THE IMPACT OF THE EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATIVE PROCESSES ON THE INTER-ETHNIC RELATIONS IN MACEDONIA

MACEDONIA
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The impact of the Euro-Atlantic integrative processes on the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia

Project by: Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia

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Content:

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Foreword

The inter-ethnic relations have always been an issue of great importance for every multiethnic country and society. This entails that every country which aspires toward prosperity, development and well-being should invest in its inter-ethnic environment and should strive toward reconsideration, revision and improvement of existing inter-ethnic practices. Fostering and promoting good inter-ethnic relations is a critical point which we must devote our efforts to, in order to trace our Euro-Atlantic path.

The idea of NATO and the EU implies not only investment in the security and stability of a country, but also in building and promoting the values that directly affect democracy, equality and inter-ethnic coexistence. Active commitment to these fundamental values is a key to both our Euro-Atlantic path, and to our growth as a society. Meanwhile, Macedonia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures will positively contribute to the harmonization and further improve inter-ethnic relations. Economic development, investment and greater social stability are some of the positive benefits that Macedonia would acquire as a member of NATO and the EU which have the potential to contribute to the prosperity and cooperation between the members of different ethnic communities and to minimize the potential for conflict and tension.

Macedonia remains committed in building a multiethnic society that includes equal opportunities, integration and inclusion of all ethnic communities. The Ohrid Framework Agreement represented a breakthrough that laid the foundations for equal representation in all sectors. However, further action of all the social and political actors is necessary in the further construction of the multi-ethnic character of our society.

The Research that was implemented by the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia is a step forward in that direction, which could serve as an indicator regarding the public opinion on the relationship between the inter-ethnic relations and Euro-Atlantic aspirations of the country.
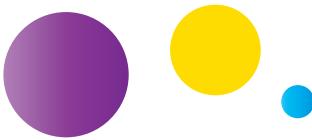
1. Introduction

Macedonia has always been a state with multiethnic character. Well-established inter-ethnic relations are the only way to make progress in the country, and to go ahead with its development as a multiethnic democracy. Referring to its independence, relations between ethnic groups have evolved and developed in various ways and phases. Leading political structures, in most cases, in order to come to power, misused interethnic relations for personal, group or party interests. Such situations have led to the incidents with nationalistic motives, resulting in inter-ethnic conflict in 2001.

However, one of the highlights is the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA). This agreement laid the foundation for further development and progress of the country in this area. It created institutions of multi-ethnic composition providing service to every citizen of this country. Also, the police and army took multiethnic composition. By this huge effort, Macedonia has established its own swift approach for integration in the Euro-Atlantic structures.

Through integration into Euro-Atlantic structures, the OFA will not only get the implementation entirely within the legal and political system, but will be presented as a model of how a multi-ethnic consensual democracy should work. After all, since the declaration of independence and formation of the first independent institutions, Macedonia has multiethnic parliament and multiethnic government on an ongoing basis.

On one hand, it is natural for a country with such an institutional structure to have harmonious inter-ethnic relations, because most of the state policy is implemented in these institutions and by these institutions. On the other hand, the process of the integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, namely NATO and the European Union is a serious medium for Macedonia to express and further promote its cultural and ethnic diversity as a quality and distinctive in itself. Thus, Macedonia's integration into Euro-Atlantic structures is directly related to inter-ethnic relations.

Therefore, the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia has initiated a research which main weight of effort was to examine the public stances and the public opinions concerning the indirect and direct effects of the Euro – Atlantic integrations and the potential positive or negative effects on the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. On the long haul, the research was implemented in order to attain wider attention and to influence the future policy making with regard to the inter-ethnic community building in the country. The whole project comprised several phases: start – up conference, conducting a research (both qualitative and quantitative), organizing four public forums/workshops, publishing brochure with recommendations, and closing (wrap up) conference.

2. Methodology and Research Strategy

The research was implemented in three phases and was specifically structured to serve for quantitative and qualitative data collection of both primary and secondary sources. The whole research lasted from March 2016 to August 2016 and was aimed at exploring the public stances and opinions in respect of the effects that the Euro-Atlantic integrations would have on the overall inter-ethnic relations in the country. The in-depth research comprised a desk research, phone and online survey and a qualitative analysis of the media narratives. It undertook broader and integrated approach by combining both quantitative and qualitative methods and analyzing the recent and the potential measures for improvement of the inter-ethnic relations in the country as prerequisite for successful integration of Republic of Macedonia into the Euro-Atlantic structures.

A **desk research** was conducted as a pre-phase in order to provide the basis for the more detailed research envisioned in this project. It utilized a specific literature and already available secondary data intended to explore what has been already done in direction of the inter-ethnic issues in Macedonia and particularly for its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The primary data was directly extracted using **online questionnaires** by targeting population with different ethnic background, age and gender situated in both urban and rural areas. The online questionnaires had been disseminated through social media tools (particularly Facebook and Twitter), e-mails and posted on the EACM website.

Phone polls were also carried out by random choice targeting the whole region of Republic of Macedonia in accordance with the 'probability sample' approach, in order to provide direct and unbiased information regarding the current stances and public opinions in respect to the connection between the Euro-Atlantic integration and inter-ethnic relations.

Press clippings and press extracts were summarized and analyzed throughout the period of 6 months aimed at acquiring in-depth information regarding the current media narratives on the inter-ethnic issues in the country. The **media analysis** was conducted in compliance with the Method of Critical Discourse Analysis. This analysis was primary from qualitative nature, although a brief quantitative intersection of the media coverage of the inter-ethnic issues was considered. The analysis was conducted considering that the media is important factor in creating the public opinion in every aspect.

Four public forums/workshops were organized in order to promote the research results among the wider community, to stimulate discussions, to raise awareness and to provide valuable insights regarding the experts' standpoints on the relevant topic. The public forums took place in four cities/plan regions with different ethnic composition in Republic of Macedonia, namely Tetovo, Stip, Strumica and Kumanovo and gathered individuals with different ethnic background and professional profile.

The research provided answers to the following research questions: what is the level of support of the population in respect of the Euro-Atlantic integrations; how and to what extent the Euro-Atlantic integration can contribute in improving the inter-ethnic relations and the economic situation in the country; what is the effectiveness of the policies and practices already in place; and what measures should be undertaken in the future for the improvement of the inter-ethnic climate in the country.

3. Research Findings
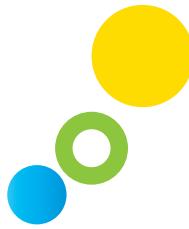
A) Preliminary Research

• An Overview of the Inter-Ethnic relations in Republic of Macedonia

According to the secondary sources that were considered during the research process, since the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, Macedonia is torn between its nationalistic policies, inter-ethnic challenges and its Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The tumultuous period of the Republic of Macedonia before and after independence, right up to the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement is marked by several important events that led to infighting between the two main ethnic groups, the majority of Macedonians and the nation's largest minority group of Albanians. The series of boycotts including the one with the referendum back in 1991, the adoption of the Constitution in 1992 and the census that followed in 1994 had galvanized the dissatisfaction of the both major ethnic groups. The situation was further deteriorated with the Kosovo conflict and refugee crisis which occurred in 1999 and culminated with the inter-ethnic conflict within the Macedonian borders back in 2001.

The conflict was largely a result of the discontent felt among the ethnic Albanians experiencing regular under-representation in public administration and among the levers of power, social exclusion and under-treatment in the Macedonian Constitution. The Ohrid Framework Agreement has made significant advancement in inter-ethnic community building in the country. It was a product of the conclusion of the 2001 inter-ethnic conflict and has provided a footing for reforms and integration of the minorities in Macedonia.

The Albanians demanded changes in the Constitution of the country, which would mean to increase the rights of the Albanian ethnic community, which were not a small number compared to the Macedonians to be neglected in the Preamble of the Constitution. During that time, the Constitution had officially recognized only the Macedonian language and the Cyrillic alphabet as national language and alphabet which would mean that the Albanians were hindered in acquiring education in their mother language and alphabet. The period of destabilization turned into an armed conflict that has affected both major ethnic communities, hence the only solution to end the needless bloodshed was a political decision. With great support from the international community and constructive negotiations, the negotiations were successfully finalized with the Ohrid Framework Agreement, which opened prospects for successful management of the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. The international community, namely NATO and EU, had a significant role in assisting the process of negotiating a political deal for a ceasefire. Their contribution in the inter-ethnic community building in Macedonia was equally important during the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement and during the whole reconciliation process.

The Peace Agreement marked the end of the conflict rejecting violence as a method of achieving political goals. It has foreseen several revisions in the legal, political and institutional framework in Macedonia. More concretely, except of the cessation of hostilities, it has provided reforms for decentralization (by transferring state competences to local municipalities), equitable representation, language usage and special parliamentary procedures.[1] The signing of the agreement was followed by a period of transformation and a process of undertaking measures intended to stimulate the process of transitional justice. This process included attempts for establishment of fact-finding commissions, prompted material reparations and inducted the amnesties as legal means for achieving reconciliation.

From the security perspective, the Ohrid Framework Agreement has strengthened the security environment in the country, has frozen the inter-ethnic conflict and has relaxed the tensions between the two largest ethnic communities in Macedonia. The peaceful and non-violent post-conflict transition process was encouraged as an inevitable precondition for building healthy and resilient society that is capable to ensure the conditions for further coexistence.

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[1] See, Ohrid Framework Agreement, concluded at Ohrid, Macedonia on 13 August 2001.

