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Project by:



Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia

STRENGTHENING THE  
**YOUTH**  
DIALOGUE FOR  
DEMOCRACY  
PROMOTION IN THE  
LIGHT OF  
EURO-ATLANTIC  
INTEGRATION

# PROJECT PUBLICATION

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## STRENGTHENING THE YOUTH DIALOG FOR DEMOCRACY PROMOTION IN THE LIGHT OF THE EURO-ATLANTIC INTEGRATION PROCESSES



Project by: Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia



Project supported by: CIVICA Mobilitas

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H.E. Talat XHAFERI, President, Assembly of Republic of Macedonia

“

*It is important to enhance the youth dialogue. . . Behind these positive trends stands only one tool and that is the dialogue. Dialogue on the internal plan, among the political entities, dialogue with the expert public, with the NGO sector, dialogue and openness with the media.*

”

H.E. Zoran ZAEV, Prime Minister, Government of Republic of Macedonia



“

*We should give them a chance, and motivate the young people as well as all the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, that our goal of national interest - membership in NATO and the EU is a goal that belongs to all citizens.*

”



H.E. Zoran SAPURIC, Minister without Portfolio, Government of Republic of Macedonia

“

*NATO and the EU are a guarantee of stability and a prerequisite for relaxation of the relations with the neighbor countries, and the youth dialogue is of great importance in these processes.*

”

Dr. Bekim MAKSUTI, Deputy Minister of Defense, Republic of Macedonia



“

*It is necessary for the country to invest more in the young people, in their educational process, in creating living conditions for better livelihood and working on their motivation.*

”



Mr. Vladan ZIVULOVIC, Vice President, Atlantic Treaty Association; Atlantic Council of Serbia

“

*The reforms implemented by Macedonia over the past ten years constitute the bedrock for its forthcoming Euro-Atlantic integrations and more opportunities for the young people.*

”

H.E. Sybille Suter TEJADA, Ambassador, Swiss Embassy in Macedonia



“

*The role of the youth in social and political processes is of great importance and I am happy to say that the inclusion of youth and their empowerment is integral part of all our projects*

”



H.E. Danijela BARISIC, Ambassador, Croatian Embassy in Macedonia

“

*The integration is an important process that helps in building strong institutions. Changing the approach for reaching the young people is more than necessary in this process.*

”

Dr. Mersel BILJALIĆ, Professor / Political Analyst



“

*Macedonia has an interest to keep the youth within its borders, and to encourage them to seek opportunities in their home country. The future NATO integration will have an impact in opening opportunities for the youth.*

”



Lieutenant Colonel Ivailo TOSHIROV, NATO Liaison Office, Skopje

“

*It is necessary that the youth is well-trained, educated, and capable of sharing experience and qualities in order to help the country in the integration process.*

”

Mr. Ilija DJUGUMANOV, Presidency, Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia / President, YATA Macedonia



“

*We should strive and work towards engaging young people in all spheres of the society including Euro-Atlantic integration processes. Only fully integrated and engaged youth can contribute for promotion and enhancement of democracy.*

”



Ms. Marija JANKULOSKA, Research Coordinator, YATA Macedonia

“

*Fostering direct youth participation and youth empowerment as a precondition for integration and development of the democracy requires a combination of legal and political instruments for factual inclusion of youth in the decision-making process.*

”

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Mr. Ismet Ramadani

President of Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia

## Foreword

This project which was implemented by the Euro - Atlantic Council of Macedonia that targets young people as a category of citizens who can, and must have the greatest impact on the Euro-Atlantic integrations through their innovative and original ideas, digital literacy, skills and knowledge is of great importance for Macedonia and the region.

The Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia is fully and persistently committed and dedicated in spreading, reaffirming, enhancing and upholding the goals and values that the Euro - Atlantic integrations imply and stand for, such as promoting and strengthening democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The role of the EACM in the political developments in Macedonia is of paramount importance because it maintains a commitment to values that can be shared with NATO and the EU. Over the years, the EACM has been striving to include and integrate young people in its activities and initiatives given their adaptability and potential for democracy promotion.

When the youth in Macedonia is in question, the time of declarative practices and conformism has ended. We need to deliver concrete results that will assist Macedonia to fully integrate into NATO and the EU structures. Therefore, as a society, we should work to stir and encourage as many initiatives as possible that directly involve young people, to prepare young people for their greater participation in democratic and decision – making processes, as well as to create mechanisms for larger inclusion of young people in the process of Euro-Atlantic integrations. In fact, the research itself indicates that we have to take appropriate and concrete steps to directly involve young people in these processes.

The research implemented by the Euro – Atlantic Council of Macedonia should be viewed as yardstick and guideline of the current perceptions, opinions and standpoints of youth in Macedonia, but also for the level of their involvement and participation in democracy.

It should serve as an incentive and pretext for our future commitment and the future active endeavors that we should make in order to contribute to better engagement, greater inclusion and larger opportunities for the young people in Macedonia.

# 1. Introduction

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The youth constitutes an important component and an integral part of the democratic, economic and social processes in each society. They are often seen and recognized as a driver of democratic changes, reforms and transformations that move the society forward. The youth is a category of the population which is very important for the future of every country, given the fact that it represents a potential that will be present on the social scene in the coming decades, giving back to the community that has invested in it. Young people go through the educational process; choose their future profession; form themselves as individuals; get acquainted with social duties; engage in political decisions and other civic activities in order to achieve their goals as citizens and as a significant factor for social change. The young people are those who have the power, enthusiasm and energy to place new ideas and to contribute for community development in a positive direction. Therefore, their role in democracy should be intrinsic for each society.

Arguably, the more the society invests in the growth and development of young people, the more it will produce skillful, proactive and conscious youth, which would have the needed capacity to positively affect the overall democratic development and progress. The growth and development of young people is more or less determined by their proactive role in a society that largely depends on the appropriate public policies for youth inclusion in decision-making, governance and creation of public policies.

Youth and changes go together, so it is indicative that young people are a principal and uppermost factor for the Euro-Atlantic integration processes that have begun in our country. They can greatly contribute in accelerating this process, largely because of their need to live and work in a more democratic and inclusive environment.

Therefore, the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia has initiated a project action designed to contribute directly to the achievement of the goals and priorities of the young people, and to empower them to impact positively to the Euro-Atlantic integrations by targeting young people, students, youth and student organizations and the youth wings of political parties. The project is based on the assumption that the youth is a notable contributing factor and agent of social changes that has the capacity and potential to influence the democratic processes in Macedonia and to contribute to NATO and EU integrations. The main activities were aimed at promoting the youth dialogue for active contribution to the democratic processes as a precondition for Macedonia's integration into NATO and the EU.

## 2. Action Overview

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The project action aimed at stimulating active youth engagement by strengthening the awareness, dialogue and capacities of the target groups in order to contribute for good governance, decentralization and development of the civil society.

The overall objective of the project action and the research activity was to encourage on a long term an active participation of the young people based in Macedonia in the building of democratic processes as a prerequisite for Macedonia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures. Despite that, the project's specific objective was focused on achieving active contribution to the Euro-Atlantic integration processes by developing dialogue, capacity building and networking of the target groups. The target group was determined in a wider context consisting of youth and youth organizations, students and student organizations, youth wings of political parties and young professionals.

The main activities that were implemented in function of the attainment of the specific objective were deployed in three groups/phases:

1. Research activities consisted of field and online surveys and organizing 4 workshops in the Republic of Macedonia in 4 cities in the country, and two central events in Skopje covering eight statistical regions in total;
2. Networking activities, including roundtables for partnership building;
3. Dissemination activities, including issuing a brochure with recommendations.

The research and the overall activities were envisaged to attain the following results:

1. To raise awareness among young people, youth organizations, and state institutions about the importance of the participation of young people in promoting fundamental Euro-Atlantic values such as democracy, security and the rule of law, as well as to make the importance of Euro-Atlantic integrations more familiar to the young people in Macedonia;

2. To increase cooperation and networking of the youth, students and the other target groups in Macedonia in the promotion of joint causes in the context of Euro-Atlantic integrations;
3. To promote the importance of actively involving youth and student organizations in the democratic and decision-making processes among the state authorities, public institutions and the other stakeholders, as well as the importance of their increased role in the Euro-Atlantic integrations.

The project is based on the assumption that the youth is an important factor and driving force of social changes and has the capacity to influence democratic processes, thus indirectly to contribute to NATO and EU integrations of the country. Setting a common cause among the target groups, a concrete platform for future cooperation, enhanced communication between the members, partners and constituents were among the focal points of this project. Ultimately, the results of this action are expected to affect the transfer of positive effects to the entire social community.



### 3. Methodology

The action was envisioned to address the problems and the needs of the target groups, chiefly through research and workshops implemented to detect their problems and expectations in the light of the Euro-Atlantic integrations, as well as the barriers and obstacles that they face in achieving their goals with regard to their participation or non-participation in the democratic processes.

The main approach of the action was directed to achieving the main objective of the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia i.e. promotion of the Euro-Atlantic values by stimulating greater participation of young people in the democratic processes in Macedonia. The approach was centered on employing educational tools, exchange of ideas and suggestions and developing mechanisms for cooperation.

A **desk research** was conducted in order to explore the roots and to analyze the situation and the position of the youth in the social and political context in the post-transition society in Macedonia along with the challenges that the youth face in the post-conflict environment such as the influence of the inter-ethnic relations, the economic deprivations and the social disparities. It was library-based employing secondary sources.

The first activity i.e. the survey, employed quantitative methodological approach through **field and online surveys** in order to gain a representation and to collect data and information on the current views, attitudes and perceptions of the young people in Macedonia regarding their participation in democratic processes and their awareness of the importance of the Euro-Atlantic integrations. It was particularly envisioned to get a perception of the position of the target groups on these issues of importance. The questions were conceptualized as close-ended and rating scale questions, employing 'non-probability' sampling approach targeting youth as a subset of population, and relying primary on 'convenience' and 'quota' techniques. The whole survey was designed to serve as an assessment tool and indicator for the current youth engagement.

