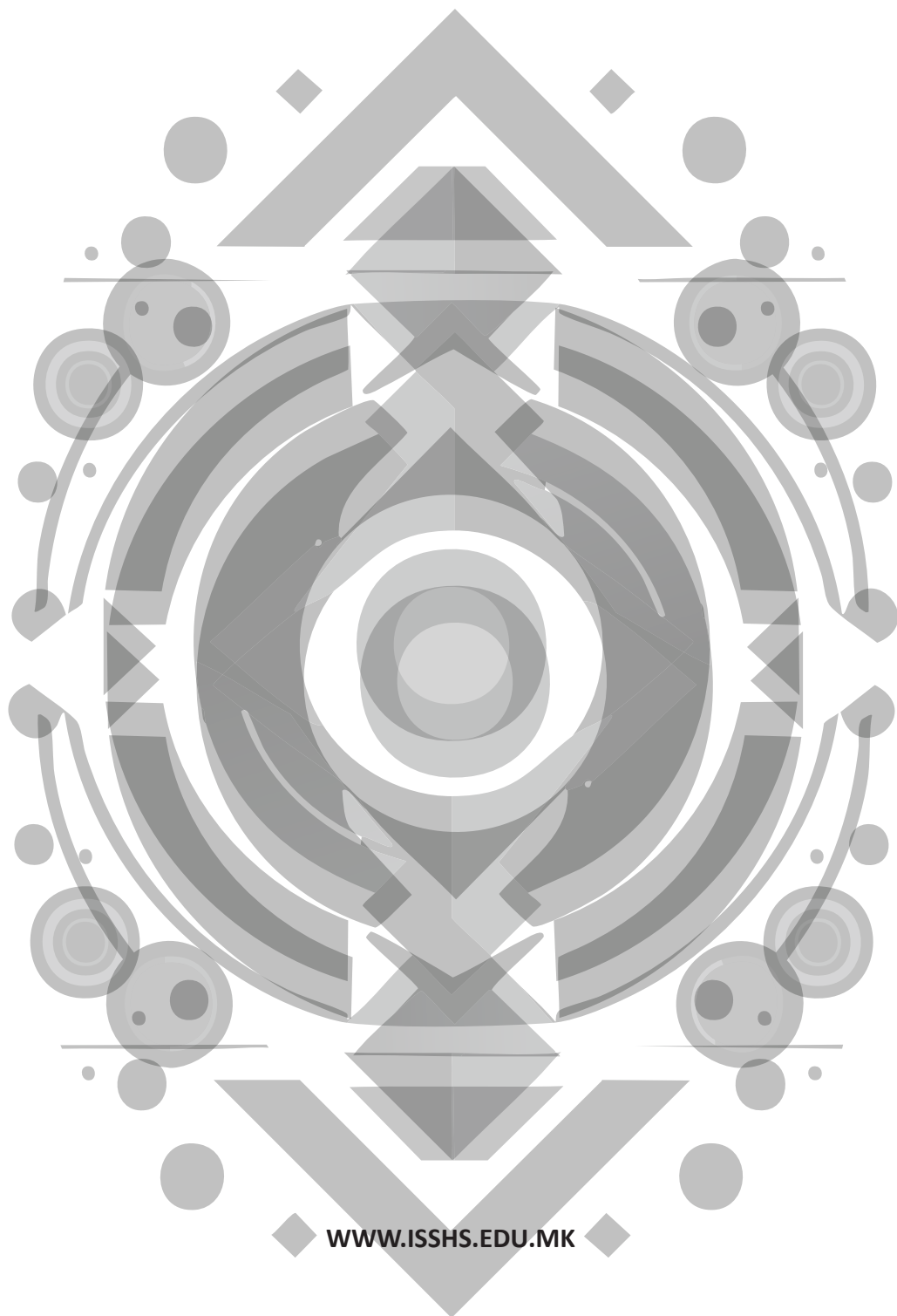
Before we conclude, we would like to cite one of the responses in the open question part of the survey: *Changing formal education towards the best social effect for me is not so much about new "curricula, skills and competences" as it is about imposing new discourses. Finding a way to instill in students the idea that they don't have to adapt to the rules of the game after leaving university (ex. join a political party to get a job in a corrupt way and then progress over to higher social function) but they can influence and change them. What should these "new discourses" be composed of and how do you introduce them to the public sphere is a fruitful direction of thinking.*

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Majority of decision makers and policy makers study law, which explains the lack of notion of governance which goes beyond lawmaking and law enforcement, namely does not even begin to touch upon the concepts of policy analysis and planning let alone public affairs management. This finding probably explains the N. Macedonia's highly law score on policy planning, cross-sectoral reform vision and multi-issue policy solutions for a democratic, EU aligned administration, as per the latest SIGMA report on N. Macedonia (OECD/EU, 2021 Report, pp. 28-30), ranking below the region's average of 2.7. On the other hand, said Report quotes the highest level of legislative alignment with the European Acquis in the region, way above the regional average. According to our field research data and the desk analysis of the program and the accreditation documentation, those that specialize in administrative law are perceived as civil servants in the sense of mere clerks, even if high ranking. Those holding administrative law degree do not seem to be seen as policy creators but rather as executioners of laws. The latter is noteworthy – even the “civil servants” are trained more as enforcers of law rather than servants. This realization of our study offers an explanation to the situation stated in the cited SIGMA report. It also shows that the situation can be remedied only through education, that is multi-issue and interdisciplinary policy studies centered, that offers skills and knowledge and the general culture necessary for policy creation, or any other program under a different yet akin heading offering a similar content.

We believe that an educational system offering tertiary level policy studies education, or studies of administration, as we find them in the curricula offered by Sci Po may improve the situation significantly. In order to do so successfully, a program of the sort we are proposing here ought to be embedded in the regional context, and in line with how cultures here spontaneously perceive the region – as Southeast Europe rather than Western Balkans which is merely an administrative definition. Our immediate neighbors are EU members states (Bulgaria, Greece, Croatia, Romania, Hungary), both in the regional sense but also as far as the general perception of N. Macedonia's society and culture is concerned – not merely the physical direct neighbors are considered as part of a share region, but also the states that ensued from the former Yugoslav Federation (Croatia and Slovenia). Also, considering the region in such a sense is most beneficial in the sense of combating the issue of brain-drain on the level

of BA studies, which is grave in N. Macedonia, with thousands of high school graduates enrolling in Slovenia and Croatia. A joint regional program, where one might study in their home country, but receive a Slovenian, Croatian or Bulgarian and Greek stamp on their possibly joint degree program would both help combat brain drain but even more importantly – improve the educational system for policy makers while adding a European level dimension of a study program pursued from home. To conclude, on the basis of this study our EfE consortium should produce a feasibility study for a regional program in which all of the present consortium members would participate, including Sci Po, while assigning the regional program’s seat and seal (Accreditation) in any of the regional EU member states.



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