



Граѓанска мрежа за
спречување на конфликт
на интереси во јавната
администрација

МАКЕДОНСКИ МЕДИУМИ
ИНСТИТУТ ЗА



CSOs Watchdog Network to Prevent Spoils and Conflict of Interest in the Public Administration
The project is funded by the European Union



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CONFLICT OF INTEREST AND CORRUPTION AT A LOCAL LEVEL

Public Opinion Survey conducted in February and March 2015

May 2015



This publication has been prepared with the assistance of the European Union. The content of this publication is the sole responsibility of the Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" Skopje (IDSCS) and can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.



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Summary of Key Conclusions

The Survey identifies a negative perception as to the level of transparency exhibited by the local government units.

During the period between the years 2014 and 2015, a decline in the perception regarding the transparency of the municipal administration has been recognized.

Half of the citizens consider the municipal tenders to have been awarded unfairly, whereas one fourth of the respondents are not sufficiently familiarized with the tendering process.

One fourth of the respondents strongly agree with the following statement: “The companies close to the municipal authorities always take precedence in the tendering process”.

Nearly two thirds of all the respondents consider the recruitments process in the municipal administrations to be open and accessible exclusively to those individuals close to the municipal governing party.

Certain increase in the number of corrupt transactions is evident between the years 2014 and 2015 as well reduced resistance to the pressure of corruption. Concurrently, a certain portion of the administration has improved integrity by rejecting offers of bribe. In 2015, 115 076 transactions were registered of bribe being requested and received in the municipalities, which represents a significant increase in comparison to the year 2014, for which 72 935 such transactions were projected.

Decline in the potential to report corruption to the relevant institutions and other stakeholders was also registered. In 2015, in comparison to 2014, the percentage of citizens who would not report corruption has grown. Every fourth citizen would not report corruption at all, whereas diminished confidence is registered in almost all of the competent institutions.

Almost half of the respondents strongly agree that in Macedonia no one will get employment unless is a member of a political party; more than half of the respondents strongly agree that the state is the agent responsible for providing employment to its citizens, whereas 4 out of 10 individuals strongly agree that in Macedonia, the practice “quid pro quo” is a widely developed phenomenon.

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Introduction

This Report accounts for the findings of the public opinion survey conducted in the period between February 19 and March 2, 2015 under the Project “CSOs Watchdog Network to Prevent Spoils Conflict of Interest in the Public Administration”. The purpose of the survey was to gather data on the perceptions, views and experiences of respondents in relation to a range of questions regarding conflict of interest and corruption at a local government unit level, but also regarding the progress of Macedonia in the EU integration process.

In addition to this report, the findings of the survey related to the conflict of interest and corruption are enclosed. The findings on the perceptions as to the progress of Macedonia in the EU integration process are contained in a separate report available on the website of IDSCS (www.idscs.org.mk).

Findings of a total of 10 questions are presented in this report. The data is presented descriptively, shown in tables and charts.

The questions from the survey conducted in the year 2015 are identical to the questions used in the initial public opinion survey under the “CSOs Watchdog Network to Prevent Spoils Conflict of Interest in the Public Administration” conducted in March 2014¹. This report includes questions addressed comparatively, so the results of the 2014 survey are compared to the results of the 2015 survey in order to depict the identified trends, but also the major deviations in obtained data.

The surveys carried out in 2014 and 2015 explored the themes of transparency, corruption and conflict of interest through two broad perspectives. The first perspective examined the practice and perception of citizens on specific topics such as bribery or public procurement procedures. The second perspective examined the big picture outlook such as the expectations from the behaviour of the municipal authorities’ representatives and the supposed institutional culture.

The report accounts for an insignificant minority to respond to up to 10% of the sample, small minority for responses between 10% and 25% of the sample, minority for responses between 25% and 40%, majority for responses between 50% and 70% and great majority for over 70% of the sample.

