Political Party Transparency in the Western Balkans

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Political Party Transparency in the Western Balkans

Following civil wars, civil unrest and unstable governance in the 1990s and early 2000s, Western Balkan countries began processes of relative democratisation, increased civic participation and improvement in the main governance issues faced by the countries. In parallel with the processes of democratisation, political parties were also developing.

Although progress has been evident in several governance areas such as improving electoral frameworks, decentralisation and local governance, major problems remain across the Western Balkans in dealing with corruption, accountability, government transparency and media freedom. Current levels of trust in political parties in the Western Balkans are at a historic low. The reports of Freedom House on the Western Balkans mark all countries as partly free. Part of this problem lies in the political culture and the isolation of citizens from decision-making during the many decades under one-party systems. In addition, all countries in the Western Balkans, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), have shifted their electoral systems from first-past-the-post majoritarian models to fully proportional closed-party lists. Links between constituents and elected representatives have been effectively severed and political party leaders have been disproportionally empowered to represent citizens’ interests.

The transparency of political parties, especially with regard to party financing and party decision-making, has been low and has contributed to a decrease of trust in political parties. Political parties have been experiencing low levels of trust and there has been an increasing perception that political parties are less open for citizens. Viewed as distinctively undemocratic and patronage–clientelist, political parties are often seen as dominating the public sector once they win elections and using state resources for party and personal interests.

Levels of trust in political parties across the Western Balkan countries have been steadily decreasing. Political parties are the institutions least trusted by citizens. In comparison with voter turnouts in the 1990s when the democratic transition was new, voter turnouts have been consistently decreasing, mainly being between 50 and 60 per cent. More transparency and accountability from political parties could positively influence citizen engagement and increase trust in political institutions and actors in the Western Balkans.

For improved representation to take place, political parties could improve responsiveness, accountability, communications and transparency practices. Operating in a non-transparent and unaccountable manner has created a negative perception of political parties and has contributed to higher levels of distrust in political parties. As a result, engagement with and membership in political parties have been decreasing continuously and citizens have become sceptical about and distrustful toward political parties. Political parties as institutions of representative democracy have not been able to broadly represent citizens’ interests and demands in a responsive and accountable manner. There is a gap in communications from political parties to citizens on the manner in which parties operate. This contributes to the problem of representation and in turn leads to less accountability to citizens and constituents.

Foreword

Following civil wars, civil unrest and unstable governance in the 1990s and early 2000s, Western Balkan countries began processes of relative democratisation, increased civic participation and improvement in the main governance issues faced by the countries. In parallel with the processes of democratisation, political parties were also developing.

Although progress has been evident in several governance areas such as improving electoral frameworks, decentralisation and local governance, major problems remain across the Western Balkans in dealing with corruption, accountability, government transparency and media freedom. Current levels of trust in political parties in the Western Balkans are at a historic low. The reports of Freedom House on the Western Balkans mark all countries as partly free. Part of this problem lies in the political culture and the isolation of citizens from decision-making during the many decades under one-party systems. In addition, all countries in the Western Balkans, with the exception of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), have shifted their electoral systems from first-past-the-post majoritarian models to fully proportional closed-party lists. Links between constituents and elected representatives have been effectively severed and political party leaders have been disproportionally empowered to represent citizens’ interests.

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For improved representation to take place, political parties could improve responsiveness, accountability, communications and transparency practices. Operating in a non-transparent and unaccountable manner has created a negative perception of political parties and has contributed to higher levels of distrust in political parties. As a result, engagement with and membership in political parties have been decreasing continuously and citizens have become sceptical about and distrustful toward political parties. Political parties as institutions of representative democracy have not been able to broadly represent citizens’ interests and demands in a responsive and accountable manner. There is a gap in communications from political parties to citizens on the manner in which parties operate. This contributes to the problem of representation and in turn leads to less accountability to citizens and constituents.
Most political parties in the Western Balkans rarely provide citizens with detailed organisational, financial or operational information on their work. They are not easily accessible and open through their party websites. Most party websites lack or have very little information on party finances; they are not regularly updated with information on decision-making and party representatives; they are not interactive; in many cases they fail to communicate in all local languages; they are not accessible for blind or deaf citizens; and they communicate only in one direction – party to public.

In February 2020, the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) published a call to representatives of political parties in the Western Balkans to submit case studies and papers presenting their views on political party transparency. The aim of the call was to raise the discourse on transparency by political parties and for political parties. In order to raise the discourse on political party transparency, the WFD invited eligible applicants, members of political parties from the Western Balkans or persons affiliated to political party think tanks or political party research institutes to prepare a brief case study on the transparency of their political party.

Each author aimed to answer specific questions and provide a personal perspective on how the political party they belong to had been working on raising transparency in the areas of communications, financial reporting and internal party decision-making, and what best practices their party could promote. As a result of the call, the WFD is publishing a compilation of 12 case studies on political party transparency written by members of political parties or persons affiliated to party think tanks and research institutes from Albania, BiH, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Kosovo.

We would like to thank the authors—Teuta Vodo, Stilijano Rushaj, Jasmina Mrso, Jelena Pekic, Stevan Salatic, Kreshnik Ahmeti, Vladimir Pavicevic, Omer Ajdini, Meriton Civuli, Martin Popov, Stefan Simic and Natasa Gacesa—for preparing the case studies and presenting their views on political party transparency in their own political party. We hope that this compilation of papers will contribute to a wider discussion on political party transparency and political party reform in the Western Balkans.

The Westminster Foundation for Democracy is the United Kingdom public body dedicated to supporting democracy around the world. In August 2018 the WFD launched a new three-year regional initiative for the Western Balkans entitled the "Western Balkans Democracy Initiative". The initiative is funded by the British government's Conflict, Stability and Security Fund.

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Democratic Party

By: Stiliano Rushaj
Introduction
The 2013 elections not only sent the Democratic Party of Albania (DP) into opposition but also led to the end of almost two decades of leadership of the party by the outgoing prime minister of that time, Sali Berisha, who served also as president between 1992 and 1997. In July 2013 the DP introduced for the first time the system of one-member–one-vote for its internal elections and under the new chairmanship of Lulzim Basha it embarked on a new journey of transformation for the party.

During the following six years, the country experienced a difficult period of government with a lot of regression regarding the development of the political arena and a deterioration in the democratic standards that the country had succeeded in building in the previous two decades. The democratic environment in the country is not only perceived as a loss of standards in the democratic institutions but also as the loss of citizens' trust in the system and the political parties. Building citizens' trust by the political leadership requires a commitment to have a reliable and accessible party.

This paper analyses the DP leadership transformation since 2013 and concludes it has been a success. The Basha leadership envisioned a twofold approach to make the party more credible to its members and rebuild the trust of citizens as important processes to make the government more accountable in all institutions. This leadership approach has improved party transparency and accountability by making it again a party of the people, by the people, for the people.

The analysis discusses the concept of the party's reliability from the perspective of its institutionalization, setting trust in the political party as the main value. Then the analysis elaborates on Basha’s twofold leadership approach to enhance party credibility among members and rebuild citizens’ trust in order to become a reliable and accessible alternative for government. The paper conclusions will trigger further discussions to improve party practices in building trust among members and thus improving the standards of the democracy.

1 According to several public opinion polls, citizens' trust in political parties and the justice system are the lowest compared to other areas. A total of 79 per cent of citizens did not trust political parties to be reliable in 2015. By 2017, 72 per cent of citizens still did not trust political parties. For more see the Institute for Democracy and Mediation (IDM) studies (Link1) (Link2).
Answers to questions on transparency
Trust is needed from the start for any form of engagement with an organisation. First, we need to trust the party; only then can we start to be identified with that organisation, and later to trust it enough to vote for it and or to be involved with it. Involvement as an organisational bond indicates the extent to which a citizen feels involved with a political party or its representatives. Usually involvement in an organisation remains relatively stable, while identifying with it – sharing common bonds, ideas and principles with a particular party – largely depends on the context of that organisation.

From the perspective of organisational psychology, involvement constitutes three different levels. First, emotional engagement/involvement means the emotional attachment to an organisation. Persons who feel a strong emotional commitment to another person feel that they are part of the same family (organisation). Someone who feels they belong to an organisation also wants to be part of it. People with an emotional involvement want to be part of an organisation.

Secondly, normative involvement means that a person feels connected to an organisation through a moral and ethical belief. Persons with a normative involvement are part of an organisation because they believe they should be part of it.

And thirdly, citizens can see involvement based on continuity. Here, linking with an organisation can be understood by calculating the costs it would take to cease being part of it (such as location change, loss of social ties and others). Persons with an ongoing involvement are mainly engaged in the activities of an organisation (or party) because they believe they should be part of it.

A leading goal of a political party is to have as high a percentage of voters as its members as possible. They are very important as they see their engagement in the party beyond voting day. They promote their party in conversations with their friends. For this reason, the motto for electoral activities is “unite the believers!”

Meanwhile the main aim of a political party is to attract votes from undecided voters or those voters who have no bonds or involvement through the three models presented above. To attract as many of these voters as possible, it must be able to produce a normative commitment by using appropriate political arguments and messages during ongoing political activity and finally during an election campaign. Persons who have a normative commitment will not necessarily have to share or support the whole range of the party’s ideology; but they can reach their decisions based on a subjective assessment of their interests.

The Democratic Party of Albania since its establishment has variously generated the involvement of citizens of any group from various interests. As such the party tended to build trust among its citizens through normative involvement which saw the engagement of people feeling a connection with the principles and values that the party promoted. However, by the time that party changed its position within the political landscape – leading the government or being the main opposition – it tended to promote involvement through the emotional context and by that involvement based on continuity.

The following analysis discusses the dynamics of the transformation of the party leadership headed by Basha since 2013 and argues that the DP developed a mixed approach of normative involvement and emotional involvement in order to make the party more credible to its members and to rebuild trust among citizens that it can become the government of tomorrow.

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Current practices in the Democratic Party
Democratizing internally: A more involving membership

Following the 2013 general election, the DP officially became the main opposition party in Albania. Weeks after the change in government, the party started a constructive approach of leadership transformation by holding the first one-vote-one-member internal election, in which Basha defeated four other candidates in a three-week campaign to be elected as the new chairman after almost two decades under the leadership of outgoing prime minister Berisha. Being in opposition after eight years of government created not only a lot of challenges but also opportunities for the party. The DP’s first challenge came in tracking in the party branches the causes of the defeat and how to regain membership trust. The second challenge was in using all the instruments and mechanisms the party had as the official opposition in order to exercise parliamentary oversight and make the government accountable for its acts and decisions in order to increase transparency and trust in the wider public opinion.

With a majority of 89 out of 140 seats in the Albanian parliament held by the new government led by the Socialist Party (SD), the ability of the DP to exercise substantial parliamentary control over laws and policies was limited. This had a direct impact on the capacity of the DP to perform a constructive role in the parliament and to provide citizens with a reliable alternative through different policies.

In parallel a process of new elections in the party branches continued during the first and the second years of the Basha leadership. Following the DP congress in September 2015 a new structure was presented to the members and the public. The DP established a structure of 25 departments. The party headquarters focused on several areas in order to deliver substantial and constructive policy alternatives to the government. Prior to this transformative change in the internal executive structure, in 2014 the DP had established a team of 24 coordinators with professional experience in various fields and academic backgrounds that worked in the establishment of the departments in the following year.

This model of departments was also introduced at the branch level in order to encourage potential working teams at the local level to generate local policies on various matters. The reformed structure provided the DP with a combined local-central approach to issues in governance at both levels. Since then this structure has provided the DP with substantial evidence, research and policy proposals about political, economic and social life in Albania which has made the party more open and transparent in its policy formation and political platforms for the elections.

A further democratisation process was followed in the two party elections in 2014 and in 2018. At the last elections the party branches elected a woman for the first time as the head of a branch, representing a positive change in the party establishment. The representation of women in the party needs to be promoted further although five of the 17 members of the party presidency are women. This presents a positive change compared to previous party presidencies. Women’s participation in politics has increased, but this was not due to a socio-cultural development, but rather due to an increase in the quota of women’s representation in politics.

4 For more see the interview with Mrs Mirlinda Collaku, the DP head of Branch No2. https://politiko.al/intervista-e-vetmja-grua-drejtuese-ne-deget-e-pd-flet-mirlinda-collaku-leksion-i-forte-qytetarie-seshte-e-lehte-te-jesh-ne-politike/
5 https://pd.al/kryesia/
According to DP Secretary General Gazment Bardhi, the current leadership of the DP has sought to enhance internal democracy and increase transparency, which with the adoption of the new party constitution in April 2018, has made the system of one-vote-one-member a leading model for all the elections in the party and in its associated entities such as the League of Women and the Youth Forum. This new approach has advanced the process of the selection of candidates for election to the Albanian parliament, city councils and offices of mayors. Similar to the model of the British Conservative Party, the DP initiated in November 2018 a model of selecting candidates through a series of steps which will be implemented in the upcoming elections. This new approach is also followed with the adoption of a Code of Ethics and Conduct during the December 2018 amendment of the party constitution.