And along with this process, neither the Albanians, nor Macedonians were fully satisfied, but over the course of time and because of the political compromise of the two largest political parties based in Macedonia, the agreement set on the process of implementation. Although the Ohrid Framework Agreement formally has been more or less implemented, a discontent among the two biggest ethnic communities in Macedonia has been running through the entire period after the conclusion of the agreement. Macedonians considered that they have done enough and that further requests should not be accepted, while the Albanians maintained that the framework agreement is the foundation that still needs to be complemented and upgraded.

Seen from today's perspective, the Ohrid Framework Agreement, brought years of peace and stability in the country with small isolated incidents, which caused no major turbulence on interethnic basis, which is of great significance. Formally speaking, the Agreement today is a cornerstone, both in legislation and in the process of implementing institutional measures. Although the divisions along ethnic lines are not fully displaced, the Ohrid Framework Agreement set the premises for building inter-ethnic mutual trust and coexistence.

- *Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic Aspirations*

The multiethnic character of the Macedonian society is further challenged by the social inequalities, economic deprivations and the poorly managed transition processes.

Besides dealing with these issues internally, the young and still unstable state after the independence and the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement recognized that its survival, development and economic prosperity can be realized only as a part of both EU and NATO alliances. But this dream that the Macedonian state has been dreaming for too long, is burdened by the outstanding issues with its neighbors. Beset with such isolation, the Macedonian economy is under-developed, it experiences a high unemployment rate, and consequently, the socio-economic situation is at lower level. All these factors are affecting the progress of the inter-ethnic relations in the country.[2]

It is undeniable that the accession of Macedonia at EU and NATO would mean open market, free movement of people, goods and services, larger and more secure investment opportunities, economic growth, social security and improved life of citizens in every single sphere. The preliminary research indicates that the countries that acceded NATO and EU have positive economic pay-offs by experiencing significant increase in gross domestic product (GDP) and increase in both inward and domestic investments.[3]

From security perspective, the Euro-Atlantic integrations would mean greater stability, secure borders and the acceptance of the neighbors as allies. In this improved environment, from economic and security point of view, the nationalistic feelings of the citizens will lose momentum and they will be oriented to business cooperation and using all opportunities for more intrinsic cooperation and better quality of life. It also has a capacity to open up the space for the promotion of the coexistence, better promotion of the rights of the minorities, more efficient democratization and effective confidence-building between the communities.

A significant change is expected to experience all the institutions based in Macedonia, as well as the whole legislative and political system. NATO and EU conditionality and enlargement policy imply investing in the inter-ethnic environment in Macedonia and especially in the realm of the democracy, human rights and the protection of the rights of the minorities.

As it is actually stated in the original text of the Ohrid Framework Agreement, "a modern democratic state in its natural course of development and maturation must continually ensure that its Constitution fully meets the needs of all its citizens and comports with the highest international standards, which themselves continue to evolve."[4]

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[2] See more in International Crisis Group, "Macedonia: Ten Years After the Conflict" (11 August 2011), available at https://www.ciaonet.org/catalog/22929

[3] See more about NATO economic benefits in "The NATO Effect: On the Economic Trends of its New Member Countriesand Potential Projection on Georgian Context" and more on EU economic benefits in Nauro Campos, Fabrizio Coricelli and Luigi Moretti, "How much do countries benefit from membership in the European Union?" (09 April 2014), available at http://voxeu.org/article/how-poorer-nations-benefit-eu-membership; See also, Badinger, H, "Growth Effects of Economic Integration: Evidence from the EU Member States", *Review of World Economics* (2005).

[4] Ohrid Framework Agreement, concluded at Ohrid, Macedonia on 13 August 2001

Joining NATO and the EU, where diversity is nurtured and respected, for the citizens of Macedonia would mean an impulse internally to reduce ethnocentrism and mistrust between ethnic communities, and to increase unity, cooperation and respect.

B) Phone Interviews

A total of 1079 interviews were conducted in the period of 15th June to 15th August 2016. The respondents were selected randomly in accordance with 'probability sample' approach with a special attention the survey sampling to provide coverage of all the groups of interest for the research and to deliver unbiased results.
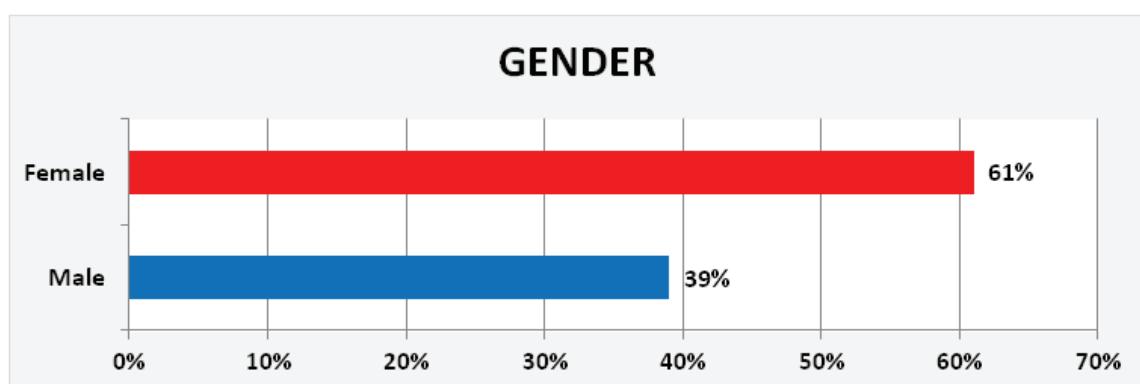
During the research a Simple Sampling Frame has been chosen taking into account the cost-prohibitive nature of the Detailed Stratified Sampling. The simple stratification was approximately determined by the size of the population concentrated in both urban and rural areas (information primarily retrieved from the National Statistical Office – 2002 census conducted in Macedonia).

The sampling frame was specifically designed to comprise population with different ethnicity, age and gender. The interviews were conducted through traditional landline phones targeting population aged 15 and older. Aside from possible 'sampling' errors, potential 'non-sampling' ('response' and 'data coding') errors were also taken into consideration although such misinformation or systematic biases are deemed as negligible. The appraised margin of error (of both sampling and non-sampling errors) is around 3 %.
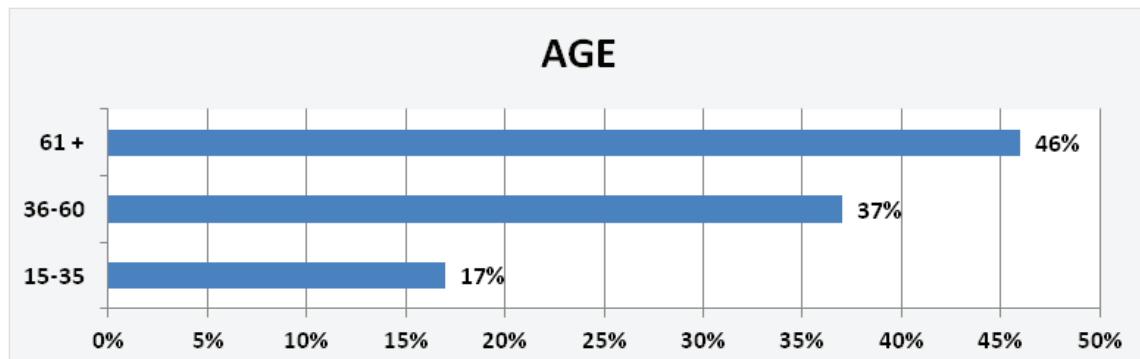
The poll consisted of three close-ended questions which purpose was to get general insights about the stances of the population regarding these important issues. The results have been expressed in percentages and visual graphs, but also were descriptively articulated.
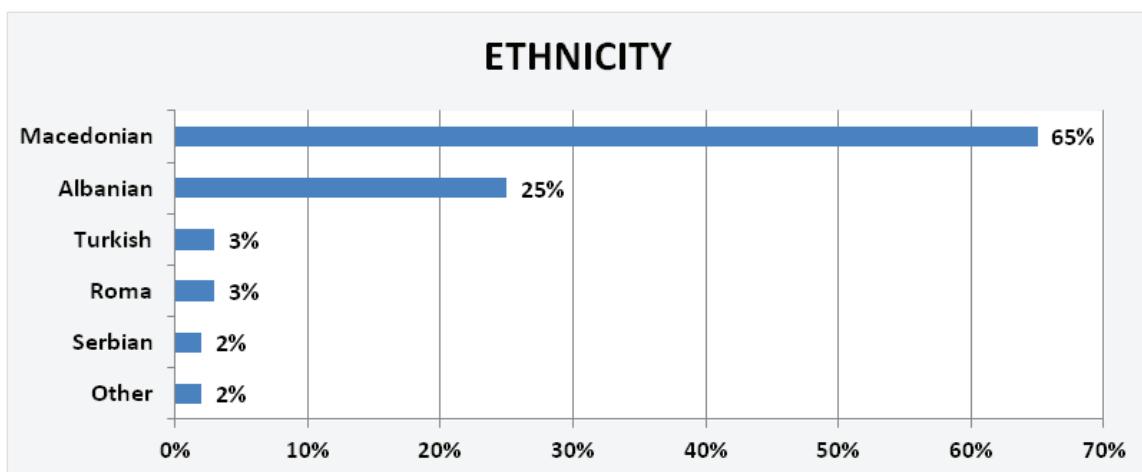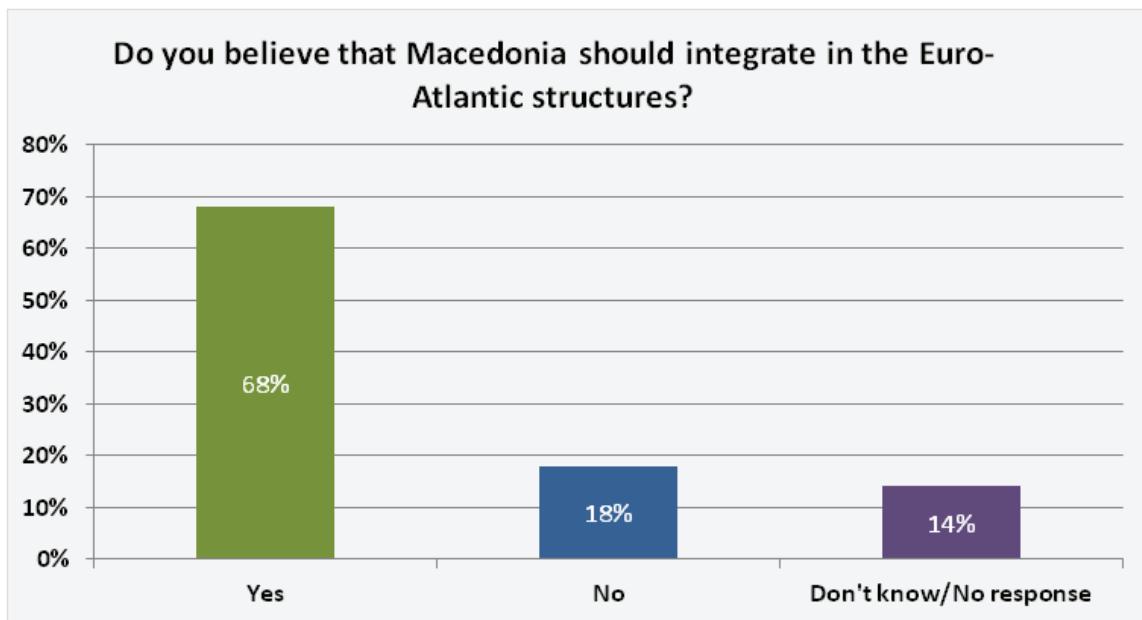
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

