

---

**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **The Impact of EU Integration on the Political, Economic and Social Systems of Republic of North Macedonia (As a Candidate Country)**

**Miranda Sabriu Bexheti**

*Professor, Balkan and Eurasian Studies, University Mother Teresa, Skopje North Macedonia*

**Corresponding Author:** Miranda Sabriu Bexheti, **E-mail:** [msabriubexheti@gmail.com](mailto:msabriubexheti@gmail.com)

---

**| ABSTRACT**

Subjective assessments from various relevant factors to the level of North Macedonia's achievements in the path of European integration are often contradictory and partial for a general conclusion. The analysis of this research lies on this context, which aims to provide answers to the country's achievements towards European integration through analyses and generalizations of the results from the official reports of the European Commission as well as through concrete data about the country's achievements (statistical entities and V-Dem Varieties of democracy) for the development of the political, economic and social system as a whole during the years 2010-2023. The results show that North Macedonia consumes concrete benefits from European funds and associations, but the progress in the country is insignificant.

**| KEYWORDS**

EU integration; Integration achievements; Republic of North Macedonia.

**| ARTICLE INFORMATION**

**ACCEPTED:** 15 January 2024

**PUBLISHED:** 05 February 2024

**DOI:** 10.32996/ijlps.2024.6.1.9

---

### **1. Introduction**

European integration as a phenomenon can be studied from several aspects. First, as a form of international organization where decisions are made by bringing together the interests of member states; secondly, as regional economic cooperation, whose primary interest is the establishment of a common market and a free trade zone; and third, as a unique system of policy making and implementation where a large number of actors and different influences are involved. The issues of the integration of the European continent and the problems of the European Union must inevitably be studied from the perspective of integration theories. Integration theories are most closely related to the discipline of international relations, and their subject of interest are relations between independent states, issues related to achieving peace, and forms of closer association (Burgess, 2009).

Of particular importance for the understanding of European integration are three dimensions of the process itself:

1) the functional scope - the process began with integration in two sectors, coal and steel, continued with the areas of trade, agriculture, transport, competition and atomic energy, and later extended to regional policy, development, research, environmental protection, industrial policy, health, education and culture, as well as foreign and security policy;

2) the institutional capacity – a combination of supranational and intergovernmental characteristics, whereby the supranational character is expressed in the independence of the European Commission (EC), qualified majority voting in the Council of Ministers, as well as a legal system that has supremacy and direct effect in the member states;

3) the geographical area – it started with six founding states from Western Europe, and later, through four expansion cycles (1973, 1981/86, 1995 and 2004/07/13), its borders were extended to the North Pole, Russia and the western and eastern Mediterranean (Burgess, 2009).

Article 49 of the Maastricht Treaty stipulates that "any European country that respects the principles of the EU may apply for membership of the Union". At the meeting held in June 1993 in Copenhagen, the EU Council of Ministers prescribed the so-called Copenhagen criteria that contain political, economic, and legislative criteria. The political part includes standards for (Den Boer, 1997):

- ✓ Democracy in the country – participation of citizens in decision-making, free elections with secret ballot, freedom of the press, etc.;
- ✓ Rule of law – power must be exercised only in accordance with the laws adopted in a certain procedure;
- ✓ Respect for human rights and minority rights – adoption of the principles from the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as protection and respect for the culture, language and identity of minorities.

The economic criteria represent the ability of the country to have a functioning market economy and the ability to prepare for the pressure of competition and the forces of the Union's common market. Regarding the criteria related to the legislation, all the states that want to join the Union must implement in their legislation the so-called *acquis communautaire* – the European legal acts adopted within the EU (El-Agraa, 2007).

In addition to the common criteria, for each applicant country, there are also special conditions that are different in terms of their character. Also, on the side of the necessary conditions is the absorption capacity of the Union, that is, the ability to accept new members of the European family. The accession process involves an application to the Council of Ministers, which will make a decision after consultation with the European Commission and the opinion of the European Parliament. The European Commission prepares an opinion regarding the application, in which it recommends if and when the country should receive candidate status. The next step is membership negotiations, followed by the signing of an accession agreement, which must be ratified by each member country and candidate country in accordance with national ratification procedures (Bolton, 2009).