This new mechanism is used to scrutinise all DP candidates for internal elections and for DP representation in local and central bodies through a twofold process: vet candidates to see if they were non-communist collaborators with the former Security Service and check their conduct in their previous political and professional lives, and vet any possible past criminal activity under the law to decriminalise politics. The last process was initiated as a necessity due to a substantial number of political representatives in central and local offices who were previously convicted or had escaped justice by using of alternate identities. This led to the adoption of a national law and since then has been put in practice to vet all senior state officials. The DP is the first political party in Albania to adapt the law for internal use. This has enhanced trust among party members but, at the same time, according to Halim Kosova it has also increased the party’s credibility in wider public opinion as a party guided by the highest values and principles.

As such these new practices not only improved the perception of the party in public opinion but also increased internal democratic competition within the party. A clear democratic lesson for Albanian democracy occurred during the internal party elections, and it was followed with the introduction of the first party constitution which guaranteed the integrity of every member and representative of the DP at the local and central levels. This was achieved with the introduction of the internal vetting process – anti-criminalisation and anti-communist collaborator – representing a high standard in the Albanian political arena in comparison to the political appointments of persons with criminal backgrounds in the Parliament and local government that had been made for several years by the socialist government.

A party of principles: Building trust among the citizens

Building citizen’s trust remains an indispensable and challenging issue for all political parties, especially for those in opposition. But at the same time, this creates an opportunity for every leadership transformation to gain momentum and make the party a more reliable, accountable and policy-oriented alternative to the government.

The DP represents a successful case in its party leadership transformation since 2013.

The internal democratisation of the party that started with the introduction of the one-vote-one-member model at all levels was a significant achievement in the political scene. This is contrary to the national electoral standards that have declined since November 2013 with mass vote-buying in the partial elections in Korca. There was not a single case in which the

7 Interview with DP Secretary General Gazment Bardhi on 6 March 2020.
8 Interview with the DP Head of the Commission of Party Integrity, Prof. Dr Halim Kosova, 7 March 2020.
9 https://www.zeriamerikes.com/a/5279506.html
10 Interview with the DP Head of the Commission of Party Integrity, Prof. Dr Halim Kosova, 7 March 2020.
opposition had to act firmly and with the necessary political will. In just one year after the SP came to power, media investigations reported that several government MPs had a criminal past using aliases. This led to an orchestrated physical attack on an opposition MP who denounced the SP MPs with criminal pasts. In response to that, the opposition was forced to boycott all parliamentary activities and begin a Decriminalisation Agenda.

The opposition asked for a new mechanism to vet all MPs and high officials about their previous activities. The government first refused to deal with this and Prime Minister Edi Rama declared publicly that within SP there were no candidates with criminal pasts. But after international pressure, mainly by the European Union (EU), it accepted the opposition points to draft a law including an enforcement mechanism that later was known as the Decriminalisation Law. An intra-parliamentary commission began working officially on 24 December 2014 and was to produce a draft law before the 2015 local elections. The commission failed to deliver the draft law in time and it was not until 15 December 2015 that the parliament voted for the law. This initiated a vetting process which in the following two years led to the dismissal of more than 333 high officials from all governing levels. Of the 83 MPs of the Socialist-led government, 10 were dismissed or resigned. However, this did not stop the phenomenon as in the last local elections, which were conducted in an undemocratic climate, five of 61 mayors were forced to resign due to their criminal pasts which meant that they had falsified the decriminalisation declaration.

Contrary to the SP, the DP had introduced a decriminalisation vetting mechanism to scrutinise all the party’s candidates at the local and central levels, which was elaborated on in the first section of this paper. According to the DP Secretary General, 82 per cent of the citizens have supported the Decriminalization Agenda and the continuing efforts to conduct a vetting process for all high officials and politicians. He also emphasised that the Venice Commission has supported the new agenda of the DP as a “necessity due to the specific circumstances in the country”. The commission also said “the introduction of a special mechanism of verification of high officials is seen as a legitimate decision…because the disqualifying that cancels an electoral mandate shall not be considered as democratic backsliding but rather as a mean of containing it”.

This improved the party’s public perception as one oriented to principles and values rather than to political expediency. But the election results did not reflect improved trust among citizens. According to the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Report on the local election in 2015 and 2017, vote-buying and pressure on voters were the most worrying issues that prevented standards from being met by the country.

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13 https://javanews.al/intervista-rama-nuk-kemi-asnje-kandidat-me-te-shkuar-kriminale/
17 Interview with the Secretary General of the DP, Gazment Bardhi, 6 March 6th 2020.
19 Interview with the Secretary General of the DP, Mr. Gazment Bardhi, 6 March 6th 2020.
20 For more details see the “Priority Recommendations” section of the report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) on Albania’s Local Elections 21 June 2015, p. 25 Link and for the OSCE/ODIHR Albania General Elections 25 June 2017, p. 24 Link.
Election standards failed again to conform to democratic standards during the last local election in 2019 in which the OSCE reported voters did not have a meaningful choice between political options because there was only one candidate in each of the 61 municipalities due to the opposition burning all mandates at the local and central levels.

The Standards Agenda forced the opposition to choose the ultimate measure to confront politically the growing undemocratic majority. This started when the SP elected a temporary general prosecutor without a simple majority vote. Then in 2019 the German newspaper Bild published a series of wiretaps that revealed orchestrated manipulation by several high officials from the local and central SP governments in the 2016 partial local elections in Dibra and the 2017 general elections. The prime minister rejected these accusations and declared that he would sue Bild in a German court. Following that, the international media argued that the Albania democratic path was in danger due to the prime minister’s undemocratic policies.

Meanwhile Albania’s reputation in the world deteriorated not only because of the undemocratic policies of the government but also due to the surge of drug trafficking and cannabis cultivation. The Exit News media outlet reported that over the last two years cannabis cultivation had increased by up to 1,200 per cent. This led several media reports to point to Albania as an emerging narco-state with deteriorating democratic standards. Albania also failed for four consecutive years to start membership negotiations with the EU due to some countries rising concerns about illicit activities and organised crime.

All these events caused the Democratic Party to take a determined approach to the situation by developing a clear Standards Agenda. It resigned parliamentary seats and demanded a new caretaker government to prepare a new electoral code and conduct early elections. Unprecedented one-party local elections were held in June 2019 although the president had decreed that they be postponed to October to provide time for political dialogue between the opposing fronts.

The government continued to hold the elections without opposition participation which resulted in total SP control of local and central governance. By late October, the German federal parliament adopted nine conditions to start Albania’s EU accession negotiations which included the establishment of a constitutional court to deliver a final decision on the local election constitutional dispute. Also the EU urged both political parties to start a constructive dialogue on drafting an updated electoral code which would take into considerations all the OSCE recommendations by the middle of March 2020.

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22 For more see Reporters Without Borders Link and BalkanInsight Link.
23 For more see Vice “The Inside Story of Europe’s First Narco-State”, Link, and The Independent article “Colombia of Europe” Link.
The Standards Agenda has successfully resulted in increased citizen trust in the Democratic Party. This is shown by an independent poll conducted on April 2019 that found that more than 10 per cent more citizens would vote for the DP if an election were held on that day\(^\text{29}\). Also the last local elections showed wide public support for the opposition by boycotting massively the single-party elections organised by the government.

Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
4.1. PROPOSALS

The transformation of the Democratic Party of Albania’s leadership has made the party more responsible to its members and regained citizen confidence that it can become an alternative government. But it should be further transformed from ethical and integrity perspectives. Thus the DP should lead a process of transparency, democratisation and membership empowerment through the use of a multistep process, possibly such as primaries, in the selection of candidates. Such a process should be based on the best experiences of European or North American political parties, with the experiences adapted to the Albanian context of political party organisation. The approach can be applied not only to DP candidates to become MPs but also to local political representatives.

4.2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The DP should open a nationwide process with constitutionalists, academics, professionals and former politicians to reconsider and reshape the political system. This process must tackle:
• The electoral system (majoritarian with 100 electoral districts),
• Parliament (bicameral),
• Local governance (100 municipalities),
• Party wide primaries for local/central representatives and
• Political party financing.

4.3 CONCLUSIONS

Building citizens’ trust in political parties remains a challenging issue but also provides opportunities depending on the position of the party. Through a party leadership transformation, the DP represents a successful example which demonstrates an improvement in party credibility among its members due to a process that furthered internal democratisation, oriented party decision-makers toward policy and expertise and enhanced the ethical and integrity standards for party candidates at the local and central levels. In addition, this internal approach demonstrates a positive impact on general public opinion through: political engagement based on values and principles, an agenda of decriminalisation to prevent all high officials and central/local representatives with criminal pasts from holding office, and the protection of democratic standards on holding elections as a basic precondition to consolidate democracy. The DP has engaged in an ethical and integrity approach rather than an unprincipled approach and this has improved and raised citizens’ trust. Overall this leadership approach has improved party transparency and accountability by making the DP once more a party of the people, by the people, for the people.
ALBANIA

02

Socialist Party

By: Teuta Vodo

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
Political parties are increasingly initiating strategies on transparency, including more user-friendly websites and greater access to their official data through social media. Political messaging between candidates and prospective voters can take many forms including social media. The deployment of social media in putting forth one's or a party's ideology, propagating one's or a party's agenda, and persuading the voter is widespread as never before. The media and other means of informing the public base their activities on a party's constitution and programme, thus guaranteeing their autonomy and freedom of information.

The Socialist Party of Albania (SPA) has been transformed through a strategic communications structure with its members. It conveys its political message and communicates with its members and citizens very quickly and efficiently. Communications from the government and elected officials through social media is one of the ways which help to connect with the people and transmit political messages. This report points out the best practices of the SPA in providing greater visibility and political transparency through its public communications with its members, voters and citizens. It illustrates how the SPA uses online communications as a tool to spread political messages and decisions (meetings, voters’ right, party programme).

The research method for this study included semi-structured interviews with political actors from the Socialist Party as well as the analysis of reports on its key communication factors. In conclusion, this report describes the best methods of communication the Socialist Party uses to reach its members and other interest groups. It analyses the responses and strategies of communication actors in relation to the political values of democratic accountability, and it produces recommendations for improvements.

Answers to questions on transparency
Secretariat for digitalisation

The party has elements of transparency, public information and media relations standards in its constitution. There are three main articles in the SPA constitution that regulate these aspects:

“Transparency and informing the public” (article 9); “Implementation of transparency standards and Code of Ethics (article 54)”7; “Press and other means of informing the public (article 81)”8.

The digital secretariat has been part of the party structure since 2016. It was primarily initiated by the party leader Edi Rama and approved by the SPA national assembly6. It is composed of six national-level digital coordinators engaged voluntarily at the SPA premises to manage the network of digital organising coordinators at each level. The digital secretariat is composed of information technology staff who monitor the number of shared posts, the number of people reaching the posts and reading the message which report daily and weekly to the secretariat and municipality on the work done.

Territorial divisions respond with coordinator coverage at each level as follows: a district-level coordinator (for each district) composed of 12 members; a municipal-level coordinator (for each municipality) composed of 61 members; an administrative unit-level coordinator (for each unit of the municipality) composed of 386 members; an organisational-level coordinator (the smallest cell in the territory of the Socialist Party organisation) composed of 4,870 members (that is, one for each socialist organisation in the country).

The main responsibilities of the digital secretariat are to manage and coordinate the official social media pages of the party leader, members of the parliament, mayors and party delegates. The coordinators communicate via WhatsApp groups and email. There is a WhatsApp group where information is shared daily8. The coordinators delegate tasks to inform the community and spread the message by sharing posts. These latter are distributed by the digital secretary and then to each coordinator at both central and local levels. The digital coordinators receive links which should be shared with the district-level coordinators and mayors and then, via another WhatsApp group, the message is shared with other groups of coordinators9. The content of the information is based on such matters as initiatives, solutions to community issues and decisions of the Socialist Party leadership.

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2 Article 9, article 54, and article 81 (Constitution and Regulations of the Socialist Party of Albania, January 2018).

3 The activities of the governing bodies of the party are open to its members. Documents reflecting the activities and decisions are made known to party members through its organisational structures, the media, its website and other electronic media. Governing bodies report to party members; central governing bodies report to local governing bodies and vice versa/reciprocally. Those elected to the governing bodies have the right to attend meetings of party structures and to use the necessary documentation. Meetings of party structures and forums are open to the public. The party regularly informs the public and its members about its activities and decisions (Constitution and Regulations of the Socialist Party of Albania, January 2018).

4 The Ethics Standards Guarantee Commission monitors voters, party members and organs, the constitution, the regulations issued pursuant to it, and the code of ethics by providing opinions and explanations. It drafts an annual report on the implementation of the code of ethics and, when necessary, submits to the national assembly proposals for amendments or supplements to the code of ethics (Constitution and Regulations of the Socialist Party of Albania, January 2018).

5 Constitution and Regulations of the Socialist Party of Albania, January 2018.

6 It is mostly known as the “Digital Party” and currently being led by Blerina Gjylameti, Member of Parliament, Tirana District.

7 In 2015, the administrative reform was implemented. As a result, there are 12 regions, 61 municipalities, 386 administrative units.

8 This includes to share, like and comment on their posts, as much as possible with their followers and party members.

9 Interview with Guce Morena, Digital Coordinator at the national Level, 3 March 2020.
Generally, the sharing of the messages contain the posts of the party leader and the secretary-general which cover a broad range of topics. Also, the sharing of activities of MPs and party leaders of the municipalities is managed by the municipal-level coordinators. This group, based in the premises of the SPA, conveys information being delivered by the party leader’s office and the secretary-general on the weekly activities of the party (including the weekly report of the party). The digital coordinators convey messages to be shared with other coordinators via WhatsApp and then, to the social media official pages. The most used and preferred social medium is Facebook followed by Instagram, Twitter and the respective websites.