GENDER

AGE

ETHNICITY

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity	Percentage
Macedonian	65%
Albanian	25%
Turkish	3%
Roma	3%
Serbian	2%
Other	2%

RESULTS OF THE PHONE INTERVIEWS

1. Do you believe that Macedonia should integrate in the Euro - Atlantic structures?

The respondents were asked about their preference regarding whether or not Macedonia should be integrated in the Euro - Atlantic structures. The results display an overlap in the positive attitudes for almost 68 % of the respondents. 18 % said that they think Macedonia should not become a NATO and EU member, while 14 % don't have defined position regarding the question.

Do you believe that Macedonia should integrate in the Euro-Atlantic structures?

| Response	Percentage
Yes	68%
No	18%
Don't know/No response	14%

2. Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in Euro-Atlantic structures holds potential to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?

According to the results, a vast majority of citizens (59 %) believe that Euro-Atlantic integrations are important facet in improving the interethnic relations. 25 % of the population has uttered "no", while 16 % have no stance regarding the question.
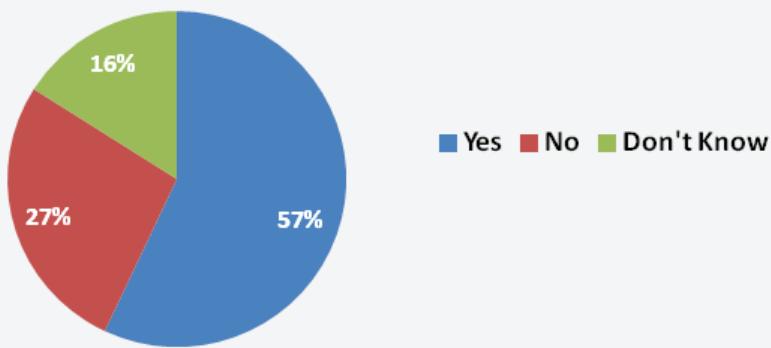
Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in Euro-Atlantic structures holds potential to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?
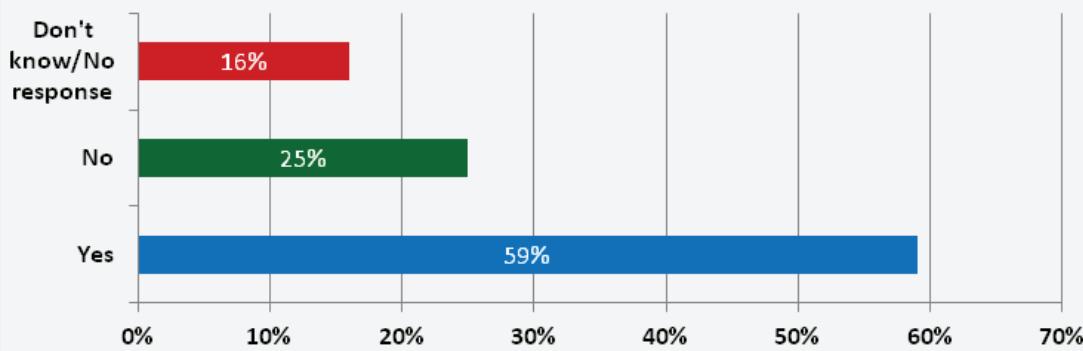
3. Do you believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia will improve the economic situation in the country?

Most citizens (57 %) believe that the Euro-Atlantic integrations will positively impact on the economic situation in the country. 27 % of the respondents think that the Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonia will not improve the economic situation, while the 16 % of them said that they don't know what kind of effect the integrations will produce in respect of the economic situation in the country.

Do you believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration of the Republic of Macedonia will improve the economic situation in the country?
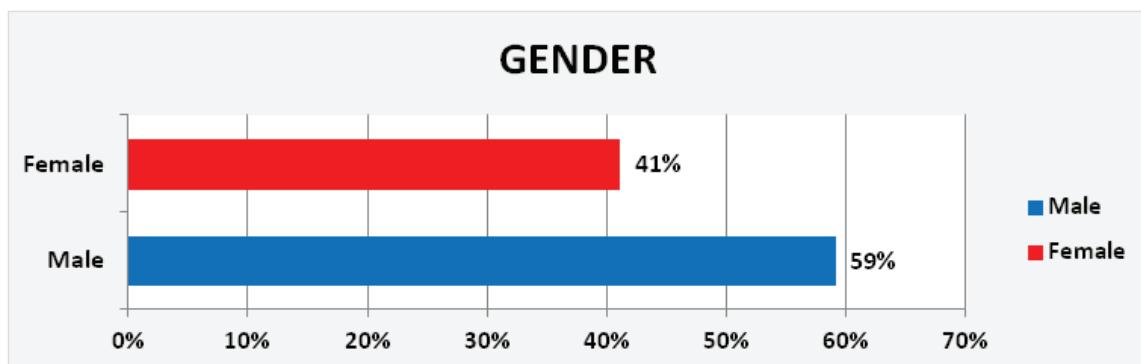
C) Online Questionnaires

The online survey was envisioned to obtain broader insights regarding the stances of the population concerning the inter-ethnic relations in the country. The representative sample comprised a total of 185 respondents.
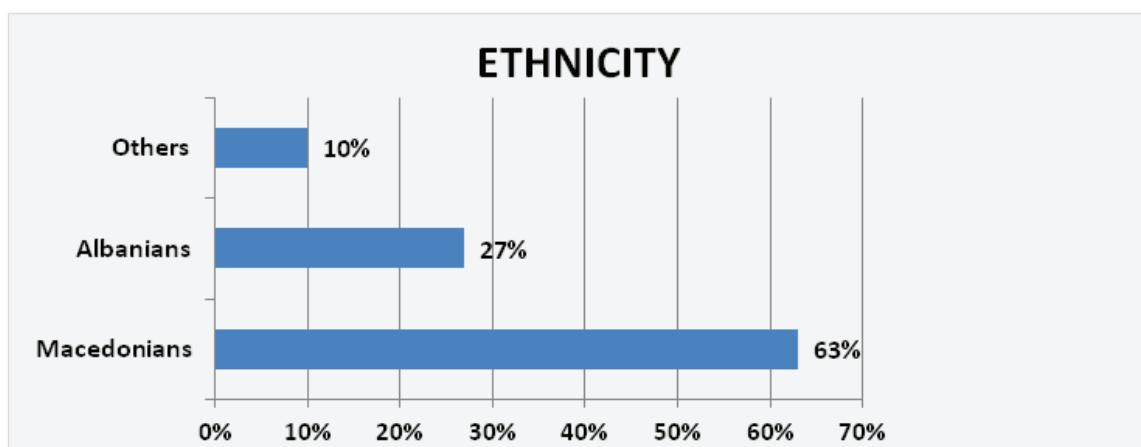
The questions were divided in two categories out of which one category was focused on the effects that the Euro-Atlantic integrations would have on the inter-ethnic relations, while the other category was designed to assess the effectiveness of the already implemented measures.
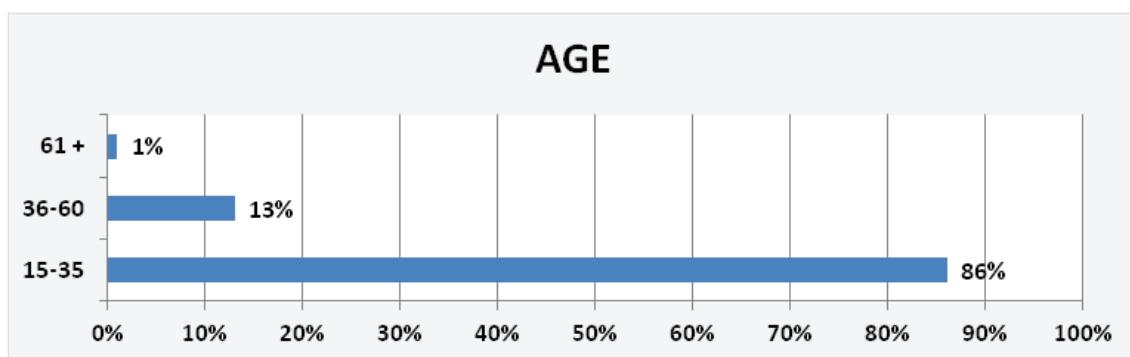
DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