In this direction is the journey of North Macedonia since 2004, when the country expressed its intention to join the EU. The journey itself for membership in the EU, in addition to the reforms that must be made, the benefits are inevitable due to the fact that the EU itself signed the agreements in this journey, that is, through reforms according to European values and standards as well as assistance from European associations and institutions, the country has benefits in the context of economic, political and social development. But how much this journey in the integration of the Republic of North Macedonia into the EU from 2004-2023 has influenced the economic, political and social development is also the goal of this analytical-empirical study.

### **1.1 Research Questions:**

- ✓ Has the path of integration of North Macedonia had a positive impact on the country's political, economic and social system?
- ✓ Is this impact of benefits from European funds and standards significant for North Macedonia for the fair development of the political, economic and social system?

### **1.2 Main Hypothesis:**

The path towards integration into the European Union has a positive impact on the smooth development of the political, economic and social system of the Republic of North Macedonia.

## **2. Literature Review**

In the field of political relations, North Macedonia was the first country in the Western Balkans to sign the Stabilization and Association Agreement (SAA) with the EU, which entered into force in April 2004. The SAA aims to liberalize trade for 95% of exports with the EU. The Joint Parliamentary Commission was established in 2004. The Commission examines all aspects of relations between the EU and the Republic of North Macedonia, especially the implementation of the SAA. In December 2005, the country was granted the status of a candidate country for EU membership. In December 2009, citizens of the country were granted the right to travel without visas in the Schengen area. In March 2020, the European Council approved the decision to open negotiations with North Macedonia. After the Council approved the Negotiating Framework, in accordance with the revised Enlargement Methodology, on 19 July 2022, the EU started the opening phase of accession negotiations with North Macedonia (European Commission, 2022).

In the economic segment, according to data from the statistical entities of North Macedonia, as well as the analytical centers of the EU, the main partner of North Macedonia is the EU itself, including 77.5% of the country's exports and 51% of its imports. Germany is the country's largest trading partner, followed by Great Britain, Serbia, China and Greece. Exports from the country are concentrated in several products, the most important being ferro-nickel alloys, iron and steel, and textiles. The main imports are crude oil, electricity rolled iron and steel products, and vehicles (European Commission, 2022).

In terms of business support, some of the main EU programs and initiatives to support the growth of businesses and the wider economy are available to companies based in the Republic of North Macedonia, including (European Commission, 2022):

- Horizon Europe 2021-2027 (the main EU funding program for research and innovation with a budget of €95.5 billion).
- Access2Markets (portal for EU export and import, providing all tariffs, customs procedures and formalities, and product requirements for the EU market).
- Grow your Business (subsidized advisory services for companies).
- Enterprise Europe Network (information and advice for companies on EU issues).

As for civil society, it can be said that civil society organizations support the authorities of North Macedonia in the implementation of structural reforms on the way to accession. They mobilize citizens, express people's concerns, and channel the energy of communities in support of sustainable development. On the other hand, the EU listens to civil society, works with civil society, and advocates for the increased role of civil society organizations in the policy dialogue based on sectors in the country.

In this context, the EU also provides financial assistance for civil society projects through the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA). The EU created the Civil Society Facility in 2008 to support the development of civil society in South East Europe and help them to (European Commission - North Macedonia - financial assistance under IPA, 2010-2022):

- Play an active role in policy dialogue and support the accession process at the community level.
- Mobilize citizens and communities in finding local solutions and leading social inclusion initiatives.
- Engages in the promotion of human, social and environmental rights.
- Be an effective observer in monitoring structural reforms directed by the government.
- Develop cross-border projects and networks.

In the period 2014-2020, the EU provided EUR 24.3 million for civil society organizations' projects in North Macedonia.

As we emphasized above, in order to help the integration of the country, the EU provides continuous support and financial assistance through projects so that the country can undertake any necessary reforms.

So, as we emphasized above, the Instrument for Pre-Accession (IPA) is the main financial instrument of the EU to support structural reforms in North Macedonia and the country's path to EU accession. Since 2007, the EU has invested 1.3 billion euros through the national IPA envelope in five main areas (European Commission - North Macedonia - financial assistance under IPA, 2010-2022):

- Rule of law and fundamental rights.
- Democracy and good governance.
- Environmental protection and sustainable connectivity.
- Economic growth and human capital.
- Agriculture and rural development

The country has also benefited from the IPA Multi-Beneficiary Programme, which distributed EU aid of €2.98 billion in 2014-2020 to support projects with a regional impact on the Western Balkans.