**Co-governance platform**

“Albania We Want” is an open online platform of communication and interaction with citizens which serves as an instrument of direct democracy and transparency by receiving complaints and requests in real time. The platform is a practical instrument of co-governance with any ordinary citizen whose aim is to be part of a platform where they can express their critical stance on reforms, projects and issues of current governance and fight abusive behaviour of state structures and designated officials.

The complaints may be of political and governmental relevance with the aim to: discuss with people relevant measures to deal with their interests, enabling them to influence governance policies in each sector or the performance of each ministry, agency and/or state institution; identify and denounce corrupt acts at each sector/institution; and promote and guarantee the honest resolution of community or personal problems.

The prime minister, the official chairperson of the platform, announces at a weekly press conference the solutions given to the citizens (up to 15) and invites them to witness “their story”. In this way, the party builds trust through the platform. At every government meeting for each ministry there is a weekly report on the cases with no solution or whose deadlines are exceed.

In 2018, at the central level, out of 22,706 complaints, 16,213 were resolved whereas, at the local level, 4,230 out of 20,631 complaints were resolved. Ministers have been called on by citizens during 2018 for concrete initiatives. Progress towards the platform is visible year after year, along with increasing citizen requests.

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10 Co-governance involves making decisions at the lowest possible level of authority thereby creating checks on the overall decision-making process.

11 Available at: https://www.shqiperiaqeduam.al/.

12 Interview with Megi Ajtyresa, Head of Co-governance Platform, 1 March 2020.
Current practices in the Socialist Party
Media relations, which are covered by the Media and Communication department, include interacting with journalists and are very important to the Socialist Party. As the first digital secretary put it, “for the first time, there is a continuous communication with the big socialist family which is enabled in the virtual world with citizens.”

The Socialist Party of Albania through the social media, press, and websites gives people the opportunity to easily access information. Communication of the prime minister, ministers, MPs, party leaders in each district, through social media, is one of the ways to help people connect with their representatives and learn what has been done. The main issue is how the interests of citizens are being represented by the MPs. These latter should use their social media pages to submit and update their calendar of work, to show weekly reports of the work done in their respective regions as well as weekly or monthly requests to be solved. And for how many of the citizens they have been working.

In fact, 90 per cent of newsrooms focus on political developments and the staff monitor news in a time frame of 12 hours.

The main challenges are fake news produced by unregistered online news portals. Generally, in the Albanian media space, many matters, especially those related to governance, are unclear for the public. To meet this need, the PM’s online platform, that is “ERTV” on the official Facebook page, has been created as an innovation. Due to the very limited space remaining for discussions in the media, ERTV comes as a clear option for those initiatives which are being differently interpreted for political objectives, especially by the opposition parties. In this situation what we should do is to promote this initiative and the values of it. On ERTV, governance representatives, being ministers or directors are asked to give an overall view of the initiatives and their benefits, explained to citizens in a simple way.

The focus of this platform is determined by the public and mainly covers relevant matters which are being discussed. The staff currently working for ERTV is based at the SPA premises (media and communication office). Additionally, there is a studio dedicated to ERTV where interviews with government officials and SPA representatives are conducted. The aim of the platform is to raise awareness of specific issues in governance which related to the interests of the people.

Online communication can reach followers in such a way that the classic TV cannot do. On Facebook live you can see people’s comments and it gives you feedback on the topics and calculations on the most seen topics in order to understand what Albanians want to see and hear but also to understand their main issues.

As shown, communication with party members is divided into two fields: institutional and political. The former includes dialogue through the national assembly, delegates of the congress, MPs and others with the electorate. The latter includes the dialogue through political and media communications, such as meetings/dialogues, political events, congresses as well as weekly reports.

13 Interview with Albiona Sulo, Director of Communication, Socialist Party of Albania, 5 March 2020.
15 Interview with Albiona Sulo, Director of Communication, Socialist Party of Albania, 5 March 2020.
16 Interview with Alteo Hysi, journalist ERTV, 3 March 2020.
17 Interview with Alteo Hysi, journalist ERTV, 3 March 2020.
The public debates help to use the feedback to improve and increase transparency\(^\text{18}\).

Party structures constantly communicate and disseminate the political message through SP spokeswoman Elisa Spiropoli, press releases from MPs and ongoing updates on social media\(^\text{19}\).

The SPA is working on transparency through weekly reports (mainly focused on the work of MPs). In this way members can get information on the party structure, decisions, and processes\(^\text{20}\).

As noted above, continuous communication and transparency are the key to success in the Socialist Party’s communications strategy.

Another advantage in being active on social media is that it is a traditional place to connect with the people where they can read the activities of their representatives\(^\text{21}\).

Some members are critical of “digital transparency” stating that:

There is big confusion among the members when it comes to getting information. Members are only asked to share posts. Sharing and posting on social media is not enough. This may also be done through newsletters so the people can learn the processes and understand. We should find a way of communicating so stakeholders can share or can give an opinion if the issues are related to their interests\(^\text{22}\).

As shown, digital communication on social media is faster to disseminate political arguments and is different from the institutional communication used by party structures. To summarise, there are lots of discussions on SPA domestic issues and dynamics. The level of transparency and communication between elected officials and citizens should be improved and increased through more meetings. Additionally, the official website of the party for each city should be updated with reports and monthly calendars after each meeting so that citizens can be aware of the aim of the meeting.

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18 Interview with Alteo Hysi, journalist ERTV, 3 March 2020.
19 Interview with Resul Resulaj, activist and member, Socialist Party of Albania, 5 March 2020.
20 Interview with Grejsi Bixhi, Leader of Youth Forum Branch No. 8, 4 March 2020.
21 Interview with Glindxhet Madhi, Leader of Youth Forum Tirana, 2 March, 2020.
22 Interview with Maura Linadi, activist and member, Socialist Party of Albania, 4 March 2020.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
The Socialist Party is one of the most advanced parties digitally in the Balkans. Through social media, the media and the website, it gives people the opportunity to easily access ongoing information.

As an easy way to connect with its members, it has a continuous relationship with the media for press statements, interviews, reports etc. It conveys its political message and communication with its members and citizens very quickly and efficiently.

To summarise: the digital secretariat is present in 61 municipalities and 12 regions with 4,870 members. During an election campaign, attention is paid to the fan pages of individual politicians compared to the party’s institutional sites. The online platform “Albania We Want” is one of the most clicked platforms in the country with 17,000 issues nationally and 2,000 locally solved each year. During an election campaign, attention is paid to the fan pages of individual politicians and these are compared to the party’s institutional sites. ERTV has been created as a platform to increase transparency and communication with citizens. The spokesperson of the leadership communicates weekly on political decisions and SPA reforms.

Conducting this research and its interviews with party functionaries provided an opportunity for these officials to express openly some of the core problems with the internal communication within the party structures. As a result, this process in the long term will build a solid mechanism to improve and increase transparency among members.

The Socialist Party has efficient digital communications in the Balkans in terms of communication and transparency practices. However, digital communications, transparency with journalists, the co-governance platform, continuous communications, use of social media and ERTV need further improvement. Despite best practices, there are also some challenges that need to be met in the coming years. The interviewees showed us that:

- The Socialist Party of Albania has a unique and a solid organisational structure, especially in recent years with the new party functions. The current constitution of the party states that it “guarantees the freedom of expression of ideas and the introduction of platforms to all members who aim to improve and implement the programme, the constitution and the democratisation of the party. These practices can accelerate intraparty integration and can mobilise the membership of the party (Neni 4, pika 1 e Statutit të Partisë Socialiste të Shqipërisë).
- The party structure nationwide is characterised by relatively weak communication with its members and voters, especially at the local level.
- The communication is mainly common during electoral campaigns.
- At the local level, the political message is shared in social media but the benefits and arguments transmitted and communicated to the citizens are not as clear.
- There is more focus on the leadership’s messages rather than on how the messages are being perceived and/or implemented.
- There is a need for more consultancy and transparency in the candidate lists in order to avoid candidates with criminal records representing the party.
- Timely information spread equally and over all the country is required for the party to improve; with a focus on the political message and its reach to citizens.

This report and its recommendations will help the party secretariat and leadership to engage frequently on discussions on the party’s needs, internal democracy and communication with the voters and leadership.
Party transparency and internal integration will bring the party closer to the people if, in addition to the policies, conditions and structures, there will be continuous research, surveys and questionnaires, and databases of proven results, reports and improvements.

1. Members of parliament and party secretaries should defend citizens’ interests in their social media, work calendars, weekly reports and regular meetings with citizens, and they must create their own websites. Holding legislative and executive functions makes it very difficult to focus on party activities and communication. Their functions should be considered in order of inclusiveness and improvements of party policies.

2. Members of Parliament should have personal website pages where they share their objectives and proposals for their constituencies.

3. Better internal communication with the constituencies in the decision-making process for candidate lists.

4. Party websites and other social networks should give arguments (not merely sharing the prime minister’s status).

5. More transparency at the local level with citizens and party members.

6. Increased level of representation, much more open meetings and discussions with the citizens.

7. The legal changes being made public should be discussed or clarified in advance.

8. The role of the digital secretariat should be reviewed and broaden.

9. Annual reports and studies from within the structure should be conducted to help the party to improve.
Social Democratic Party

By: Jelena Pekic

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
The Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP BiH) has been faced, over the past several years especially, with numerous challenges concerning the democratisation of the party itself, and concerning the introduction of new mechanisms and methods of operation. These have been developed to answer the requirements coming from citizens aiming to set up higher levels of responsiveness, accountability, communications and transparency, which are expected especially from a left-wing, citizen-oriented party. The need for changes within the party came due to the increasing level of citizens’ distrust in the work of political parties, and because of the view that “all political parties are the same” regardless of their ideology and position within the political spectrum.

An increase in the level of distrust of political parties is present not only in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) but also at the global level. This is evident in the continuous growth in the number of abstainers from voting, which is especially visible in BiH which is already faced with increased citizen migration to developed European Union countries. Some of the factors in this distrust that can be identified are:

• Corruption of the system and of politicians holding government office;
• Lack of political parties’ consistency in the implementation of the elements that contribute to party integrity, here especially including: a party’s profile and its advocacy of the public interest, insufficient transparency, a party’s closeness to the citizens, and slow reactions;
• Citizens losing hope that things can be improved, which is especially present in BiH where the rhetoric of the ethnonational ruling political parties replaces solving citizens’ real-life issues.

We are talking about political party integrity where citizens, non-governmental organisations and the interested public in general are grading political parties in accordance with ideological consistency, the fulfilment of promises, the degree of internal party democratisation and the practices in the decision-making process, citizens’ inclusion, and communication with the citizens, as well as the parameters of financial transparency. We offer 10 indicators that make up a political party’s integrity as follows: accountability, dedication, culpability, competitiveness, integrity advocacy, legality, ideological framework, protection of public interest, representation and transparency.

Answers to questions on transparency
The SDP BiH faced the following challenges in fulfilling the requirements in the areas of responsiveness, accountability, communication and transparency, which are interconnected and interdependent.

Coalition with ethnonational political parties in the period 2010-2014 and inability to fulfil the public’s expectations

Following the 2010 general elections, the SDP BiH was the leading political party in the country with 19 per cent support and eight seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina. It entered government at different levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina and started with a number of activities in the area of public infrastructure improvement and legislative initiatives. However, strong negative public perception of SDP BiH policies and people in government resulted from such factors as: a continuous negative campaign inspired by nationalists, coalition decisions and changes which proved to be political mistakes, internal conflicts within the party leadership, difficult consequences of the global and regional economic crises, civic unrest in February 2014 and disastrous floods that occurred a couple of months later.

When it comes to the public perception, it is important to point out that the main problem was not in the SDP BiH coalition with national parties as such (in the first instance with the Party of Democratic Action), but in the facts that the SDP BiH did not impose itself as the party that leads in the position of power, and that the party did not fulfil citizens’ expectations. As a result, the 2014 general elections showed a strong decline in support for the SDP BiH (10 per cent and three seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina). Since 2015, the SDP BiH has been the opposition party in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Communication with the membership, supporters and citizens

The SDP BiH as a left-wing political party always had well organised local branches that were in continuous communication with their members on the one hand, and with supporters and citizens on the other hand. The first form of communication was through the continuous presence of SDP BiH employees in local offices where citizens could receive information on party activities through direct contact, then through organising party organs’ meetings, while communication with citizens was conducted through debates, round-table discussions, and similar. Also, the party has a very functional website which contains contact information of all party organisations in the country. The website has been improved over the years and is regularly updated with news, thus directly enabling a higher level of party transparency in terms of everyday activities.

However, due to changes in society and new trends, this communication became insufficient, especially in the period during the party’s participation in the government since 2010. During this period, party work has been completely neglected, and when SDP BiH representatives have been appointed to the executive government, in addition to the cadre that has been elected to the legislative government, the party remained “empty”. Although the SDP BiH has managed to implement important projects from its “five policies manifesto”, this has not been communicated efficiently to the membership and general public. The general public perception was that the SDP BiH failed in fulfilling expectations. The fact that the party confessed that it has made mistakes did not help it to regain lost trust, which eventually resulted in a decline in its election results at the local elections 2012, followed by similar result at the 2014 elections.

