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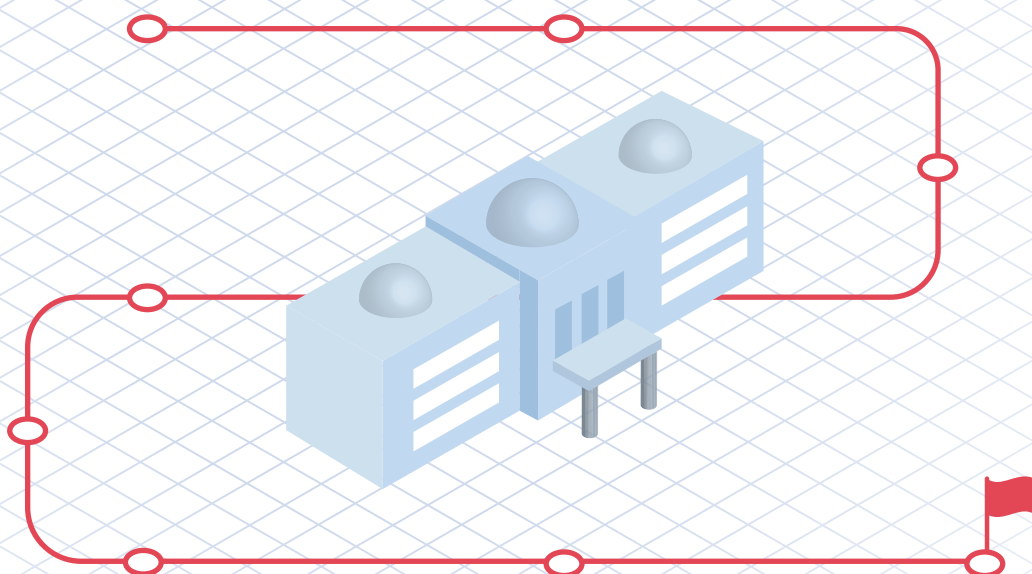
MIRROR MIRROR ON THE WALL, HOW ARE

ANTI-CORRUPTION EFFORTS GOIN'?

National Strategy oversight guidelines

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If there is one thing that we have in abundance in North Macedonia, it is strategies. However, we still face a discrepancy between the efforts included in the strategies and what is happening in reality. The Parliament recently adopted the National Strategy for Fight Against Corruption, which is a document adopted by the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption (SCPC). The Commission developed this document in 2019 through a consultative process, which involved a dialogue between the Commission, members of the Parliament (MPs), government

institutions, independent and regulatory bodies and non-governmental and business sectors.

It is a good start, but the real effort now is to entrench the commitments of the Strategy in the daily work of the institutions and how to achieve success. The key question is how to ensure that the Strategy will provide the desired results, and how we can monitor its achievement and impact on the daily lives of the citizens. The second question is how the Parliament can instigate a success in the fight against corruption, through its oversight role over the Strategy.

MEASURING SUCCESS INSTEAD OF ACTIVITIES

The Strategy for Fight Against Corruption includes 12 main objectives clustered around four main topics. The first topic includes the objectives related to demonstration of political will and strengthening of the integrity of the institutions. Some of the objectives are related to capacity building of the institutions, and the third topic is related to transparency. Finally, the Strategy aims towards cooperation between the institutions, but also their cooperation together with external stakeholders, such as journalists, civil society and the business community.

These objectives are important because their achievement is the foundation of the fight against corruption. The institutional reforms will be successful if they thrive in an environment where those that have the political power are actually allies in the fight against corruption. Only in that way can we see changes in the long run, that is, a situation in


which continuous investments will be made in the fight against corruption.

However, if there is a political will, it is also necessary to have integrity within the institutions in order to be successful with the reforms. That is why the Strategy is paying attention to strengthening of the independence of the institutions, as well as their impartiality and ethics. At the same time, it means a parallel process of capacity building because the quality of work cannot be improved if the resources of the institutions are not increased.

The transparency-related objectives, in turn, ensure building of resistance in the institutions. The true functional transparency, the decision-making, the business processes and the accountability in the politics reduce (but do not eradicate) the possibility of setbacks. That is why improving transparency is an important part of the commitments included in the Strategy.

