

INTERNAL CONTROL MECHANISMS WITHIN THE MINISTRY OF INTERNAL AFFAIRS OF THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND THEIR IMPACT ON CORRUPTION PREVENTION (2010–2024)

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Abstract: Corruption within security institutions represents a profound challenge to the rule of law, democratic stability, and public trust, particularly in transitional contexts such as the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM). As the central authority responsible for law enforcement and public security, the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA) plays a critical role in preventing corruption, making the effectiveness of its internal control mechanisms essential to the promotion of institutional integrity. This study examines the period 2010–2024 through a comprehensive assessment of the MoIA’s organizational structure, legal framework, human and technical capacities, and the operational performance of the Department for Internal Control and Professional Standards (DICPS). The analysis is based on internal statistical data, official documentation, academic literature, and empirical evidence derived from employee and citizen perceptions, including surveys conducted by international organizations such as Eurothink, the OSCE, and the World Justice Project. The results reveal a measurable increase in investigative activities and disciplinary measures, indicating a gradual strengthening of internal control mechanisms. Nevertheless, limitations persist with regard to institutional independence and the protection of whistleblowers. Comparative evidence from the region, including Albania, Croatia, and Slovenia, suggests that externally independent oversight bodies, continuous professional training, and transparent reporting practices are decisive factors in enhancing public confidence and institutional effectiveness. Furthermore, the study identifies a persistent gap between the formal legal framework and its practical implementation. Political interference, resource constraints, and insecure reporting mechanisms for corruption cases continue to undermine institutional credibility. Beyond statistical and comparative analysis, the study explores the influence of high-profile cases and media coverage on public perceptions of police integrity. On this basis, the paper formulates policy-oriented recommendations aimed at strengthening the independence of the DICPS, expanding human and technical capacities, establishing secure and credible whistleblower protection mechanisms, institutionalizing continuous ethics and transparency training, and ensuring regular public reporting to enhance accountability and public trust.

Overall, the study provides an in-depth understanding of the role of internal control mechanisms in combating corruption and fostering a culture of integrity and accountability within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia. The findings offer valuable guidance for public policy development, institutional reform, and the advancement of best practices both regionally and beyond.

Keywords: internal control, corruption, oversight mechanisms, police integrity, accountability, institutional reform

1. INTRODUCTION

Corruption in public institutions, particularly within law enforcement agencies such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs (MoIA), represents a serious challenge to the rule of law, public trust, and democratic development (Rose-Ackerman, 1999). In countries in transition, such as the Republic of North Macedonia (RNM), the legacy of a centralized administration and limited accountability significantly affects institutional performance, making the establishment of strong internal control mechanisms a necessity for ensuring institutional integrity (GRECO, 2021). The MoIA is the central institution responsible for law enforcement, the maintenance of public order and security, and the management of national security issues. Due to its size and exposure to political and economic influence, the MoIA has frequently been the focus of criticism related to corruption, abuse of official position, and lack of transparency (Ковачевић, 2020). These challenges have been consistently highlighted in reports by international organizations such as the European Union, the OSCE, Transparency International, and the Council of Europe (Transparency International, 2023).

In an effort to improve institutional integrity and strengthen accountability, in 2018 the MoIA upgraded the Sector for Internal Control and Professional Standards to a separate department with expanded competences and a more consolidated structure (Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia, 2018). This department is mandated to investigate illegal and unethical conduct by police officers and administrative staff, as well as to ensure compliance with professional standards within the MoIA. However, the existence of a formal structure does not guarantee immediate effectiveness; practical implementation challenges, limited resources, and political influence remain key obstacles (Petrović, 2012).

This study aims to analyze the impact of internal control mechanisms within the MoIA during the period 2010–2024 by examining institutional evolution, the legal framework, practical performance, and public perception (Горѓевска, 2021). The analysis relies on statistical data, official documents, and comparative assessments with countries in the region and European Union member states with similar characteristics (DCAF, 2022).

The objective of the paper is to assess whether, and to what extent, internal control mechanisms have contributed to corruption prevention and to the improvement of an institutional culture of integrity and accountability (Johnston, 2005). The main research questions guiding the study are:

- What are the competences, structure, and instruments of internal control within the MoIA of the RNM?
- How effective has this system been in investigating, preventing, and sanctioning corruption during the period 2010–2024?
- How is the functioning of this mechanism perceived by the public and the professional community?
- How does the RNM compare with countries in the region and European practices in this field?