2 Governments led by the SDP BiH have been overthrown by parliamentary votes at the Sarajevo level in September 2012, while FBiH Government and BiH Council of Ministers (state government formed in December 2011) remained until the 2014 elections.
Political party accountability

With regards to the political party’s accountability which is mirrored in clearly defined election goals, programmes and policies, and in taking over the responsibility for implementation or lack of implementation of election goals, programmes and policies, the SDP BiH has always made an attempt to fulfill its promises. This fulfilment depended on a series of factors and the general public’s perception. However, what the party lacked was accountability in terms of resigning and in terms of admitting its mistakes for unfulfilled election goals.

Decision-making processes within the party and financial management make two key transparency factors.

Insufficient internal democracy regarding the decision-making process

Although the SDP BiH has had good party organisation in terms of its hierarchy, where regular sessions of party organs were organised at all levels, it was considered that the SDP BiH was not a sufficiently democratic party and that the key decisions were made by a small circle of people close to the then party president (until 2014). The collapse that the party faced in 2014 required urgent measures and the creation of a process aimed at democratising the party.

Also, it was considered that the process of selecting the cadre for the elections lists and for participation in government after the elections was not sufficiently transparent, although the party had cadre committees at all levels of organisation. Biographies of candidates on the lists, later on of those proposed for the executive government, have rarely been available.

Insufficient financial transparency

In previous years, the SDP BiH has been fined by the Central Election Committee of BiH (CEC BiH) because of its financial management. In 2017, it was fined twice for violations of the law on political party financing. Also, there were no clear mechanisms or procedures and internal controls set by the higher-level party structures when it came to financial management by the local organisations.

Public debates conducted by civil society organizations in BiH especially influenced public perceptions that parties are not sufficiently transparent, especially with regards to their sources of financing, and that all parties and politicians are corrupt, that all of them are the same. The SDP BiH has always demonstrated a willingness to increase transparency, but it lacked concrete tools and mechanisms to implement it.

Current practices in the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina
In order to address the obvious need for serious internal reform, the III Extraordinary Congress of the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2015 was organised and several important decisions for the future of the Party were taken, as follows:

**The one-member-one-vote principle**

A new party rule introduced the one-member-one-vote system as the method of internal party elections. On 31 May 2015, approximately 20,000 members of the party directly elected presidents of municipality and regional branches of the party and became part of the historic political project of internal democratisation without precedent in the political history of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This bold step toward empowerment of party members was further stabilised after the September 2015 intraparty elections for the new president of the SDP BiH. The SDP BiH Congress held on 3 October 2015 confirmed an overall commitment to the democratisation of the party.

However, the four-year implementation period for the system revealed certain weaknesses in electing local organisations’ party leadership, so in 2019 the system was preserved at the SDP BiH presidential level while the local level reintroduced the delegate system.

**Established membership database named Atlas**

The condition for implementing the one-member-one-vote system was to set up a precise membership database. To do this, a revision of the party membership was conducted and a software solution was developed. Advantages to this system lay in setting up new forms of communication with the membership, such as email communications and providing information through email. It also facilitated the cadre process conducted at all levels of the organisation by the cadre committees because it contained all the necessary information on the membership (biographies, interests, membership in different party bodies, etc.).

**Two-year cyclic model of policymaking**

Thanks to cooperation with the political foundation Forum of the Left Initiative, a two-year policy development process was developed within the SDP BiH in 2014 and further amended in 2015. An especially important role in this process was given to the committees for the development of public policies and to the public consultations with the membership and general public. A developed and fully functional policymaking structure brings a number of benefits for political parties, ranging from strengthening the skills of party legislators and officials to motivating membership and increasing public support for the party, its people and policies.

Party organs such as committees, commissions or working groups developed for specific tasks contribute to a sustainable discussion of programme issues and ensure participation of specific groups, such as youth, women, entrepreneurs and seniors. When they are fully functional, such organs will contribute significantly to the formation of political opinion and have the capacity to demonstrate that parties are taking into serious consideration the interests and concerns of a variety of social groups. In other words, these committees are very important for the inner life and dynamics of modern political parties, as well as for their external image.

In addition, consultation processes (including a variety of mechanisms such as informal consultations, the circulation of policy proposals for public comment, public hearings, meetings and debates) ensure the timely communication and involvement of members and citizens in this aspect of party work. Here it is important to highlight that these consultations have an online dimension organised within the appropriate web platform with all the necessary features required to maintain two-way communications.
An **Election Programme named Plan 10** for the 2018 elections was developed through the above-mentioned methodology, and the experience has been transferred to the local level as well through different educational activities. In addition to setting up communications with the broader public, an important aspect of this process is an indicator of ideological consistency that helps in determining whether the party has stayed devoted to its ideological positions during and after the programme development and implementation. This later influences a party's responsibility and accountability. One of the good examples of presenting its viewpoints based on ideology is printing the newspaper Glas Slobode (The Voice of Freedom) which was cut in 2017 due to a lack of funds.

When speaking of public policy development and of party standings, we talk of the **protection of the public interest** as part of a party's responsibility because progressive parties need to show by example that putting particular interests over the public interest will not be tolerated. However, the SDP BiH did not develop these mechanisms, which was clearly seen in some instances when it reacted to some burning issues (for example, air pollution by Global Ispat Coke Industry Lukavac (GIKIL)). To protect GIKIL workers' rights, SDP BiH did not support the closure of the industry, thus putting the interest of one target group over the public interest.

Other measures and activities have also been conducted so far.

**Political education and programmes for intraparty democratisation**

In cooperation with political foundations, different education programmes for SDP BiH leadership at all levels of the organisation have been conducted, focusing on setting up mechanisms of internal party democratisation and on involving the membership, interest groups (Youth Forum, Women’s Forum, Forum of Trade Union Activists, and Forum of Seniors) to the decision-making processes within the party.

These changes were initiated with the changes in the constitution in 2015 when questionnaires and polling among the members and referendums were introduced.

Aiming to determine the membership's opinion and to strengthen its influence on policy, cadre solutions, and SDP BiH activities regarding the most important political and developmental issues, an anonymous polling/questionnaire can now be conducted on the opinions of SDP BiH members. In addition to its organs, other interest groups in the party can conduct polling to determine the position of the members on issues they are focusing on. A referendum can be organised to determine the membership's opinion on certain issues in the country and/or in the SDP BiH. A referendum can be conducted to take a stand on key political issues such as: BiH constitutional changes, unification with other political parties, participation in the executive government, and the setting up of a coalition.

The referendum mechanism was used to confirm the SDP BiH candidate for the BiH presidency at the 2018 elections.

So far, numerous educational activities have been conducted with the SDP BiH leadership at all levels of the party, focusing on setting up a mechanism of internal party democratisation based on the principles of participatory democracy such as:

- Internal and external assignments of a political party;
- Regular meetings with the membership and supporters, aiming to include them in the decision-making process, and to inform them on SDP activities;
- Strengthening interest groups (Youth Forum, Women’s Forum, Forum of Trade Union Activists, and Forum of Seniors) aiming to include them into the decision-making processes; and
- Asking for the membership’s opinion through questionnaires, polling, etc.
Public nominations of the candidates for election lists was introduced in 2020; some organisations even introduced interviews for the candidates who would be leading the lists, and an overall attempt was made to make the cadre policy as transparent as possible, in addition to fulfilling requirements such as gender and youth representation.

The SDP BiH has developed inclusive mechanisms of participation in the decision-making process for interested members, and it is important to point out that mechanisms have been set up for questioning decisions in front of another organ, like the SDP BiH’s Statutory Board and Chancery. In 2020, the SDP BiH’s Main Board adopted a Code of Ethics whose implementation will be conducted by the Chancery.

Financial management

The second important transparency issue is financial management and the regular publication of financial reports on the webpage in accordance with the BiH law on political party financing, which has been complied with in the past three years. The reports name all sources of income, information on all individuals and organisations/companies which contribute to the party, and data on the expenditures. Additional efforts were made in financial transparency in 2015 when control of local organisations’ finances was introduced through the following measures:

- All local organisations were obliged to open bank accounts and reduce cash transactions;
- Control of the receipts and payments was centralised from one location (e-banking has been introduced for the local organisations and the headquarters); and
- A lack of this mechanism meant higher expenses for individual bank accounts for all organisations.

Presentation of the party’s work through the official webpage and social media

In addition to regular updates of the webpage with SDP BiH news from all levels of organisation, webpage http://www.sdp.ba/stav/ was set up for anyone interested to be able to find official SDP BiH positions on current issues in society. This was another attempt to apply the SDP BiH’s ideological position based on social democratic principles and values.

Programmes promised – fulfilled

Following the 2010 elections and aiming to address the challenges posed by the broader public in terms of the party’s accountability, Programmes Promised – Fulfilled was introduced to present the implemented projects in those parts of the country where the SDP BiH had participated in the government.

It is important to point out that the mechanisms established and the measures implemented are interconnected because none of them alone can raise the total level of party transparency and its image as a party close to citizens. All measures (especially the one-vote system, the public policy development system, the system of strengthening internal party democratisation, and the introduction of internal financial control and public financial transparency) have contributed to regaining citizens’ trust in the SDP BiH, and, to a certain extent, to rebranding the party as a democratic party. However, the public expects more, and these processes need to be continued if the SDP BiH wants to achieve true rebranding and differentiation from other political parties, which will be elaborated on later in the recommendations.

For example, the one-member-one-vote system revealed weaknesses when it came to the election of local party leaderships but, on the other hand, this system introduced new mechanisms
of internal party democratisation where party members decide on important issues and where each member feels involved and important in the decision-making process. However, lessons learned during the implementation show that this is not sufficient, and that membership and public inclusion in party work needs to be more thorough, enabling them to see the true impact of their proposals in the decision-making process. A similar situation occurred with public policy development where the focus needs to be on the proposals from the membership and the broader public when finalising the proposals to be implemented when party is in government. Furthermore, if the work of party organs becomes more transparent and open to the public, it will contribute to an additional increase of active membership inclusion in the party. The SDP BiH has tried to achieve this through systematic work on internal party democratisation.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
The established mechanisms presented from the examples of good practice need to be implemented consistently and improved continuously if the SDP BiH wants to regain the highest level of public trust, where key SDP BiH target groups (such as workers) will see it once again as the party which defends, shields and advocates for their interests.

In this context, the SDP BiH in the coming 10 years needs to establish itself as the party truly seen by citizens as the party that advocates for and shields their interests based on liberty, equality and solidarity. It needs to become the party that will achieve new rebranding in accordance with new challenges and trends, without breaking up the connections with basic social democratic values that it advocates; it needs instead to find a new, different and more innovative way to present that. In conclusion, it needs to become a modern political party with a high level of public financial transparency, a high level of membership and public inclusion in party work using contemporary communication models, and the party whose officials put general well-being before their individual interests, as overseen by appropriate party bodies.

The following recommendations are proposed to achieve the party’s long-term goals:

• Development and adoption of the Integrity Action Plan which will provide a precise overview of the activities, indicators, deadlines, and people responsible for implementation, with continuous monitoring and evaluation of the plan’s implementation.
• Changes and amendments to the constitution, decisions and internal acts that will improve or introduce new mechanisms for improving political party integrity, especially focusing on:
  • Decision-making processes with continuous improvement of the existing processes and procedures; setting up clear procedures and ways of including party membership and citizens in the decision-making process at all levels of party organisation and monitoring the implementation of these procedures;
  • Announcing sessions of the party organs that are open to the public and providing an opportunity for participation in discussions and organising online sessions;
  • Enabling representatives of youth, women, seniors, and trade union activists’ organisations to have the right to vote at the party organs in cases where they participate in the organs’ work;
  • Development of the public appearance protocol for all party representatives;
• Adopting new procedures for candidate selection which will be more transparent and where all party members and supporters will have an opportunity to nominate a candidate including publishing biographies of all candidates; and
• Monitoring the implementation of the Code of Ethics.
• Party modernisation and use of new technologies aiming at improving communication with the membership and with the general public. This includes more visible party documents, reports, and party positions on current issues on the webpage (quick and timely formulation of viewpoints on ongoing socio-political issues that will be immediately available to the broader public, which is not the case currently).
• New ways of conducting public consultations and policy presentation in addition to the classic ones (debate, round-table discussion) need to be established in accordance with new ways of communication and the use of new technology.
• Setting up direct cooperation with relevant stakeholders and offering joint work on finding solutions to ongoing issues, offering joint work on developing legislation and the development of public policies, which would present additional an improvement in the public policy development process.
• Strengthening the internal financial control mechanism through setting up clear, consistent and special rules on the auditing requests thereby ensuring the necessary autonomy of the professionals conducting the political party financial audit, with audit reports being published.

• Establishing a protocol for the prevention and investigation of corruption within the party.
• The SDP BiH needs to be one of the initiators of new amendments to the legislation concerning political party financing in accordance with the Council of Europe: Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO) committee recommendations, as well as to promote Freedom of Information Act requests first of all within the party, then regarding public institutions.
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Nasa Stranka

By: Jasmina Mrso

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
Nasa Stranka (Our Party) is a social-liberal, centre-left, multi-ethnic political party from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), founded in 2008 by a group of intellectuals and activists seeking an alternative to the predominant nationalist and social-democratic blocs in the country. This is a pro-European Union (EU) and pro-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) party that seeks to put individual rights above collective ones, fighting to abolish ethnicity-based decision-making in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Its current leader is Predrag Kojovic (elected in 2015 and re-elected in 2019), a Serb from the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and a member of the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Nasa Stranka’s election programmes reflect its strong support for certain liberal economic ideas such as the concepts of: free market and free trade, deregulation, smart privatization, tax reductions for private companies, and public-private partnerships. On the other hand, as progressive liberals, its members also support free education and healthcare, as well as social services being made available to everyone. Nasa Stranka also advocates a reduction in the country's enormous administration which according to them would significantly improve the economic situation in BiH. In contrast to ethnic-based parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Nasa Stranka advocates that the development of economic interests and free markets are the main integration mechanism for any society. The party is also well known for its gender equality achievements, with more than 50 per cent of its elected officials being women.