GENDER

ETHNICITY

AGE

RESULTS OF THE ONLINE QUESTIONNAIRES
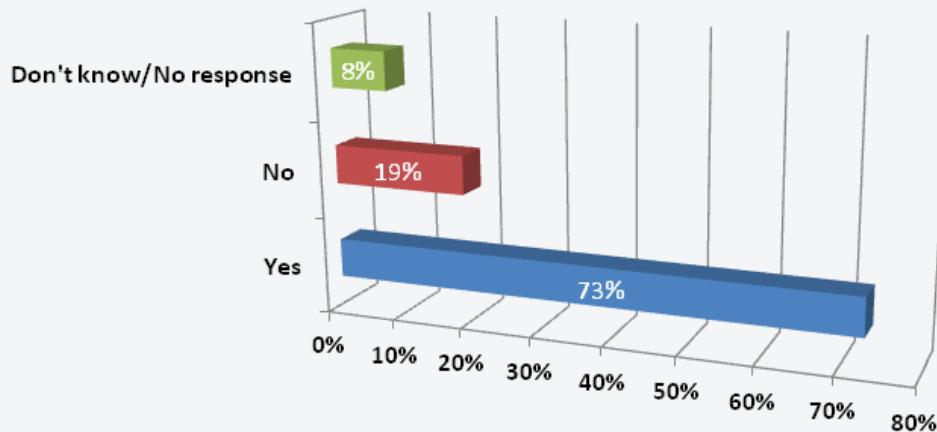
1. Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and EU holds potential to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?

With regards to the possible improvement of the inter-ethnic relations in the country, most of the respondents (73 %) replied with "yes", 19 % said "no", while a really small proportion (8 %) replied with "don't know".
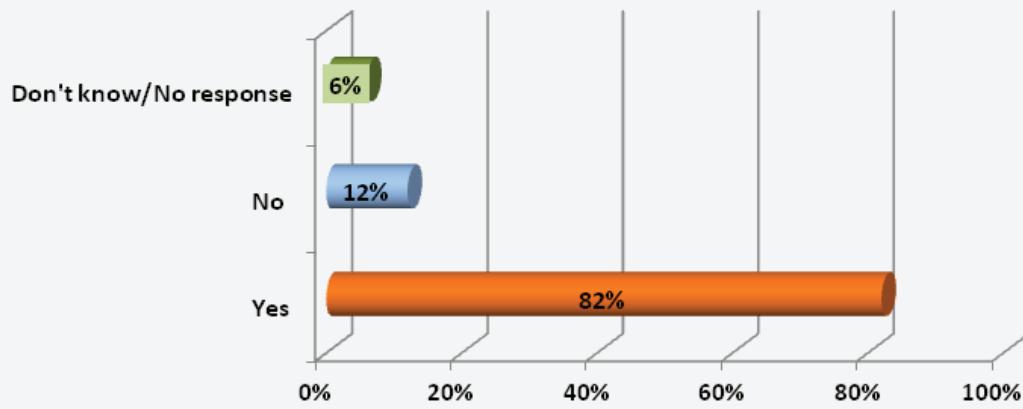
Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and EU holds potential to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?

2. Do you believe that Euro-Atlantic integration will mean greater security and guarantee of the country's internal stability?

Out of 185 respondents, 82 % believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration will mean greater security and guarantee of the country's internal stability. 12 % have opposite opinion, while 6 % have no opinion.

Do you believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration will mean greater security and guarantee of the country's internal stability?

3. Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and EU has the capacity to deliver faster economic growth and greater social security of citizens of all ethnic communities?

The results have shown that 76 % of the respondents believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and EU would provide basis for faster economic growth and greater social security. 16 % said "no", while only a minor part have no opinion.

Do you believe that the integration of the Republic of Macedonia in NATO and EU has the capacity to deliver faster economic growth and greater social security of citizens of all ethnic communities?
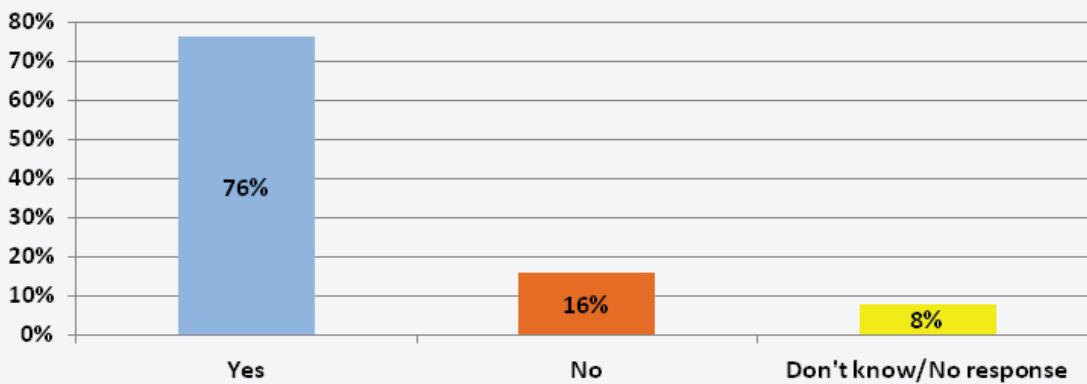
4. In your opinion, will the improvement of the economic situation of the citizens of Macedonia indirectly improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?

Regarding this question, the dominant view (82 %) is that there is a great probability that the inter-ethnic relations will be improved as an indirect result of the improvement of the economic situation in the country. 9 % of the respondents think that there is not such probability, while the other 9 % have no defined position.

In your opinion, will the improvement of the economic situation of the citizens of Macedonia indirectly improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country?
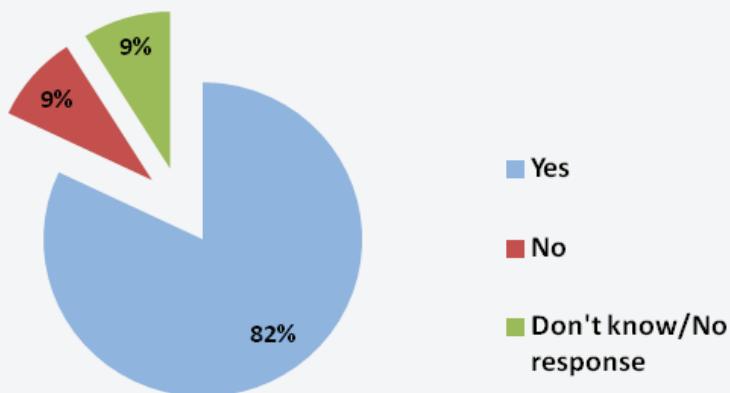
5. In your opinion, has the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement influenced the development of democratic processes in Macedonia as a prerequisite for membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures?

Most citizens (55 %) think that the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement influenced the development of democratic processes in Macedonia as a prerequisite for membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures. 33 % of the respondents expressed opposite view, while 12 % have no opinion in respect of this question.
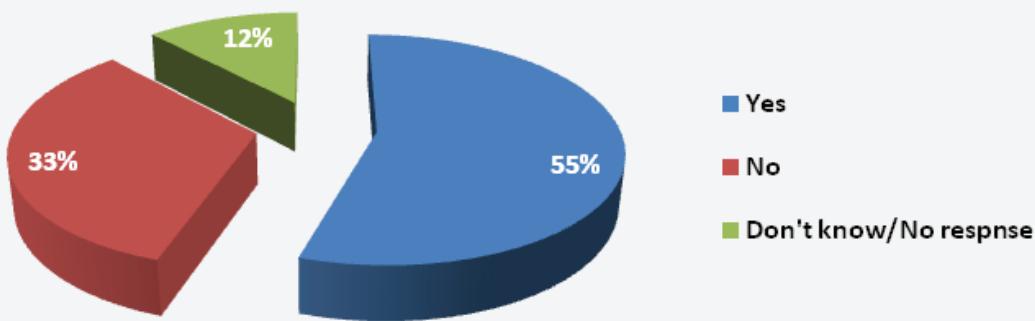
In your opinion, has the adoption of the Ohrid Framework Agreement influenced the development of the democratic processes in Macedonia as prerequisite for membership in the Euro-Atlantic structures?

- Yes — 55%
- No — 33%
- Don't know/No respnse — 12%

6. Do you think that the implementation of the Framework Agreement, which stipulates proportionality in employment in public institutions, improves the confidence in the public institutions of all ethnic communities in Macedonia?

The prevailing view of the respondents (56 %) positively assessed the implemented measures which presuppose proportionality in employment in public institutions. 37 % think that these measures are ineffective, while the 7 % said that they have no stance regarding this question.

Do you think that the implementation of the Framework Agreement, which stipulates proportionality in employment in public institutions, improves the confidence in the public institutions of all ethnic communities in Macedonia?