The **workshops** were envisaged to be organized in a way to generate knowledge, encourage discussion and open deliberation on important topics related to the Euro-Atlantic integrations (such as the conditions for building a democratic society through youth engagement, equal representation and investment in the capacities of the youth and student organizations). The workshops that were conducted were directed towards acquainting the young people on the importance of their participation in the social and democratic processes. They were implemented in four cities/statistical regions with different ethnic composition in Republic of Macedonia, specifically in Tetovo, Struga, Stip and Strumica.

The **brochure** as a final product of the project is intended to display the results of the research, the conclusions from the workshops, and to provide recommendations for the policy makers in Macedonia.

# 4. Research Findings

## a. Research Methodology

The research that was implemented embraced a combination of quantitative and qualitative methodology collecting both primary and secondary data.

The qualitative desk research had a supportive role in the whole research process. Drawing on theory and secondary data, the chief aim was to provide in-depth analysis of youth involvement and participation in the Euro-Atlantic integrations and wider democratic processes in Macedonia in the current social and political setting.

The data-driven quantitative research was designed to extract numerical-based results and statistics expressed in percentage. The total number of interviews with young people (field and online surveys) conducted in the period from March 2017 to September 2017 is 1025 interviews. They were in a form of standardized questionnaires consisting of close-ended and rating scale questions

The parameters that were investigated were the degree of involvement of the youth in the democratic processes, the level of familiarity i.e. information about the opportunities for involvement in the democratic processes, and the factors that influence their participation or non-participation in the democratic processes.

In this vein, the research aimed to answer the following research questions:

- Whether the young people in Macedonia are engaged in the overall democratic and political processes?
- Whether they are familiar with the possibilities of taking an active part, especially in areas of their interest?
- What factors influence their participation or non-participation in these processes?

## b. Preliminary Research

The young people are an active player, a significant actor and bearer of the social changes in each society. They are inextricable part of the overall democratic, socio-economic and cultural processes. The role of youth in these processes is reflected mostly in their potential to bring new and authentic ideas, innovative approaches and unique forms of engagement.

The 'youth' constitutes a broadly interpreted notion and there is no universally accepted definition for it. However, there are common elements that are acceptable for most of the countries. In this respect, the UNDP defines 'youth' as "young women and men, in all their diversity of experiences and contexts, taking into consideration the existing definitions of youth used at the country and/or regional level(s)." <sup>1</sup>

Bearing in mind the mental structure, the specific set of values and their familiarity with digital technology, it is evident that the youth should play central and catalyzing role in the democratic development of each country. Youth participation is highly important for democracy promotion since it has the capacity to enhance transparency in the political processes and to ensure greater political accountability.

Arguably, the idle and inert youth is unfavorable in the process of building and sustaining strong and efficient institutions. Participating in the political and decision making process, voicing for their opinions and conveying their ideas are some of the preconditions for fostering positive and lasting changes in a society. Thus, it is not surprising that the inclusion and the role of youth in democracy is often supported and substantiated through various policies and also in the creation of long-term strategies.

The importance of participation and youth engagement in the decision making has been recognized and advocated for on international level. The UN defines youth participation as "involving of youth in responsible, challenging action that meets genuine needs, with opportunities for planning and/or decision-making" <sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> UNDP Youth Strategy 2014-2017: "Empowered Youth, Sustainable Future", United Nations Development Programme, p. 9

<sup>2</sup> National Commission on Resources for Youth, "Youth Participation: A Concept Paper. A Report of the National Commission on Resources for Youth to the Department of Health", 1975

The Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU)'s reports (conducted in 2014 and 2016 respectively based on the resolution "Youth participation in the democratic process" adopted at 122nd Assembly in Bangkok, in 2010<sup>3</sup>) suggest that political participation by young people is "a crucial new focus of efforts to enhance democracy worldwide".<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, the importance of youth-driven policies directed towards addressing the large spectrum of needs of the young people is repeatedly acknowledged on international and regional level. The Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes internationally was a major leap forward which required developing national youth policies and operational programmes in order to ensure active youth participation and national youth development.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the Council of Europe designates that "the purpose of youth policy is to create conditions for learning, opportunity and experience which allow and enable young people to develop the knowledge, skills and competencies to be actors of democracy and to integrate into society, in particular playing an active part in both civil society and the labour market."<sup>6</sup>

Speaking comparatively, there are no uniform practices on how to integrate youth. Ranging from non-formal education and evidence-based knowledge, through volunteerism and consultations to direct political engagement and participation in the governance and decision-making, the integration of youth takes different forms and manifestations.

### ***The situation in Macedonia***

The current situation in Macedonia is characterized with deficient and restricted involvement of young people in the democratic processes and decision-making practices in the wider social context. Many studies that were designed to determine youth participation show downward trends that are particularly apparent in the area of youth participation in democratic processes. In addition, although there is no specific research regarding the awareness of the young people in Macedonia about the importance of Euro-Atlantic integrations, the lack of public debates and deliberation that explicitly address the role of the young people in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes indicates that the youth's awareness in Macedonia in relation to these processes is insufficient.

The youth in Macedonia is still sidelined and under-represented group in the process of decision-making. There is lack of substantial youth participation which is boiled down to declarative, formal and symbolic role of the young people. In a post-socialist and transition society, where democracy is still being taught and democratic processes are still in development, one cannot expect that young people can easily channel their ideas and stimulate social change. Other challenges in the country, such as the high level of unemployment, deep social inequalities and divisions along ethnic lines, further aggravate the participation of young people in democratic processes in Macedonia. This indicates low level of interest in active participation in democratic processes, lack of capacities and knowledge, as well as absence of information regarding the advantages of their potential participation.

Macedonia has been experiencing political, economic and social challenges for a protracted period of time. The period of transition from state-regulated to market-based economy, which lasted too long, has paralyzed the civil sector and diminished citizens' awareness of what democracy means, how it is implemented and how they should contribute to its development. Young people in every country can and must play an essential role in the process of enhancing democracy, thereby enabling the prosperity of the country itself.

As the preliminary research suggests, there are three major challenges that mostly hinder youth participation in the democratic processes in Macedonia.

First, the educational system in the Republic of Macedonia is not democratized and efficient enough to implement the practical needs of youth and thus, it does not provide any incentive for participation in social and community activities. The poor and inefficient educational system also contributes to socially lethargic and inactive youth. Formal and traditional education full of worn out curricula which in practice is not functional and operative, does not encourage the youth to think independently, to build own attitudes, and to stimulate free expression. The education in Macedonia fails to introduce the young people with their opportunities for civic activism, nor does it stimulate entrepreneurial spirit, leadership and collision of opinions, which are of great importance for the future life as citizens of a pluralistic society with a market economy. The youth initiatives, ideas and leadership qualities are often suffocated and repressed from the authoritative figures involved in the educational process that are afraid and reluctant to innovative and progressive ideas.

<sup>3</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Youth participation in the democratic process", Resolution adopted by the 122nd IPU Assembly (Bangkok, 2010)

<sup>4</sup> Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), "Youth participation in national parliaments", 2014

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO Culture of Peace Programme, "Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes", Lisbon, Portugal, 12 August 1998

<sup>6</sup> Lasse Siurala, "A European framework for youth policy", Council of Europe Publishing, p. 50

Therefore, the non-governmental sector is an important tool that can help educate and activate young people for greater participation in social, democratic and political activities in the country. The youth organizations in Macedonia exist independently, without greater mutual cooperation, common platforms and initiatives. There is minimal influence on young people to encourage higher participation and youth activity for political and democratic development and progress. The NGO sector and other associations are somehow contributing in actualizing the problems of the young people, but they also face problems because they are not supported enough by the central and local government, they work fragmentarily, they are not adequately connected to one another, and therefore cannot perform larger social changes in the field of youth problems. Moreover, although there are many youth organizations in Macedonia that deal with youth issues, they are not sufficiently interconnected with their platforms and there is poor and inadequate networking that could lead to mutual dialogues, suggestions, exchange of ideas and initiatives with respect to the goals set by the Euro-Atlantic integrations..

In addition, the lack of credible representative bodies transpiring from the youth as subset of population, further contributes to stagnation in this respect. The existence of youth councils within the municipalities and local self-government does not provide essential and comprehensive youth participation in policy-making on issues that directly affect them, nor do they provide practical mechanisms for more serious involvement of young people in the public life.

Secondly, the economic and social insecurity has its price when it comes to youth engagement, given that the youth is especially affected in this regard. Youth disengagement and inertness in Macedonia is at a high level partly due to poor economic conditions, high unemployment rate, social insecurity and interethnic intolerance. According to the official data, based on the information of the latest estimates of the population (extracted from the Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia), it is indicated that the unemployment rate in Macedonia is 22.1 % of the total population.<sup>7</sup>

According to a research conducted by Reactor, concerning the youth position in the labor market in Macedonia, 22, 6 % of the young people in Macedonia are declared as unemployed; 18, 3 % as employed; 41, 2 % of them as still a part of the educational process, while the others were declared as focused on other types of activities.<sup>8</sup>

It is undeniable that the disenfranchised individuals are mostly result of the economic deprivations and social inequalities. Long years of waiting at the gates of the NATO and EU, and the uncertainty about instant integration have demoralized the youth, creating a sense of imprisonment and stand-off. The polarization of young people on a political basis is also a problem that seriously hampers the democratic and economic progress.

Lastly, there is no specific legal framework, concrete state policies or effective strategic documents that can set the basis for youth engagement or to ensure greater participation. The National Youth Strategy (2016-2025), adopted in 2016 the only relevant political document in this respect. The Action Plan for 2016 - 2017 is the operational document intended to serve the process of implementation of the National Youth Strategy, while the Agency of Youth and Sport is an independent body which is germane to the implementation of the strategy. The National Youth Strategy sets out four strategic priorities concerning youth: better standard of living and equal opportunities, education and personal development, systematic integration of different categories of youth, and youth participation in monitoring and implementing policies and decisions affecting them.<sup>9</sup>

The Strategy for promotion and development of the volunteering (2010-2015) also provides a policy framework for the volunteerism as a form of active citizenship. The volunteerism is widely considered as a productive and worthwhile type of participation which is in unison with the youth needs and expectations. As it is noted by the European Commission's White Paper, the volunteer activities should be encouraged among young people by observing that the youth volunteerism is "an educational experience and a factor in employability and integration".<sup>10</sup>

Although, the existence of strategic documents that address the youth needs is irrefutable, the question that remains open is whether they are applicable and effective in practice. The bureaucratic obstacles and the implementation difficulties, as well as other social circumstances, can slow down and inhibit the process of implementing the strategic goals and priorities which are of immense youth interest.