In 2016, Nasa Stranka became affiliated to the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe Party and received full membership with voting rights in the ALDE Party in October 2019. The membership in the ALDE Party helped create a clearer ideological framework for future party policies, but also helped the increase of the party's domestic and international influence, especially during the last two election cycles.

The first elections Nasa Stranka participated in were the 2008 local elections when it won 24 seats in different municipal and city councils and its candidate Ermin Hajder became the municipal mayor of Bosanski Petrovac. The 2010 general elections were a bump on its path. After poor results – only 2 seats in the Sarajevo canton assembly – the party could not sustain its nation-wide local infrastructure so its new leadership decided to concentrate party finances on its strongholds (Sarajevo and other urban areas) for the upcoming elections. After that, the party achieved better results in both the 2012 local elections and the 2014 general elections. This led to the start of an ongoing expansion of the party’s local infrastructure, followed by a double increase of votes in the 2016 local elections, so Nasa Stranka became the fastest growing party in the country.

In the 2018 general elections the party achieved its best result: 10 seats in five different cantonal assemblies (compared to three seats in only the Sarajevo cantonal assembly in 2014), six seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliament of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (one seat in 2014) and two seats in the House of Representatives of the Parliamentary Assembly of BiH (no seats in 2014). For the first time in its history, the party had a candidate for the presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Unfortunately, Borisa Falatar, who ran for the Croat position in the presidency, lost this race. Sadly, the party is still underrepresented in the Republika Srpska entity, Brcko District and parts of the country with a Croat majority and changing this is one of the main goals of Nasa Stranka for the upcoming two election cycles.

Becoming the second strongest party in the Sarajevo region, in December 2018 Nasa Stranka formed a programme-based, broad coalition government in the Sarajevo canton with five other parties from both sides of the political spectrum. As one of two senior partners in the coalition, Nasa Stranka claimed the position of prime minister for its then vice-president Edin Forto, as well as the positions of minister of justice and administration (Lejla Brcic) and minister of communal
services (Srdjan Mandic). Efforts made by the Nasa Stranka-led government to fight corruption and maximise the transparency of its work were widely acclaimed (even an article about it was published in the Financial Times on 13 August 2019\(^1\)). The government proposed anti-corruption activities and legislation, especially the new Law on Property of Public Officials of Sarajevo Canton\(^2\) which was later adopted by the cantonal assembly. Its measures were supported by citizens, as well as by foreign ambassadors, local civil society organisations and international organisations. Unfortunately, due to political power struggles, two parties left the coalition by the end of 2019 and their lawmakers joined the right-wing Party of Democratic Action (SDA) to form a new majority in the Sarajevo cantonal assembly. Regardless of its high approval ratings, the government led by Forto was ousted by the new majority and a new government was appointed at the beginning of March 2020. Nevertheless, it is still believed to have been one of the most popular governments of all time in the country.

As for the 2020 local elections, the party aims to continue its vote increase and winning mayoral positions.

\(^1\) [https://www.ft.com/content/68419cb0-8836-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2](https://www.ft.com/content/68419cb0-8836-11e9-a028-86cea8523dc2).

\(^2\) [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CD4LacDTN-CX Ae0aSzMW0D22-SXAPPOd/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1CD4LacDTN-CX Ae0aSzMW0D22-SXAPPOd/view).
Answers to questions on transparency
Before addressing the questions, it is necessary to consider Nasa Stranka’s current communication practices regarding: internal and external communication, financial reporting, and decision-making. This is based on interviews conducted with the following Nasa Stranka staff members: the party’s technical secretary, head of the public relations department and head of the administration department.

How easy is it for citizens to contact Nasa Stranka and find out information about its decisions or contact party functions?

All three have reported that it is generally very easy to find out information and much easier to reach party officials of all levels compared to other political parties. This has a lot to do with both the party’s intention to keep communications open most of the time with all interested parties, but also with the fact that it is still a fairly small organisation, which certainly makes things easier.

The technical secretary is always easy to reach via email, telephone or for visitors. He then directs all inquiries to persons he thinks can provide the most information. Besides this usual route of communication, the public relations department mostly gets inquiries via direct messages on social media platforms and it makes sure it finds the right answers within 24 hours.

Financial reports can be found on the party website; but some details about the party finances cannot be seen, such as information on the amounts of party membership fees paid by each member individually. Also the personal data of individual members cannot be disclosed in any of the reports, unless it is data about elected officials, which is mostly made available to the general public.

What are the main challenges for Nasa Stranka, and political parties in general, to increasing transparency and improving current communications, financial reporting and decision-making practices?

When it comes to the responsibilities of the party departments in charge of communication and financial reporting, all of those interviewed mentioned the departments being too understaffed to develop adequate internal and external communication strategies and the lack of additional party financing for outsourcing the development of these strategies. This is due to the fact that Nasa Stranka is still a young and inexperienced political party with a small network and smaller presence in parliaments compared to other parties which have larger organisations and, more importantly, much larger budgets. The upside of being a small organisation is that the top-bottom approach of communication is still much more efficient than in larger organisations, because it is easier to reach everybody and to connect members and citizens direct to all of the party’s departments as well as its leadership.

The technical secretary is in charge of distributing minutes and transcripts from party bodies in charge of decision-making to local party branches, whose technical secretaries then are supposed to send them to their branches’ members. The headquarters’ technical secretary reported occasions in which minutes and transcripts were leaked to the media or to other parties, who then used them to create negative articles in the tabloid media they controlled. Even though these transcripts and minutes are easily accessible and usually do not contain sensitive information, they were used as the basis for spinning some recent party decisions and spreading propaganda against Nasa Stranka. Leaked email correspondence between party officials and committee members has also landed in the media on one or two occasions.

3 Only the entire amount of money collected through membership fees is listed.
Political Party Transparency in the Western Balkans

The head of the public relations department also reported feeling ambiguous about the size and inexperience of the party, seeing it both as the main reason for the lack of a clear professional communications strategy, but also as an advantage because it makes it easier to create clear messages through communication channels that are shorter than in larger parties. He said that the content and information quality and format Nasa Stranka is able to produce in its external communications is visibly much better compared to other parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The misuse of leaked information is always a challenge for crisis communication and the department in general and, although damage can be decreased through higher levels of transparency, misuse of any internal communication has not been prevented by the implementation of such measures. He found it hard to examine the efficiency of the current communication strategy. Due to a lack of additional funds, the party cannot undergo such research, so the strategy may not be adequately adjusted in a way that both efficiency and transparency are increased.

The head of the administration department said that the financial reporting is very transparent because the law requires it; but some financial aspects that are not covered by the law cannot be published, for example private information on individual members or other aspects that are considered confidential and crucial for party business and contain information that can be seriously misused. For her it was also very difficult to explain to potential donors that their names had to be disclosed in financial reports because it is required by the law and the party regulations, which sometimes turns a lot of them away from the idea of making a contribution.

What do you think are the reasons for the global and regional decline of trust in political parties?

All three shared the same thought while answering the question: irresponsible actions by some parties have shed a bad light on all political organisations. This makes everyone mistrust every single political party not just in Bosnia and Herzegovina but also in the region and the rest of the world. They reported that this makes it challenging for party staffers, who try to make a change, to convince members of the sincerity and long-term benefits of the measures such as those mentioned above that they try to push, both internally and externally, as well as measures proposed by Nasa Stranka officials in parliaments and governments.

Which challenges were encountered when it comes to attempts to increase transparency?

What happens a lot – which is a concrete challenge all three tended to encounter – are random and unfounded questions and inquiries from citizens about all kinds of matters unrelated to party politics, such as: inquiring about job opportunities for their children (even though Nasa Stranka tends to do all its hiring publicly though open calls); pleading for recommendation letters from prominent members, such as the Academy Award winning film director and writer Danis Tanovic; and asking for charity. But people also demand information the party cannot provide for the simple reason that nobody in the party has such information. All three feel that this is due to the fact that the political system of Bosnia and Herzegovina is too complicated for citizens to understand, so they usually do not know the roles of opposing and ruling parties and they also get very confused about all the different levels of jurisdiction in the country.

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4 As mentioned in article 13 of the Nasa Stranka constitution.
Current practices in Nasa Stranka
The technical secretary of Nasa Stranka is the first person you reach when dialling the party and the first one to meet you when you enter the party headquarters. He is also responsible for communicating with local branches via email and phone, and informing chairs and technical secretaries of local branches about top-level decisions since they are the ones who distribute the information to their members. Communication about current events and decision-making is being done through a top-bottom approach and mostly with the help of the technical secretary.

He reported dealing with questions from citizens and other interested parties many times a day as external communication happens on a daily basis. In terms of internal communication, he informs local party branches and its members about everything that has happened in the headquarters at least five times a week but usually even more frequently.

The public relations department of Nasa Stranka does not communicate direct with all of the members that much, as the head of that department explained. But it does communicate on a daily basis with the media, as well as with party officials. The only direct channel of communication that this department has with all the members is a newsletter it tends to send out on a monthly basis via email. It communicates with members and voters mostly through social media and traditional media at least three times a day. Questions and inquiries from citizens and other parties that reach the department tend to get answered in 24 hours or less, but mostly as soon as possible. The department is not involved much in the decision-making processes; however, it reports about all relevant decisions the party leadership deems should be communicated to the general public.

When it comes to financial reporting, the head of the administration department knows all about the procedures required by law and party documents, and she is the one who makes sure all is done by the book, together with the secretary general and with the help of services provided by a hired external accounting agency. Since political parties in Bosnia and Herzegovina are mostly funded by state, entity and local public budgets, yearly reports are sent to the Tax Administration of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Financial Intelligence Agency (by 28 February for the previous year), as well as to the country’s Central Election Commission (by end of March for the previous year).

Besides the yearly reports, regular quarterly reports sent to the government of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina must show how and where the money transferred out of the federal budget to the political party has been spent. A financial plan for spending future tranches has to be submitted as well, both on a yearly and a quarterly basis. Yearly reports are sent out to some local governments and administrations, such as to the administration of the city of Sarajevo, even though most of them never officially ask for reports.

In terms of internal financial reporting, financial reports and budget proposals are sent first to the party presidency and the supervisory board for approval. After that, they reach the main committee which makes the final decision about all financial documents of the party. All these documents are prepared by the secretary general. This is regulated by the party’s constitutional acts and other party financial regulations. Various financial plans and budget proposals are implemented up to three times a year, and during election periods it can happen more often. This is usually done if changes to financial dealings are necessary. Financial reporting is also a two-way communication between the headquarters and the regional and local branches and it is done on a monthly, six-monthly and yearly basis.

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5 Law on Political Party Financing in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Income Tax Law of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Nasa Stranka is a parliamentary party represented only in the entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina).
As required by law, financial reports are also published and can be found both on the party website together with all of the other party documents\(^6\), as well as on the website of the Central Electoral Commission.

**Nasa Stranka’s good practice examples:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice example</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Result</th>
<th>Main challenge</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sharing information with all party members using a top-bottom approach.</td>
<td>Making sure information and decisions made on all levels reach every member.</td>
<td>Members feel informed and included. They also feel more confident when responding to questions and comments of voters, but also of critics.</td>
<td>As the party organisation becomes larger, it becomes harder to control the flow of valid information. Adjustments have to be made continuously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessing and addressing every inquiry, no matter whether it comes by phone, post, email or social media, within no more than 24 hours.</td>
<td>Making sure open communication with citizens and other interested parties is kept all the time.</td>
<td>Voters, potential voters and other citizens feel more involved in party decisions and closer to the information source, if addressed directly.</td>
<td>Communication channels that are completely open to the public sometimes can be misused.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial reports posted online.</td>
<td>A party which feels free to expose its own finances in a public manner is therefore felt to be more trustworthy.</td>
<td>Political parties are financed by the state, so citizens know how the money is being spent and feel the party can be trusted with their money.</td>
<td>Financial information can be misused to potentially cause damage to the party, if such intentions exist.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Continuous education of staff and members on transparency.</td>
<td>Staff and party members who are aware of the importance of transparency.</td>
<td>Transparency is available to everybody on all levels of communication.</td>
<td>Depends heavily on staff selection and individual eagerness to learn.</td>
</tr>
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<td>Official email addresses and cloud platforms.</td>
<td>Easy-to-find contacts and documents.</td>
<td>Members, voters, citizens and media find it fairly easy to reach the party at all times.</td>
<td>Communication channels and documents sometimes tend to be misused.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making it easy to reach high-level party officials.</td>
<td>Making sure an open communication with citizens and other interested parties is kept all the time.</td>
<td>Voters, potential voters and other citizens feel more involved in party decisions and closer to party officials.</td>
<td>As the party organisation becomes larger with time, adjustments have to be made for this to continue.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Data about elected and appointed officials made public.</td>
<td>Making sure voters and citizens know as a lot as possible about all of their representatives.</td>
<td>When information about party officials is already made public, voters feel they can find it easily at any time.</td>
<td>All information can be misused to cause damage to the party.</td>
</tr>
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</table>

\(^6\) Search www.nasaastranka.ba under Documents.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
When talking about challenges, besides the intention for open and transparent communications, a lot comes down to having the right staff in the headquarters, the regional and the local branches who can deliver. A concrete example occurred when Nasa Stranka introduced new official email addresses and a cloud platform for all documents, and some staffers in the local branches were not technically educated enough to grasp this change and had a difficult time accessing some information. This obstacle was overcome with continuous communication between the headquarters and the local branches. Seminars and continuing education on the importance of transparent and open communications and measures for its achievement, made available to all parties in the country, can lead to an increase in awareness about political transparency.