The methodology employed is mixed: the legal and institutional framework is analyzed using a normative approach; statistical data and official reports are examined through quantitative and qualitative analysis; and international comparison is used to identify best practices and lessons that may be applied in the RNM. (Мојаноски, 2015)

2. LEGAL AND FUNCTIONAL FRAMEWORK OF INTERNAL CONTROL

Legal foundations: Law on Internal Affairs, Law on Police, Criminal Code

Internal control within the MoIA of the RNM is regulated by several key laws that ensure institutional functioning and the integrity of employees. The Law on Internal Affairs defines the organizational structure of the MoIA, its responsibilities for maintaining public order and security, and the foundations for safeguarding institutional integrity. The Law on Police establishes professional standards, disciplinary rules, and principles governing police conduct, authorizing the creation of internal control structures for investigating internal violations (Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia, 2018).

The Criminal Code defines criminal offenses such as abuse of official position, bribery, and obstruction of justice, which often constitute the subject of internal investigations (Republic of North Macedonia. Criminal Code, 2016). This legal framework provides the basis for the operation of the Department for Internal Control and Professional Standards (DICPS) and links institutional mechanisms with individual criminal liability (Ковачевиќ, 2020).

Competences and jurisdiction of the DICPS

The DICPS is the primary internal control structure within the MoIA and functioned as a sector until 2018 (Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia, Annual Report, 2017). Following institutional reform, it was expanded into a specialized department divided into several functional units:

- Internal Investigations Unit
- Oversight and Inspection Unit
- Ethics and Professional Development Unit
- Citizens' Complaints and Communication Unit

This expansion aimed to enhance efficiency and improve the functionality of internal control mechanisms. However, international assessments have identified a lack of genuine independence and insufficient resources, which continue to limit the department's effectiveness (GRECO, 2021).

Internal investigation procedures

Internal investigations are conducted through several standard phases:

1. Receipt of a complaint or internal whistleblowing report
2. Preliminary verification and case initiation
3. Evidence collection, including interviews, documentation, video recordings, and on-site inspections
4. Cooperation with the Basic Public Prosecutor's Office in criminal cases

In specific cases, the External Oversight Mechanism (EOM) is also involved to ensure impartiality (Dunaj, 2024). This dual process aims to increase transparency and minimize the influence of external factors on investigations (OSCE, 2022).

Challenges and weaknesses in law enforcement

Despite reforms, internal control within the MoIA continues to face significant challenges:

- Political interference in sensitive cases
- Insufficient human and technical resources
- Dependence on the Public Prosecutor's Office for criminal proceedings
- Inadequate protection for whistleblowers

International organizations, including GRECO and the OSCE, have recommended strengthening the autonomy of the DICPS and enhancing safeguards for institutional integrity (GRECO, 2021). These challenges underscore the importance of a strong legal and functional framework that ensures not only appropriate procedures but also the resources and independence necessary for effective internal control (Rose-Ackerman, 1999).

3. EFFECTIVENESS IN PRACTICE – ANALYSIS OF DATA AND PERCEPTIONS

Annual statistics of the DICPS (2010–2024)

During the period 2010–2024, the DICPS, previously known as the Sector for Internal Control and Professional Standards (SICPS), conducted a substantial number of investigations into violations within the MoIA. The data indicate a gradual increase in the number of initiated investigations, reflecting growing institutional awareness and strengthened internal control capacities (Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia).

Throughout this period, dozens of officials were sanctioned or dismissed for disciplinary violations and corrupt practices, while several cases were referred to the Public Prosecutor’s Office for criminal prosecution, indicating a more stringent approach toward abuses of authority (Ministry of Internal Affairs of North Macedonia).

Table 1. Annual statistics on investigations and disciplinary measures within the DICPS, 2010–2024 (Transparency International, 2025)

Year	Investigations initiated	Officials sanctioned	Officials dismissed	Cases referred to prosecution
2010	78	23	5	11
2012	95	31	6	15
2014	112	44	9	18
2016	104	38	7	17
2018	89	29	4	12
2020	121	53	11	20
2022	136	61	13	24
2023	143	67	14	26
2024*	77 (as of June)	35	6	14

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of RNM, Annual Report of the Internal Control Department, 2010–2024.

The number of investigations and sanctions demonstrates a steady increase in DICPS activity, particularly after 2020 (OSCE Mission in Skopje, 2022).

High-profile cases and their impact on public opinion

During the analyzed period, several high-profile cases exposed weaknesses in the internal control system and influenced public opinion. The involvement of senior officials in corruption scandals triggered immediate institutional responses (GRECO, 2021).