<sup>7</sup> State Statistical Office of the Republic of Macedonia, information available at [http://www.stat.gov.mk/Default\\_en.aspx](http://www.stat.gov.mk/Default_en.aspx)

<sup>8</sup> Reactor – Research in Action, "Youth in the labor market" (2012), p.14

<sup>9</sup> Youth and Sports Agency, "National Youth Strategy (2016-2025)", January 2016

<sup>10</sup> European Commission White Paper "A New Impetus for European Youth", COM (2001) 681 final, Brussels, 2001

Legally, this field is more or less regulated with the Law on Secondary Education, Law on Higher Education, Law on Student Standard, and the Law on Volunteering that indirectly concern youth participation. The legal framework neither provides coherent and straightforward legal solutions, nor does it appropriately regulate the types of youth organization as a notable aspect of youth engagement.

On the one hand, the tokenism, political polarization and solely the formal involvement in democracy and in the decision-making, do not solve the problem of youth exclusion, apathy and inertness, but otherwise create misperceptions of inclusion which contributes even more in deepening the problem. On the other hand, the lack of awareness, information, and knowledge of all the stakeholders how to intrinsically integrate youth in political and democratic practices additionally implicate the process of youth participation.

### ***Youth in Macedonia and the Euro-Atlantic integrations***

The integration of Macedonia in the Euro-Atlantic structures remains the highest priority for future democratic development and economic prosperity of the country. In this vein, the support for Macedonia's membership in NATO and EU is at high level relying of the last research which indicated that most of the citizens based in the Republic of Macedonia irrespective of their ethnicity are firmly oriented and supportive towards the Euro-Atlantic integrations.<sup>11</sup>

The process of EU and NATO membership and the efforts of the Republic of Macedonia are reflected in the long way of reforming, reconstruction and political endeavors. The Euro-Atlantic integrations unquestionably were a significant driving force of the reform process in Macedonia. The prospects of integration implied a series of institutional, judiciary and political reforms as a guarantee for security, well-being and the rule of law.

The process of Euro-Atlantic integration in a wider context implies the development and investment in institutional and human capacities, in order to strengthen and consolidate democracy and the rule of law. The rise of investments, economic progress and the overall well-being which can be expected after the integration of Macedonia in NATO and EU<sup>12</sup>, bespeak for greater and diverse opportunities for the youth to realize their goals and potential in the country, but also to be more involved in building strong, democratic, and inclusive institutions. The EU and NATO integrations, given the values they stand for, have a capacity to hinder the marginalization of the young people, to enhance employability and to promote active citizenship.

### **c. Quantitative Research**

The quantitative research design employed 'non-probability' sampling combining convenience, snowball, and quota techniques in order to evade potential bias, and to reach appropriate confidence level of the research results. In order avoid the intricacies and impracticality of the probability sampling, and due to cost effectiveness, the 'non-probability' sampling was a preferable option.

The questions were conceptualized in a way to extract direct information and measurable results about the views, standpoints and perceptions of the target groups on their engagement and involvement in the democratic processes. It utilized standardized questionnaires with close-ended type of questions (articulated in dichotomous scales and rating scales). The preliminary questions were directed at obtaining information on the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

The whole research brought satisfactory turnout with a total of 1025 respondents who agreed to take part in the research. The units that were opted for, i.e. the representative sample provided coverage of both urban and rural areas, targeting young people with different ethnicity, age and gender. The research targeted young people with diverse ethnicity and gender, in the age bracket from 15 to 29 years. The respondents were divided in three age groups/categories (15-19 years; 20-24 years; 25-29 years).

The results were processed and analyzed relying on the simple descriptive univariate analysis examining each variable separately. The results have been expressed in percentages and also displayed in visual (column and sector) diagrams, and in addition were descriptively articulated. The data value was also determined by using frequency tables and cross-tabulations.

The appraised margin of systematic error of the whole survey (containing both sampling and non-sampling errors) is around 3 % assuming 97 % of confidence level.

<sup>11</sup> Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia, "The impact of the Euro-Atlantic integrative processes on the inter-ethnic relations in Macedonia", Research Publication (ed. Ramadani, Djugumanov, Jankuloska), 2016

<sup>12</sup> See more about NATO economic benefits in "The NATO Effect On the Economic Trends of its New Member Countries and 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).

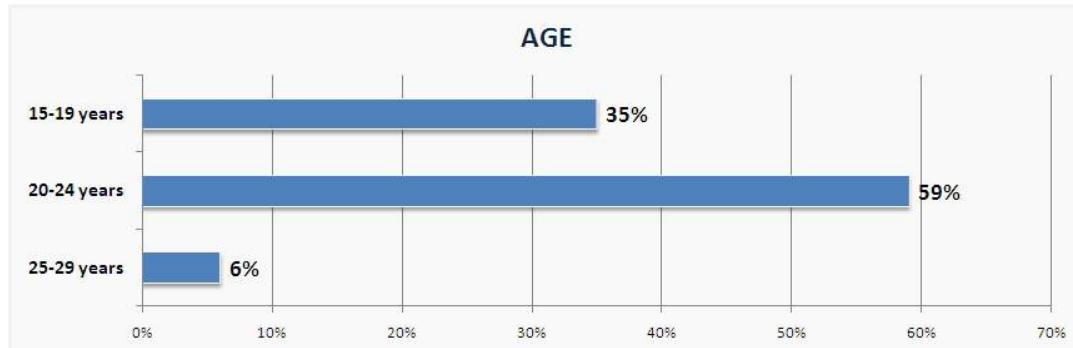
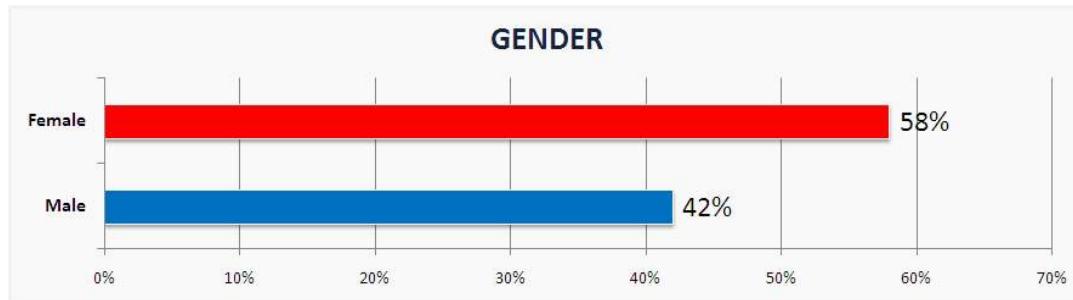
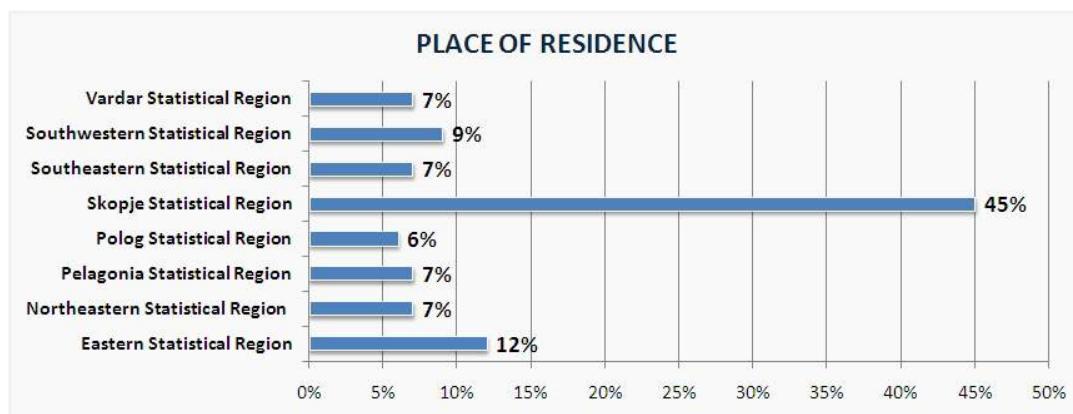
The youth participation was approached broadly in the form of youth involvement in participatory structures (i.e. youth organisations or volunteering); participation in discussions, forums or debates both on local and national level concerning issues of their interest; and learning about democracy (i.e. attending training or similar form of gathering information).

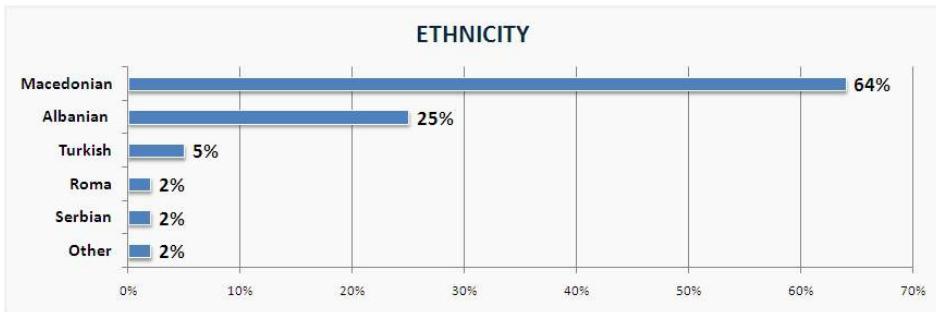
## DEMOGRAPHIC DATA OF THE RESPONDENTS

For the purpose of this research the preliminary questions were designed to assess the demographic characteristics of the respondents of the representative sample. According to the place of residence, 20 % of the respondents live in the countryside, while 80 % live in the urban areas. Out of total 1025 interviews conducted, 58 % of the respondents are female, while 42 % of them are male.

