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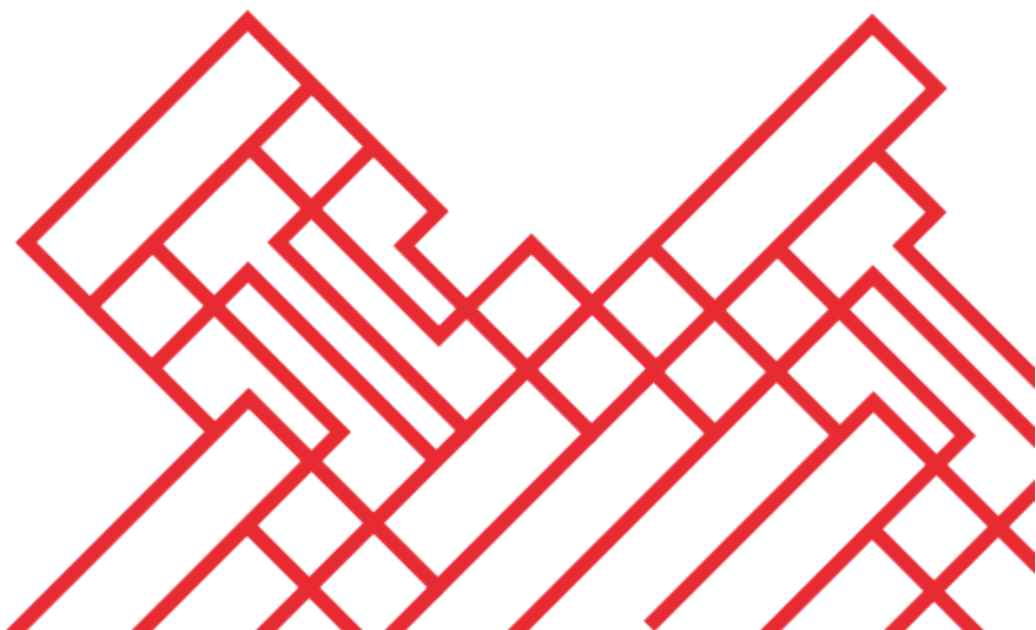
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Young people and politics in North Macedonia: How is the work of the Assembly perceived?

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Executive Summary

The development of a country hinges on the values and positions of the new, young generations in terms of various issues that have a bearing on the society. The perception of young people as showing little interest in the political processes dominates the discourse related to the way in which politics is perceived in general terms.

The young people in Southeast Europe, including North Macedonia, do not have sufficient knowledge of politics, they are not interested in following political events and they do not have great trust in the national institutions¹. Most of the young people believe to be excluded from the decision-making process and feel that politicians do not represent their interests sufficiently.²

The majority of young people in North Macedonia believe that the Assembly is, generally speaking,

unavailable to the public, while most of them state that they are not cognizant of its mechanisms nor that they have attempted to get involved in its work.

The young people of North Macedonia are relatively distrustful of the Assembly, giving their trust a score of 4.1 on a scale from 1 to 10, whereby 1 is the lowest possible score. Despite the fact that the majority of the young people believe the Assembly to be an important institution that plays a significant role in the life of the state, they still believe that the Government controls its work to a certain degree.

The Assembly must exert additional effort to improve young people's perception of the way it operates. This can be achieved by reinforcing the role of the Assembly as a supervisor of the Government, by more active and regular utilization of the oversight mechanisms, by bigger transparency of the Assembly in terms of sharing information and involving the young people in its work, and by making sure the Assembly genuinely focuses on the needs and challenges that the young people face.

¹ Jusić, M. (2019) Political Alienation of a Precarious Generation Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/bueros/sarajevo/15553.pdf?fbclid=IwAR2xSQeJIWcu7LmdekAHMcKTDWU2E-oCt-hc-TDNWJcShqnnJYVWPoYh2M>

² Jusić, M. Lavrič, M and Tomanović, S. (2019) Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019: Political and Civic Participation. Friedrich Ebert Foundation. Available at: <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/id-moe/15274-20190408.pdf>

1. Introduction

The direction that a future development of a country takes depends on the values and the know-how of the new generations. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to acknowledge the position of young in society and to take into account the way they view and perceive various issues. In the discourse about perception of politics in the broadest sense, the dominant narrative is that the young people do not have a great deal of trust in the political institutions and that they show little interest in the political processes.