Methodological Approach

Data is gathered by the means of a field survey in person, to a sample of 1603 respondents of a statistical error of +/- 2,5%. The Survey was conducted in Macedonian and Albanian language. The sample included individuals aged over 18 years, whereas the structure of the sample was determined according to the following criteria: gender, age, ethnicity, education and balanced

¹ The results from the March 2014 Survey are presented in the following Report: Bliznakovski J. (2014) *Conflict of Interest and Corruption at a Local Level. Public Opinion Survey conducted in March 2014*. Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” Skopje. Website link: <http://idscs.org.mk/images/anketi/anketa-sudir-na-interesi-korupcija-17072014.pdf>

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regional distribution. The survey was conducted by the SWOT Research agency from Skopje (<http://www.swot.com.mk/>).

Out of a total of 1603 respondents in the sample the following split according to the set of criteria was rendered:

- According to **gender**: 49.6% men, and 50.4% women;
- According to **age**: 20.1% aged between 18 and 29 years, 20.0% from 30 to 39 years of age, 18.5% from 40 and 49 years of age, 17.7% from 50 to 64 years of age and 23.7% over 65 years of age;
- According to **education**: 19,7% have completed elementary education or less, 49,7% hold a secondary education degree and 30.6% hold a college or higher education degree;
- According to **ethnicity**: 69.9% are Macedonians, 22.1% are Albanians, 2.5% are Turks, 2.2% are Roma, 2.1% are Serbs etc.
- According to the **employment status**: 14.3% are public sector employees, 27.4% are private sector employees, 19.6% are unemployed, 8.8% are housewives/housekeepers, 6.8% are students and pupils and 20.8% are retired persons.

Political and Social Context

At the onset of the process of gathering of public opinion research data, the political opposition party SDSM started exposing to the public wiretapped conversations revealing indications to numerous corruption scandals by highest state officials. It may be so that some of the results rendered in this report are affected by the immediate effect of the disclosed corruption scandals through the publicizing of the wiretapped conversations.

Similarly, Republic of Macedonia has been in a state of political crisis for a longer period of time as a result of which the representatives of the opposition parties have refused to partake in the operation of the institutions. Such a state contributes to the general decline of the citizens' confidence in the state institutions' performance.

The country has been consigned to a profound state of European integration blockage as a result of the inability to initiate negotiation talks for joining the European Union. The latest EU Progress Report for 2014, according to many opinions, has been the most negative one in respect to the EU perspectives of the country in the past few years.

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Findings and Conclusions

Negative Outlook regarding the Level of Transparency of the Local Government Units

The survey ascertains a perception of the population about the municipal administrations and the local government units to have been operating with a low level of transparency. If one aggregates the perception assessment scale (full transparency and moderate transparency) one may realize that around half of the respondents in the year 2014 as well as in the year 2015 consider themselves as residing in transparent municipalities. However, in 2015 a decline in the perception regarding the transparency of municipalities is evident. While in 2014, the perception regarding the transparency of municipalities was a cumulative 54.6 %, in 2015 was 49.1 %, a result which indicates a slight decline.

Q1. Which of the following statements best describes the municipal administration in your municipality?	2014	2015
Completely transparent	13.2	9.3
Moderately transparent	41.4	39.8
Moderately intransparent	19.9	23.5
Completely intransparent	12.7	12.4
I don't know	11.5	14.6
No answer	1.3	0.5
Total	100	100

Similarly, a slight increase is evident in the number of respondents who have identified the performance of the municipal administration as intransparent (lacking transparency). In 2014, 32.6% of the respondents have answered moderately or completely intransparent, whereas in 2015, that percentage has increased to amount to 35.9%.

Similarly to 2014, in the year 2015 too, significant distinction is observed between the perception of the respondents working in the public sector and the remaining respondents. It may be concluded that two different worldviews exist between these two categories of respondents. For example, in 2015, 22% of the public sector employees consider that the municipalities operate in complete transparency, a percentage that fails to encapsulate more than 10% of all the other remaining categories of respondents. Furthermore, in 2014 such an outlook would have been shared by 35% of the public sector employees, which represents a significant decline in only one year's time.