Nevertheless, the prompt intervention of the DICPS and other institutions contributed to restoring public trust in certain cases. Media coverage increased public awareness of the need for reforms and more rigorous internal oversight within the MoIA (OSCE Mission in Skopje, 2022).

Table 2. Selected high-profile cases and their impact on public opinion

Year	Main case	Institutional response	Impact on public opinion
2018	Senior official corruption scandal	Immediate investigation by DICPS	Increased skepticism and decline in trust
2020	Disciplinary procedure violations	Dismissal and sanctions	Improved perception of transparency
2022	Misuse of public funds	Referral to prosecution	Intensified public debate on reforms

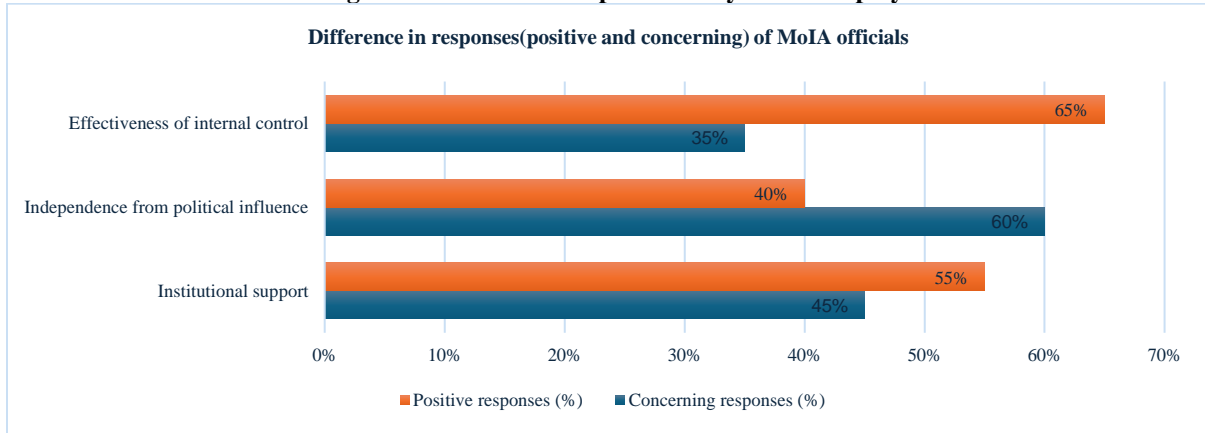
Source: GRECO, Fifth Evaluation Round, 2021; OSCE, Annual Policing Report, 2022.

Media-reported cases generated institutional pressure and significantly shaped public perceptions of the MoIA.

3.3 Perceptions of MoIA officials regarding internal control

Surveys conducted by Eurothink and the OSCE indicate mixed perceptions among MoIA employees. Many acknowledge the importance and positive impact of internal control on professional discipline, while others express concerns regarding political influence and insufficient institutional support (Eurothink Center for European Strategies, , 2023).

Figure 1. Perceived independence by MoIA employees



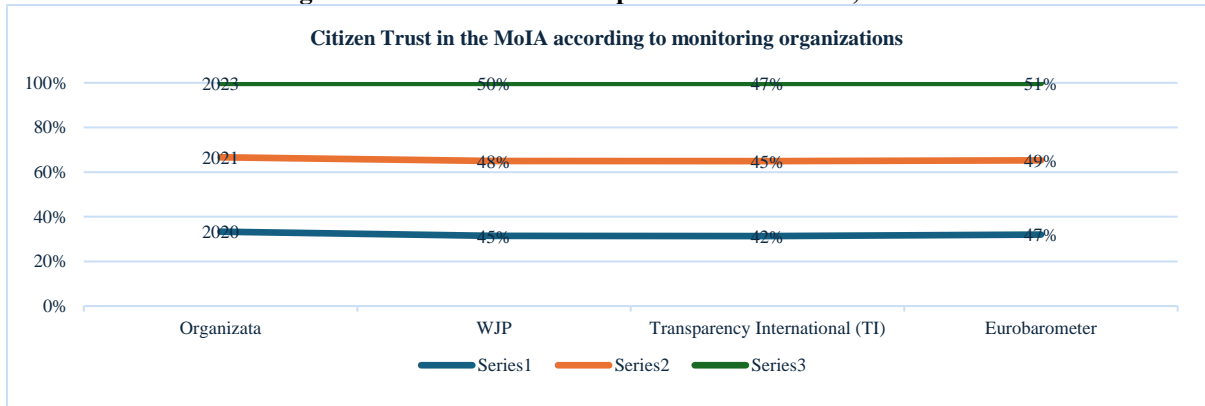
Source: Eurothink – Citizens’ Perceptions and Attitudes about the Police in 2022, 2023.