Analyses show that the perception of young people in North Macedonia is in line with the attitudes of young people across Southeast

Europe.³ Thus, the young people here too, believe that they are excluded from the decision-making processes in society, they don't have sufficient knowledge of the mechanisms they can use to get involved in these processes, and they do not have great faith in the Assembly.

The goal of this analysis is to demonstrate how young people perceive the political actors, especially the work of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia, and to provide a comparative review having in mind their peers in the region. Their perception is seen through the prism of the trust these citizens have in public institutions, as well as how informed they are and how willing they are to participate in their work.

³ ibid

2. Young people and politics in Southeast Europe: How is the work of the Assembly perceived?

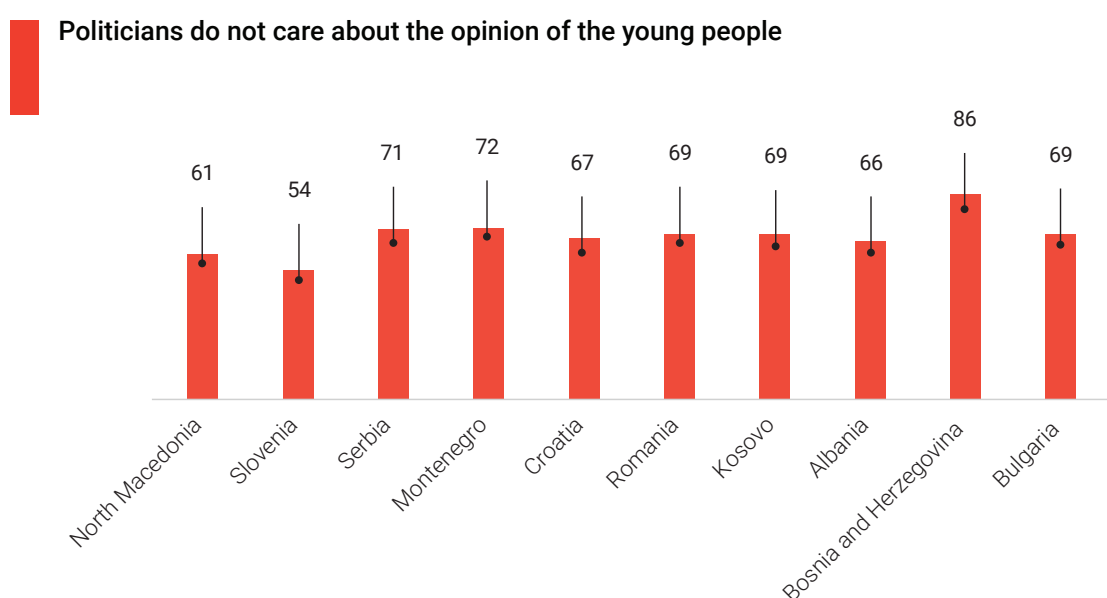
The relationship young people in Southeast Europe (SEE) have towards politics is equal to that of their peers in the other parts of Europe. This conclusion has been confirmed with the research which concludes that the youth of SEE countries are generally mistrustful towards the political institutions in their respective countries, and possess sparse general interest and know-how of the various political spheres.⁴

Still, the comparative analyses show that the differences in political culture between countries have a bearing on the various aspects of how young people think and act. Thus, the degree of political trust and youth participation differs from country to country.

2.1. Getting involved in the decision-making process

Most of the young people from all SEE countries do not see the officials in their countries as allies. Such a negative perception of politicians is most evident among the youth of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where a staggering 86% believe that the politicians do not care about what they think. In North Macedonia, 61% of young people believe that the politicians do not care about their opinions and standpoints. Even though this figure is lower in comparison to virtually all other Southeast Europe states (excluding Slovenia - 54%), it still shows that most of the youth in the country do not believe their views and standpoints are sufficiently represented by the politicians (Chart 1).

Chart 1. Age group: Young people aged 14-29, 2018/19.