- Yes — 56%
- No — 37%
- Don't know/No response — 7%
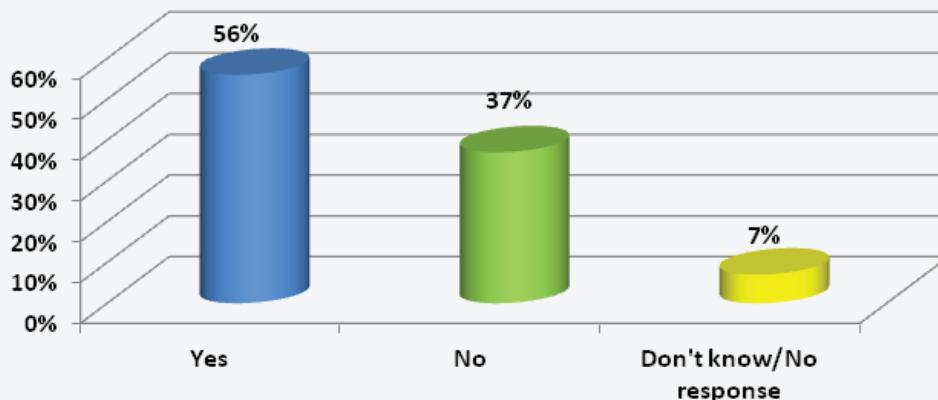
7. Do you think that the quotas in education envisaged with the Framework Agreement are an effective political measure in building a multi-ethnic society?

This question gathered the following results: 53 % of the respondents believe that the quotas in education envisaged with the Framework Agreement are an effective political measure in building a multi-ethnic society, 38 % of them replied with "no", while 9 % are not acquainted well with this policy.

Do you think that the quotas in education envisaged with the Framework Agreement are an effective political measure in building a multiethnic society?

- Don't know/No response — 9%
- No — 38%
- Yes — 53%
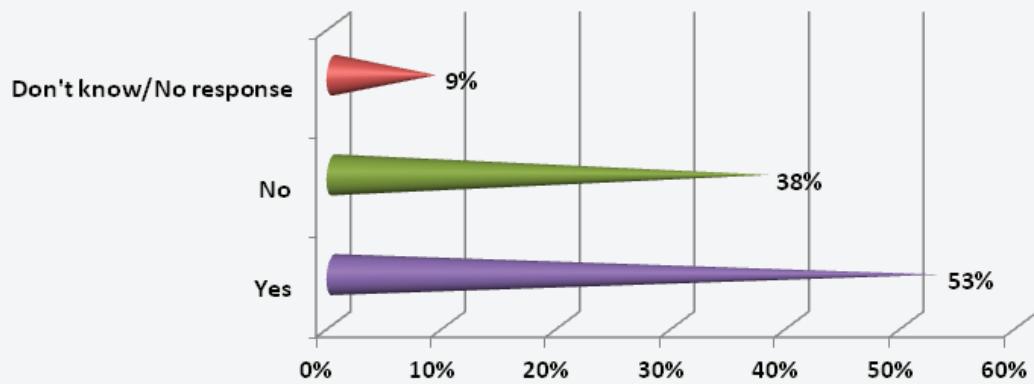
8. Do you believe that the gradual building of the multi-ethnic character of our society goes in favor of faster integration into EU and NATO?

78 % of the respondents said that they believe that the gradual building of the multi-ethnic character of our society goes in favor of faster integration into EU and NATO. There were 14 % of the respondents that don't believe that this articulation is true, while 8 % don't know.

Do you believe that the gradual building of the multi-ethnic character of our society goes in favor of faster integration into NATO and EU?

- Yes — 78%
- No — 14%
- Don't know/No response — 8%
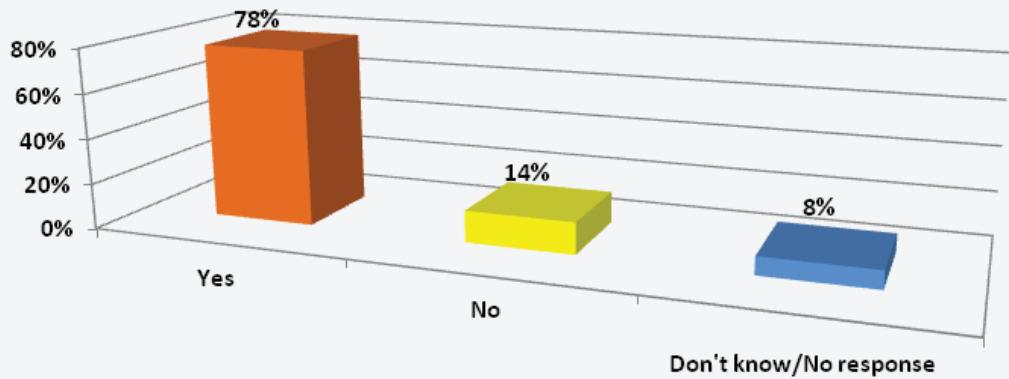
9. In your opinion, does the inter-ethnic dialogue within the framework of fostering good neighborly relations positively affect the Euro-Atlantic integration processes?

This question was positively responded by the vast majority of the respondents (88%), 6 % of them responded negatively, while 6 % said that they don't have a standpoint regarding the question.

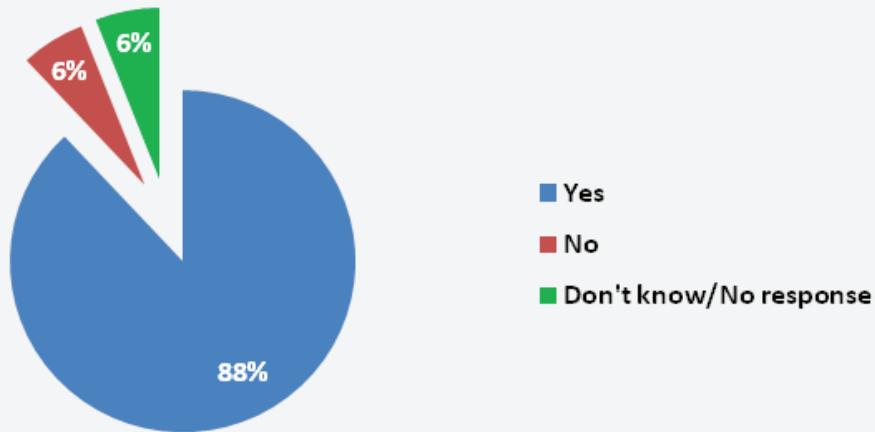In your opinion, does the inter-ethnic dialogue within the framework of fostering good neighborly relations positivly affect the Euro-Atlantic integration processes?

6%
6%
88%

■ Yes
■ No
■ Don't know/No response

10. Do you believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration as a whole will create conditions for greater cooperation between members of different ethnic communities in Macedonia?

The results of this question demonstrate that the larger part of the respondents (78 %) think Euro-Atlantic integrations will create conditions for greater cooperation between members of different ethnic communities. 11 % have an opposing opinion, while 11 % do not have a defined standpoint.

Do you believe that the Euro-Atlantic integration as a whole will create conditions for greater cooperation between members of different ethnic communities in Macedonia?

80%
60%
40%
20%
0%

78%
11%
11%

Yes   No   Don't know/No response
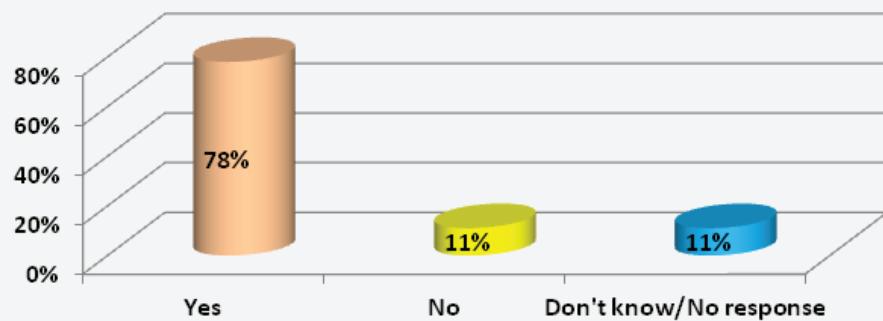
D) Analysis of the Media Coverage

For the purpose of research, special attention was paid to the collection and analysis of press clippings and press extracts from several renowned media and other means of reporting based in Macedonia in order to obtain insightful information about the media narratives concerning the inter-ethnic relations in the country. To that end, six TV channels (Sitel, Telma, 24 Vesti, Alsat, NOVA TV and Kanal 5), three newspapers (Dnevnik, Vest, Nova Makedonija, Lajm) and three Internet portals (Kurir.mk, Press 24, Almakos) were considered.

They were particularly selected taking into account their role, function and importance in the political and social setting in the country. The other additional parameters that were taken into consideration during the selection process were the level of the influence that the media have over a large proportions of the population in Macedonia, the length of the existence starting from the period of their establishment and their overall reputation among the citizens. The consideration was focused on the days in the period from March 2016 to August 2016 and was centered on reports related to the inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country.

The methodological approach that was implemented was the interdisciplinary Method of Discourse Analysis in combination with the Method of Content Analysis. This specific methodology was particularly employed in order to assist in obtaining information of the media narratives in the designated period i.e. to provide in-depth insights on how the media based in Macedonia report on inter-ethnic issues.

Assuming that the media is a significant factor in creating the public opinion, this part of the research was intended to explore what kind of narrative the media utilizes in everyday reporting regarding the inter-ethnic relations and whether it holds potential to have positive or negative effect on the overall inter-ethnic environment in the country. The focus of the media analysis was at exploring the language and the specific wording employed by a particular media and the general content of the media texts.