Regarding the place of residence, the largest number of respondents is from Skopje's Statistical Region (45 %). As for the other regions, there was lower responsiveness, but it was however significant for the purpose of the research. The percentages of the respondents out of the Skopje Statistical Region are as follows: Vardar Statistical Region (7%), Southwestern Statistical Region (9%), Southeastern Statistical Region (7%), Skopje Statistical Region (45%), Polog Statistical Region (6%), Pelagonia Statistical Region (7%), Northeastern Statistical Region (7%) and Southwestern Statistical Region (7%).

According to the ethnic background, 64 % of the respondents are Macedonians, 25 % are Albanians, 5 % are Turkish, 2 % belong to Roma ethnic community, 2 % of them are from Serbian ethnic background, while the remaining percentage (2 %) are members of the other ethnic communities.



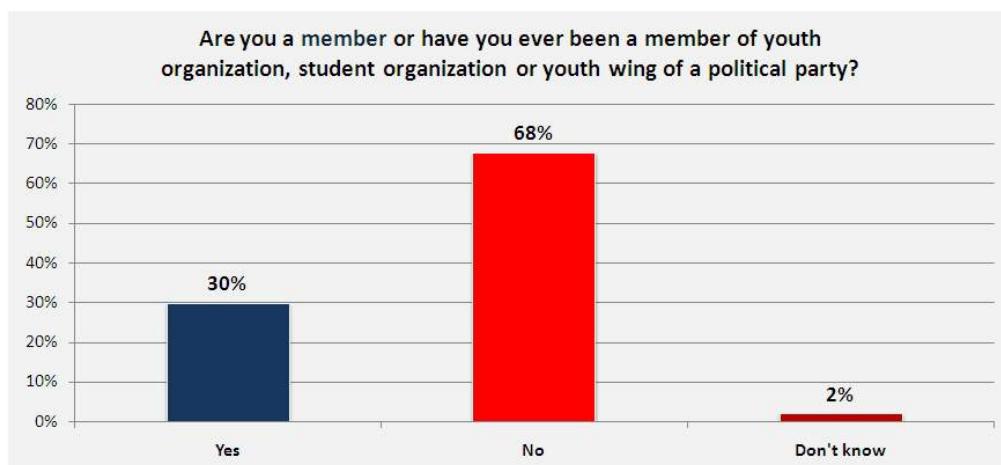


## RESULTS

### Results of the Field and Online Research

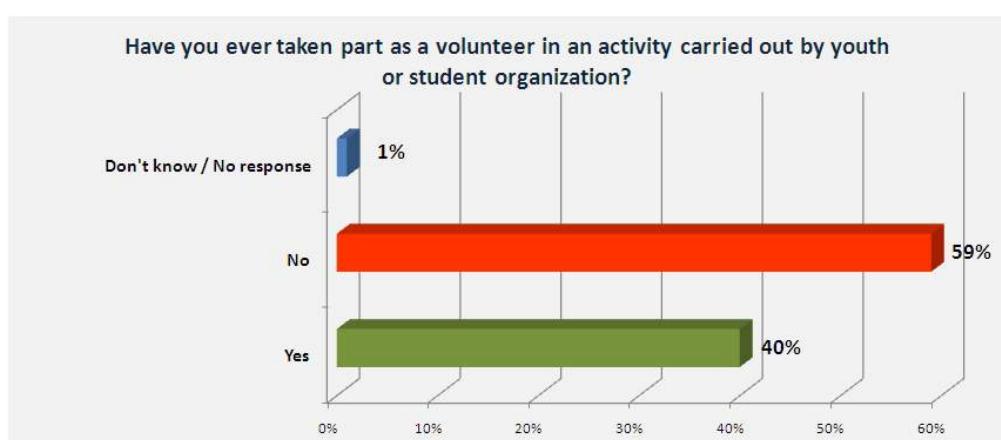
#### 1. Are you a member or have you ever been a member of a youth organization, student organization or youth wing of a political party?

As the results have shown, most of the respondents (68 %) answered that they have never been a member of a youth organization, student organization or youth wing of a political party. 30% of the respondents said that they are, or once were a member of such organizations, while 2 % of them had 'no response'.



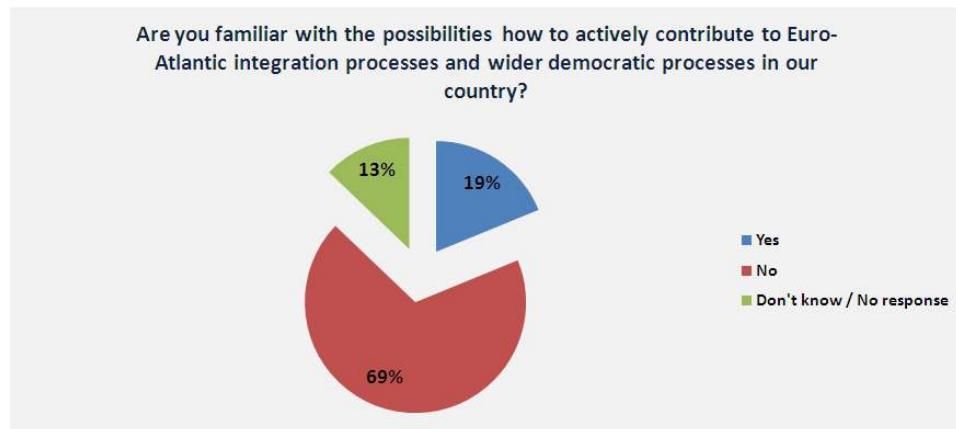
#### 2. Have you ever taken part as a volunteer in an activity carried out by youth or student organization?

The second question which referred to the volunteerism as a form of participation in democracy has shown that 59 % of the interviewees said that they were never engaged as volunteers in activities carried out by youth or student organization. 40 % have taken part as volunteers in such activities, while only a small portion of the respondents had 'no response'.



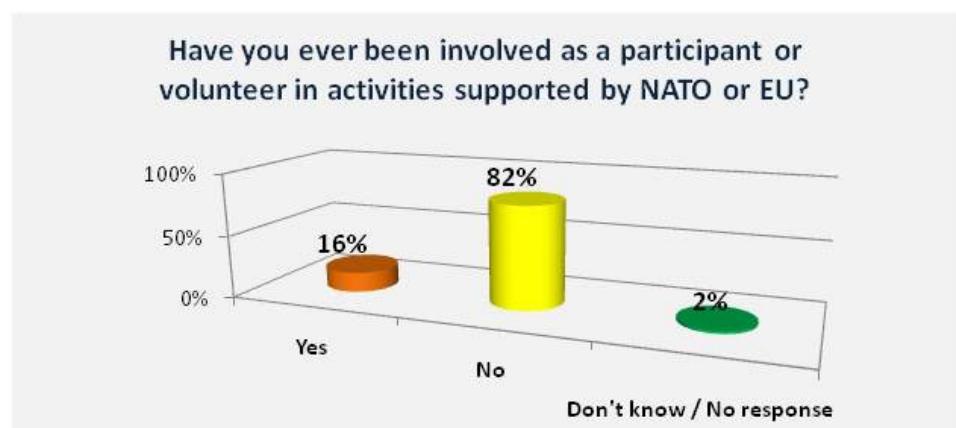
### 3. Are you familiar with the possibilities how to actively contribute to Euro-Atlantic integration processes and wider democratic processes in our country?

The largest portion of the respondents (69 %) indicated that they are not familiar with the possibilities and opportunities on how to actively contribute to Euro-Atlantic integration processes, and in the democratic processes in the country in general. 19 % of the interviewees responded that they are acquainted with the possibilities for contribution, while 13 % had no defined position.



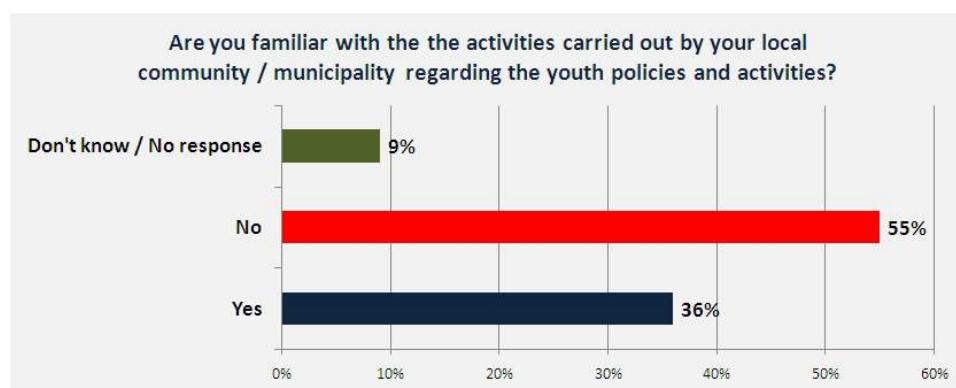
### 4. Have you ever been involved as a participant or volunteer in activities supported by NATO or EU?

Out of 1025 respondents, 82 % have never been involved as a participant or volunteer in activities supported by NATO or EU, 16 % of them participated or volunteered in such activities, while 2 % answered with 'no response'.



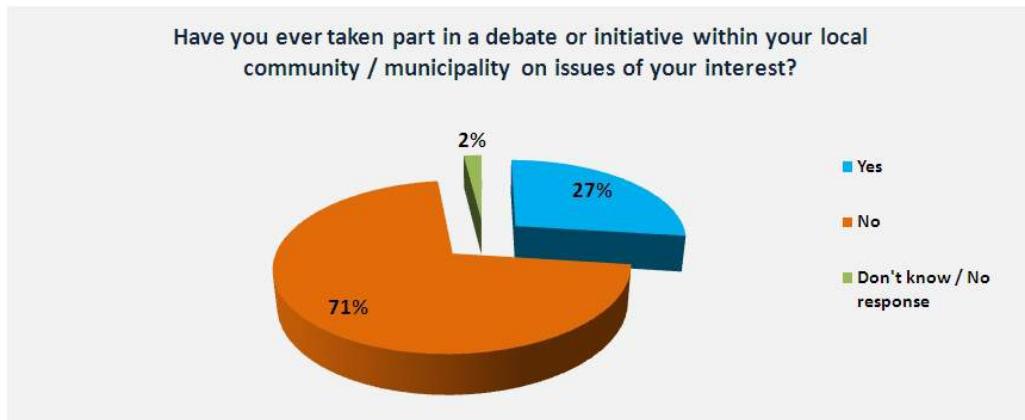
### 5. Are you familiar with the activities carried out by your local community / municipality regarding the youth politics and activities?