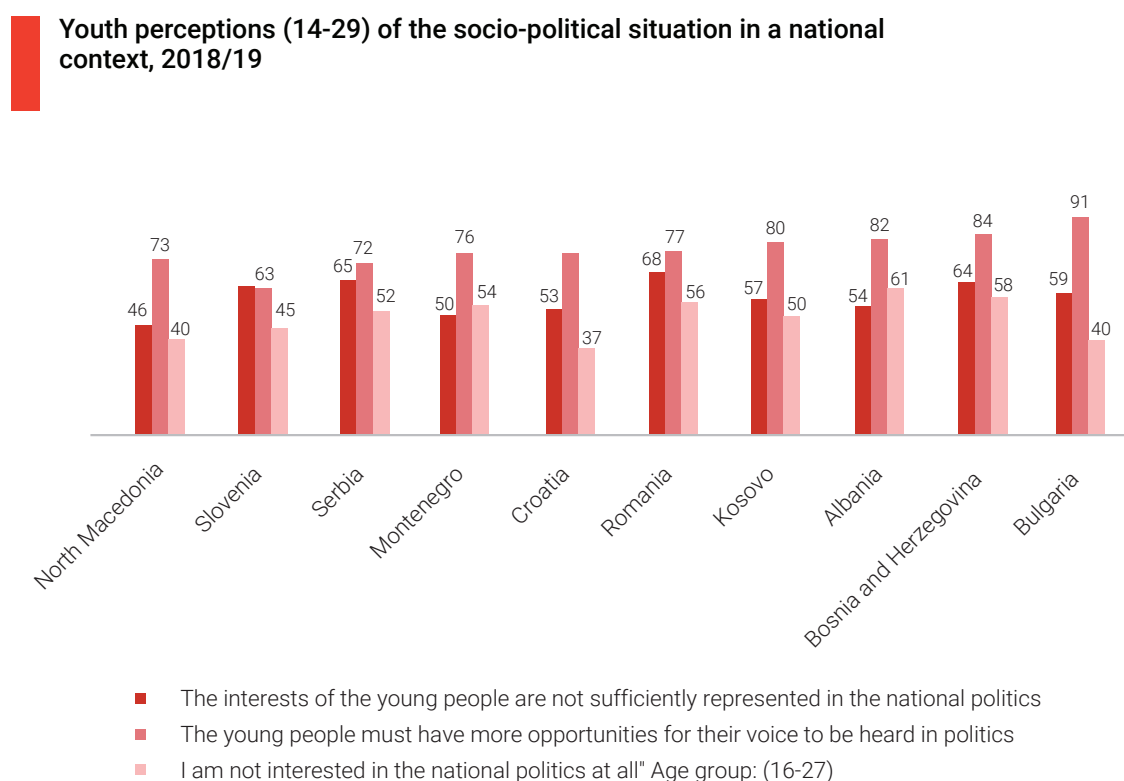
Source: Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, FES

⁴ ibid

This impression by young people is supported by their opinion that their interests are largely underrepresented in the country's political life. The research of Jusić et al. (2019)⁵ shows that the perception of being excluded from the national politics is the most salient in the case of Romania, where more than two thirds of youth believe to be represented in the national politics considerably poorly (68%), while it is least noticeable in North

Macedonia, where 46% of young people share that sentiment. Consequently, the majority of the youth in all countries of the region have also stated that they need to be given more opportunities to voice their opinion on their country's policies. This stance of the youth from SEE renders them disinterested in the national policies implemented in their respective countries (Chart 2).

Chart 2. Age group: Young people aged 14-29, 2018/19.



Source: Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, FES

⁵ ibid

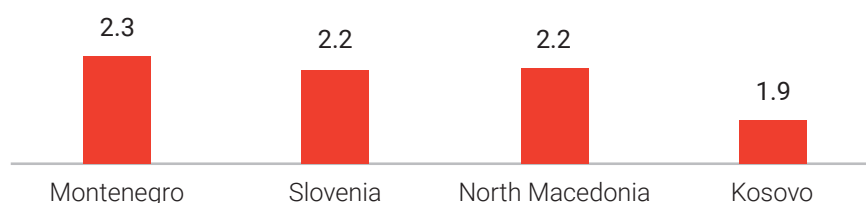
2.2. Trust in the institutions: How much trust do they have in the national legislatures?