Losing power, and not being in power in general, puts political parties in a difficult position in Bosnia and Herzegovina when it comes to accessing correct information which they can share with their members, constituents, other citizens and the general public. Since a party in opposition finds it harder to inform the general public, ensuring transparent governance is key to making sure all political parties can be held accountable when they are not open to the public. This can be done by adopting laws to force government officials and elected representatives to keep the public informed at all times, such as the one implemented by the government of the Sarajevo canton that was mentioned above.

Laws that control financial reporting ensure a level of transparency when it comes to the finances of parties, who tend to work within the law. For those which choose to break them, stricter control and implementation of anti-corruption measures are necessary. Since this is a good practice, it can be adapted to other areas of political party activities, such as their decision-making and information on party officials. Legislation that controls other party activities, similar to the one on financial reporting, could be implemented.

Since understaffed departments seemed to be the biggest obstacle to Nasa Stranka’s intention to implement more transparency measures, it is hoped the party will become a much larger organisation in 10 years with much more financial and organisational resources to help tackle these challenges. This would solve the problem of a lack of a proper communications strategy and enough staff to cover all necessary functions well and keep the transparency of the party at a high level. The technical secretary would have more high-quality people to provide services to an increasing number of local branches. The public relations department would have its own photographer, speech writer, copy writer, and spokesperson, as well as an entire subdepartment for digital media. A party that has held more positions of power would also generate content of even higher quality and provide more information to the general public. The administration would hire another person to assist the head of the department to provide the necessary services to the much larger organisation that Nasa Stranka is possibly to become.

The global and regional decline in trust towards political parties has created many challenges for parties like Nasa Stranka which try to implement measures to increase transparency and create trust amongst their leadership, members and the general public. Therefore, making political parties increase the transparency of their work, decision-making and financial reporting is the only approach that can ensure long-term results in the fight against political party-related corruption and nepotism – burning issues that are considered to be the main obstacle for the development of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the entire Western Balkan region.
Serb Democratic Party (SDS)

By: Stevan Salatic

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
The Serb Democratic Party (SDS) was established on 12 July 1990 as a national democratic party of the Serb people in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). In the first multiparty elections in 1991, the SDS won the largest number of votes among the Serbian people in BiH. During its 30 years of existence, the Serb Democratic Party has participated in all elections and has had very remarkable results.

From 1991 to 1997 and 2000 to 2005, the Serb Democratic Party was the ruling party in Republika Srpska. Since 2005, it has been the largest opposition party in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. In the last parliamentary elections, the Serb Democratic Party won more than 123,000 votes and took 16 seats in the National Assembly of Republika Srpska. Currently, the Serb Democratic Party forms the government in 17 local communities in Republika Srpska.

Today, the Serb Democratic Party is a modern centre-right national democratic party with significant cooperation with the European Union’s European People’s Party and its members. In 2016, the SDS sent a letter to the leadership of the European People’s Party expressing its aspirations to become a member. In 2020, the SDS will celebrate 30 years since its foundation, and on this occasion we will announce a new party programme for the future.

The sector for media and politics is an organisational unit of the secretariat of the Serb Democratic Party whose main job is to communicate with the public. The main organisation of affairs and responsibilities is prescribed in the 2016 constitution of the Serb Democratic Party.

The political and media sector performs the following tasks:

- Analyse political processes and media coverage;
- Monitor, analyse and report to the president and the secretary-general on current political events and media coverage of these events;
- Implement the party communications strategy;
- Create and implement annual communications plans and action plans for the strategy;
- Advise the president of the party on matters of media advertising and public appearances;
- Coordinate the communication process between the party secretariat and the municipal committees;
- Coordinate and monitor the work of the economic and social council;
- Coordinate and monitor the work of line committees; and
- Create political messages and send them to the public.

All party communication activities with the public during the 2018 election campaign were coordinated by the media team at the general election headquarters, the political and media sector, as well as by all people involved in party communications (ministers and chief spokespersons in the municipalities, communication officers as well as persons in charge of communications in the municipal/city election headquarters of the party).

The political and media sector at the secretariat of the Serb Democratic Party was the central point of the party’s communication with the public in the last election campaign. Additional support for the work of the sector was provided by the agency that managed the campaign for the SDS, as well as by a photographer hired from a local municipal committee of the party.

It is expected that a critical review will be completed shortly of the best practices in rapid responses by the party to media inquiries during an election campaign. An analysis of crisis communications during the last campaign will provide information on which practices for rapid
responses by the party were considering best by civil society and the media. The paper will de-
scribe which channels of communication are fastest for providing information to the public, and
it will also describe ways to successfully promote party policies on the internet and to conduct
two-way party communications with citizens. The purpose of this review is to determine how
a political party can communicate with the public transparently and successfully with the aim
of presenting major party messages to the public and receiving feedback.
Answers to questions on transparency
The principle of transparency, as one of the fundamental principles of the European Union, suggests that every decision important to the public should be available to everyone. Transparency, in a business or governance context, involves honesty and openness. Transparency and accountability are generally considered the two main pillars of good corporate governance. Policy transparency should be implemented at all levels of governance. The government of the Republika Srpska adopted a law on free access to information in 2001. Its purposes are:

(a) To establish that information under the control of a public authority constitutes a public good and that public access to this information promotes greater transparency and the responsibility of these public authorities, and that this information is necessary for the democratic process;
(b) To establish that every person has the right of access to this information to the fullest to the extent possible in accordance with the public interest, and that the public authorities have an appropriate one an obligation to disclose information, and
(c) To allow any individual to request a change, and to comment on his or her personal information under the control of a public authority.

The most important organisation involved in promoting the principle of transparency in Republika Srpska is Transparency International. In cooperation with the Central Election Commission, this institution monitors the transparency of public institutions in Republika Srpska and reacts when transparency is compromised.

The Serb Democratic Party is guided by the principle of transparency and advocates publicity for its work. Article 95 of the constitution of the Serb Democratic Party says:

The SDS shall organise its operations with consistent application of the principles of accountability, legality and transparency.

Also in its programme, the SDS mentions the word “transparency” in 13 sections (from parliamentary work and work of control bodies to judicial transparency).

The party announces its policies through official channels of communications. Through these channels, communications by the SDS with the public are daily and two-way.

The central channels for the Serb Democratic Party’s communications are:
2. SDS Facebook Page - https://www.facebook.com/srpskademokratskastranka/
3. SDS Twitter Profile - https://twitter.com/sdsrscom
4. Instagram SDS Profile - www.instagram.com/sds.rs/
5. SDS YouTube Channel - “SDS Info Serb Democratic Party”

The party’s website launched on 20 April 2017 is much more functional and usable than its previous one. In 2018, it was the most read and visited newsletter of a political organisation in Bosnia and Herzegovina according to alexa.com, a website for measuring website visits.

Through official channels, the SDS communicates daily with the public. However, official party-communication is not enough, so we will explain below how the officials of the Serb Democratic Party can contribute more to the party’s public transparency.

1 https://whatis.techtarget.com/definition/transparency.
3 http://www.transparency.org/
4 http://www.sdsrs.com/UcitaneSlike/admin/Statut_SDS.pdf
5 http://www.sdsrs.com/UcitaneSlike//admin/Program_SDS.pdf
Current practices in Serb Democratic Party
In order to make it more accessible to the public during the election year, the Serb Democratic Party took a number of steps to modernise its communication system in the year leading up to the 2018 election.

Its sector for media and politics undertook the following activities during the last election campaign:

- Created a network (list) of communication channels (media) and contact persons, from the local level to the entity and BiH levels, through which information was disseminated in order to assess the relevance of a topic to a specific population. With the media on this list, the Serb Democratic Party defined the rules of cooperation during the election campaign and leased media advertising space through these contracts.
- Created a network of reactive and proactive communication channels during the election campaign:
  1. The proactive channels of communication included such forms as: briefings, interviews, a public campaign “Contract with the People”, and appearances of SDS officials on television shows, specialised publications (SDS Programme) and other media content, working visits of the officials of the party to the municipalities, active campaign by party website, and email networking.
  2. The reactive channels of communication during the election campaign were immediate and the party’s reactions through proactive channels of communication were strategically designed although, due to a lack of human capacity, this segment could have been much more active in the election campaign.
  3. During the election campaign, the sector for media and politics adapted communication tasks to new technological solutions, using modern tools of communication and dialogue-creation (infographics, videos, pictures, animated content).
- Active participation in all the public forums in the 58 municipalities and cities of Republika Srpska. Together with partners from the coalition Alliance for Victory, the head of the sector for media and politics conducted all the technical and media activities that the Serb Democratic Party and the Alliance for Victory had during the pre-election forums. The SDS political and media sector reported on time to the public all of the major messages from the pre-election forums of the Alliance for Victory.
- During the 2018 election campaign, the sector for media and politics actively participated in the drafting and implementation of the “Contract with Citizens” campaign aimed at direct communications for the citizens of Republika Srpska with presidential candidate Vukota Govedarica. During the month of September, more than 130,000 people signed the contract with the presidential candidate.

During the period from 1 January 2018 to 31 December 2018 the sector for media and politics published over 700 press releases promoting SDS views on important political issues. Particularly prominent were the activities of the Serb Democratic Party during the election campaign, when the sector for media and politics immediately informed the public after each event. For this purpose, 24-hour monitoring of the activities of the expert bodies and officials of the Serb Democratic Party was organised.
The activities of the former president Vukota Govedarica and other SDS members were promoted on a daily basis on the SDS official website and on social networks.

The Vukota Govedarica Facebook page has received a lot of followers in a short time. This channel of communication was the focal point of the 2018 presidential election campaign. In addition to the Facebook page, an Instagram page was opened, which in a short time became very influential with the younger population.

The head of the sector for media and politics participated in the election headquarters of the Serb Democratic Party presidential candidate Vukota Govedarica and, through his work, managed, created messages, supervised and coordinated all media activities of the presidential candidate.

We actively participated in the creation of the basic messages and programmes of the presidential candidate and fully managed the internet promotion of the presidential candidate.

All requests from the media, invitations to media appearances and press inquiries have been timely answered by the sector for media and politics since its formation until today.

The sector for media and politics drafted a crisis communication plan, which was repeatedly implemented during 2018, both during the pre-election period and during the campaign period for the general election.

During the pre-campaign, the sector for media and politics participated in the writing of two very important campaign documents for the 2018 general elections, namely: Campaign Message Box 2018, and “Answer Tricky Questions” for candidates. The SDS political and media sector sent these documents to all SDS candidates so that they would be aware of the official views of the Serb Democratic Party on sensitive social issues.

Using modern communication technologies (infographics, videos, images and other forms of online communication), the Serb Democratic Party presented itself as a transparent political group with clear policies and recognisable politicians during the election campaign.

Through acting on the internet, mostly through social networks, the party’s presidential candidate identified himself as a modern politician who is available to the public at all times. During the election campaign, the public always had a timely and clear answer to every question. Online communications during the 2018 election campaign demonstrated that social networks are the fastest and best way to communicate with both the media and the public.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
In order to improve communications with the media and contribute to greater transparency of the party’s work in the future, it is necessary to improve the following elements of the campaign:

- Officials of the Serb Democratic Party (above all members of the SDS presidency and expert bodies) must design weekly media activities and respond personally to the public. First of all, attention should be paid to promoting the benefits of the policies and practices of the party at the local level.

- Officials of the Serb Democratic Party (above all members of the SDS presidency and expert bodies) should be available to defend the official policies of the party at any time.

- Rapid Response Team: It is necessary to identify a group of functionaries who should respond to all public inquiries made to the Serb Democratic Party. The reaction should be written and immediate and logistical support for this activity should be provided by the sector for media and politics.

- A greater presence of SDS functionaries on social networks is required. The purpose of Facebook and Instagram, as the largest and most important social networks, is direct communication with individuals. Facebook pages and Instagram profiles have been shown to be significantly more interactive when they are linked to a person with a first or last name rather than a party account. Therefore, it is necessary to create a Facebook page and Instagram accounts for several SDS officials that will be updated daily. It is recommended that these sites be maintained by people who are close to the SDS functionaries as they are able to publicise current developments and respond to people’s inquiries. In this way, the media can also ask questions through social networks, and they can get an official party position on a matter in just a few minutes.

- Greater Instagram presence: Instagram has proven to be the fastest growing social network, so it is necessary to step up the party’s Instagram activity. As Instagram is a personalised social network used primarily by the younger generation, it is necessary to create Instagram accounts for our young MPs and mayors. Young people are informed via Instagram and young MPs and mayors can answer all the questions of the young population on Instagram very easily.

