



Weekly Briefing

Macedonia Social briefing:
Macedonia's most important think tanks
Anastas Vangeli

China-CEE Institute

Kiadó: Kína-KKE Intézet Nonprofit Kft.

Szerkesztésért felelős személy: Chen Xin

Kiadásért felelős személy: Huang Ping

 1052 Budapest Petőfi Sándor utca 11.

 +36 1 5858 690

 office@china-cee.eu

 china-cee.eu

In the previous paper on Macedonia's society we analyzed the role of think tanks in Macedonia's public sphere. In this report, we turn to discussing the cases and experiences of Macedonia's most important think tanks. In particular, we discuss the think tanks that fit the Macedonian definition of the term, which is informed by the post-socialist, transitional context of the country, heavily influenced by the liberal democratic paradigm of the early 1990s. According to this understanding, a think tank is a non-governmental, non-profit research organization who as their mission has the advancement of (broadly speaking) liberal democratic ideals and good governance, as well as the Euro-atlantic integration of Macedonia. In practice, Macedonian think tanks are heavily reliant on external funding provided by Western European and the United States governments and embassies, the European Union institutions, as well as public and private foundations from the West, with Macedonian public and private sources contributing with only a fraction of the think tanks' total funding.

Macedonian Think Tanks among the Top 100 CEE Think Tanks in 2017: CRPM and EPI

The annual Global Go To Think Tank Index Report prepared by professor James McGann from the University of Pennsylvania is a good starting point for obtaining systematically gathered and analyzed data on think tanks around the world. The report also features an analysis of think tanks by various world regions, including a section on the Top 100 Think Tanks in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), which includes Macedonia. According to the 2017 Report (the most recent one), two of the top 100 CEE think tanks there are from Macedonia (the fact that there are only two Macedonian think tanks among the top 100 in the region shows that there is ample potential for improvement of Macedonia's think tanks which is nonetheless often harmed by systemic conditions, something that was also emphasized by the previous paper, which also merits further discussion; but it also suggests that perhaps there is also room for

improvement of the methodology and inclusiveness of the Global Go To Think Tanks Report, which nevertheless is beyond the point of this paper). At number 43 in CEE stands the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) and ranked number 94 in CEE is the European Policy Institute (EPI), both from Skopje.

CRPM is one of the oldest non-governmental think tanks in Macedonia, founded in 2004, run by the academic couple Dr. Zhidas Daskalovski and Dr. Marija Risteska. CRPM is known for its achievements in research, advocacy, policy cycle management, and has also specialized in public opinion polling. It has won three international awards: The PASOS Think Tank Award 2010, The PASOS Think Tank Publication Award 2013, and the GDN Japanese Award for Outstanding Research on Development 2016. Dr. Daskalovski, who has an expertise in liberal theory and Dr. Risteska, specialist in public administration and public policies, are also known public figures who have profiled themselves with providing critical commentary on a number of governance issues, and recently have been critical towards the Agreement between Greece and Macedonia by which Macedonia is obliged to change its name. In their policy-oriented work, CRPM has had a particular impact on legislation and policy debates. Their portfolio lists a number of contributions to the formulation of legislation and policies in the country, such as the Law on higher education, and in particular the replacement of the nostrification of foreign diploma system with diploma recognition system; the Law on pension and disability insurance, and in particular the decrease of the administrative fees charged by private pension funds; the Law on the national air carrier, in particular the cancellation of the monopoly position of MAT and the adoption of the open sky agreement; the Law on fortune games, in particular the change of licensing policy for sport betting houses; the adoption of new system of home care service provision on community level for elderly and feeble people; the new communication system for pension insurance; and various gender participation models for local policy making and budgeting. CRPM has also prepared a number of strategic

documents on national and local level, and contributed to the change and formulation of EU policies towards Macedonia, including the visa free travel policy and the methodology for preparation and consultation of the annual progress report of the European Commission.

The second Macedonian think tank ranked in the top 100 in CEE, EPI, is founded in 2011 and is led by Dr. Simonida Kacarska and Dr. Malinka Ristevska - Jordanova. It is an organization with particular focus on EU affairs, and advancing Macedonia's accession to and integration in the Union, by providing in-depth, methodologically sound, comparative social and policy research, and linking with like-minded organizations in Macedonia, in the Balkan region, and around Europe. EPI works in several thematic areas, including: 1) Democracy, institutions, law; 2) Human rights and media; 3) Enlargement and regional cooperation, foreign policy and security; 4) Market and competitiveness; 5) Social development/Diversity and cohesion; 6) Network industries and environment. They specialize in EU accession monitoring and advocacy; monitoring and promotion of democracy and rule of law; monitoring and evaluation of sectoral policies, and monitoring of how allocated funding under the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance by the EU are being managed. EPI is known for its networking and the initiative to bring together experts from the country and the Western Balkans with the long term objective to pool together knowledge and expertise on EU affairs in Macedonia and beyond. EPI and its researchers have been particularly active in international events concerning Western Balkans – EU relations and the so called “Berlin Process” and “Berlin Plus,” and related advocacy platforms. EPI's Director, Dr. Simonida Kacarska is one of the country's most renowned experts on EU integration, who has authored a number of scholarly, policy and media articles and has gain a Europe-wide recognition in her field.