Political trust is an important indicator of political legitimacy and of how just the political institutions, as well as the system which comprises the citizens themselves, are believed to be. The trust in the political institutions has been the subject of much research, especially as a result of the findings that point to decreasing levels of political trust in Western democracies in the last few decades.⁶

The young people from SEE have little trust in their legislatures. Thus, in Montenegro, on a scale of 1 (the lowest score) to 5 (the highest score), the young people have given their trust of parliament an average score of 2.3, while it is 2.2 in Slovenia, and 1.9 in Kosovo. (Chart 3). In comparison, the youth from Nordic countries Denmark, Finland and Sweden have the highest trust in their respective parliaments, and the average grade is in the top half of the scale.⁷

Chart 3. Age group: Young people aged 14-29, 2018/19.

The young people from the Balkans have little trust in their respective assemblies



Source: Youth Study Southeast Europe 2018/2019, FES

⁶ Turper, S. And Aarts, K. (2015) Political Trust and Sophistication: Taking Measurement Seriously. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-015-1182-4>

⁷ Aarnio, Anna-Riikka. (2017) HOW IS TRUST BUILT? Available at : <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/102172/GRADU-1507723190.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

3. Youth and politics in North Macedonia: How is the work of the Assembly perceived

3.1. Involvement in the work of the Assembly

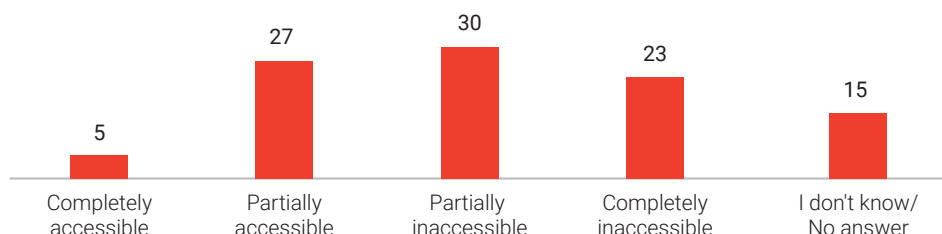
in terms of the prospects the society offers to the young people, as well.⁸

Research in North Macedonia points to the fact that young people have poor interest in and knowledge of the political life in the country, as well as that they are excluded from the decision-making process. This situation turns most of the youth into pessimists

In respect to how they perceive the Assembly of North Macedonia, more than half of the youth believe that this institution partially or completely prevents the public from participating in its work (Chart 4).⁹

Chart 4. The young believe that the Assembly is completely or partially inaccessible to them

The young believe that the Assembly is completely or partially inaccessible to them



Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

⁸ Galevski, M. (2019) Socio-political Participation of Youth in North Macedonia: Apathy, Optimism or Disappointment; Participation in institutional decision-making processes. Westminster Foundation for Democracy, North Macedonia. Available at: <https://www.wfd.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/WFD-Youth-NMK.pdf>

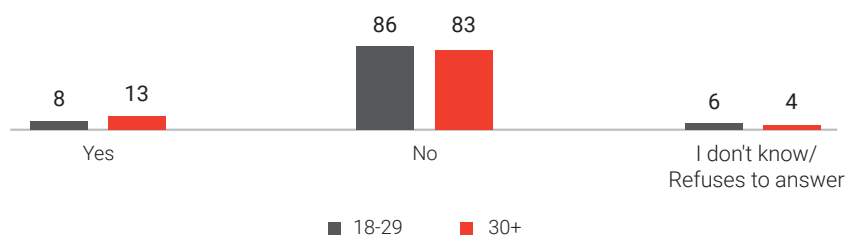
⁹ Results from the field survey (2020) on how the citizens perceive the work of the Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia. IDSCS. Available at: <https://bit.ly/2GqmAkV>

The field survey that IDSCS has been implementing within the Parliamentary Support Programme (PSP) also confirms the poor knowledge of the mechanisms for getting involved in the work of the Assembly. Hence, a staggering 86% of the youth are not at all acquainted with the ways in which they

can exercise their right to participate in the work of the Assembly. In comparison to the responses of the 30+ age group (83%), we can see that this lack of information among young people aged 18-29 is higher by three percentage points (Chart 5).¹⁰

Chart 5. The young people are not informed about the ways they can participate in the work of the Assembly

The young people are not informed about the ways they can participate in the work of the Assembly



Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

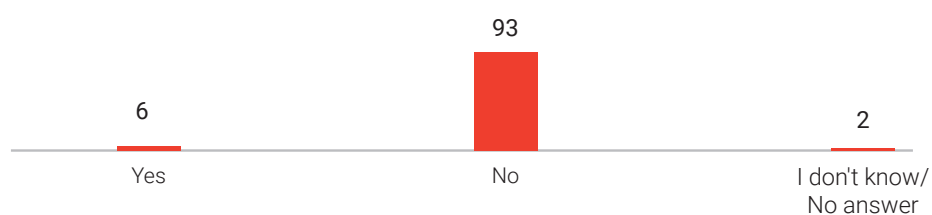
¹⁰ ibid

Since the youth are poorly informed about the mechanisms they can use to get involved in the work of the Assembly, the

overwhelming majority of young people (93%) have never attempted to get involved in its work (Chart 6).

Chart 6. A large number of young people have not attempted to take part in the work of the Assembly

A large number of young people have not attempted to take part in the work of the Assembly



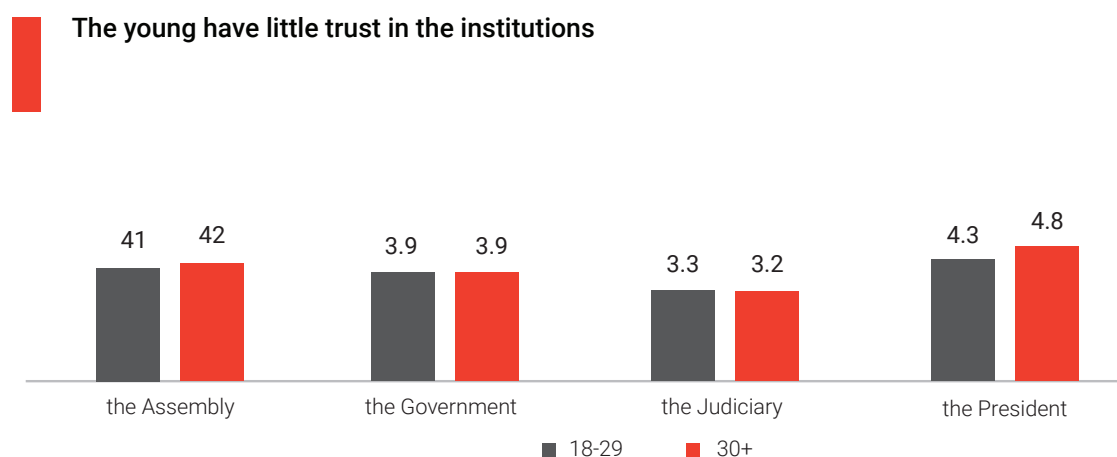
Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

3.2. Trust in the legislative, judicial and executive branch

The youth in North Macedonia have little trust in the institutions of the country and their perception corresponds to that of the respondents older than 30. Thus, on a scale from 1 (the lowest score) to 10 (the highest score), the youth gave a below average score to the trust towards the country's Assembly, Government, Judiciary and President.¹¹ The youth have the least amount of trust in the work of the

courts, which received a score of 3.3, whereas they believe the most in the President of the country, who was rated with a 4.3. In terms of the Assembly, the average grade for youth trust towards this institution was 4.1. The biggest discrepancy in regards to the perception of the respondents older than 30 was recorded in terms of the trust towards the President - the citizens older than 30 rated their trust with 4.8, which is 0.5 higher than the grade received from young people aged 29 or younger (Chart 7).

Chart 7. The young have little trust in the Assembly.



Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

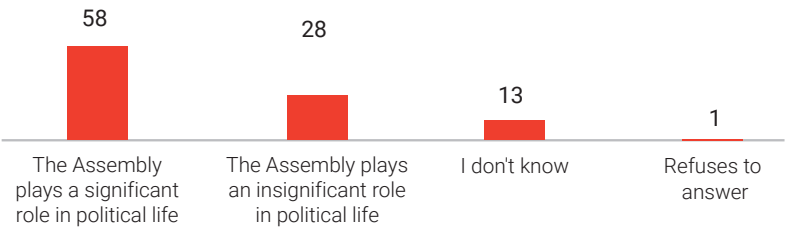
¹¹ *ibid*

3.3. The role of the Assembly in the political life of the state

Most of the surveyed young people believe the Assembly to be an important institution that has a significant role in the political life of the country (58%), while less than a third of the youth hold the opposing view (28%, Chart 8).¹²

Chart 8. The young believe that the Assembly plays a significant role in the political life of the country.