When asked whether the respondents residing in their respective municipality consider the tenders in the municipality to have been awarded fairly, such an impression is shared by every one out of five respondents. Such a result shows a decline of almost 7% in comparison to March 2014. On the other hand, every second respondent holds the impression that the tenders in his/her municipality have not been fairly awarded. Every fourth respondent does not know the

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answer to this question, which indicates a low level of familiarity of the citizens with the disbursement of municipal funds.

Q2. Which of the following statements are closely related to your opinion?	2014 %	2015 %
I have the impression that the tenders in my municipality are fairly awarded.	27.0	20.2
I have the impression that the tenders in my municipality are unfairly awarded.	47.3	49.9
I don't know	22.2	25.2
No answer	3.6	4.7
Total	100	100

The employees in the public sector, significantly more than the others, consider the tenders to have been fairly awarded. Such an opinion is shared by the 36% of this category of respondents, which in comparison to 2014, when this percentage was almost 52%, indicates a significant decline. Presently, the public sector employees are almost divided, or 38% of respondents consider the tenders to have been unfairly awarded. All the remaining categories of respondents, notwithstanding the retired persons, according to the employment status, share a predominant opinion that the tenders are being unfairly awarded.

Moreover, in 2015, only an insignificant minority of 6.3% strongly disagree with the following statement "Companies close to the municipal authority always take precedence in the tendering process". On a scale of 1 to 5, where "1" means "I strongly disagree" and "5" means "I strongly agree", every fourth respondent answered with a "5- I strongly agree" with the statement that the companies close to the municipal authorities always take precedence in tenders (25.2%). A high percentage of 42.8% of all respondents have selected the higher scores "4" and "5", whereas every fifth respondent answered with a "3".

Q3. Companies close to the municipal authorities always take precedence in the tendering process	2015 %
I strongly disagree	6.3
2	7.3
3	20.9
4	17.6
I strongly agree	25.2
I don't know	10.7
No answer	12.1
Total	100

As in other situations, the public sector employees diverge from the recognized trend of agreement with this statement. Every fifth respondent employed in the public sector has strongly disagreed with this statement (score "1") or answered with a "2" (20.4%). The remaining groups in the category "employment status" in majority agree with the statement.

Almost two thirds of all of the respondents (63.7%) consider the recruitment process in the municipal administration to be open and accessible to individuals close to the governing party in

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the municipalities. Contrary to that, the minority of all the respondents (26.7%) consider the process to be an open one and accessible to all citizens. Such data almost equally match the data gathered during the survey in March 2014, and thus refer to a firm and unyielding perception among the citizens as to the nature of the employment processes in the municipal administration. Similarly, such results coincide with the results from other performed research activities, thereby indicating an apparent partisanship in the state institutions².

Q4. How do you perceive the recruitment process in the municipal administration in your municipality:	2015 %
Open and accessible to all citizens	26.7
Open and accessible to individuals close to the governing party in the municipality	63.7
I don't know	7.9
No answer	1.7
Total	100

According to the employment status, once more, the diverged perception by the public sector employees in comparison to the remaining categories of respondents is apparent. For 41.6% of the respondents, the public sector employees, the recruitment process is open and accessible to all citizens, whereas only 24.7% of the private sector employees share the same opinion, 22% of the unemployed, 19% of the students and pupils and 23.1% of the housewives/housekeepers and 29% of the retired persons. Nevertheless, majority of respondents of all categories, including the public sector employees consider the recruitment process to be open and accessible only to individuals close to the governing party in the municipality. As a comparison, in 2014, 48.6% of the public sector employees considered the process to be open and accessible to the individuals close to the municipal governing party, whereas this percentage has been raised to reach 51.7%, in 2015. The respondents Macedonians, more than the respondents Albanians, consider that the recruitment process is open and accessible to all the citizens (29.5% against 20.2%).