Another instrument in this direction is the Investment Instrument for the Western Balkans (WBIF), which supports North Macedonia in the implementation of 23 projects with a total value of €2.1 billion. EU investments channeled into North Macedonia reached €163.2 million and covered technical assistance and investment work. EU investments had a significant leverage effect, bringing to the country a total of €181.8 million in grants and €580 million in preferential loans (European Commission - North Macedonia - Reports, 2010-2022).

On the other hand, the European Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights (EIDHR) has provided €8.1 million for projects that improve democracy and human rights in the period 2007-2020.

Although the goal of Government policies is in the direction of structuring European standards and values in the country and enabling citizens to have a European way of life, i.e., a system of values that imply a legal state in which everyone is equal before the law, in which order, order and organization are predictable and are part of everyday life, solidarity, equal society for all, quality infrastructure, productive and sustainable agriculture, as well as a healthy living environment, despite this European reports as well as the current situation in all state and social spheres they show stagnation and immature standards. What has happened in reality these last years!?

### 3. Methodology

This study focuses on a concise analysis of the impact of North Macedonia's journey towards the European Union on the political, economic and social system. Analyzing and drawing generalized conclusions from the official reports of the European Commission for the years 2010-2023, as well as reflecting concrete assessments from the statistical entities of the RNM and the EU, as well as concrete values from V-dem (Varieties of democracy), this research gives a concrete answer to the impact of the integration of North Macedonia in the political, economic and social system.

### 4. Results and Discussion

The reality is structured through EU reports and economic and social indicators (according to the Statistical Office of North Macedonia and European statistics and V-Dem Varieties of Democracy data). European reports from 2005 to 2023 generally show stagnation in many segments, especially in the political and jurisdictional ones. If we generalize those findings and assessments from the official European reports on the integration of North Macedonia towards the EU, we can conclude that for Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security, almost a whole decade there is no significant progress towards European standards (European Commission - North Macedonia - Reports, 2010-2022).

When it refers to Chapter 31 – on the common security of the candidate states with the European Union, namely, the candidate countries must be able to conduct political dialogues within the framework of Chapter 31, to comply with EU statements/positions, to participate in its activities, to apply its sanctions and restrictive measures.

In the Annual Report from 2018-2023, the definition of progress in the sphere under Chapter 31 starts from the key obligations of the member states that must be able/have the capacity/power, where it is stated for North Macedonia that:

- ✓ The state remains/continues to be prepared in a certain sense/to a certain extent/to a limited extent;
- ✓ Positive assessment of the fact that our country actively continues to cooperate with international organizations and adhere to the decisions that the EU presents to them - UN, OSCE and CE;
- ✓ It is also important to assess that the security measures were applied behind the border security from the point of view of the migrant and refugee crisis, the crisis measures for command and control have been upgraded, and praising the extensions of our participation in the EU mission in BiH, NATO Resolute Support in Afghanistan and KFOR of the National Coordination Center, and the cooperation with the European Defense Agency continues.

In terms of the global strategy of North Macedonia's diplomacy, from May 2018 to February 2019, the country complied with 75 out of 87 declarations of the High Representative and 86% of the Council's decisions, but, as a novelty, it did not comply with the restrictive measures against Russia and Ukraine; in terms of international arrangements for exports and non-proliferation – all the words used are identical to last year's.

More specifically, for Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights and Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and security, the evaluations of the EC in general for cooperation in civil and criminal cases in all reports, up to the one on progress in 2009, were clearly critical. The EC gave the first serious compliment due to the signing of the Cooperation Agreement with Eurojustice (which, by the way, entered into force on 23.6.2010) and the series of other international conventions relevant to these areas. Fortunately, in 2010, the EC concluded that the country was in a moderately advanced stage in this area.

The EC concluded that the country had implemented most of the structural and legal reforms for the fight against money laundering. The Financial Intelligence Unit was incorporated into the Egmont Group in June 2004. The overall assessments of preparations in the areas of money laundering were carried out as follows: significant progress/progress. The main remarks concerned the absence of overall statistics for the entire area. On the other hand, the EC found only limited progress in the fight against counterfeiting of euros and against weak research capacities.