Table 1: Main objectives of the Strategy

- 1. Increasing the level of political responsibility and demonstrated willingness to fight corruption
- 2. Conscientious management of the political influence in the public sector and prevention of political influence in the work of independent bodies and in the procedures regulated by law
- 3. Strengthening the integrity and accountability of the public sector
- 4. Implementing public sector competencies in a legal, transparent, ethical, cost-effective, accountable and effective manner
- 5. Ensuring integrity and transparency in employment and in human resources policies in the public sector, based on a system of values and quality criteria
- 6. Strengthening the oversight and controlling mechanisms
- 7. Digitalization in the public services

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- 8. Reducing corruption in public procurements and in the process of awarding grants, subsidies and other state aid
 - 9. Strengthening the capacity and commitment of the law enforcement agencies, the prosecution and the judiciary in detecting and sanctioning corruption, as well as strengthening of the resistance to corruption in their ranks
 - 10. Supporting transparency and integrity in the private sector
 - 11. Public awareness raising and delivery of anticorruption education
 - 12. Involvement of the civil society and the media in the fight against corruption in the society and building personal and professional integrity.

Source: [National Strategy for Fight Against Corruption](#)

However, the plan sets out indicators that measure the implementation of the activities. This does not make it immediately apparent to see to what extent the objectives of the strategy have been achieved, even though each activity in the plan is linked to at least one of the twelve objectives and, in that way, overview of the effect the implementation of the Strategy has on the daily life of the citizens.

It goes without saying that the measurement of success is far more difficult, especially in the area of anti-corruption, where the effects of the actions may become visible later. However, if we want to go one step further, it is necessary to create a reporting framework, which will at least give a qualitative answer to how much and in what way has the realization of each of the activities contributed to the achievement of the strategic objectives. This is already possible in the Strategy, as there are relatively good descriptions of the objectives, so that the rapporteurs (the SCPC and responsible institutions) can make an appropriate assessment. Additionally, the committees in the

Parliament have already adopted new reporting templates, according to which the report can be technically maintained.

At the same time, the strategies must have a concrete impact on the lives of citizens. It is therefore necessary to link, in the reporting framework, the achievement of the objectives with the concrete benefits for the citizens. This will complete the comprehensiveness of the reporting, certainly without the need to construct complex indicators of success as starting references – it is sufficient for them to be qualitative. This can be done relatively easily, and the SCPC can already announce this as a criterion to the institutions that will be sending data to the Commission. In that sense, in addition to reporting on implementation of the activities, the SCPC can also ask the institutions how the completed activity contributes to the objectives of the Strategy, and provide concrete and easy-to-understand examples of how the citizens benefit from the changes.

THE STRATEGY AS A TOOL FOR ALL INSTITUTIONS

The national Strategy was adopted through a process of consultations that involved a number of stakeholders, including those that are most relevant. Involved in this process were policy makers as well as entities from the Government and the Parliament. The discussion regarding the national Strategy also involved those in charge of law enforcement, such as the police and the judiciary and involved in the process were also representatives of independent or regulatory bodies, such as the State Audit Office and the media regulator. The civil society organizations were also invited. This involvement in the process united stakeholders from all parts that make up the anti-corruption system – those who work on prevention, detection and prosecution, but also those who create anti-corruption policies and are in charge of managing the institutions that may be most vulnerable to corruption.

This, at least in theory, presupposes that all the institutions involved shall consider the Strategy as their own, and not just a document of the Commission for Fight Against Corruption. In practice,

however, this does not mean that the institutions will pay equal importance to the commitments in the Strategy. Many of those efforts require either time or resources, or resources for which the Strategy does not say how big they are. Hence, if there is a will, the institutions will give importance to those cases where the commitments are not too complex and can be completed with the existing budgets. This mostly goes to the commitments in the first year, and by the beginning of the second year (2022) the success will depend on the extent to which the undertaken obligations will be budgeted.

Therefore, the reporting on the implementation of the national Strategy must include financial or resource indicators. This data is needed for the MPs in order to be able to make informed decisions and evaluate the achievements in relation to the investment with which the commitments are realized. Nothing is free, and least of all reforms aimed against corruptive influence of politics and the business sector on one hand, and the institutional inertia on the other.