In particular, the analysis was concentrated in determining how the investigative journalism is conceptualized in terms of whether (or not) they employ xenophobic rhetoric; whether (or not) their reports have tendency to incite inter-ethnic hatred, conflict or bigotry; and whether (or not) their reports are more or less biased or politically motivated when the inter-ethnic issues are concerned. The parameters that were explored were the level of neutrality, the level of incitement and the level of ethnocentrism and stereotyping.

QUANTITATIVE INTERSECTION	
MEDIA	Approximate number of articles covering inter-ethnic relationsin the analyzed period (also expressed in percentage
TOTAL	**97**
TV CHANNELS	**65**
SITEL	**20 - 31 %**
TELMA	**8 - 12 %**
24 VESTI	**12 - 18 %**
ALSAT	**12 - 18 %**
NOVA TV	**5 - 8 %**
KANAL 5	**8 - 12 %**
NEWSPAPERS	**15**
DNEVNIK	**6 - 40 %**
VEST	**3 - 20 %**
LAJM	**6 - 40%**
INTERNET PORTALS	**17**
KURIR	**7 - 41 %**
ALMAKOS	**3 - 18 %**
PRESS 24	**7 - 41 %**

Number of reports relating to inter-ethnic relations expressed in percentage and translated into graphs.

TV CHANNELS
   - Total number of considered media articles - 65
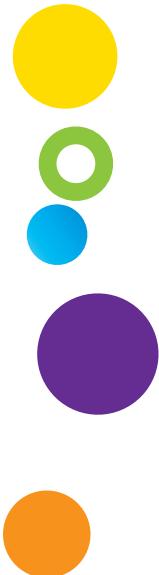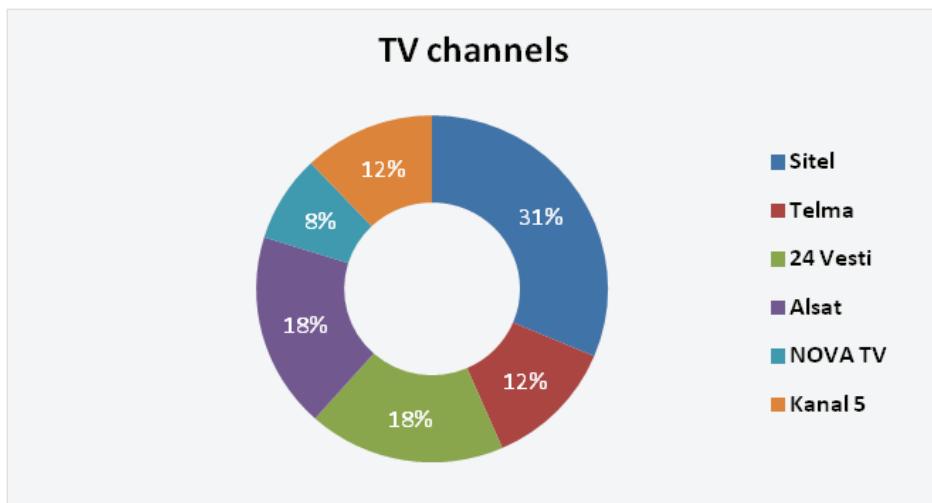
NEWSPAPERS
   - Total number of considered media articles - 15
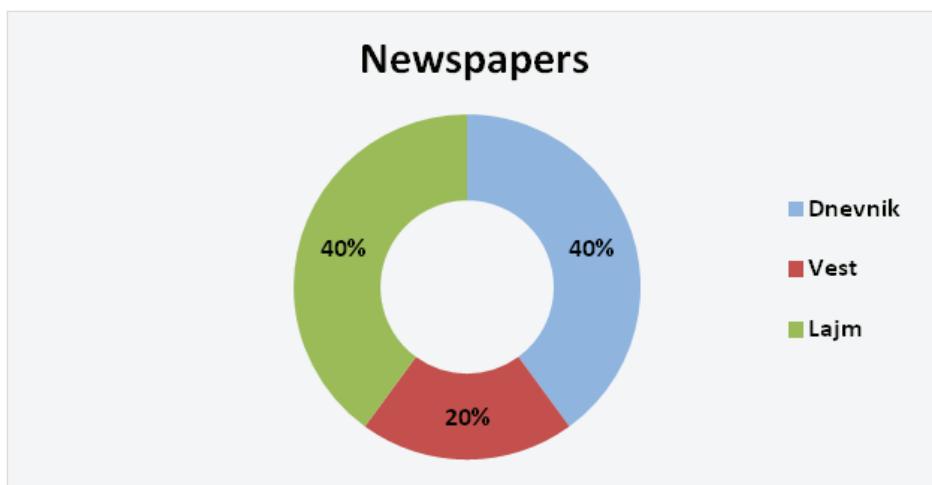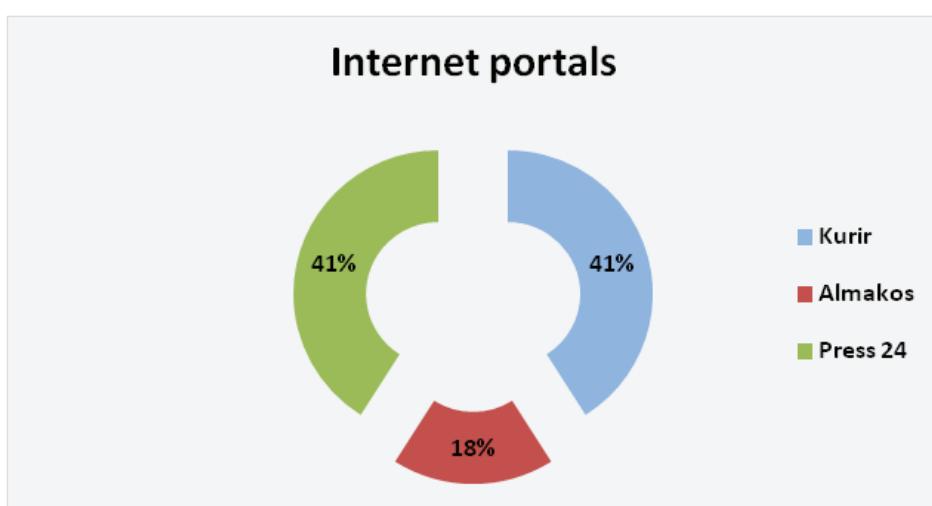

INTERNET PORTALS
   - Total number of considered media articles - 17

According to our selected texts and the same systematically and coherently analyzed we have reached several conclusions.

One of the main events that marked the designated period revolves around the building of the 51-meter long Cross in the Skopje Neighborhood of Butel which has stirred resentment among a group of ethnic Albanians. This event has attracted much media attention and was highly politicized. In this respect, for instance, pro-governmental newspaper Kurir has stated: *Guided by the leadership of DUI, protestors stoned the foundations of the cross in Butel, tore down the barriers and set up tents and Albanian flags on the place where the multi-foot metal cross is scheduled to be raised. All this, the police at the behest of Oliver Spasovski from SDSM only followed by side.*[5] *On the other side, the national television broadcaster Alsat relying on the opinions of analysts has reported: The recent developments with the Eagle in Chair and the Cross in Butel is the last attempt of DUI and VMRO - DPMNE to conceal the crime that they should bear responsibility for.*[6] 24 Vesti has stated: *These developments have caused uneasiness in the public and criticism and accusations that this is the scenario of VMRO-DPMNE and DUI to incite ethnic tensions before the elections.*[7] These instances indicate that the political turmoil going on in the country largely shaped the media reporting in the given context.

The other events were minor sport incidents, ethnic qualifications during the counter-government protests, demolition of national monuments and reporting about the treatment of certain vulnerable categories of ethnic groups. In the analyzed period there were no major inter-ethnic collisions, incidents or tensions. The media mainly reports on these issues using mild and balanced rhetoric given the sensitivity of the inter-ethnic issues. However, the media is sometimes unselective when conveying information from variety of sources and approach to these issues without in-depth scrutiny. In this vein, there is a deficiency of investigative journalism especially with regard to the internet portals which usually rely on other sources.

Speaking generally, the media usually use ethnic identification in reporting about certain less grave conflicts or tensions between ethnic groups. However, it was not identified expressive xenophobic approach in reporting neither in Macedonian nor in Albanian media. There is also an absence of explicit or implicit ethnocentrism, stereotyping narratives or discriminatory approach. More or less, sometimes the overemphasized ethnic background of the individuals covered with the reports can be construed in negative connotation. However, it should not be neglected that the identification of the ethnic groups is not employed when reporting particularly in relation of the Euro-Atlantic integrations and inter-ethnic relations in the country.

Considering both the Macedonian and the Albanian media, one can infer that there is evidently a different approach when reporting on inter-ethnic issues, but these differences are largely shaped by the ethnic and religious affiliation of the editorial board or the political orientation of the medium. The ideological differences of the media are directly reflected in the way the media reports on inter-ethnic issues.

It was noted that neither the Macedonian media, nor the Albanian media invoke associations with previous incidents or ethnic tensions when reporting on sensitive issues. It was also observed that in the reporting of the events, the media does not frame the events in ethnic or historical context, but instead places them in political setting. What was interpreted as a positive signal is that there was not exaggerated or excessive one-sided reporting or a reporting of some of the analyzed media that was solely focused on the issues of its ethnic group, but rather, there is a balanced media approach in this respect.