The evaluations in this Report in Chapter 23 generalized for the last decade concluded that (European Commission - North Macedonia - Reports, 2010-2022):

- The state has achieved some level of preparations for the application of *acquis communautaire* and European standards;
- Legal and institutional frameworks were largely present but without progress;
- The authorities did not express sufficient will to more effectively address the shortcomings of the independence of the judiciary;
- Corruption remained dominant in many areas, never ceasing to be a serious problem;
- Political influences and structural weaknesses have undermined the functioning of the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption;

In this segment, we continue with the following extremely important and, at the same time, very painful topic – the functioning of the judiciary/the functioning of the courts and the behavior of judges and prosecutors. According to the Reports for the last decade, it can be generalized that:

- strategic documents – the multiple amendments were made in/on the legislative frameworks in irregular ways through the implementation of shortened procedures and without proper/adequate consultations with the professions that had to be intervened, including a) wrong actions in all judicial areas; b) the connections with court rulings; c) the notarial illegalities with the sheriff officers and d) the implementation/application of the relevant suggestions of the EC and the standards/views of the Venice Commission; all in all, the necessary political will for reforming the right ways forward was evident;

- the governing bodies – the Judicial Council made certain efforts to improve transparency, in particular, through regular updates; however, the Office of the Public Prosecutor was still dealing with the shortcomings of budget allocations, especially with IT support and adequate personnel;

- independence, impartiality, objectivity – the Judicial Association began to be actively involved in the promotion of judicial independence; however, there was no indication that judges felt confident enough to complain to competent bodies. The Judicial Council, which launched initiatives to protect judges from interference, did not lead to/failed to produce practical results;

- the responsibilities/seriousness/obligations/keeping accounts of the obligations – the Judicial Council, the Minister of Justice and the Office of the Ombudsman continued to "handle" the growing number of complaints about the operations/actions of the courts; for example, in 2015 the Supreme Court received 610 requests for compensation for unreasonably long procedures – compared to 637 in 2014; there was only one request for the accountability of a judge based on the new procedure from 2016, which was rejected;

The next area of Chapter 23 in the Reports for the period from 2013-2023 also focused on the anti-corruption policy by emphasizing the need to establish a more reliable supervisory/supervisory system and more consistent flows/reviews of findings and the imposition and implementation of effective penalties, especially against the largest political parties that had to be resolved, as numerous cases were still in the prosecutor's offices submitted by the police; understandably, the Reports insist on much more active coercive applications of the law by supervisory bodies as well; whereas, the Public Prosecutor's Office was required to follow the criminal investigations initiated by the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption Acts, as well as by the State Office that controlled the state spending/spending of the authorities and other related institutions; the institutional framework through the State Commission for Dealing with Corruption – was not able to fulfill its own mandate despite the adoption of the methodology for anti-corruption verifications, because the establishment of the new unit even with only the four temporary employees and the electronic registers of the elected and the appointed officials who made it possible to declare assets or interests were urgent urgencies for reforms/introduction of reforms in this sphere as well, but still insufficient and unsuccessful.

The reports ascertained the establishment of the advanced/ modernized State Office responsible for state spending and interests, but unrelated to the other applicable regime that had to be developed, and the roles of certain institutions had to be classified for the purpose of controls on party donations; The reports also insisted on the regular controls on public procurement, concessions, public-private partnerships and the execution of the contracts of the institutions; according to him, there were neither administrative punishment mechanisms, nor transparency, nor responsibilities of public institutions, as well as of state entrepreneurs, at the same time, while public expenses did not cease to be insufficient; The Freedom of Information Commission was generally seen as passive and criticized for the shortcomings of non-functional independence (European Commission - North Macedonia - Reports, 2010-2022);

Another big area that the 2013-2023 Reports stuck to was fundamental rights; through most of the various negative facts that he specifically addressed, despite the fact that North Macedonia was a contracting party to many international legal acts on human rights even before 2015, only in 2016 did it ratify Protocol 15 to the ECHR - the European Convention on Fundamental Freedoms and Rights and became an observer state in the Human Rights Agency of EU; the Court in Strasbourg has found violations in

several cases submitted to it for decisions, the most numerous: a) cases of violations of the prohibitions on torture and all types of inhuman and degrading treatments/treatments/behavior; b) cases on the right to fair trials; c) cases due to disrespect of family life and d) cases for property protection;

However, how far North Macedonia has actually reached with European integration and what impact the country's integration has had so far on the economic, political and social segment is shown in the latest report (2023) of the European Union on the progress of North Macedonia in the path of European integration!

It is realistically shown that even to this day, there are still no significant achievements, especially for Chapter 23: Judiciary and Fundamental Rights (2023) and Chapter 24: Justice, freedom and Security (2023). Overall, there was no progress on strengthening judicial independence and improving the legal framework for fundamental rights protection. The judicial system of North Macedonia is in between some and moderate levels of preparation. There was no progress in the judiciary field during the reporting period. The Judicial Council should strive to protect the integrity and independence of judges and institutions and should resist any external influence.