On the other hand, the results confirm that the jobs in the public sector hold greater sway in influence over the hiring process rather than the other groups. So when the respondents were asked whether they have influenced the hiring of a close relative/friend, 29% of the public sector respondents answered affirmatively. This situation differs from the general trend according to which 22% of the respondents have admitted to have exercised such an influence once or several times. This suggests that the public sector employees are in a more favourable social situation, since they can affect somebody's employment more than others.

² For example, the political party affiliation is recognized as the most frequent form of discrimination in the country according to the Equal Opportunity Barometer. See: Popovikj M., Mihailovska J. (2013) *Equal Opportunity Barometer-2013 [internet]*. Skopje, Macedonian Center for International Cooperation (MCIC).

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Q5. How many times have you exercised personal acquaintances, contacts and authority, to influence the hiring process of a person close to you?	2015 – total %	Public sector employee
Once	10.9	17.1
Two to five times	8.1	9.7
More than five times	2.8	2.8
Never	74	66.4
I don't know	2	1.5
No answer	2.2	2.5
Total	100	100

Increase in the Number of Corrupt Transactions

Surveying the experiences related to bribery in cash, services or gifts represents a significant part of the corruption research activities. Unlike perception, this instrument enables projections of the level of corruption to take place in practice, which will further serve as the baseline for the assessment of the efficiency of the corruption control activities. Certainly, the methodological restrictions of this instrument should be taken into consideration during surveys, since the corruption practice is considered a socially undesirable conduct. In that respect, a chance exists that a certain number of respondents will not answer truthfully to the question, or would not report any participation in corruption. However, such an instrument has been widely accepted in research practices since in addition to the conservative evaluation it renders (most often projects lesser occurrence of corruption than in real life) acts as one of the rare mechanisms for independent assessment of the efficiency in dealing with corruption.

In the course of the survey, the question was asked about experiences related to offering and receiving bribe. In percentage terms, a noticeable increase in bribing is evident in comparison to 2014, when it amounted to 2%, whereas in 2015 was almost 7%. Similarly, a noticeable increase in offering and receiving bribe was also recorded. So in 2014, such cases were prevalent at 4.5% whereas in 2015 the numbers grew to 7.1%.

Q6. What is your experience in relation to offering/receiving gifts/money/services in the municipality?	2014 %	2015 %
I was solicited a bribe, but I did not comply	10.6	8.8
I was solicited a bribe, and I did comply	5.4	5.6
I did offer bribe, but was rejected	1.6	3.3
I did offer bribe, and was accepted	4.5	7.1
I did compensate in gifts/money/services	2	6.7
Such event has not occurred	72.4	65.6
I don't know	2.9	3.6
No answer	3	3.8

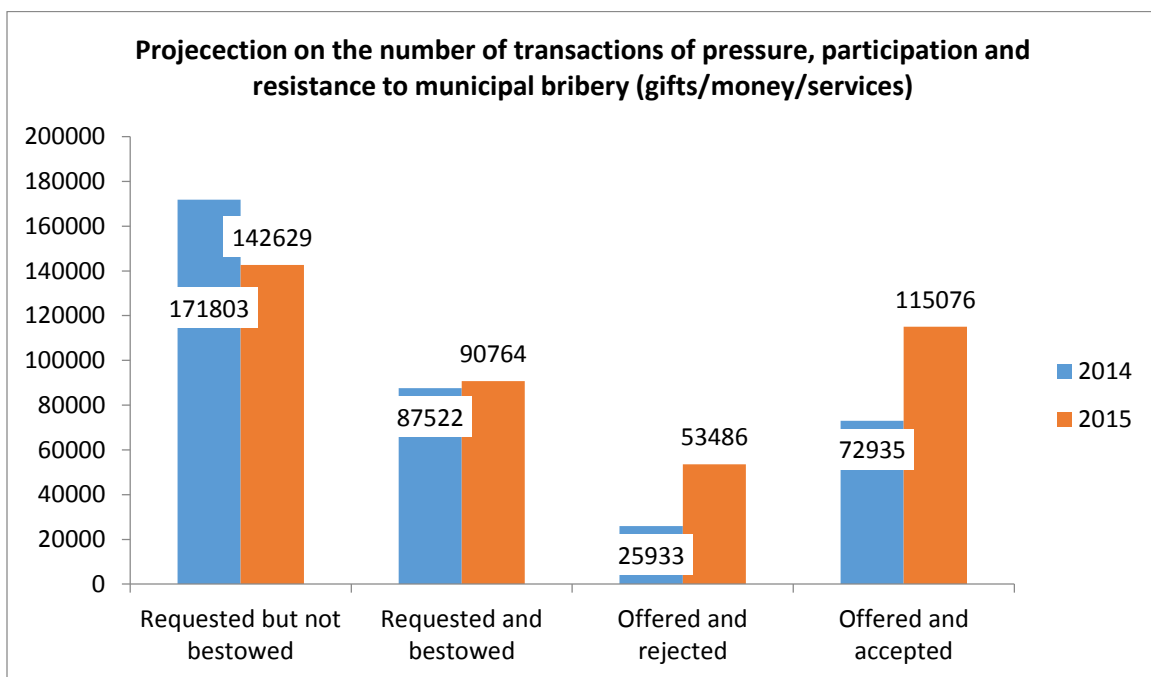
Note: since the question allows for multiple answers, the total exceeds 100%