The youth believes that the Assembly plays a significant role in the political life of the country

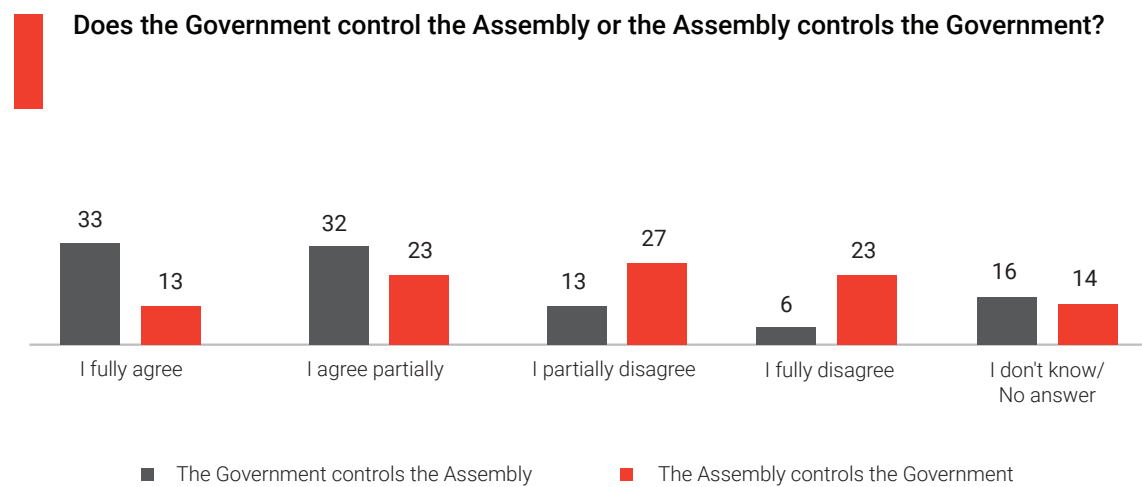


Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

On the other hand, despite the positive perception of the role of the Assembly, two thirds of young people (65%) believe that the Government exerts some control over the Assembly, despite the fact that this clashes with the constitutional competences of the Assembly - the Assembly should in fact elect and oversee the Government. Approximately one third of young people (36%, Chart 9) fully or partially agree with the statement that the Assembly is the one that controls the Government.

¹² ibid

Chart 9. Does the Government control the Assembly or the Assembly controls the Government?



Source: A Survey on the Way Citizens Perceive the Work of the Assembly, Aged 18-29, 2020, IDSCS

4. Conclusion

The standpoints and the perceptions of the youth in North Macedonia about the work of the political institutions, including national legislatures, in essence do not differ from the perceptions of their Southeast Europe peers. Most of the young people in SEE share the opinion that they are politically excluded from the decision-making processes and feel that politicians do not represent their interests sufficiently. The youth shows varying levels of interest in national policy, but it is generally low.

The viewpoints of young people in North Macedonia point to the fact that they perceive the Assembly to be an important factor on the political scene

in the country and they believe in the important role this institution has, but still doubt its political independence when making decisions. In addition, the country's youth, akin to their more senior compatriots, have little trust in the Assembly and are completely excluded from its work. Primarily because they are not informed about the mechanisms that they can use to get involved. This perception by the young people creates a barrier for them to be actively involved in the work of the Assembly, alienates them from their MPs and discourages them from taking action in order to ensure their views and standpoints are represented in the Assembly.

5. Recommendations

For these reasons, the Assembly must exert additional efforts to improve the youth perception and position. One of the ways for doing so **is to reinforce the oversight role of the Assembly over the Government, by more active and regular implementation of the oversight mechanisms.** This will instill young people with a greater trust in the political independence of the Assembly.

In addition, the Assembly must be more transparent in order to be able to inform and get the youth involved in its work. The fact that young people have little to no information is a serious hurdle that

can be overcome by implementing various programmes for getting the youth involved in the work of the Assembly.

In the course of its work, the Assembly should also genuinely focus on young people.

In this way, by taking into account the youth needs and by considering the solutions from the perspective of how they will influence the country's youth, the situation of the young people will be improved and they will have a better opinion and greater trust in the work of the Assembly.



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