In the section with Fight against corruption (2023), the country is in between some moderate levels of preparation in the prevention and fight against corruption. No progress was made. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and is an issue of concern. For Fundamental Rights (2023), the legal framework on the protection of fundamental rights is partially aligned with the EU acquis and European standards on fundamental rights. The country continues to meet its general obligations on fundamental rights, but legislation should be implemented in a systematic manner. North Macedonia is in between some and moderate levels of preparation for freedom of expression.

As far as the existence of a functioning market economy (2023), North Macedonia has made some progress and is at a good level of preparation to develop a functioning market economy. In 2022, the economy was badly hit by the fallout from Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which significantly slowed down its post COVID recovery. The country benefits from EU budget support worth EUR 80 million to cushion the impact of energy price increases on households, small and medium-sized enterprises and public service providers, of which EUR 72 million was disbursed on March 56, 2023. Challenges in the business environment are undermining the competitiveness of domestic companies, investment and global value chain integration. Challenges posed by the large informal economy are not addressed decisively.

As well as Chapter 19: Social Policy and Employment (2023), that the country remains moderately prepared in the area of social policy and employment. Some progress was made, notably in steadily reducing unemployment and increasing social assistance benefits.

#### *A. Integration according to economic, social and political indicators*

On March 26, 2020, the European Council decided to start negotiations with the Republic of North Macedonia for EU membership. With the beginning of EU membership negotiations, the country had to be prepared in many social segments according to European standards; society had to be transformed according to European rules, principles and values. According to the above evaluations from official reports from the European Council in recent years, we found that this preparation and transformation of society is still far from European standards. On the other hand, according to the purpose of this study for a detailed analysis of the impact of the path of integration in the political, economic and social system of North Macedonia, we continue with the empirical analysis comparing the official data from the statistical agency of North Macedonia and of the EU, further, the People's Bank of North Macedonia as well as the data from V-dem (Varieties of Democracy) about the achievements of North Macedonia in the social and political context.

**Table 1.** Economic development of North Macedonia according to macroeconomic indicators from 2010-2022

	GDP	Inflation	Employment	Unemployment	Productivity	Tax Revenue	Informal Economy Scale
2010	3.4	3.0	43.5	32.0	.	16.86	24.01
2011	2.3	2.8	43.9	31.4	.	16.99	26.70
2012	-5	4.7	44.0	31.0	-1.30	16.41	28.30
2013	2.9	1.4	46.0	28.6	.10	15.66	29.90
2014	3.6	-5	46.0	27.6	3.20	16.23	30.10
2015	3.8	-4	47.8	27.3	2.70	16.81	32.30
2016	2.9	1.6	56.8	24.5	-.30	16.95	37.60
2017	2.8	1.7	44.1	22.4	-1.00	17.16	33.00
2018	3.3	1.3	44.8	20.7	-.90	17.57	28.80
2019	3.8	.6	43.1	17.3	-1.90	17.08	21.30
2020	-6.1	1.2	.	16.4	-1.90	16.12	23.20
2021	4.0	3.2	.	15.7	-1.70	16.86	33.00
2022	2.7	10.6	.	15.2	.	16.99	24.01

**Source:** State Statistical Entity of RNM

<https://makstat.stat.gov.mk/PXWeb/pxweb/mk/MakStat/?rxid=46ee0f64-2992-4b45-a2d9-cb4e5f7ec5ef>

According to Table 1, the GDP rate of the RMV for the period 2010-2020 ranges from -6.1 for the pandemic year 2020 to a positive 4.0 for the year 2021; according to statistics, the recovery and renewal of the economy from the pandemic has continued. On the other hand, since 2016, the employment rate has shown a decrease due to the fact that the productivity of the economy does not continue to grow; this can be seen as a phenomenon that can also be the result of the informal economy or the country's departure from young people! The rate of inflation is worth noting that in recent years, 2018-2022, has increased as a bad indicator of the development trend of the economy of the Republic of North Macedonia, but also the fact of the world economic crisis last year as a result of the war in Ukraine! Due to the lack of complete data from the National Bank of RMV on the total productivity of the country's economy for this period, the trend of this rate from 2010-2022 has been decreasing since 2016, while tax revenues have not had any significant oscillation is observed for this period. In 2010, the rate of the informal economy was estimated at 24.01%, while in 2022, the informal economy was estimated at 24.01% of GDP, so there has been no movement for more than a decade, and the coefficient is quite high compared to European countries (max 11% ). From these macroeconomic indicators, we can conclude that during the integration, North Macedonia did not have significant economic development; in other words, the economic system of North Macedonia was far from EU standards.

