

GOOD GOVERNANCE IN TRANSPARENCY OF INSTITUTIONS IN NORTH MACEDONIA AFTER THE PRESPA AGREEMENT

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Abstract: The Prespa Agreement (2018) marked a transformative political juncture for North Macedonia, not only resolving a longstanding bilateral dispute but also reactivating the country's Euro-Atlantic integration trajectory. This paper examines the extent to which the post-Prespa reform agenda has advanced good governance through increased transparency and institutional openness. Drawing on qualitative analysis of policy documents, reports from international organizations, and national legislation, the study evaluates progress in public access to information, digital governance and anti-corruption mechanisms.

Findings indicate that while notable improvements have been made particularly in aligning legal frameworks with EU standards and expanding open data initiatives implementation gaps persist. Institutional transparency is often constrained by administrative inefficiencies, political polarization, and limited enforcement capacity of oversight bodies. Moreover, despite formal commitments to openness, public trust in institutions remains fragile, reflecting a disconnect between reform rhetoric and practical outcomes.

Based on the methodology we have envisaged, such as comparative analysis, content analysis of documents-reports, empirical and statistical data, the paper argues that sustainable progress in good governance requires not only legal compliance, but also a profound transformation of institutional culture and accountability practices.

Strengthening independent institutions, enhancing digital transparency tools, and fostering active civil society engagement are identified as critical drivers for consolidating democratic governance. The study contributes to broader debates on EU conditionality and governance reform in Western Balkan states, emphasizing the importance of transparency as both a normative principle and a functional prerequisite for democratic consolidation.

Keywords: Good governance, transparency, institutional openness Prespa Agreement, North Macedonia

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of good governance has become central to democratic consolidation and European Union (EU) integration processes, particularly in the Western Balkans. Transparency and openness of institutions are key pillars of governance, ensuring accountability, citizen participation, and trust in public administration. In the case of North Macedonia, the signing of the Prespa Agreement in 2018 marked a turning point not only in foreign policy but also in internal governance reforms. The agreement unlocked the country's NATO membership and revitalized EU accession prospects, placing governance reforms especially transparency and anti-corruption at the forefront of political priorities (European Commission, 2023).

This paper explores how transparency and institutional openness have evolved in North Macedonia after the Prespa Agreement, assessing both progress and persistent challenges.

1.1.THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: GOOD GOVERNANCE AND TRANSPARENCY

Good governance is broadly defined through principles such as accountability, transparency, rule of law, participation, and effectiveness (World Bank, 2021). Transparency, in particular, refers to the accessibility of government information and clarity in decision-making processes.

Institutional openness complements transparency by enabling citizen engagement and participatory governance. According to the OECD (SIGMA, 2022), open institutions promote trust and improve policy outcomes by incorporating public input.

In EU accession contexts, transparency is not merely normative but conditional. Candidate countries must align with governance standards under Chapters 23 and 24, which emphasize rule of law, anti-corruption, and democratic accountability.

1.2 POST-PRESPA REFORMS IN TRANSPARENCY AND OPENNESS

Following the Prespa Agreement, North Macedonia undertook several reforms aimed at strengthening transparency. Key developments include:

- Adoption of improved legislation on access to public information
- Expansion of open data portals and digital governance tools
- Increased participation in the Open Government Partnership (OGP)
- Strengthening of anti-corruption frameworks

The government's Digital Governance Strategy (MISA, 2021) emphasized e-services and transparency, aiming to reduce bureaucratic opacity. Additionally, the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption has enhanced monitoring mechanisms and public reporting practices.

1.3 CHALLENGES IN IMPLEMENTATION

Despite formal progress, implementation remains uneven. Several challenges persist:

First, administrative inefficiency continues to hinder access to information. Many institutions lack the technical and human capacity to ensure timely and accurate disclosure.

Second, political polarization affects institutional independence. Oversight bodies often face pressure, limiting their effectiveness (Bieber, 2020).

Third, corruption remains a significant concern. According to Transparency International (2024), public perception of corruption remains high, undermining trust in governance reforms.

Finally, citizen engagement mechanisms are still underdeveloped, with limited public participation in decision-making processes.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on a qualitative and descriptive research approach focused on the analysis of governance reforms in North Macedonia after the Prespa Agreement. The research relies on secondary sources, including reports from the European Commission, SIGMA/OECD, Transparency International, the World Bank, Open Government Partnership reports, and official government strategies related to transparency and digital governance. Academic literature on good governance, institutional transparency, and European integration in the Western Balkans was also reviewed. The methodology includes comparative and analytical examination of post-Prespa institutional developments, with emphasis on legislative reforms, anti-corruption mechanisms, and digitalization processes. The study evaluates both formal legal changes and practical implementation challenges in public administration and institutional accountability.

3. RESULTS

The findings indicate that North Macedonia has achieved measurable progress in strengthening institutional transparency after the Prespa Agreement. The adoption of improved legislation on free access to public information and the expansion of digital governance platforms contributed to greater public access to institutional data. Participation in the Open Government Partnership further encouraged transparency standards and cooperation with civil society organizations. In addition, anti-corruption institutions increased public reporting and monitoring activities. However, the results also reveal persistent structural weaknesses. Administrative inefficiency, limited institutional capacities, and political influence continue to affect implementation. Public trust in institutions remains relatively low due to perceptions of corruption and selective accountability. Therefore, while reforms have produced visible improvements in the formal framework of governance, the practical effectiveness of transparency mechanisms remains inconsistent.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings suggest that North Macedonia has made important strides in aligning with EU governance standards, particularly in legislative reforms and digital transparency initiatives. However, a gap persists between formal compliance and practical implementation.

This reflects a broader pattern in the Western Balkans, where reforms are often driven by external conditionality rather than internal institutional transformation. Sustainable governance improvements require a shift from formal adoption to genuine enforcement and cultural change within institutions.

5. CONCLUSION

The post-Prespa period has brought renewed momentum to governance reforms in North Macedonia, particularly in transparency and institutional openness. While progress is evident, especially in legal alignment and digitalization, significant challenges remain in implementation, accountability, and public trust. To ensure sustainable good governance, the country must strengthen institutional independence, enhance enforcement mechanisms, and foster active citizen participation. Transparency should be viewed not only as a compliance requirement but as a foundational element of democratic governance. Ultimately, the success of North Macedonia's EU integration process will depend on its ability to translate formal reforms into tangible improvements in governance practices.

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