Regarding independence from political influence, a larger percentage (60%) of officials express concerns, indicating that this is the most problematic area according to them. Institutional support and the effectiveness of internal control receive more positive responses, but there are still concerns in these areas (Eurothink Center for European Strategies, , 2023). Overall, this chart highlights the need for improvement, especially in institutional autonomy and internal control within the MoIA.

Survey Results on Citizen Trust

Studies conducted by organizations such as the **World Justice Project (WJP)**, **Transparency International (TI)**, and **Eurobarometer** indicate slight improvements in citizen trust in the MoIA; however, trust levels remain below the regional average. Negative factors include the perceived prevalence of corruption and lack of transparency (World Justice Project, 2020-2023) (Transparency International, 2023) (Eurobarometer).

Figure 2. Gradual increase in public trust in MoIA, 2020–2023



Source: World Justice Project, Rule of Law Index 2020–2023; Transparency International, Corruption

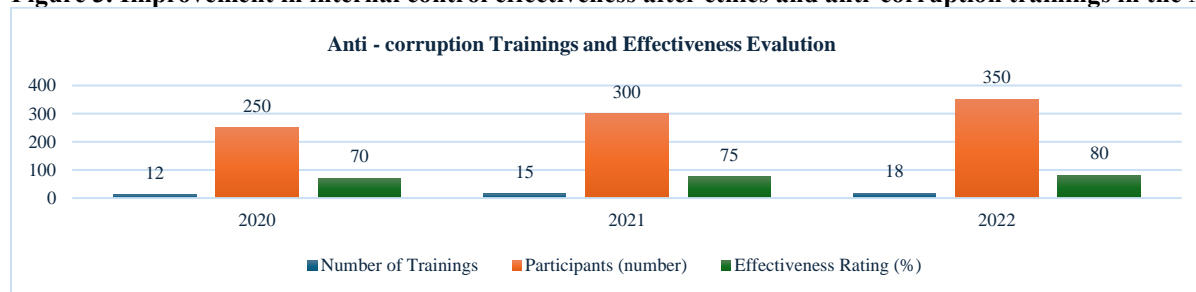
Perceptions Index 2020–2023; Eurobarometer, Public Opinion Surveys on Trust in Police, 2020–2023.

The graph illustrates a gradual increase in citizen trust in the MoIA during the period 2020–2023, according to measurements by the **WJP**, **TI**, and **Eurobarometer**. The modest improvement reflects the positive impact of anti-corruption measures and transparency initiatives, although differences between organizations indicate that public perception remains influenced by various factors and requires continuous monitoring.

Impact of Training and Preventive Measures

Ongoing training on professional ethics, transparency, and corruption reporting has had a positive effect on the institutional culture within the MoIA. These initiatives have fostered greater awareness and active identification of inappropriate behavior. To achieve full effectiveness, such programs should be accompanied by systematic reforms and stronger political support (MBP на PCM).

Figure 3. Improvement in internal control effectiveness after ethics and anti-corruption trainings in the MoIA



Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of RNM, Report on Ethics and Anti-Corruption Training, 2020–2022.

The increase in effectiveness following the trainings indicates a positive shift in the institutional culture within the MoIA.

4. REGIONAL COMPARISONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Internal Control Models in Regional Countries

To improve internal control mechanisms within the MoIA of the RNM, it is important to examine the practices of neighboring countries that have achieved notable results in strengthening the independence and effectiveness of oversight structures (DCAF, 2022).

Albania – Police Oversight Agency (AMP)

In Albania, internal control functions are performed by the Police Oversight Agency (AMP), which replaced the Internal Affairs and Complaints Service (SHÇBA) following the 2021 legal reform. AMP is a civilian institution with extended competencies for investigating criminal and disciplinary offenses of State Police personnel, particularly in cases of corruption and abuse of office. The agency cooperates with the Prosecutor’s Office and international partners and provides accessible reporting mechanisms for citizens. (Ministria e Punëve të Brendshme e Republikës së Shqipërisë).

Croatia – Police Oversight Council

In Croatia, internal control is conducted through an Independent Police Oversight Council, outside the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The Council consists of representatives from parliament, civil society, and independent legal experts, with competencies to investigate complaints, oversee the police, and recommend disciplinary measures (Vijeće za nadzor policije. Godišnje izvješće 2023).