Regarding this question, 55 % of the interviewees responded negatively, 36 % said that they are familiar with the activities carried out by their local community / municipality regarding the youth politics and activities, while 9 % had 'no response'.



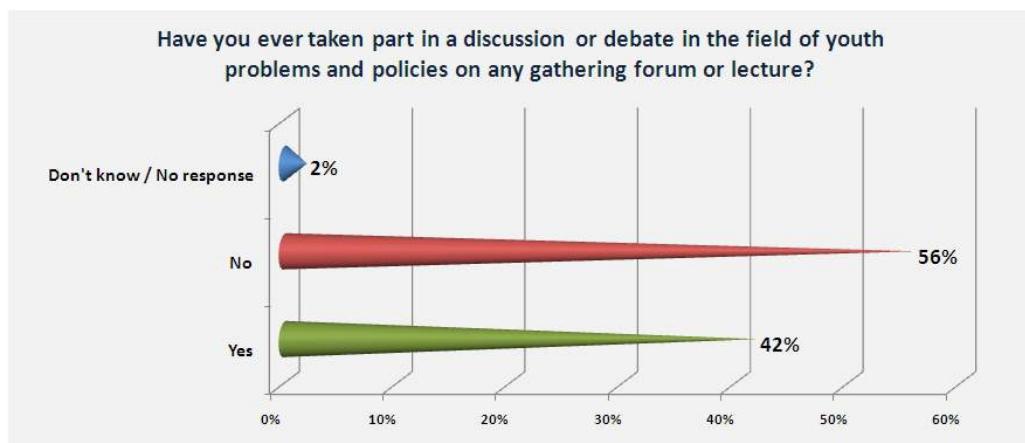
## 6. Have you ever taken part in a debate or initiative within your local community/municipality on issues of your interest?

Most of the respondents (71 %) said that they have never taken part in a debate or initiative within their local community/municipality on issues of their interest. 27 % of them answered that they have previously taken part in such activities and only 2 % of them circled 'no response'.



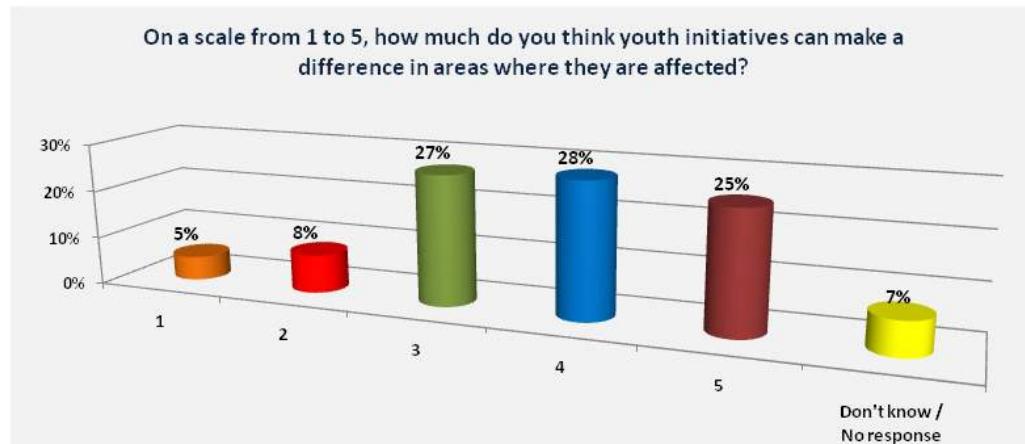
## 7. Have you ever taken part in a discussion or debate in the field of youth problems and policies on any gathering, forum or lecture?

56 % of the respondents said that they have never taken part in a discussion or debate in the field of youth problems and policies on any gathering, forum or lecture, while the 42 % of them had the opposite answer. The last 2 % of the respondents had 'no response'.



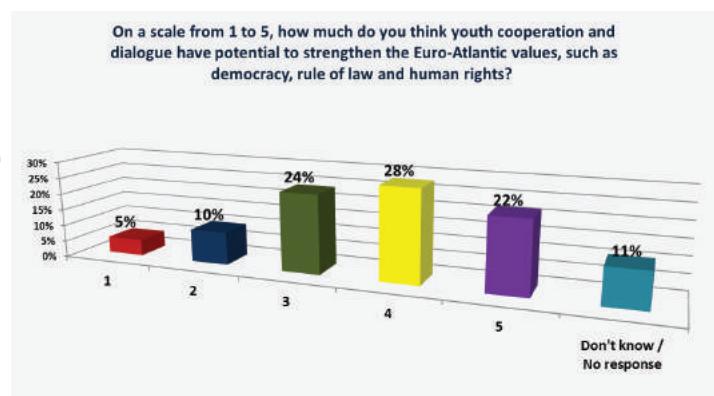
## 8. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you think youth initiatives can make a difference in areas where they are affected?

The first question formulated as Likert scale with 5 as positive and 1 as negative end. The dominant view in this respect, or the 28 % of the respondents' circled number 4.



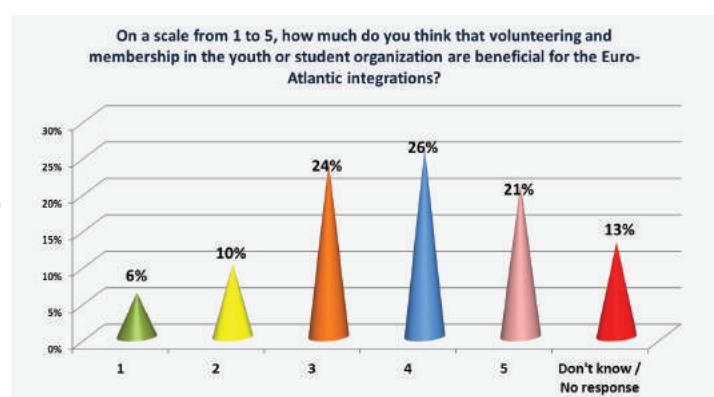
**9. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you think youth participation and dialogue have potential to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic values, such as democracy, rule of law and human rights?**

The Likert scale chart displays 4- point (28 %) dominant belief of the respondents that youth participation and dialogue have potential to strengthen the Euro-Atlantic values.



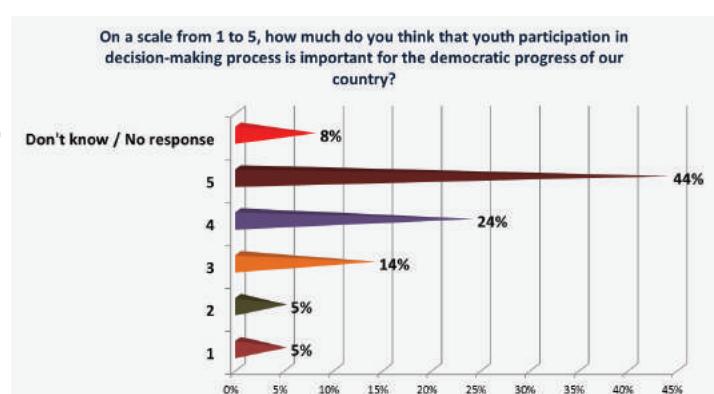
**10. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much do you think that volunteering and membership in the youth organization, student organization or in the youth wings of the political parties are beneficial of the Euro-Atlantic integrations?**

The 4- point (26 %) is the prevailing belief of the respondents that volunteering and membership in the youth organization, student organization or in the youth wings of the political parties are beneficial of the Euro-Atlantic integrations.



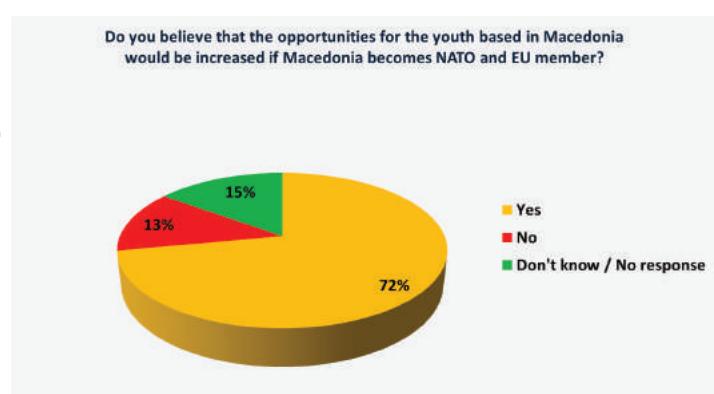
**11. On a scale from 1 to 5, how much you think that youth participation in decision-making process is important for the democratic progress of our country?**

Regarding the question whether the youth participation in decision-making process is important for the democratic progress of our country, the dominant degree of belief is 5- point, meaning that the most of the respondents strongly agree that youth participation in decision-making process is highly important.