For better illustration, these results make up for the evaluation of the number of transactions that have occurred within the year. The percentages received are extrapolated to the size of the adult

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population in the Republic of Macedonia³ so as to establish a projection for the minimum number of transactions.

The results indicate a diverse practice. An increase in the integrity of the municipal officers is evident, who have rejected an offer of bribe in 53 486 cases which is an improvement in comparison to the previous period. However, this outcome has been seriously overshadowed by the major leap of events in which the offer was accepted. According to the projections, in 2015 there were 115 076 offers of accepted bribe, which is more than 40 000 transactions.



Diminished Confidence in the Institutions to Report Corrupt Activity

One of the key mechanisms for suppression of corruption is to report corruption to the relevant institutions. One factor that significantly affects this mechanism is the confidence the citizens invest in the institutions in charge of combating corruption.

The results show a mild decline in peoples' confidence to report corruption to the Ministry of Interior (MVR). Whereas in 2014, 24% of the citizens would have reported bribery to the authorities in MVR, in the 2015 survey that number is almost 20%. The State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (DKSK), the media and the non-governmental sector have failed to

³ According to the State Statistics Office, in 2013 the estimates account for 1,620,785 inhabitants over 18 years of age.

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motivate greater confidence in the period between the two conducted surveys, or mainly no significant change has been recorded.

However, the results indicate an increase in distrust, defeatism regarding the possibility to report corruption. From the survey conducted in 2014, if a victim or a witness to corruption, 19.4% of the respondents would not report corruption. Nowadays, in 2015, that number has amounted to 25.5% or every fourth citizen in the Republic of Macedonia would not report corruption.

Q7. Who would you approach if you were asked for a gift/money/service or if you have witnessed such a request being imposed onto other(s)?	2014 %	2015 %
Municipal Council	3.2	4.7
Local community	2.0	1.3
Mayor	9.4	10.3
Member of Parliament	0.8	1.3
Media	10.9	9.3
NGO	9.6	7.9
DKSK (State Commission for Prevention of Corruption)	12.3	10.6
Ministry of Interior	23.8	19.8
Public Prosecution Office	2.0	1.2
Other	1.1	0.9
I wouldn't approach anybody	19.4	25.5
I don't know	4.1	5.9
No answer	1.4	1.4
Total	100	100

Further Strengthening of Social Practices Perception related to Corrupt Activity

On a scale of 1 to 5, where “1” refers to “I strongly disagree” and “5” to “I strongly agree”, almost half of all of the respondents (49.4%) strongly agree with the following statement: “In Macedonia no one can get employment, unless is a member of a political party”. Additionally, 18.2% agree with the statement but scoring it with a “4”, whereas 14.3% with a score “3”. Only insignificant minority of respondents (6.5%) strongly disagree with the statement.