Slovenia – External and Independent Police Oversight

In Slovenia, internal control is organized through an external and independent authority, institutionally separate from the Ministry of Interior. This model has significantly contributed to increased public trust and reduced political influence in investigative procedures against police officers (Avtonomna komisija za nadzor policije, 2024).

Table 3. Comparison of internal control models in regional countries

Country	Oversight Structure	Institutional Independence	Public Access	Investigative Competence
Albania	AMP	High	High	Yes
Croatia	Police Oversight Council	High	High	Yes
Slovenia	External authority from MoI	Very high	High	Yes
RNM	DICPS	Limited	Low	Yes

Source: Ministry of Internal Affairs of Albania (2024); Vijeće za nadzor policije (2023); AKNPOL (2024); DCAF (2022)

RNM shows limited independence compared to neighboring countries, while Slovenia stands out for the highest level of institutional independence and public trust.

International Assessments of the RNM MoIA

International organizations have provided various assessments regarding the state of internal control in RNM: (GRECO, 2023)

- GRECO, in the context of anti-corruption policy evaluations, recommends strengthening the institutional independence of the Department for Internal Control, Professional Standards, and Criminal Investigations

(DICPS), improving whistleblower protection, and implementing higher ethical standards in investigative procedures (GRECO, 2023).

- Transparency International notes progress in establishing institutional structures but emphasizes challenges in the practical implementation of anti-corruption measures and the need for further depoliticization of the system (Transparency International, 2024).
- DCAF stresses the need for continuous professional training, building public trust, and increasing transparency through regular and standardized reporting (Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance - DCAF, 2023).

Comparison of Effectiveness and Transparency Indicators

Compared to neighboring countries, the RNM demonstrates lower levels of effectiveness and transparency in the functioning of internal control mechanisms. Albania and Croatia show higher numbers of completed investigations and disciplinary measures, reflecting institutional autonomy and political support provided to their respective structures (Rose-Ackerman, 1999); (DCAF, 2022).

Table 4. Comparison of efficiency and transparency indicators

Country	Completed Investigations (%)	Public Reporting	Whistleblower Protection	Public Trust (%)
Albania	78%	High	Advanced	49%
Croatia	83%	High	Moderate	53%
Slovenia	91%	Very high	Advanced	61%
RNM	65%	Low	Unstable	47%

Source: GRECO (2023); Transparency International (2023); DCAF (2022); Agencija Republike Slovenije za statistiko (2024); national official institutions.

RNM is characterized by a lower rate of completed investigations and weaker whistleblower protection mechanisms compared to regional countries.

5. CONCLUSION

The analysis of internal control within the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia during the period 2010–2024 shows significant progress in investigative and disciplinary activities, but also highlights ongoing challenges related to institutional independence, political influence, transparency, and public trust. The Department for Internal Control and Professional Standards has increased the number of investigations, sanctioned dozens of officials, and referred cases for criminal prosecution to the Prosecutor’s Office, demonstrating strengthened operational capacities and institutional awareness.

However, regional comparisons indicate that RNM lags behind in several key indicators of effectiveness and transparency. The models of neighboring countries, such as Albania, Croatia, and Slovenia—particularly those operating outside the direct influence of line ministries—offer practical examples for reorganizing and reforming existing internal control mechanisms. For instance, Slovenia has shown that an external and independent authority not only increases the credibility of the system but also minimizes political interference and conflicts of interest in investigations.

Perceptions of MoIA employees and citizens, reflected in surveys and international reports, indicate that skepticism regarding the functioning of the internal control system persists. The absence of periodic public reports, uneven case handling, and the lack of reliable mechanisms for whistleblower protection weaken both public trust and institutional integrity.

Reports from international organizations such as GRECO, Transparency International, and DCAF support calls for structural reforms, emphasizing several key priorities:

- **Strengthening the independence of the DICPS**, by ensuring its legal status as a separate unit outside direct political influence;
- **Developing professional and technical capacities**, through specialized training and the use of modern investigative technologies;
- **Increasing transparency**, through regular publication of annual reports and the creation of an open platform for citizen engagement;
- **Establishing an effective whistleblower protection system**, enabling early identification of violations and encouraging internal reporting.

In conclusion, strengthening internal control within the MoIA is not merely a technical or administrative matter, but a fundamental component of the rule of law, institutional integrity, and the protection of human rights. An integrated

approach, combining institutional restructuring, continuous training, political support, and citizen participation, can help the RNM build a sustainable and credible internal control system, in line with European standards and societal expectations

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