Greater presence of party officials on social networks as well as their availability to the media through a “quick response” system will contribute to greater transparency in the party’s work. The first requirement of transparency is accessibility, and I believe the SDS through the availability of our most important representatives can contribute to the public’s understanding of the SDS as a transparent political party.
Movement for Self-Determination

By: Kreshnik Ahmeti

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
Lëvizja VETËVENDOSJE! (Movement for Self-Determination) was founded over 14 years ago, based on the conviction that freedom means little if people have no choice in the path for their collective future. The Movement for Self-Determination believes that, in a democracy, political rights and human rights should go hand in hand with economic rights. Therefore, in our political programme we emphasise centre-left policies that seek economic development and combat unemployment through a production-based economy, investment in education and training, and a fair redistribution of income through progressive taxation.

In recent years, the Movement for Self-Determination has experienced a high growth in support, doubling its seats in parliament in 2017 and winning the elections in 2019. Since 3 February 2020, it has led the government of the Republic of Kosovo in a coalition with Lidhja Demokratike e Kosovës (Democratic League of Kosovo).

Through this paper, I intend to describe the best practices that the Movement for Self-Determination uses regarding internal democracy and financial transparency. I believe that these two practices had a major influence on the growth of the Movement for Self-Determination and in raising the transparency standard of the political landscape in the Republic of Kosovo.

The questions that I will try to answer in this paper are the following:

- How easy is it for citizens to contact your political party and find out information about party decisions or contact party functions?
- How often and in which way does your party communicate with members (internally) and with the general public (externally)?
- What are examples of good transparency practices in your political party (for example, disclosure of funding, candidate selection, internal democracy)?
- How have debates about transparency and openness of political parties influenced public perceptions of politics in your country?

The Movement is organised in three levels: the first level called “the Point”, is the territorial organisation in a village or urban neighbourhood; the second level, called “the Centre” is the territorial organisation in a municipality; and the third level is the national level, which consists of the general council, the presidency, and the president1.

In non-electoral periods, according to our party constitution, all the levels have periodic meetings. The Point meets at least once a month. All the members of the Movement who live in the area that the specific Point covers can take part in the meeting. Every month, officials from the second (municipal councillors/directors or the mayor) and third level (members of the parliament, minister, prime minister, and others) join these meetings in which they report to and discuss with the members of the Point.

1 https://www.vetevendosje.org/organogrami/.
The Centre, which is the second level of the territorial organisation of the Movement, has two main forums: the Centre’s council, and the Centre’s presidency. The council of the Centre consists of delegates from the Point, and meets at least once every three months. Beside the organisational discussions and decisions, the council of the Centre also discusses national and municipal issues. The second important forum in the second level is the presidency of the Centre, which is elected by the council of the Centre. The presidency, which is the highest body between council meetings, meets at least once every two weeks and it discusses and takes decisions on a variety of local political and operational issues.

Lastly, we have the third level, which consists of two important forums: the general council and the presidency of the Movement. The general council meets at least once every three months and it consists of delegates from each Centre council, members of the parliament, mayors from the Movement for Self-Determination and the prime minister and ministers from the Movement for Self-Determination. The most important organisational and political issues are tackled in the general council. Between meetings of the general council, the presidency is the highest body and it meets at least once every two weeks. The presidency is elected by the general council.
Answers to questions on transparency
These are the systematic mechanisms through which the Movement communicates internally with its members. Besides these, there are also other activities where members meet each other, such as: movie screenings and discussions, book clubs, the internal political schools, open discussions on different topics organised by the professional committees and recreational activities. Until now, in Kosovo it is only the Movement for Self-Determination that practices transparency and direct democracy/referendums in internal affairs. They are used for decisions such as: electing the president of the Movement; electing the president of the Centre; establishing pre-election coalitions at the national level; and establishing coalitions at the national level.

Regarding local elections, every member can propose her/himself or some other member to be voted as a candidate for the municipal council or for the mayor’s office. Depending on the number of members, each Point has a specific number of proposals it can send to the Centre’s council to be voted for the Movement for Self-Determination’s list of candidates for municipal council. The Centre’s council, after gathering all the proposals from its Points, discusses and votes on the final list, which is then approved by the general council. On the other hand, all the candidates for mayor go through a direct democracy voting procedure in their respective Centres. Regarding the general elections, three quarters of the candidates for parliament are elected by the Centre councils and one quarter is elected by the president of the Movement. All the members can propose themselves or someone else to be part of the list of candidates for the parliament. The whole list is then approved in the general council and finally the ranking of the candidates in the list is decided by the presidency of the Movement. The candidate for prime minister is elected by the general council.

All of these procedures are monitored by the general internal election commission and the respective internal election commissions of each Centre, and the Central Election Commission of the Republic is invited to monitor the procedures. For the procedures of direct democracy/referendum, the voting centres open in most of the Points and all of the Centres, and stay open for 12 hours. After the verification and counting of the votes, and complaint procedures, all the results are made public and every member is informed.
Current practices in the Movement for Self-Determination
The Movement has a variety of channels through which citizens can contact its officials and through which they can request and gain information about our decisions.

In a more active approach, we communicate with citizens through our Movement bodies such as the secretary of external and international relations, professional committees, the secretariat for media and communications and our Centres, which are the territorial organisations in a municipality.

Through our secretary of external and international relations, we link citizens who are organised in worker’s unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), with our Movement’s officials and provide them information regarding our decisions. The secretary of external and international relations communicates on a daily basis with such categories of our society and organises systematic meetings between him/her and the relevant Movement officials, such as members of the parliament, councillors, ministers, worker’s unions and/or NGOs. The secretary of external and international relations is an ex officio member of the Movement’s presidency and participates in parliamentarian group meetings in order to raise issues from the Worker’s Unions and NGOs to the highest levels of discussion in the Movement.

Besides the secretary of external and international relations, there are also the professional committees which link professionals and academics with our Movement and our Movement’s officials in the municipal council/executive, members of the parliament and officials in the central government. The work of the professional committees results in documents that are proposed by our councillors or members of the parliament and/or by our directors, mayors, ministers and the prime minister. Membership in the Movement is not required to belong to the professional committees, which creates the opportunity for all the independent professionals and academics to contribute through the monthly meetings that each committee holds.

Another channel of communication is public meetings. Such meetings are common in our country during electoral campaigns; but one of the things that has set the Movement for Self-Determination apart from the other political organisations is that we organise public meetings on a regular basis. During non-electoral periods, we organise small public meetings which are held in houses and classrooms, and which have a territorial aspect to them, meaning that the participants are members of the village or the neighbourhood where the meeting is being held, regardless of their profession or party affiliation. In these meetings a variety of issues are discussed by the panel, which usually consists of three Movement officials: one from the village/neighbourhood, one from the second level (councillor/director/mayor), and one from the third level (member of the parliament, minister, prime minister, and others). These public meetings are organised by the secretariat for activities, which functions in the third level of the Movement, and is replicated in all of the Centres in Kosovo.

There are also public and individual meetings that our officials, who hold different positions in local or national institutions, have with citizens. Those are organised by the local/national institution, by the Movement, or by the official on her/his own.

A more distant way of communicating with the public is by our daily official news releases, coordinated individual statements by our officials, and answers to the requests of the media regarding a variety of issues. This dimension of public relations is taken care of by the secretariat for media and communication, which works on the third level of the Movement and is replicated in a similar but smaller way in all of the Centres. The secretariat for media and communication is in constant contact with journalists and its responsibility is to coordinate the communication between them and our officials, but most importantly it is to provide a consistent political response from all of our officials.
A more passive approach of providing information and coordinating meetings with citizens is the regular function of our offices in 30 municipalities in the Republic of Kosovo. All of them open at 9:00am and stay open at least until 5:00pm. On a daily basis citizens approach our officials in these offices and require a variety of information. The addresses of these offices and the contact details of their managers are public on the Movement’s website.

Another passive approach is communication through our website. Every important document and all the public statements are stored and made public on the website. Hence, any citizen or organisation can access them easily.

The activities of the Movement for Self-Determination are financed from four sources:
- the Democratisation Fund given by the Central Election Commission of the Republic of Kosovo;
- membership fees;
- donations;
- contributions from its members of the parliament.

Every parliamentary political party receives money from the Democratisation Fund from the Central Election Commission. This is a fund allocated based on the number of seats that the parties have in the parliament. The fund is distributed quarterly and is the main source of the Movement for Self-Determination’s budget.

The second channel is the membership fees that are paid by our members. The fee is 50 euro cents a month, and members who are in difficult financial circumstances are exempt from payment.

The third channel is the donations, which are small in amount, but large in volume. According to the law, the Movement for Self-Determination does not accept financial donations in cash. They are accepted through the banking system, either by donating them in the bank physically or by donating them online, and in Kosovo it is only the Movement for Self-Determination that uses the latter method.

- In years when there are no elections, on average the percentage of funding by each source is: 97 per cent from the Democratisation Fund, two per cent from donations (financial and in-kind), and one per cent from membership fees.
- In election years it is: 86 per cent from the democratization fund, 13 per cent from donations, and one per cent from membership fees.

Another source of finance is the contributions that our members of the parliament make. Since their wages and benefits can reach up to €2,000 a month, which is high compared to the low average wage in our country, our members of the parliament contribute to the Movement for Self-Determination whatever amount that exceeds €1,400 as their income per month. The contribution is done by employing staff through their personal income that exceeds €1,400, who then work for the parliamentary group or for the organisation of the Movement. Besides helping the operations of the Movement, this also fosters an environment of solidarity within the organisation.

2 https://www.vetevendosje.org/qendrat-e-vetevendosjes/
3 https://donacion.vetevendosje.org/sq/.
The Movement for Self-Determination reports annually to the Central Elections Committee and regularly publishes these reports on its website. Beside this, the Movement for Self-Determination cooperates closely with external audits and also publishes their reports in its own website⁴.

Public opinion in the Republic of Kosovo has been dominated by the issue of the transparency and openness of political parties, especially because of the strong civil society in Kosovo. The Movement for Self-Determination has been part of these debates in a variety of forms, and has taken into account the recommendations that have come up from civil society. I believe that our growth as a political organisation and its rising influence as a political movement have also happened because of the influence that these debates have had on the public perceptions of politics in Kosovo.

Because of these debates, the public constantly requested higher standards of transparency and openness by the political parties. Since the transformation of our Movement from a civil organisation into an institutional political Movement in 2010, it has been clear that there are options in our political processes that can accomplish the transparency and openness requested by public opinion.

Besides showing that it is possible, I also believe that our practices have in many cases raised the standard and contributed to the general perception of transparency and openness.

The consistency of the Movement for Self-Determination in respecting the law and procedures on these two important issues, as it has been shown in this paper, has resulted in constant electoral and organisational growth.

In 2010, we had less than 5,000 members and 14 seats in the parliament. In 2020, we have more than 41,000 members, 31 seats in the parliament and lead the government of the Republic of Kosovo.

The correlation between transparency and openness, and the growth of the organisation has been a clear lesson that, above everything else, you need the trust of the people and that trust can only be gained by having legitimate finances, being transparent on how you spend, and being open to include a variety of opinions within the organisation.

The growth of our organisation is a positive sign, but it also brought us a new challenge: the coordination and consistency of the message. We have over 100 councillors, we govern two big municipalities, and we have 31 members of the parliament, six ministers, one deputy prime minister and the prime minister. This is a big and wide network of officials that the Movement’s organisation has to coordinate. Until now, we have successfully managed our network on our own, without outsourcing any management or services, even during election campaigns, and I believe that this is one of the biggest successes of our organisation. Currently, faced with a new situation regarding our grown network of officials, we felt the need to restructure our system and management. At such a crucial point in our Movement’s history, we have found a partner in the Westminster Foundation for Democracy (WFD) to cooperate with in advancing our structure in order to upgrade our public relations.

⁴ https://www.vetevendosje.org/publikimet_tax/raporte/.
At the time that this paper is being written, together with the WFD we are creating a new approach to the system and management within our organisation in order to coordinate our political message among all our branches, in all levels the organisation and in the institutions. This cooperation with the WFD is one of the best examples of how the discussion regarding the transparency and openness of political parties and the cooperation between political parties and civil society have contributed to the betterment of the public perception, and to the advancement of the political reality in the Republic of Kosovo.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
In conclusion, the Movement for Self-Determination does not have any major issues regarding financing and transparency.

One improvement that might take place in the future could be the digitalisation and the automation of our financial procedures and reporting. Most of the manual processes in our secretariat for finances could be substituted by a more sophisticated method, and I believe this is one of the points that we will be working in the future. Because of our rapid organisational growth, a more challenging issue that I see in the future is the issue of communication with and inclusion of our members. The structure and methods that have been used since 2010 are not up-to-date with the current situation. While we are working together with the WFD to create better communications with the officials who represent us in the institutions, we are undertaking ongoing structural reform in the organisation to create new channels and to use new methods of communication.