But what happens to the social system on the way to the integration of North Macedonia towards the EU!? In order to have an objective and real overview, in addition to the above evaluations from the reports of the European Commission, below we reflect Tables 2 and 3 with data from V-dem (Varieties of Democracy) about the capacities and achievements of North Macedonia in the social segment.

**Table 2.** Development of the social system according to the degree of socio-economic corruption phenomena in the RNM from 2010-2022

	Public Sector Theft	Public Sector Corrupt Exchanges	Executive Bribery	Corruption index	Corruption control
2010	2.45	1.78	1.37	.	-.09300
2011	2.45	1.64	1.25	.	-.10700
2012	2.45	1.64	1.25	43.00	-.05100
2013	2.45	1.64	1.25	44.00	-.05600
2014	2.45	1.64	1.25	45.00	-.03200
2015	2.45	1.64	1.25	42.00	-.23900
2016	2.45	1.64	1.21	37.00	-.27200
2017	2.45	1.78	1.90	35.00	-.30200
2018	2.23	1.68	1.67	37.00	-.36800
2019	2.23	1.68	1.28	35.00	-.43400
2020	2.23	1.68	1.28	35.00	-.47100
2021	2.23	1.68	1.28	39.00	-.35200
2022	2.12	1.68	1.28	.	.

**Source:** Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) 11.2023 [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)

According to the V-Dem methodology (0: Constantly, 1: Often, 2: About half the time, 3: Occasionally, 4: Never, or hardly ever) theft in the public sector in North Macedonia (average index 2.2) is more than actual and significant compared to European countries (index 3-4) is indirectly related to the promotion of the informal economy in the country due to the lack of trust in institutions, the loss of morality and discipline and the promotion of corruption. According to V-Dem's methodology, Public Sector Corrupt Exchanges in RVM (1: Common 2: Sometimes 3: Scattered 4: No. Never) are quite widespread with a value above 1.5, which means that about half of the time passed at work or public sector employees engage in such exchanges, that this index in European countries is around 3-4. Also, Executive Bribery is quite widespread, with a value above 1, which means that it happens more often than not, as well as the corruption index, which reaches a value of 35-45, which means that it happens more often and corruption is a significant deviation of society and economy of the RMV. As for the control of corruption, the values are negative, which shows the low determination of the system to deal with it.

In this context, Table 3 follows the indicators of the development of the social system during North Macedonia's journey towards the EU.

**Table 3.** Development of the social system according to the degree of democracy RNM from 2010-2022

	Domestic Autonomy	Ideology	Civil liberties index	Liberal Democracy index	Participatory democracy index
2010	1.969	3.594	0.823	0.372	0.351
2011	1.969	3.594	0.801	0.342	0.323
2012	1.969	3.594	0.77	0.316	0.311
2013	1.969	3.594	0.739	0.284	0.301
2014	1.863	3.594	0.741	0.276	0.3
2015	1.719	2.752	0.717	0.271	0.299
2016	1.719	1.805	0.704	0.28	0.294
2017	1.761	1.805	0.78	0.386	0.363
2018	1.75	1.805	0.803	0.393	0.394
2019	1.958	1.17	0.836	0.414	0.413
2020	1.958	1.625	0.821	0.405	0.404
2021	1.762	1.625	0.826	0.389	0.398
2022	1.762	1.625	0.795	0.365	0.369

**Source:** Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) 11.2023 [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)

According to the values from V-Dem for Domestic Autonomy of RNM, it can be concluded that there is a partially structured autonomy with some oscillations during these years. According to V-Dem's methodology, countries with an index above 2 are considered countries with full autonomy, while in this case, North Macedonia is considered a country with external influence from



time to time, depending on the political ideology in the country. Also, according to the ideology index, North Macedonia oscillates a lot in terms of political elites, which means that the influence of politics in society is great and that there are political actors with opposite ideologies (pro-European and pro-Russian ideologies). The civil liberties index in North Macedonia during this period had no significant oscillations, but it was considered a system with partial civil rights in contrast to European countries with full rights (index above 1). Liberal Democracy index and Participatory democracy index are considered as a value that shows the freedom and participation of civil society in the political processes as well as in the democratic processes of the country. It is clearly seen that North Macedonia has low indices in this regard; for a society developed according to European standards, the index is close to 1. Also, from these social data, we can conclude that during the integration, North Macedonia did not have a significant development in its social system; in other words, the social system of North Macedonia was far from EU standards.