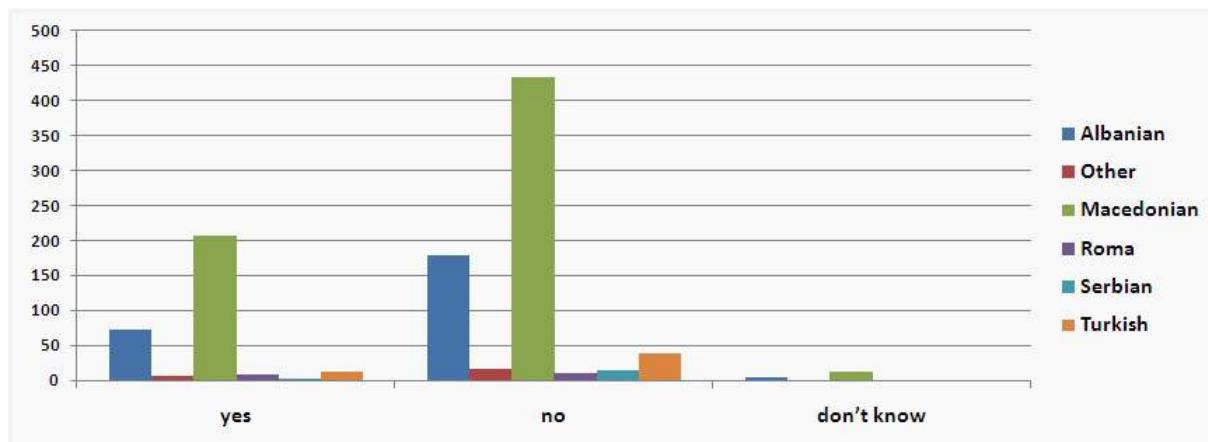
**12. Do you believe that the opportunities for the youth based in Macedonia would be increased if Macedonia becomes NATO and EU member?**

Most of the respondents (72 %) believe that the opportunities for the youth based in Macedonia would be increased if Macedonia becomes NATO and EU member. 13 % of them responded negatively, while 15 % had no defined standpoint regarding this question

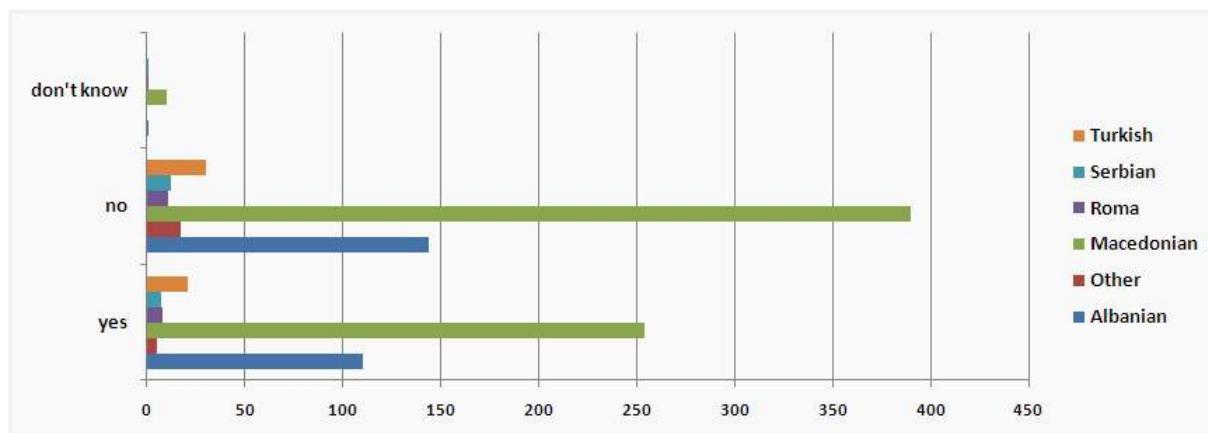


## Results of the Field and Online Research expressed in frequency tables and cross-tabulations

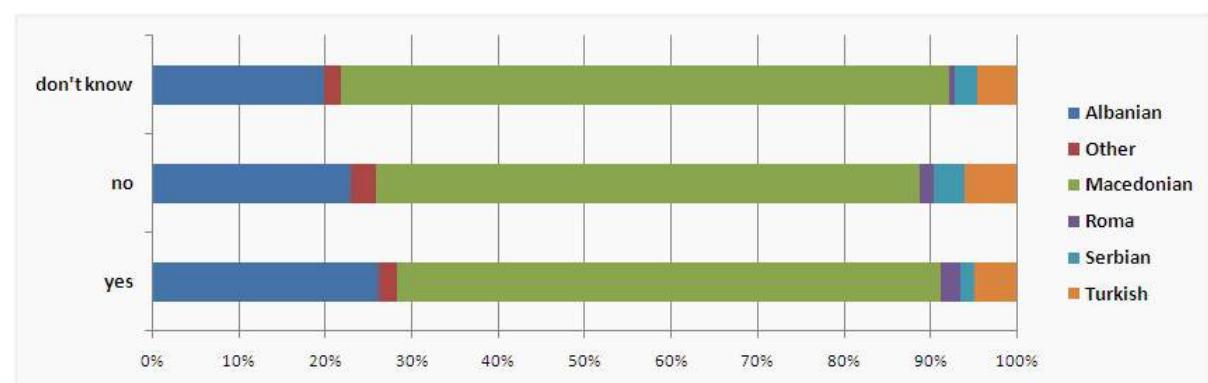
Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding membership in youth or student organizations among respondents with different ethnic background



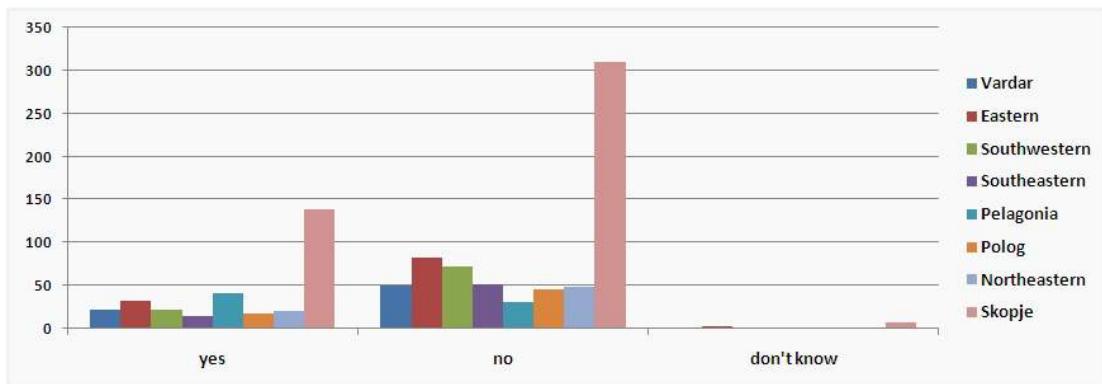
Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding volunteering in youth or student organizations among respondents with different ethnicity



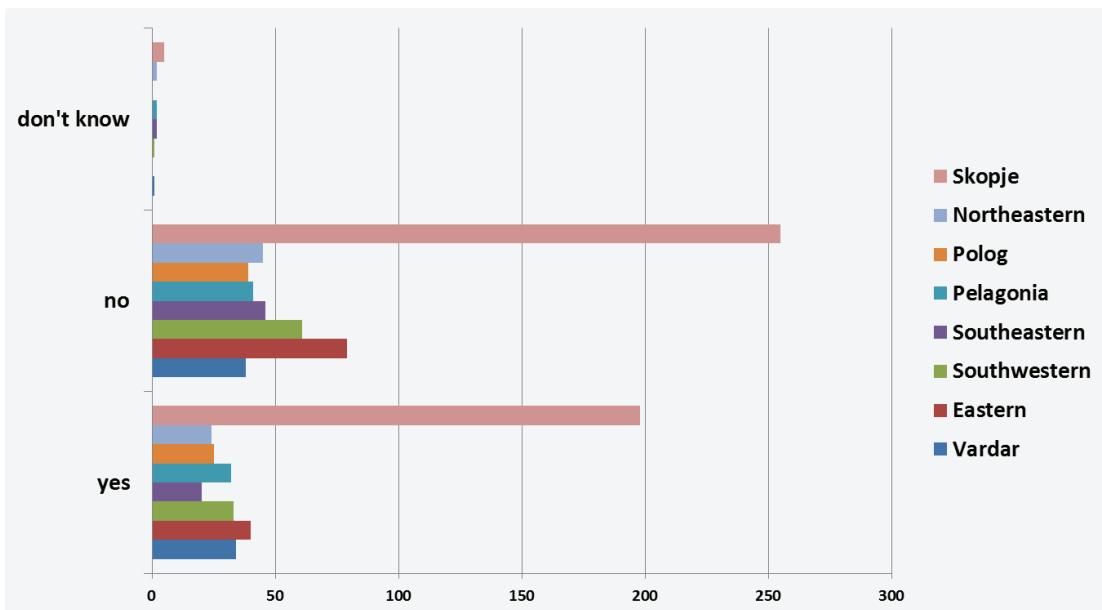
Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding the belief whether the opportunities for the youth in Macedonia would be increased if Macedonia becomes NATO and EU member among respondents with different ethnicity



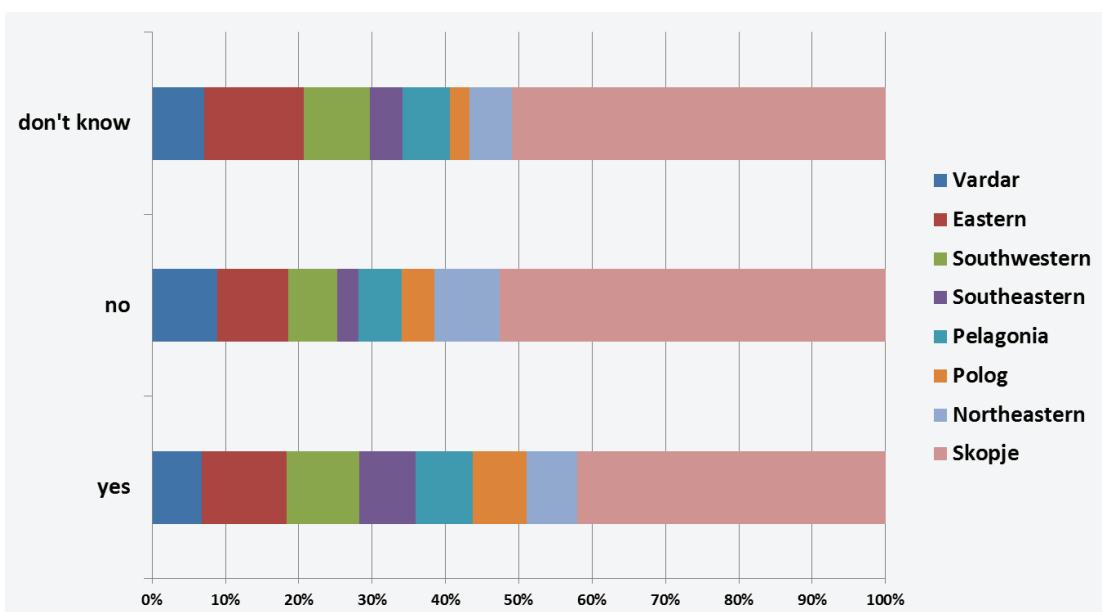
Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding membership in youth or student organizations among respondents residing in different statistical region



Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding volunteerism among respondents residing in different statistical region



Approximate measurement of the differences of the responses regarding the belief whether the opportunities for the youth in Macedonia would be increased if Macedonia becomes NATO and EU member among respondents residing in different statistical region



## **5. Workshops' and Conference Findings**

The workshops were organized in four cities in Macedonia covering the eight statistical regions, with additional two main events in Skopje (a round table and final conference) were conceptualized to stimulate exchange of ideas, suggestions and positive practices among the representatives of the students and young people in general, youth and student organizations, academia and the media. The cities were carefully selected taking into consideration the geographical coverage and the diverse ethnic composition.