However, the analysis has shown that in Macedonian media there is a lack of impartial and balanced reporting. The media is often engaging in politically-motivated speculations instead solely focusing on facts. Nevertheless, these speculations do not appear to be tendentious and to promote intolerance among ethnic communities in Macedonia. In the considered articles there were not observed texts that contain intolerance, condemnation, hate speech or any other form of discrimination based on ethnic or religious grounds, except for a slight bias when mouthing texts as important or less significant when broadcasting the information relevant to inter-ethnic issues. Although explicit hate speech wasn't identified, the objective approach in some of the media texts is still missing.

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[5] http://kurir.mk/makedonija/politika/vo-dogovor-so-spasovski-povlechena-politsijata-i-postaveni-shatori-vo-butel/

[6] http://alsat.mk/News/240937/analitichari-so-stav-za-orelot-i-za-krstot

[7] http://24vesti.com.mk/dui-na-protest-protiv-krstot-vo-butel

Notwithstanding, in general, the most of the media considered during the research period, irrespective of their type, have taken neutral position when conveying certain information or covering an event with inter-ethnic background. This fact has a positive sound in respect of the inter-ethnic environment in the country.

Media approach
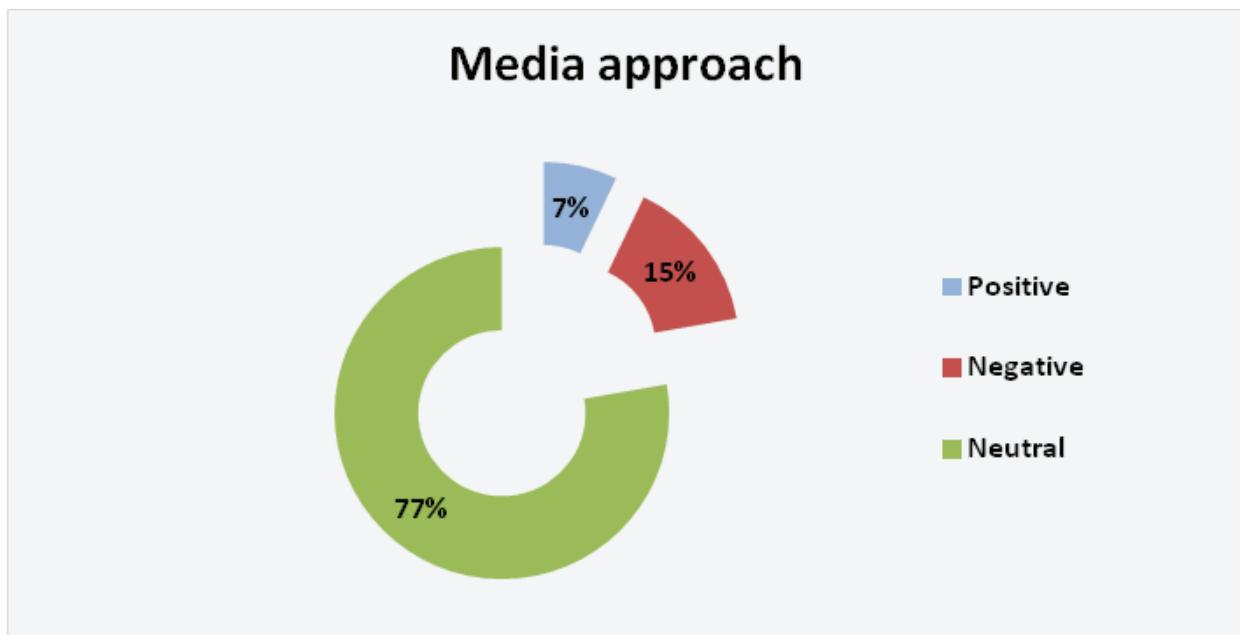
As the research results suggest, the media is less interested in covering events which concern inter-ethnic matters of lesser gravity or events which have positive contribution on the inter-ethnic relations in the country. Another point that is worth noting is that there was not a single text which was either focused on the impact that the Euro-Atlantic integrative processes would have on the inter-ethnic relations or a text that could provide in-depth analysis and discussion regarding the symbiosis of these two important topics.

4. Conference Findings

A. Start-up Conference

The project's start-up event was organized as a part of the international scientific conference entitled: "SEECURE 2016". The event took place on 14th of April 2016 at Army Hall, Skopje.It was an integral part of the last panel focused on inter-ethnic relations in the region of South East European Countries. It accentuated the role that the integration can play on improving the inter-ethnic relations and how it would contribute to inter-ethnic community building.

The Moderator of the panel was **Mr. Ilija Djugumanov**, President of YATA Macedonia. There were several important panelists that expressed their opinion on this issue.

According to **Dr. Lidija Georgieva, University Professor**, the integration in EU and NATO structures can only bring positive results for the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia. She said that the integrations can be observed from micro and macro perspective and that every country should intersect both economic and multi-ethnic aspect toward effective integration.

Mr. Rizvan Sulejmani, University Professor, outlined the current trends and perceptions in terms of integration and inter-ethnic relations. His speech also covered the importance of polity and decentralization in inter-ethnic community building.

Mr. Aleksandar Krzalovski, Executive Director at Macedonian Center for International Cooperation, presented several researches and statistics regarding inter-ethnic relations. Summarizing the results of numerous researches regarding public opinions conducted in the previous years in Macedonia, he said that there are trends in amelioration in inter-ethnic relations.

Mr. Albert Musliu, Political Analyst, emphasized that the most important thing in a multi-ethnic community is building common identity according to EU model, but preserving the specifics of every ethnic group. He also underlined the fact that the integrations in the Euro-Atlantic structures will improve the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia.

Mr. Nano Ruzin, University Professor, he deliberated upon the topic noting that the problem of inter-ethnic relations and the division along ethnic lines is rooted in the Balkan conflicts and in his view it can be overcome only by creating new values and following and spreading the ideas of the Euro-Atlanticism.

B. Four Public Forums / Workshops

The four public forums/workshops were organized in four cities/ plan regions in Republic of Macedonia in order to promote the research results, to raise awareness and to stimulate discussion on the issues of importance. They were organized in university facilities in order to draw students and young professionals considering their importance in the society as future political and social leaders.

The four public forums were constructed in a way to briefly expose the results of the research, to share know-how and to stimulate debate and discussion.

The *first public forum/workshop* was organized on 6th of October, 2016, at the premises of the Tetovo State University in Tetovo. The event gathered more than 80 students along with professors and journalists from the region.

The event started with the speech of the Deputy Minister for Defense, Dr. Bekim Maksuti. the next speakers were Mr. Ismet Ramadani, the President of the Euro – Atlantic Council of Macedonia, Mr. Trifun Kostovski – Executive of the Business Club of ATA Macedonia, Prof. Ylber Sela from Tetovo State University, and Ms. Marija Jankuloska, Coordinator of the Research.

The *second public forum/workshop* in a row was held in the Ceremonial Hall of the Faculty of Law at the State University "Goce Delchev" in Stip.

The second debate was opened by the President of the Euro - Atlantic Council, Mr. Ismet Ramadani, who noted that the interethnic relations will be much more relaxed if we follow the Euro-Atlantic values. Mr. Ramadani in his brief speech stressed the need for this research to be a message for policy-makers to work towards further improvement of interethnic relations in the country.

Prof. dr. Ananiev, Dean of the Faculty of Law at the State University "Goce Delchev" in Stip, welcomed the project of the Euro - Atlantic Council of Macedonia and reminded that there is a clear correlation of security environment and interethnic relations in each country.

The Executive Director of the Business Club of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia, Mr. Trifun Kostovski addressed the business opportunities and benefits arising from the membership of Macedonia in NATO. He also stressed that NATO membership is crucial for economic development of Macedonia, attracting foreign investment and creating new opportunities for businesses.He also emphasized that the interethnic problems come to the fore when economic growth is low and in that direction he stressed the necessity of dialogue with our neighbors.

Mr. Albert Musliu, Political Analyst, in his speech said that Macedonia should work to preserve the tradition of coexistence. He also assessed that the core of equitable representation rests upon every aspect of the population to feel the State as its own and that the promotion of inter-ethnic relations is directly linked with reducing the sense of deprivation and exclusion.

The **third public forum** was held on 19.10.2016 at the State University "Goce Delchev" in Strumica. The third public forum was opened by the Project Director, Mr. Ilija Djugumanov who made a brief overview of the research findings and indicated the importance of the project for our country and the topic that it analysis. Later, Ms. Marija Jankuloska, Research Coordinator, presented in detail the results of the research.

The **forth and the last public forum** was organized on 3rd of November in Kumanovo.

"The political elites will have to answer the need of the citizenship for positive impact from the Euro – Atlantic integrations in the line of bettering the inter – ethnic relations, and if that is the wish of the citizens, that means that we need to build stable institutions, governance of law, independent media and courts, and if the institutions function good, and if they answer the needs of the citizens, then we are a step closer to NATO and EU membership." – said Mr. Ismet Ramadani, President of the Euro – Atlantic Council of Macedonia who opened the event.

"The people want to be a part of a civilization with which they will share the same values, and we, the people want to develop and go forward, but still stay in our own country." – emphasized Mr. Trifun Kostovski, Executive of the Business Club of ATA Macedonia.

Dr. Zoran Damjanovski, Mayor of Kumanovo started his speech with the conclusion that Kumanovo is a smaller version of Macedonia, and a good example for tolerance and inter-ethnic cohabitation.

"The country is deeply divided, and that is why this kind of initiatives help in building a society in which the differences will be respected, and without this values, Macedonia will not be able to become a member country of NATO and EU. This city was in big temptation in 2001 and last year, but it managed to succumb the threat, and to not be involved in a very dark process of ethnic segregation. Now we expect the Courts to conclude what happened in Divo Naselje, and which were the motives. In the meantime, we need to put a stop to the ethnic segregation and the ethno chauvinism in the country.", - said Dr. Damjanovski.