THE STRATEGY AS A LIVING DOCUMENT

The Strategy is written but is not carved in stone. On the contrary – it should be a dynamic document, which should be changed on an annual basis. This also stems from the changing nature of the corruption or the discovery of new vulnerable areas and remediation of the old ones as a result of the commitments in the Strategy.

This is not something new and there is an understanding of this need in the SCPC. Hence,

a structured way of consultations at the end of the year will provide a reflection on how current are the commitments and activities. In that way, when reporting about the Strategy, SCPC will be able to submit a proposal for audits to the Parliament which will include the knowledge acquired through a number of sectors, both within the system and external groups, such as the non-governmental sector.

CONCLUSION

The oversight over the implementation of the national Strategy for Fight Against Corruption is an important mean that should ensure that the Strategy delivers concrete results for the citizens, which is the objective of any public policy. The key to ensuring successful oversight is to recognize whether the reforms included in the Strategy are effective, and whether they reduce the corruption or improve the lives of citizens. Hence, three sets of information need to be supervised:

1. How the activities that have been met achieve the objectives set in the Strategy – objectives that should lead to good governance;

2. What resources are used for implementation of the Strategy and is it necessary to increase the investment in the anti-corruption activities;

3. How current is the Strategy and what needs to be updated.

In this way, the oversight is focused on determining success and failure, but it links that situation to the investment as an important factor of progress and expression of the political will necessary for the anti-corruption.

SUMMARY FOR SCPC

The SCPC can make a significant step forward in reporting on implementation of the strategies and set an example for higher accountability to the MPs and the citizens. However, reporting on these three parameters also has a significant role in providing better opportunities for the responsible institutions to achieve their objective. In that regard, the SCPC should do the following in the upcoming period:

1. Prepare a list of questions the institutions would have to answer for each implemented activity and will provide information in what way the activities meet the objectives and improve the life of the citizens.

2. Request from the institutions to estimate what resources are needed for achievement of the 2020 objectives and work, in a early phase, with the line Ministries and the Ministry of Finance in order to secure the respective budgeting.

3. Starting from September 2021, initiate a series of consultations in order to identify whether and what revisions are necessary for the Strategy.

SUMMARY FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE PARLIAMENT

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The MPs often talk in their discussions about whether certain policies are successful or unsuccessful, but the reports from the institutions they monitor rarely include that information. On the contrary – they are oriented on showing statistical information, without interpreting whether and why a certain change is a success, and much less to provide practical information on how it improved the life of the citizens.

Given the importance of the National Strategy for Fight Against Corruption, now is the right time to make a positive step forward and to agree with the SCPC on how to report on it. In that sense, the Parliament should lead a public debate on the reporting on the achievements of the national Strategy, guided by the following:

1. A discussion that will be based on the evaluation of the success. In this way, parliamentary oversight will be focused on how the activities really contribute to the lives of citizens. With this, the parliamentary control will be more focused, in the interest of

the citizens, and it will be possible to be based on the evaluation of the efficiency but also the effectiveness of the measures included in the Strategy;

2. A discussion that will involve expertise of external actors. The value of the knowledge and experience of the public servants within the institutions is indispensable and they should certainly be part of the public debate. However, NGOs, journalists, the business sector and academia monitor the work of the institutions, and some of them have developed tools to measure their success. The MPs need different views and assessments in order to be informed and to be able to make the right decisions, especially when it comes to efficiency and effectiveness of the public service in achieving the commitments of the Strategy.

3. The Parliament should not be limited to one discussion per year, but it should exert its influence on the probability of the Strategy success in two phases. Thus, while the public debate is expected to take place soon after the Annual Report of the SCPC has become available, the MPs, when adopting the budget, should deliberate to what extent funding has been secured for the commitments in the Strategy.

About the project

Anti-Corruption Talks in Parliament is a project aimed at strengthening the oversight role of the MPs in the fight against corruption. The project is funded by the National Endowment for Democracy from the United States.

IDSCS is a think tank organization that researches the development of good governance, the rule of law, and European integration of North Macedonia. The mission of IDSCS is to assist the civic involvement in the decision-making and strengthen the participatory political culture. By strengthening the liberal values, IDSCS contributes to the coexistence of diversities.

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