

AUTHOR'S COMMENT #2

Series: Transparent and accountable security and intelligence services

EXPERT AND COMPETENT PARLIAMENTARY STAFF SERVICE FOR A HIGH QUALITY PARLIAMENTARY OVERSIGHT

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MARCH, 2021

The need for independent democratic oversight of the work of the security-intelligence services is a condition *sine qua non* in a democratic society, one towards which our society aspires. Having in mind the existing legal framework in N. Macedonia, the democratic oversight of the security-intelligence apparatus can be parliamentary and civilian. While it may be too early to thoroughly analyze the results of the last major reform that began in 2018, it is clear that parliamentary oversight is ahead vis-à-vis the civil, which is essentially dysfunctional for a number of reasons.¹

Until some deeper reform efforts, the Assembly is the one that through the three competent committees - the Committee on Defense and Security (CDS), the Committee for Supervising the Work of the National Security Agency and the Intelligence Agency (CSWNSAIA), and the Committee on Oversight of the Implementation of Measures for Interception of Communications (COIMIC)².

Elected MPs and expert and competent staffers

Although many MPs have had previous careers and appropriate professional training in a particular field, it is illusory to hope that a particular MP will have the appropriate experience to fully understand the work of the committees where s/he is a member or a deputy member. Additionally, some of the elected MPs are young people without significant work experience. In that direction, the professional service of the Assembly, as well as the Parliamentary Institute, should be the adequate support networks to the Members of Parliament in performing their function. Even more so when it comes to specific and sensitive areas such as oversight of the work of the security and intelligence services.

The professional staff of the Assembly provides expert and administrative support to the MPs in performing their activities³. The very new Strategic Plan of the Assembly of RNM for the period 2021-2023, sets the following as one of its four strategic goals "Advanced and efficient services and parliamentary staffers", stipulating and emphasizing the third component as to be "Independent, professional and efficient parliamentary staffers and valued employees"⁴. Such distinct parliamentary staffers in the future can provide necessary assistance to the parliamentary "committee architecture" responsible for overseeing the security and intelligence services. Special contribution within the professional staff service in this segment can be provided by the Parliamentary Institute, which is tasked to contribute to strengthening the legislative and oversight function of the Assembly, primarily by providing timely, impartial, and objective analysis of

¹ See more on Reinventing Democratic Oversight of the Security and Intelligence Services in North Macedonia, p. 18-24 <http://eurothink.mk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/09.03.2021-mk-verzija.pdf>

² See more about the competencies of the parliamentary committees at <https://sobranie.mk/rabotni-tela-2020-2024.nspix>

³ See more about the organization and work of the parliamentary staff at <https://www.sobranie.mk/organizacija-na-sluzbata-na-sobranieto.nspix>

⁴ Strategic plan of the Assembly of RNM 2021-2023, available at <https://www.sobranie.mk/content/%D0%A1%D1%82%D1%80%D0%B0%D1%82%D0%B5%D1%88%D0%BA%D0%B8%20%D0%BF%D0%BB%D0%B0%D0%BD%20%D0%BD%D0%B0%20%D0%A1%D0%BE%D0%B1%D1%80%D0%B0%D0%BD%D0%B8%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%BE/%D0%A1%D0%9E%D0%91%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%9D%D0%98%D0%95-%D0%A1%D0%A2%D0%A0%D0%90%D0%A2%D0%95%D0%A8%D0%9A%D0%98%20%D0%9F%D0%9B%D0%90%D0%9D%202021-2023.pdf>

certain processes and issues⁵. Gathering information, analysis and research, as well as launching the Parliamentary Institute's own research initiatives, can substantially improve MPs' awareness and familiarity with issues related to oversight of the security and intelligence services.

More competent and professional staffers – better-quality supervision

Only a professional, expert and competent service that can provide technical support to the work of the committees responsible for overseeing the security and intelligence services, can contribute to an improved parliamentary oversight. Below are just some of the mechanisms that the Assembly of RNM can consider in order to strengthen its parliamentary staffers:

Allocation of funds for new employments and continuous training of employees: The Assembly should hire appropriate expert staff to provide professional support to the parliamentary committees responsible for overseeing the security and intelligence services. Alternatively, the Assembly can invest in the further professional education of the existing administrative staff, in cooperation and with the support of domestic and international organizations working in such fields.

Provision of special technical conditions: The members of the parliamentary staff who will assist the work of the competent committees, should receive adequate working space and technical conditions, but also be able to obtain the appropriate security certificates for handling classified information. Only in this way can adequate support be provided to the work of parliamentary oversight committees.

Persistence and stability of the employees: The leadership, headed by the President of the Assembly of the RNM and the Secretary-General, should take care of the consistency and reduced job post circulation of the employees in the professional service who work more closely with the parliamentary committees responsible for oversight of security and intelligence services. This means minimizing redeployment of employees from one sector to another, as well as within the same department to support the work of the parliamentary committees. It is necessary for the professional administrative staff to have been engaged for several years with the competent parliamentary bodies, since those staffers represent the "institutional memory" of the parliamentary oversight, as is presently arranged.

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⁵ More about the work of the Parliamentary Institute, please visit: <https://www.sobranie.mk/aktivnosti-na-parlamentarniot-institut.nspix>

This Publication is a part of the activities to support the civil society sector within the programme "Intelligence Sector Reform in North Macedonia (2017-2021)".
The content of this Publication does not necessarily reflect the views or opinions of the donors or DCAF.



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