Other Notable Think Tanks

Aside from these two think tanks listed in the Global Go To Think Tank Index Report, there are few other think tanks that have a high profile in Macedonia and cannot be left out from any detailed discussion on Macedonia's think tank landscape.

The Institute for Democracy “Societas Civilis” - Skopje (IDSCS) is one of the oldest think tanks in Macedonia, founded in 1999. In the past, it was known as a team of young and promising scholars from the Political Science department at the Faculty of Law Iustinianus I at the University Ss Cyril and Methodius. One of its founders is the current President of Macedonia (and Professor at the Faculty of Law), Dr. Gjorge Ivanov, who by the mid 2000-s stopped being associated with the Institute (and in recent years the IDSCS or its staff have at times been critical towards the President). Today the IDSCS is led by Marko Troshanovski (president). IDSCS was among the first non-partisan institutions that conducted methodologically sound public opinion polling, and in particular, pre-electoral polling, and became famous for its nation-wide surveys. Today, the IDSCS pursues the following long-term goals: balanced socio-economic development; active citizen engagement; participative political culture; embodiment of liberal values in the society; respect for the rule of law and good governance; promoting sustainable education; achieving evidence based decision making; and multiethnic and multicultural coexistence. IDSCS has pursued a number of high-profile research projects, and most recently they are known for their work on corruption and informality. They have also taken active role in shaping and contributing to civil society networks during and after Macedonia's political crisis and change (2015-2017) with the goal of promoting good governance and advancing the reform agenda with the goal of advancing Macedonia's EU accession. IDSCS has also a rich portfolio of publications, including the most famous, and most durable peer-reviewed journal in Political Science in Macedonia, the Political Thought quarterly (in cooperation with the Skopje office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung).

The Institute for Social Sciences and Humanities – Skopje (ISSHS), is a unique institution that combines academic teaching at the graduate level with policy-oriented research. It is founded in 2013 and led by Dr. Katerina Kolozova, a philosopher and author with a global readership. The ISSHS has specialized in providing theoretically grounded, in-depth, critical analysis of governance practices, both in the time of the VMRO-DPMNE – DUI government, and the SDSM-DUI one. The ISHSS has undertaken in-depth research on the civic movements that emerged in the period 2015-2017 and on their perspectives, on socio-economic inequalities and labor exploitation, and on topics pertinent to the agendas of democratization, rule of law and European integration. Aside from their regular publications in the form of policy briefs and papers, ISHSS has also taken over the publication of *Identities: Journal for Politics, Gender, and Culture*, and open access peer-reviewed international journal that provides a platform for authentic theoretical production of Southeastern Europe, makes the regional thought internationally visible and links it with international debates. In addition to this, ISSHS has managed to bring a number of established international intellectuals to give lectures and conduct research in Macedonia. ISHSS also partnered with artists and other cultural workers in creative ways of data presentation and visualization.

The think tank Reactor – Research in Action, is led by Tanja Maleska and Marija Bashevska. It is particularly known for advancing the gender perspective in policy analysis and policy making, as well as issues concerning youth and urban development. The analyses of Reactor are data-driven; the organization pays particular attention to developing a sound methodology in its work, and user-friendly online data presentation and visualisation. Some of its most known products are Gender Reactor, a web database on gender inequality and systemic hurdles for women empowerment; Civic Engagement – a study on the changing patterns of political participation of Macedonian citizens; Skopje Grows – a project analyzing the changing city landscape and public and green spaces in the Macedonian capital; React! - a platform for women to report sexual and gender-

based harassment; and Republic of Youth, an initiative to bring together various NGOs that work on youth issues to engage in discussion and advocacy.

Eurothink – Center for European Strategies (formerly known as the Macedonian Center for European Training) is another think tank specializing in EU-centered research and publicity work affirming Macedonia's accession to the Union. Eurothink, even though nominally non-partisan and independent organization, has been a breeding ground for experts who then became public officials from the rank of SDSM. Eurothink and its staff were vocal critics of the former government led by VMRO-DPMNE, and took active part in the social movements 2015-2017. Today, the organization is led by Ljupcho Petkovski and Andreja Stojkovski, and works in the areas of Europeanization, Foreign Policy, Judiciary, Competition Policy, Regional Cooperation and the management of EU funds.

The list of think tanks described here is non-exhaustive, and perhaps it does not do justice to few other organizations comprised of hard-working individuals who face precarious living conditions and often adverse social and political climate.