The public sector employees to an extent move away from the level of consent to the statement that without a political party’s membership, employment is not possible. The employees both in the public as well as in the private sector, in general, and to a lesser degree, have strongly agreed to the statement from the remaining categories. So while 39.6% of the public sector employees and 43.8% of the private sector employees strongly agree with the statement, the majority of respondents from the remaining groups in the category “employment status” have also strongly agreed as follows: 51.9% of the employees, 53.9% of the housewives/housekeepers and 53.4% of the retired. Quite a high percentage of 68.6% of the students and pupils have scored the “strongly agree” statement with a score “5”.

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In the course of the 2014 survey, only 23.2% of the public sector employees strongly agreed with the following statement: “In Macedonia no one can get employment unless is a member of a political party”, whereas in 2015, that is the answer of a high 39.6% of the respondents.

Q8. In Macedonia no one can get employment unless is a member of a political party	2015 %
I strongly disagree	6,5
2	8,9
3	14,3
4	18,2
I strongly agree	49,4
I don't know	1,8
No answer	0,9
Total	100

Furthermore, on the same such scale, the majority of all of the respondents (54.1%) strongly agree with the statement “the state is responsible for providing employment to its citizens“, while only 5.9% strongly disagree. The small majority of 19% answered with a score „4“, and 15.8% with a „3“. Great majority of 73.1% of all the respondents in this scale responded with the two highest scores of consent („4“ and „5“), while a very small minority of 10.4% responded with the two lowest scores („1“ and „2“).

Once more, this data almost entirely concurs with the data of the 2014 survey. The expectation that the state should be the most important agent to provide employment against the private sector, is a feature of the Macedonian public opinion for a longer period of time. Such a public opinion is a good baseline for occurrences of clientelism and the development of interlocking networks (*clientela*) financed with resources from the state budget.

Q9. The State is responsible for providing employment to its citizens	2015 %
I strongly disagree	5.9
2	4.5
3	15.8
4	19.0
I strongly agree	54.1
I don't know	0.5
No answer	0.1
Total	100.0

On the same scale, where “1” refers to “I strongly disagree” and “5” to “I strongly agree”, the respondents were asked to give responses to the following statement: “The practice ‘quid pro quo’ is a widely developed phenomenon in the Republic of Macedonia”. Only 3.5% of all of the respondents strongly disagree with this statement, whereas a great majority of 39% strongly agrees with the statement. Furthermore, 23.8% of the respondents scored the statement with a “4”, while 22.2% with a “3”. The insignificant minority of 7.1% responded with a score “2”.

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The public sector employees to a lesser extent in comparison to the other categories strongly agree with the statement - 29% against 40% of the private sector employees, 42.5% of the unemployed, 35% of the housewives/housekeepers, 38.9% of the students and pupils and 44.7% of the retired persons.

Q10. "Quid pro quo" is a widely developed phenomenon in Macedonia	2015 %
I strongly disagree	3.5
2	7.1
3	22.2
4	23.8
I strongly agree	39.0
I don't know	3.8
No answer	0.7
Total	100

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IDSCS is a civil society organization founded in 1999 by a group of intellectuals gathered around the ideas of democracy, solidarity and civil society. The Mission of IDSCS is to support the development of the democratic processes by promoting policy-based research, analysis and consultations with the stakeholders. IDSCS explores the development of the country's good governance, rule of law and European integration. IDSCS's mission is to support the development of the civil society's inclusion in the decision-making process and to strengthen the participatory political culture. By strengthening libertarian values, IDSCS contributes to coexistence of diversity.

Other research by IDSCS:

Bliznakovski J. and M. Popovich (2015) *Public Opinion on the Wiretapping Affair: Public Opinion Survey*. Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" (IDSCS), Macedonian Centre for International Cooperation, Telma, TV, Skopje.

Damjanovski, I. (2014) *Public Opinion and Macedonia's Accession to the European Union*. Institute for Democracy "Societas Civilis" (IDSCS), Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the Republic of Macedonia. Skopje

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