On this event Mr. Albert Musliu, political analyst once again emphasized that Kumanovo is an example of harmonized inter – ethnic relations in the country, and he said that the NATO integration will release both the citizens and the institutions from the constant fear of a threat from inside or from outside.

The four public forums/workshops opened and discussed a number of questions related to the current inter-ethnic setting in Macedonia in the context of the Euro-Atlantic integrations, mainly whether or not the Euro-Atlantic integrations hold potential to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country as a whole. The main conclusions suggested that the numerous experts and pundits based in Macedonia believe that the Euro-Atlantic integrations would have positive impact on the inter-ethnic relations in the country. Several factors were mentioned as direct outcomes of the integration process that have capacity indirectly to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country, among which the improvement of the economic conditions, the growth of both the inward and domestic investments, the improvement of the standard of living and the overall social status of the citizens.

C. Final Conference

The project and the research were rounded off by the organization of a Final Conference which addressed the examined issues and much more. It gathered respected speakers, professors, representatives of the NGOs, students and young professionals. The aim of the final conference was to present the results of the research, and to encourage a debate on the relationship of the Euro-Atlantic integrations and the improvement of the inter-ethnic relations in the country.

The conference was opened by **Mr. Ismet Ramadani, President of ATA Macedonia**, who in his introductory speech emphasized the need for inter-ethnic dialogue and understanding as a prerequisite for successful integration of Macedonia in NATO and EU. He further pointed out that economic development and uniform standards are crucial in the promotion of the interethnic relations in the country.

The **Deputy Prime Minister for European Affairs, Mr Arber Ademi** said that all ethnic groups in the country regardless of their political ideology should strive towards a common goal i.e. for a successful integration of Macedonia into the EU and NATO. He noted that the integration means fostering inter-ethnic relations and that the survey conducted by the EACM is of paramount importance in this respect.

The **Secretary General of the Atlantic Treaty Association, Mr. Jason Wiseman**, welcomed the research and stressed its importance and tremendous value for the Macedonian endeavors in becoming a NATO member. He made a comparison between the situation in Belgium and Canada and the one in Macedonia which according to him are illustration of multi-ethnic society and a mix of different cultures. In this regard, he concluded that improvement of interethnic relations in the country can be viewed as political leverage in Macedonia's efforts toward full integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

At the end of the first panel session, **Mr. Ilija Djugumanov, member of the Presidency of ATA Macedonia**, presented the results of the research and also highlighted the importance of the research for the Euro-Atlantic path of Macedonia and the importance of the recommendations that will be disseminated to the institutions and policy makers.

According to **Mr. Trifun Kostovski, Executive Director of the Business Club of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia**, which opened the second panel, NATO and the EU represent postulates of equality and other values that are crucial for the progress of society. He stressed that the Euro-Atlantic integration have the capacity to positively affect the business community in Macedonia and to improve the business climate which is very important for the promotion of the interethnic relations. He noted that Macedonia should invest more in infrastructure, capital investment and energy projects which are important for fostering the inter-ethnic relations in the country and its Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

Prof. Diana Gupta, President of ATA BiH, in her speech drew a parallel between the interethnic relations in Macedonia and interethnic relations in BiH. She observed that, similarly as in Macedonia, BiH is faced with stagnation in its economic development; the religion is consumed as hatred, while the politics is impeding the Euro-Atlantic processes. She underlined that the Dayton Peace Accords has undermined the inter-ethnic relations in the country rather than to advance and to promote them. She pointed out that cooperation is a key element in building a multiethnic society.

Dr. Rizvan Sulejmani, University Professor, explained the impact that globalization has on the overall processes and noted that one country in following global trends and developments should open its borders and be integrated into the broader security and economic structures.

Dr. Zidas Daskalovski, University Professor, assessed the interethnic relations in Macedonia as minimal and limited between elites, but also determined by geographical distribution. In his speech he raised the question whether the constant support of NATO and the EU is substantial or just instrumental and underlined the risks of potential ethnic strife if the name dispute is not resolved. Finally, he stressed the necessity of innovative solutions directed at strengthening the democratic capacities as a precondition for the successful integration of Macedonia in NATO and EU.

Mr. Albert Musliu, Political Analyst, deliberated upon the subject noting that in Macedonia there is a long tradition of coexistence. He emphasized the necessity of strengthening the Euro-Atlantic reform and the need the Ohrid Framework Agreement not to be viewed as a social valve, but as a cohesive factor and a tool for increasing confidence in the institutions.

Mr. Ismet RAMADANI

Mr. Trifun KOSTOVSKI

Mr. Albert MUSLIU

Dr. Zhidas DASKALOVSKI

Dr. Dijana GUPTA
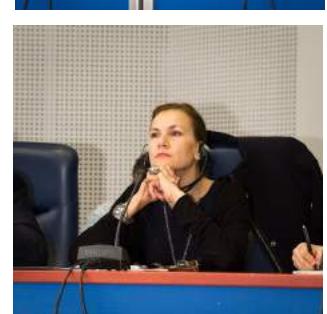
5. Conclusion

The research that was implemented has shown that the majority of the respondents in the Republic Macedonia think that the Euro-Atlantic integrations would undoubtedly mean improvement of the inter-ethnic relations. This indicator is extremely important in terms of the consistency of support of the Macedonia's membership into NATO and the EU and the awareness of the benefits among the Macedonian citizens which is on a high level.

On one hand, the statement of most of the respondents that the integration would positively impact the inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country also attests that they are aware of the other improvements as by-products of the integration that the country would experience from democratic and political aspect, but also economically and socially.

On the other hand, the secondary qualitative research that was applied, taking into account the comparative experiences, has shown that joining into NATO and the EU would assist the country in opening its borders for free movement of people, goods, services and capital which, in turn, would galvanize and increase business cooperation and thus stimulate the progress of the whole economy. All of these potential advancements are actually a prerequisite for the improvement of the general climate in the country, for higher living standard, greater cooperation between ethnic communities, and greater mutual respect and understanding.

The public debates and discussions that were organized in four cities in Macedonia with diverse ethnic composition have exhibited a high level of consciousness of the participants regarding the importance of the inter-ethnic relations for the country's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

The orientation and the clear vision of the citizens for NATO and EU integration displayed in the survey indicate that the citizens based in the Republic of Macedonia regardless of their ethnicity remain firmly oriented towards Euro-Atlantic goals with a hope for prosperity and a better life.

6. Recommendations

As the public opinion of the individuals is concerned the Euro-Atlantic processes have tendency to improve the inter-ethnic relations in the country directly and indirectly by contributing positively in three areas: democracy, security and economic development. However, Macedonia should continue to invest in its inter-ethnic environment in order to ensure stability and prosperity for its citizens. The constructive inter-ethnic relations are of paramount importance in a country where the diversity and heterogeneity are integral part of the society. Fostering the good inter-ethnic relations and nurturing the co-existence and cooperation between the individuals with different ethnic background should be prioritized by the all relevant stakeholders.

During the research there were identified several key factors that the policy makers and other community actors based in Macedonia should work devotedly to in order to eliminate the weaknesses that encompass the already implemented policies and measures.

1. Investing in education practices. In this regard, a well-streamlined approach is needed in building healthy society where the individuals would be aware and more respectful to diversities. The educational system should be adjusted in a way to promote inter-ethnic tolerance and respect among the members of all ethnic communities. The quotas provided by the Ohrid Framework Agreement are insufficient educational measure if they are not backed and substantiated by educational programs for ethnic integration and inclusiveness that would promote inter-ethnic awareness and togetherness.

2. Cooperation on regional and local level is vital in building thrust among members of the different ethnic communities in Macedonia. The cooperation should be encouraged among the policy makers, civil society and the media as well as other relevant societal stakeholders. The cooperation should not to be constrained solely among the elites and should be used as a tool for internal cohesion and symbiosis among the relevant actors. Coordination efforts, engaging in joint projects, setting clear common goals and strengthening the inter-ethnic dialogue are pivotal features in the advancement of the inter-ethnic relations in the country.

3. Working on the complete fulfillment of the quotas and the principle of equal representation foreseen by the Ohrid Framework Agreement of all ethnic communities in all sectors and public institutions based in Macedonia is also an important segment in the process of solidifying of interethnic relations. There were significant improvements in the aftermath of 2001 inter-ethnic conflict,[8] however larger efforts should be undertaken in order to increase the level of the equal representation in the public institutions.

4. Transitional and post-conflict justice – There were many flaws and shortcomings that were part in the process of post-conflict justice in Macedonia. These flaws caused distrust among citizens in Macedonia and were highly criticized by the civil society. This consequently implies that the political agreement cannot stand alone without being supported by social packages and programs, as well as appropriate mechanisms for accountability which are more than important in the process of post-conflict recovery.

5. Encouraging media pluralism and ensuring media independence and responsibility is of utmost importance both for the stability of the inter-ethnic climate in the country and for the Euro-Atlantic aspirations given their role in shaping the general public opinion. Reporting on the inter-ethnic issues must be in accordance with the international standards and the democratic principles which is an imperative for successful integration and stable inter-ethnic relations.

6. Strengthening the economy in the country should be viewed as priority. Structural economic reforms will fortify the prospects for NATO and EU membership, but also will set the premises for more harmonious inter-ethnic relations.

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[8] For instance, as it is stated in the White Book of the Defence Sector from 2012, the ethnic Albanians were represented in the military personal with 18,72 %.

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