The workshops were organized in a way to generate knowledge, to encourage discussion and open topics related to Euro-Atlantic integration (as preconditions for building a democratic society through youth engagement, equal representation and investment in the capacities of the youth and student organizations). Discussions and the workshops covered issues related to the presence and importance of the different forms and models of participation, ethnic diversity and the factors that encourage mass emigration of young people in Macedonia as well as how to surmount these tendencies

### ***a. Round Table***

#### **ONE-on-ONE DISCUSSION WITH Ambassador Tacan Ildem, Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy, NATO**

The round table was held on the occasion of the high official visit of Ambassador Tacan Ildem, Assistant Secretary General for Public Diplomacy within the Public Diplomacy Division of NATO.

After the official part of the event, the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia organized a meeting behind closed doors with the Ambassador Tacan Ildem. Several NGOs and diplomatic representatives were invited to this meeting in order to express their views on Macedonian integration in NATO and the role that civil society should play in support of these processes. The event aimed to stimulate discussion on issues of importance related to Macedonia's integration into NATO and to involve the civil society, particularly youth and student organizations in the public debate on the Euro-Atlantic integrations.

The event gathered participants with different professional profiles, such as NATO officials, political and diplomatic representatives from NATO member and partner countries, representatives from NGO's, academia and economic fields; professionals, experts, practitioners; representatives of civil society and the private sector; journalists and media operators.

The event intended to encourage discussion and to enhance the debate on the important issues regarding Macedonia's integration into NATO and to include the civil sector in the public debate as a contributing feature in the process of intensifying the Euro-Atlantic integrations.

Ambassador Tacan Ildem opened the discussion putting forward his in-depth insights regarding NATO's currents goals, policies and endeavors. He particularly centered on the NATO current agenda, relationship with Russia and partner countries, and the possible scenarios with regard to the contemporary threats and challenges.



As for Macedonia, he stressed the importance of remaining focused on the reforms and ensuring political stability. Ambassador Ildem reiterated NATO's support for Macedonia as future NATO full-fledged member. He emphasized the necessity of regional cooperation for resolving the issues with the neighbor countries, but also underscored the importance of mutually acceptable solution regarding the name issue.

The closed part of the event was focused on the discussion between Ambassador Tacan Ildem and the representatives of the civil society. The representatives of the civil society openly expressed their views and positions and asked questions of interest for Macedonia's integration in NATO structures. The questions that were opened were associated with Macedonia's prolonged process of integration in NATO structures, how the civil society can contribute to these processes and how the role of youth should be shaped in this matter.

Ambassador Ildem underlined the need of strong civil society, a diversity of think tanks, associations and expertise groups, as well as free and independent media. He also said that it is important to stimulate the younger generation to engage in these processes and in different segments in the society by concluding that the reform process is critical for pursuing of NATO integration agenda.



### ***b. First Workshop – Tetovo***

The first workshop was organized as a round table, and was held on 12th of October 2017 in the premises of the Tetovo State University. The event gathered around 50 students, professors and journalists.

The Vice Dean of the Faculty of Law at the State University Tetovo **Dr. Jusuf Zejneli**, opened the event and stressed the importance of these kind of projects, while the project coordinator, **Mr. Ilija Djugumanov** outlined the goals and objectives of the project.

After the presentation of the research results, **Mr. Ismet Ramadani**, President of ATA Macedonia, noted that young people have important influence in the democratic processes, but according to him, if we take into consideration the project's results, it is apparent that they are not engaged in the processes tied with integrations. He stressed that we should work together and should take mutual effort with the institutions in assisting the young people in Macedonia to absorb skills and democratic values, but also to be aware on their opportunities.

The Deputy Minister for Defense, **Dr. Bekim Maksuti** welcomed the initiative, stressing that the young people are a progressive force for every idea, initiative and democratic process. He highlighted the importance to work with, and motivate young people to be more aware about their opportunities for engagement, and to realize their full potential in Macedonia not seeking opportunities abroad. He said that proactive approach to provide better opportunities is of vital importance for NATO and EU integrations. He also noted that NATO is not just dealing with military issues, but it is an organization that advocates for the development of science, education, and contributes in dealing with elementary disasters, and promotes values for peace and stability.



**H.E. Ambassador Ms. Danijela Barisic** pointed out that her country supports Macedonia on the road to membership in the Euro-Atlantic family, because it understands the needs and challenges of Macedonia in this process. She shared the Croatian experience and its way towards NATO integration. She welcomed the new enthusiasm and commitment by the Government for carrying out the reforms not just in the defense sector, but urged for greater engagement of the young people in the reforming process.

**Mr. Marko Cehovin**, Civilian Advisor at NATO Liaison in Skopje, underlined that the dialogue is possible only with education and without ethnic divisions. He said that the youth is the future for economic well-being and the willingness for reforms.

**Mr. Albert Musliu**, Political Analyst, in his speech said that Macedonia should work to encourage the young people to cooperate. He said that the civil society in Macedonia is not as strong as it should be, and that the young people should engage in these processes as creative and energetic force.



The discussion touched on issues of importance for the students who discussed their limitations as members of the ethnic minorities to actively contribute to the democratic processes. Suggestions and advises for inclusive mechanisms in public institutions were provided by the participants, who urged for stronger commitment by the policy actors and the young people themselves.

### c. Second Workshop – Struga

The second workshop took place on 18th of October, 2017 in the premises of FON University in Struga.

**Mr. Ismet Ramadani**, the President of the EACM and Project Director, stressed the importance of the contribution of youth in the democratic and Euro-Atlantic processes by utilizing all the resources and capacities.

**Prof. Dr. Nano Ruzin**, Rector of the FON University in his speech explained the role and goals of NATO in order to make the students familiar with the importance of integration. He also emphasized the need of their contribution in the NATO integration processes.

**Cap. Ivajlo Toshirov**, representative from the NATO Liaison Office in Skopje argued for the necessity of youth to be well-trained, educated and capable of sharing experience and qualities, and to help the country in the integration process which in his words was frozen with some steps from the past.

**Prof. Dr. Mersel Biljali** said that the Macedonia has an interest to keep the youth within its borders, and to encourage them to seek opportunities in their home country. He also said that the future NATO integration will have an impact in opening opportunities for the youth.

A discussion followed after the speeches opened many important questions related to the role of the youth in the Euro-Atlantic processes. Some of the questions that were raised were related to the lack of the opportunities for youth living in the peripheral cities and outside of the capital city, and was concluded that there is a necessity of a debate on higher level regarding this issue.



#### **d. Third Workshop – Stip**

During the third workshop, organized on 21st of November 2017, in the premises of the State University "Goce Delcev" Stip, the moderator and coordinator of the project, **Mr. Ilija Djugumanov** briefly explained the project's goal and the importance of this debate for the promotion of the democratic processes in Macedonia.

**Mr. Ismet Ramadani**, President of EACM, underlined that NATO is not only a military alliance, but also a political and diplomatic organization in which young people are an important facet, and of which the progress in a society strongly depends.

**Lieutenant Colonel Antonio Barone** from the NATO Liaison Office in Skopje pointed out that integration is of great importance for Macedonia, and especially for the prosperity of young people that must contribute to a better common future.

**Prof. Dr. Mersel Biljali** stressed that integration is primarily of interest to young people and their development, bearing in mind the values that the Alliance advocates for.

The discussion that followed was focused on the obstacles that the youth faces on regular basis, and is related to lack of information, insufficient discussion and absence of debate that concern finding solutions for youth problems. The students expressed a dose of doubt and unreliability toward state institutions that can effectively address their problems and shared proposals for improvement of their situation.



#### e. Forth Workshop – Strumica

On 22nd of November 2017 in the premises of the State University "Goce Delcev" Stip - Strumica, the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia rounded off the cycle of workshops which were part of this research project.

At this forth workshop held in Strumica, **Mr. Ismet Ramadani**, pointed to the need of advocating for integration in an organized way, and young people to be actively engaged in the Euro-Atlantic integrations which would mean a guaranteed perspective that would stimulate originality and creativity.

The Dean of the University "Goce Delcev" Stip, **prof. PhD. Jovan Ananiev** underlined that the system would be more democratized if the young people were included in the Euro-Atlantic integration, based on the democratic values and principles that NATO promotes regularly. He urged for the pro-activity of the youth in this regard, but also the responsibility to bring the Alliance closer to the young people.

**Prof. Dr. Zoran Sapuric** emphasized that the integration is the only possible way for Macedonia. According to him, NATO and the EU are a guarantee of stability and a prerequisite for relaxation of the relations with the neighbor countries, and the debates are of great importance in these processes.

**H. E. Ambassador Danijela Barisic** gave a comparative review with the example of Croatia and pointed out that integration is an important process that helps in building strong institutions. She said that changing the approach for reaching the young people is more than necessary.

**Col. Spyridon Mylocharaktis**, from NATO Liaison Office in Skopje, underlined the benefits that Macedonia, and at the same time young people would have if Macedonia becomes a NATO member.

**Prof. Dr. Mersel Biljali** once again highlighted the advantages of NATO integrations such as the rule of law, equality, higher standard, general development, and more appropriate jobs for young people.

After the conclusion of the event, it was agreed that in order to enhance youth participation and greater inclusion, a proactive approach and cooperation on local, national and regional level is of key importance.



## Final Conference

The final conference of the research project conducted by the Euro-Atlantic Council of Macedonia entitled "Strengthening of the Youth Dialogue for the promotion of democratic processes in the light of the Euro-Atlantic integrations" took place on 13th of December 2017 in Skopje at the Members of Parliament Club.