Finally, the empirical analyses of the political system also follow according to some key indicators according to the EU that are relevant for a healthy political system compatible with that of European countries.

**Table 4.** Development of the political system according to the degree of state governance and the judiciary of the RNM from 2010-2022

	Electoral Democracy Index	Government Attacks Judiciary	High On Independence	Court Lower Independence	Court Judicial Corruption Decision	Judicial Reform	Legislature Corrupt Activities
2010	0.522	2.404	2.28	1.962	1.721	1.108	1.691
2011	0.477	2.404	2.28	1.962	1.721	1.108	1.691
2012	0.452	2.737	1.533	1.827	1.314	1.108	1.543
2013	0.444	3.03	0.893	1.056	1.705	0.825	1.05
2014	0.445	3.03	0.435	0.684	1.705	0.825	1.05
2015	0.442	2.965	0.435	0.684	1.705	0.924	1.05
2016	0.45	2.546	0.435	0.684	1.526	1.101	1.05
2017	0.547	3.193	1.588	1.527	2.02	1.347	1.736
2018	0.579	3.314	1.423	1.316	1.932	1.389	1.386
2019	0.599	2.988	1.433	1.368	1.932	1.052	1.413
2020	0.596	2.929	1.223	1.368	1.835	1.152	1.335
2021	0.585	2.991	0.64	1.282	1.059	1.152	1.335
2022	0.551	2.991	0.746	1.412	1.15	1.152	1.335

**Source:** Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) 11.2023 [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)

The Electoral Democracy Index, according to the values of the table above, is far from European standards (index 1). The electoral principle of democracy seeks to embody the core value of making rulers responsive to citizens, achieved through electoral competition for the electorate's approval under circumstances when suffrage is extensive; political and civil society organizations can operate freely; elections are clean and not marred by fraud or systematic irregularities; and elections affect the composition of the chief executive of the country. In between elections, there is freedom of expression and an independent media capable of presenting alternative views on matters of political relevance. As the main point of chapters 23 and 24, the system of jurisdiction and its influence on politics was presented. Realistically, according to the reports of the European Commission, this was the weakest point in North Macedonia, but also one of the key standards that had to be met during EU integration. According to V-Dem's methodology (0: Attacks were carried out on a daily or weekly basis, 1: Attacks were common and carried out in nearly every month of the year, 2: Attacks occurred more than once, 3: There were attacks, but they were rare, 4: There were no attacks on the judiciary's integrity) politics in North Macedonia is permanently involved in the jurisprudence system; therefore, the judiciary is considered not independent. This can also be seen in the High Court Independence and Lower Court Independence indicators, which have significant oscillations during these years, depending on the ideology and political elite that governs the state. Judicial Corruption Decisions and Legislature Corrupt Activities are significant (Usually and About half of the time) according to V-Dem, which also determines the other component, Judicial Reform, which, according to the index North Macedonia, is considered as a system where there was no change to the judiciary's ability to control arbitrary power via institutional review. So, in this regard, the reports of the European Commission confirmed that the political system in North Macedonia still does not reach European standards as a condition for the integration of the country into the EU.

## 5. Conclusion

We conclude that the reports of the European Commission, as well as the concrete data during 2010-2022, show that North Macedonia has not made significant progress towards EU integration, but this also proves the fact that even though North Macedonia consumes benefits from the EU through programs and associations signed in this journey throughout this time, the impact on the political, economic and social system is insignificant. So, we conclude that the structural hypothesis for this research generally does not hold, only for some sub-sectors of the social system it holds partially. We further conclude that the national strategy compiled by each government remains only a declaration on paper, but in reality, this integration is hostage to the mentality and non-constructive political elites. So, in order to achieve significant progress as a whole, the mentality and social consciousness have to be modified.