At the opening of the final conference, the key speakers were the Prime Minister Mr. Zoran Zaev and the President of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia Mr. Talat Xhaferi, as well as the Vice President of the Atlantic Treaty Association, Vladan Zivulovic. Moderator of the opening session was Mr. Ilija Djugumanov, Member of Presidency of ATA Macedonia.

After the opening of the conference, the **President of ATA Macedonia, Mr. Ismet Ramadani**, pointed out that the chance which is now opened to Macedonia 10 years after the NATO Summit in Bucharest should be well-utilized. He emphasized the role of young people in these processes as an essential and contributing segment.

The **President of the Assembly, H.E. Mr. Talat Xhaferi**, emphasized the importance of the dialogue for the youth and for the Euro-Atlantic processes as a way of solving the open issues in order to increase the stability of the region and the Euro-Atlantic perspective, noting that: "Behind these positive trends stand only one tool and that is the dialogue. Dialogue on the internal plan, among the political entities, dialogue with the expert public, with the NGO sector, dialogue and openness with the media."

In his address, the **Prime Minister H.E. Mr. Zoran Zaev** pointed out that the citizens of Macedonia are convinced that the country deserves the Euro-Atlantic perspectives. Among other things, he stated: "Over 75 percent of all our citizens want membership in the EU and NATO. The government, with the support of the citizens and our international partners, paves the way for our country towards NATO." He also added that the Republic of Macedonia will always make a positive contribution to every kind of initiative that will bring wider and better cooperation in the region. He also referred to other indicators of the research that indicate that young people are not sufficiently involved in the Euro-Atlantic integration processes and pointed out that it is now time to change that.



**Mr. Vladan Zivulovic, Vice President of the Atlantic Treaty Association**, stressed the need for joint cooperation, as well as the prospects that would be opened for Macedonia and the youth after joining NATO and the EU. He also added that: "the reforms implemented by Macedonia over the past ten years constitute the bedrock for its forthcoming Euro-Atlantic integration."



After the opening speeches, two panel discussions were held. The first panel discussed the domestic and institutional perspective when it comes to the inclusion of youth in democratic processes. Speakers on the first panel were: Mr. Bekim Maksuti, Deputy Minister of Defense of the Republic of Macedonia; H.E. Sibyl Suter Tejada, Ambassador, Embassy of Switzerland; Lieutenant Colonel Ivailo Toshirov, NATO Liaison Office Skopje; and Ms. Marija Jankuloska, Research Coordinator, YATA Macedonia. The moderator of the panel was Mr. Viktor Andonov, Secretary General of ATA Macedonia.



**Deputy Minister of Defense, Mr. Bekim Maksuti**, emphasized that the developing countries are facing a serious problem - to seek for a prosperous future outside the home countries. He stated that: "It is necessary for the state to invest more in the young people, in their educational process in creating living conditions for better livelihood, for their motivation. One of the conditions is the intensification of the dialogue between the youth from all provinces, regardless of their ethnic, religious, social, political affiliation". He added that Macedonia is making efforts to bring European standards in education, defense and security sector, economy and social life. He also emphasized that the opportunities and perspectives of the young people will be significantly improved with the full integration of the Republic of Macedonia into NATO and the European Union.

**H.E. Ms. Sibyl Suter Tejada, Ambassador of the Embassy of Switzerland** outlined the necessity of these type of projects and researches, and expressed support of these kind of activities. She stressed the necessity of the democratization of the institutions, and creation of conditions for youth inclusion. According to her, the inclusion of the youth is the best guarantee for the sustainability of the results.

**Lieutenant Colonel Ivailo Toshirov, representative from the NATO Liaison Office in Skopje**, accentuated the need of young people to be more involved in the democratic processes and for him the education and training of youth are crucial facets in these processes.



**Ms. Marija Jankuloska, Research Coordinator at YATA Macedonia**, presented the results of the research and underlined the key points of the conclusions of the research findings. She said that the proactive approach of the state authorities and incentives for engagement are necessary in order to integrate youth in decision making and to provide conditions for youth inclusion in Euro-Atlantic integration processes.

The second panel was focused on the regional dimension and the perspectives for regional co-operation. Speakers at the second panel were: Colonel Ljube Dukoski, Vice President of ATA Macedonia; H.E. Ms. Bisserka Benisheva, board member of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria; Mr. Vlade Radulovic, Project Director at the Atlantic Council of Serbia and D-r Beitush Gashi, Executive Director of the Euro-Atlantic Association of Kosovo. The moderator of the panel was Ms. Marija Jankuloska, Research Coordinator at YATA Macedonia.

**H.E. Ms. Bisserka Benisheva, Board Member of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria**, provided a comparative look into Bulgarian practices of how to integrate youth and reiterate her support for Macedonian membership into NATO and EU.



**Mr. Vlade Radulovic, Project Director at the Atlantic Council of Serbia**, referred to youth issues in Serbia and provided comparative analysis of youth policies in his country. He pointed out that the mass emigration of youth is one of the biggest problems in Serbia and that there is no in-depth research regarding youth participation in Serbia.

**Prof. D-r Beitush Gashi, Executive Director of the Euro-Atlantic Association of Kosovo**, stressed the need for regional projects for greater cooperation and joint action because according to him, the countries in the region share common problems when the youth is concerned.

**Colonel Ljube Dukoski, Vice President of ATA Macedonia** said that he is pleased with the fact that 72% of young people believe that their opportunities will increase if Macedonia becomes a member of NATO and the EU. In his concluding observations, he pointed out that EACM as a non-governmental organization has an obligation to monitor the public policies for Macedonia's integration into NATO and the EU, and to organize debates on their implementation and the possible political outcomes.



## 6. Conclusion

The research which lasted for 6 months and which was conducted throughout the whole territory of Macedonia divided in 8 statistical regions and covering both urban and rural areas, showed significant results in terms of the attitudes and perceptions, as well as the degree of factual involvement and participation in the democratic processes of young people based in Macedonia.

As the secondary data suggests, most of the young people do not know about the meaning or the role that the youth organizations have in the society, nor are they aware about the benefits they would have if they were a part of the democratic processes. Although, there is an abundance of diverse CSOs which field of action covers youth issues, the young people are not sufficiently and adequately informed about their existence, nor do they show interest in membership or volunteering as active involvement in their activities.

On one hand, the direct quantitative research that was implemented showed unsatisfactory level of awareness by the young people in Macedonia in respect of the importance of the participatory democracy, lack of information regarding their important role in the democratic processes, and low level of knowledge on how to be involved in the Euro-Atlantic integrative processes. The results indicate insignificant civic participation of young people at central and local level, which was measured using several indicators.

Additionally, the analysis among other things showed that there is no extreme difference in terms of awareness and actual participation in democratic processes by members of different ethnicities. Greater discrepancy is visible in terms of awareness and actual participation in the democratic processes of young people in different statistical regions in Macedonia, with the residents of Skopje Statistical Region to be more involved in democratic processes compared to the youth from the other statistical regions.

On the other hand, the educational and deliberative line of activities conducted in the form of round tables and four workshops demonstrated significant interest by the young people and students that participated at the events by actively involving themselves in the discussions about how their position should be changed in the future. This is a positive and encouraging impetus that there is an interest and curiosity, but should be well-streamlined in order to ensure greater participation. Only active, committed and directly included youth can further contribute for the growth of the economy and development of the country.

## 7. Recommendations

Each society should strive to create a favorable environment where young people can realize their full potential. The participation of young people in democracy should be essential and meaningful, not formal and declarative, and should be supported by appropriate political and legal solutions and suitable youth-oriented policies.

- 1) The economic well-being is crucial for an economically independent youth. A society overwhelmed by existential problems, social inequalities and economic deprivations, as well as uneven economic development, cannot provide healthy and thriving conditions for the advancement and prosperity of young people; neither can provide conditions for civic engagement and active involvement in democracy. The high unemployment rate of the youth in Macedonia is strong indicator that further efforts are needed for encouraging youth employment in public and private sector supported by appropriate legislation and tax incentives.
- 2) The educational system should be at a high educational level with a capacity to educate young people about their role in a democracy. It should also be invested in alternative forms of non-formal education that has the potential to appropriately address youth problems, adapt to their needs and provide mechanisms for better political education. The internet tools, the online platforms and the social media can play a vital role in facilitating the youth participation by providing new, innovative and interactive ways of education and engagement. The importance of advancing democratic processes should be a priority in educating the young people.
- 3) Strengthening the legal framework backed by political dialogue and consultation processes is vital for future proactive action and constructive youth policies. The legal framework should pay more attention to the forms of youth association, and the status of youth in the creation of the public policies which would serve as a basis for positive and effective political action.

4) The conduct of proactive policies by the authorities fortified by cross-institutional actions and initiatives is critical for improving the current situation and for creating conducive environment for youth development. The cross-sectoral and integrated policies have a capacity to deliver positive results that can be viewed as a further impetus that would stimulate new associations, initiatives and proposals, and would stir greater and upward social mobility among young people who have never been engaged.

5) The cooperation and bottom up approach which should imply networking, sharing information and collaboration on all levels and among all stakeholders is essential for better youth policies and considerable youth engagement. Cooperation between institutions at the local and central level responsible for youth issues, with youth organizations and other forms of associations, should be strengthened and intensified through joint projects that would produce practical results and will create a feeling among young people that they are beneficial factors of some positive changes for them and other citizens. The youth civic activism can be strengthened, as well as the cooperation between youth organizations / associations and state institutions, through common platforms, joint initiatives and other forms of networking.

6) Fostering the Euro-Atlantic values is one of the key factors that can help facilitate the EU and NATO integration. Therefore, young people should pay special attention to these values and work on their acceptance and implementation. They should have a high awareness of coexistence, tolerance, equality, non-discrimination, respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy. This can be achieved by nurturing a culture of youth dialogue and debate. Engaging the young people in a dialogue, discussions and consultations is pivotal to enhance the Euro-Atlantic values. With the participation of young people in these activities, they would become aware of the capacities they have and the positive changes they can make in the society.

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