Just as in every study, there are some limitations to be addressed at the end. There are some weaknesses in the context of the statistical analysis of the data, especially those of the Statistical Office of North Macedonia, which do not match the European databases (minor but very significant differences in the statistical results). This happens because the data of the statistical body in recent years are not the results of the last Population Census - 2021, but from the Population Census of 2002. According to the results of the two censuses, it is clearly known that there are significant differences in both demographic and socio-economic data. This represents an objective drop in the results of the study and all other studies that will follow in this field. Based on the conclusions and limitations of the study highlighted above, we can suggest to the European institutions that in the future, as part of their official recommendations for the integration of North Macedonia, there should also be a recommendation for the objectivity of the data of the Statistical Office of North Macedonia, which are important indicators for the level of development and integration of the state. Lastly, it is recommended that in the drafting of official policies for the integration of the country, in addition to raising the mentality and consciousness of the citizens, mechanisms and values for awareness-raising of current and future politicians as a basic standard for real integration in the European Union of the country should be drawn up too.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

**Publisher's Note:** All claims expressed in this article are solely those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of their affiliated organizations, or those of the publisher, the editors and the reviewers.

## References

- [1] Bolton, R. (2009). Guide to the EU Institutions, The federal trust for education and research, Burgess, Michael, Federalism, European integration theory (Antje Weiner, Thomas Diez) second edition, Oxford university press.
- [2] Burgess, M. (2009). Federalism, European Integration Theory, Antje Wiener and Thomas Diez, Oxford University Press, Second Edition, London (2009).
- [3] Citizenship Report (2010). Dismantling The Obstacles to EU Citizens' Rights, Brussels, 27.10.2010.
- [4] Communication from the Commission to the Council, the European Parliament, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, Reaffirming the free movement of workers: rights and major developments, COM (2010)3, Brussels, 13.7.2010.
- [5] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council on guidance for better transposition and application of Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their family members to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States COM (2009)313, Brussels, 2.7.2009.
- [6] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: Consular protection for EU citizens in third countries: State of play and way forward, COM (2011)
- [7] Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions Preparing for the 2014 European Elections: Further Enhancing Their Democratic And Efficient Conduct, Strasbourg, 12.3.2013 COM (2013) 126 final.
- [8] Communication from the commission to the European parliament, the council, the European economic and social committee and the committee of the regions addressing the consequences of disenfranchisement of union citizens exercising their right to free movement, Brussels, 29.1.2014 com (2014) 33 final.
- [9] Den B M. (ed.), (1997). The Implementation of Schengen: First the Widening and now the Deepening, Institut Européen d'Administration Publique, Maastricht, 1997
- [10] El-Agraa, A (2007). The European Union - Economics and Policies, Eighth edition, Cambridge University Press.
- [11] Hix, S; (2005). The Political System of the European Union, 2nd edition, Basingtoge, Palgrave MacMillan, (2005)
- [12] North Macedonia (2020-2023) Report of European Commission - Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions
- [13] Proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year Of Citizens (2013), Brussels, 11.8.2011 COM (2011)
- [14] Report from the Commission - Fifth Report on citizenship of the Union (1 May 2004 – 30 June 2007).
- [15] Report from The Commission to The European Parliament And The Council On The Application Of Directive 2004/38/Ec On The Right Of Citizens Of The Union And Their Family Members To Move And Reside Freely Within The Territory Of The Member States, Brussels, 10.12.2008.

- [16] Report from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council On the Application Of Directive 94/80/Ec on the right to vote and to stand as a candidate in municipal elections by citizens of the Union Residing in a Member State Of Which They Are Not Nationals, Brussels, 9.3.2012 COM(2012) 99 final.
- [17] Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council And The European Economic And Social Committee Under Article 25 TFEU On Progress Towards Effective EU Citizenship 2007-2010, Brussels, 27.10.2010 COM(2010) 602 final.
- [18] Report From The Commission To The European Parliament, The Council, The European Economic And Social Committee And The Committee Of The Regions EU Citizenship Report 2013 EU Citizens: Your Rights, Your Future, Brussels, 8.5.2013 COM(2013)
- [19] Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions towards more democratic European Parliament Elections Report on the implementation of the Commission's Recommendations of 12 March 2013 on enhancing the democratic and efficient conduct of the elections to the European Parliament, Brussels, 27.3.2014 COM(2014) 196 final.
- [20] Report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the Implementation, Results and overall Assessment of the 2013 European Year of Citizens.
- [21] Report on the election of Members of the European Parliament (1976 Act as amended by Decision 2002/772/EC, Euratom) and on the participation of European Union citizens in elections for the European Parliament in the Member State of residence (Directive 93/109/EC), Brussels, 27.10.2010.
- [22] Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (2023) [https://v-dem.net/data\\_analysis/VariableGraph/](https://v-dem.net/data_analysis/VariableGraph/)