In 10 years, I believe that the Movement’s organisation will grow further, hence the number of our representatives will increase. This will put more burdens on the structure and it will inevitably require more sophisticated working methods. Because of this in 10 years I envisage an organisation that still uses the current principles of financing and respects the rules of transparency, but also one that uses contemporary technology to improve its internal communication which will result in a higher inclusion rate for our members in the discussions and processes of decision-making. I believe that the growth of the organisation, coupled with the use of contemporary technology, will lead the structural reforms and will carve out the future of the Movement for Self-Determination.
07

Alliance for Albanians

By: Omer Ajdini
Introduction
The Alliance for Albanians (AfA) was established in 2015 and it has since then been led by Ziadin Sela, MP. It is currently one of the main opposition political parties in the Albanian voting bloc in North Macedonia. It currently manages three municipalities and in the 2016 general elections, when it ran for the first time, it managed to get 16 per cent of the Albanian votes in North Macedonia. With its greatly increasing popularity, the AfA is expected to play a determining role in the next general elections.

Article 18 of the AfA’s constitution reads: “Alliance for Albanians offers a fully transparent and a democratic way of functioning”, which is appropriate when it comes to transparency. Therefore, this case study investigates the transparency of the AfA in three key dimensions—communications, financial transparency and internal party functioning—to examine whether Article 18 of its constitution has been implemented and to suggest possible improvements. Based on the perspectives of one of the leading members of the party, this case study examines the party’s practices and compares them to the best practices of other political parties in North Macedonia. It evaluates the effect this level of transparency/democracy has on the trust people have in the party.

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Answers to questions on transparency
How easy is it for citizens to contact your political party and find out information about party decisions or contact party functions?

There is a special section in the party’s constitution entitled “Information”. Article 24 in this section specifies the website as the primary means through which citizens get information about the party and its officials.

Article 24.3 specifies that the website has a special link designed for citizens to write to any party official; however, this link is not available yet. Nevertheless, the official email address of the party is available, and the technical secretary maintains it. Furthermore, the website provides options to connect to the party’s official Facebook and Twitter pages where its daily activities can be followed. However, the website does not provide an official party phone number that citizens could use to contact the party offices directly.

The headquarters of the AFA is in two locations, Skopje and Tetovo, and they are usually open on weekdays from 9am to 5pm so citizens can contact party representatives. Its offices in other cities and municipalities do not have specific operating hours even when they do exist as such, so they mainly serve as venues for meetings of party members, and during weekdays they are usually closed.

How good is this level of accessibility to contacts? This level of easiness is therefore to be compared to the biggest parties in the country. Table 1 shows the communication channels available to the public of four political parties in North Macedonia.

| Table 1 Means of communicating with party officials Internal functioning |
|-----------------------------|----------------|------------------|----------------|
| AfA  | DUI  | SDSM  | VMRO  |
| President | None | None | Phone, email, fax | None |
| Secretary General | Email, Facebook | Email, Phone, Fax | Phone, Fax, Mail | Facebook, Twitter |
| Central Committee members | Not disclosed on the website | Not disclosed on the website | Disclosed with biographies but no contact details | Disclosed with biographies but no contact details |
| Party officials in institutions | No biographies or contacts disclosed | No biographies or contacts disclosed | No biographies or contacts disclosed | No biographies or contacts disclosed |

How often and in which way does your party communicate with members (internally) and with the general public (externally)?

Its Facebook page is usually the primary means through which the party addresses citizens. There daily activities are usually posted and decisions communicated. In important matters such as coalitions or candidates for the parliament, the media are invited to press conferences at the headquarters.

Since the AFA has 12 departments for research, they tend to hold press conferences whenever the need presents itself. For instance, the Department of Ecology would hold a press conference if the air pollution exceeds a certain level. These matters are not regulated in the constitution and there are no criteria about when or how many press conferences should be held.
Since North Macedonia is not that large in terms of territory, communication with the members is often done by going to visits in their areas. For instance, in the last couple of months we went to almost every village and neighbourhood to meet with citizens and our members. For each meeting we published the time and venue on the Facebook page and the sessions we organized were usually interactive so citizens were able to ask questions and the party officials would answer. What we learnt from these meetings with the citizens was that although communicating through social media was important, it would not be a substitute for meeting people face to face as they did have many questions and concerns that they voiced in our meetings. Besides, we realized that the connection and contacts that we would make with the people in those meeting would increase the trust they had in us as they felt we cared about them and had nothing to hide since we were totally open to feedback and questions.

**What are the best practices your political party is currently using which help it be more open, transparent and responsive to constituents?**

There are many things we are implementing to be more democratic and open to citizens, such as the meetings in every location I mentioned above. Here I will mention two more examples which we consider to be some of the best practices in the country.

First, a good recent example of internal democracy would be the election of the head of the Youth Forum. The first Youth Conference was held on 3 November 2019 in Tetovo where there were around 600 delegates from across the country. All the delegates voted one by one in the ballot boxes and eventually the current head of the Youth Forum won by a margin of 29 votes over the second candidate. This process was generally deemed as one of the most democratic internal processes of the party and the lesson learned from that process was that internal democracy and competition do not really divide the party. On the contrary, since the process was transparent and correct there were no signs of disagreement over the outcome of the process and the opponents in the race continued to collaborate fully in the Youth Forum.

Secondly, in the process of drafting our electoral platform, at the beginning of January of this year we launched an online platform called “eArdhmja” (The Future) for citizens to suggest ideas to be included in our political platform. What we learned from this new practice was that openness to citizens was an added value as we received over 1,300 suggestions in different spheres such as education, healthcare, the economy, etc., and we received very good feedback from people who felt valued for having the chance to incorporate their ideas into a political platform.
How have debates about transparency and openness of political parties influenced public perceptions of politics in your country?

The lack of financial transparency among political parties in North Macedonia has been at the centre of the discourse in the past couple of years. VMRO-DPMNE in 2016 came under public scrutiny after SCOOP-Macedonia published a documentary alleging that it was the richest party in Europe, and it owned assets of up to €60 million while its officials continuously avoided the question1. Similarly, Movement Besa, that was founded in late 2014, also faced serious allegations about the source of their funds after it started running a campaign that exceeded the usual spending that people had witnessed until then. But again, none of the political parties ever disclosed the sources of their funds, which is believed to have contributed to the low public trust in political parties in North Macedonia2. The Alliance for Albanians has continuously faced a shortage of funds and it has up to now never come under public scrutiny regarding financial transparency.

Should political parties publish resumes/biographies of all candidates in local/national elections?

Our stance is that they should publish them. Article 24.4 of our constitution specifies that the website must have a section where the biographies of the leading members of each branch/municipality are posted, but unfortunately that is not available yet on the website. Neither are the biographies of the mayors of the three municipalities that are run by the AfA, although the website does contain the biographies of the high-ranking officials (vice presidents, general secretary, head of the Academy, head of the Women’s Assembly) but not the biographies of the head of the Youth Forum and the other 16 members of the Central Committee. Besides the biographies, the high-ranking officials have their email addresses and links to their Facebook profiles on the website (but not their phone numbers), so citizens have a way of getting in touch with them. For the upcoming elections we have not yet published the biographies of the candidates, but we will try to publish the biographies of the top 10 candidates in the lists for MPs.

Where do you see your political party in 10 years from now both in terms of organizational set-up but also in terms of improved communications, policy development and responsiveness to citizens’ needs?

Our vision for the next 10 years is to be a regional example when it comes to transparency, good governance and internal democracy. We hope to win the upcoming general elections and to prove to our citizens that we can govern better by giving opportunities to young people to govern.

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Current practices in the Alliance for Albanians
INTERNAL FUNCTIONING

The most important body is the Congress which is made of 650 to 700 delegates and is held every four years. The Congress decides major issues such as the constitution of the party and the president.

Then there is the Central Assembly which is the legislative organ of the party and is composed of one-third of the total number of the members of the Congress. It meets at least every six months and it deals with matters such as the constitution of the party and the list of candidates in elections, and it chooses the members of the Central Committee. The head of each branch of the AFA is automatically a member of the Central Assembly, and they are expected to disseminate information about the decisions that are made in the assembly to their respective branches, although the constitution does not mandate that. Article 249 of the constitution mandates that each branch has meetings at least once in two months.

After that comes the Central Committee which is the executive body of the party that meets more often and decides on important matters.

Finally comes the narrow leadership group that is made of the vice presidents, secretary general, heads of forums, the head of the Academy and the president of the party. This body is not recognized in the constitution, but it does function as a consultative body to the president.

The party’s strategies and decisions are mainly determined by the Central Committee which is the highest executive body of the party. It is composed of 23 members from almost all the municipalities where Albanians live in North Macedonia, although some municipalities do not yet have representatives. The Central Committee includes the head of the Women’s Assembly and the head of the Youth Forum. Article 111 of the constitution states that the Central Committee is obliged to meet whenever the need presents itself, or a minimum of once in two months.

There is no specific written mechanism through which information is passed down to party members regarding the decisions that are made in the meetings of the Central Committee. However, the members of the Central Committee after each meeting are expected to go back and hold meetings of the branches in their respective municipalities and inform them about the decisions that were made. In cases where a municipality has no representative on the Central Committee, this duty falls on the vice president of the party representing that region.

Although internally it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the current system, I have realized that there are three challenges when it comes to internal functioning.

First, since some branches (municipalities) do not have representatives on the Central Committee yet, information is often not passed down properly as the vice presidents are usually busy and may not have time to call meetings in different branches.

Secondly, in some cases when the top leadership group is authorised to make decisions (such as in preparing the list of candidates for the parliament), trust in the leadership tends to erode as the membership of the party feels neglected and excluded from the decisionmaking process. Thirdly, since voting in the party is done through delegates (who are chosen by the sub-branches) the current leading members of the branches tend to create strong ties with the leading members of the sub-branches (neighbourhoods/villages) and that creates cliques that tend to retain power for a long time as their friends in the general assemblies of the branches select people who would vote for their friends. This way exclusive cliques are created and the party risks stagnation in growth and exclusion of valuable people.
FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY

The primary means of disclosing financial information is a party’s website, therefore in this section the information that is disclosed on websites of the parties is analysed and compared. The law on Free Access to Public Information that was passed in May 2019 in North Macedonia states that since political parties get funds from public money, the public has the right to information when it comes to the spending of that money. Therefore, all the regulations that apply to public institutions with regards to information also apply to political parties when it comes to finances that are received from the state. In this regard, the AfA publishes yearly financial reports where it discloses the money that it receives from the state as well as from membership fees. Also, all the expenses that it incurs throughout the year are disclosed in the form that it is obliged to publish on the website. Apart from the yearly reports of 2017 and 2018, the website of the party contains a financial report on the 2017 local elections. The 2019 report has not yet been published as the deadline for publishing it was extended due to the emergency created by COVID-19. Table 2 shows a comparison of financial transparency among four political parties in North Macedonia.

Table 2 Financial transparency of 4 political parties

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<th>AfA</th>
<th>DUI</th>
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<td>Donations by persons</td>
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<td>Reports from election cycles</td>
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Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
Although there are good practices in our party, there is still room for improvements in all the three areas we have discussed so far in order to achieve the vision we mentioned earlier. Here we list a few recommendations for potential improvements.

**TRANSPARENCY IN COMMUNICATION:**

First, the website needs to be redesigned and the biographies and contacts of all the 23 members of the Central Committee and the three mayors should be published for more transparency. Secondly, the party should have an official phone number and the website should contain the link to write to any party official.

Thirdly, the party offices in municipalities should have certain hours during the week when they are open so citizens can visit them. Implementing these three suggestions should make it a lot easier for citizens to get in touch with party officials and thus increase transparency.

**FINANCIAL TRANSPARENCY**

Although the AfA practices relatively good financial transparency, there are two areas which could be improved. First, the AfA should publish the list of donors (if there are any) that have contributed to the party so far, and secondly, the reports should be published in the Albanian language too, since there are citizens who may not be able to understand the report properly in Macedonian.

**INTERNAL WORKING**

Although we take pride of our internal democracy, there is still room for improvement if we are really to be a leading example in the region.

First, we should develop an online platform/portal where every member of the party has an account and can access information about decisions and vote on the decisions that the party makes. This method is practiced by Democracy in Europe 2025 (DiEM25) and it should be feasible soon for us to implement should we have the necessary resources.

Secondly, we should get representatives from each municipality on the Central Committee so that they can pass down information to their municipalities and make it a rule that every member of the Central Committee calls meetings in their municipalities a maximum of two days after a meeting of the Central Committee is held.

Thirdly, the party should minimise the instances when the president and the top leadership group are authorised by the Central Committee to make decisions on behalf of the party. Finally, we should change the voting system in the party by making it “one member one vote” instead of the current delegate system if we do not want it to be manipulated through delegates that create exclusive groups that hold on to power for a long time.

My impression is that the political will exists as the tone at the top is pro-democracy/transparency. With the necessary time and resources, I believe communication, internal democracy, and financial transparency can be further improved and the AfA can maintain and increase the trust people have in it and thus become the example it should be.
By: Meriton Civuli

Disclaimer: The preparation of this study was supported by Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of the Western Balkans Democracy Initiative. The content of this study does not necessarily reflect the position or the opinions of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy or the British Government.
Introduction
This paper closely examines the current practices and challenges for AlternAtivA as a political party throughout its political activism since the day it was founded. Being an important characteristic of a democracy, transparency means openness to public scrutiny for any organisation that operates in the public interest; thus here we will take a critical look at how AlternAtivA deals on a daily basis with public issues and how it provides accountability both to its membership and to the general public. Questions deal with matters from transparency in its daily operations to public information and communication with related parties, to responsiveness of public needs and aspirations. All answers provided are based on a rightist understanding of politics, our political platform and organisation chart.

Throughout the part of the Balkans inhabited by Albanians, tradition and traditional moral values are highly regarded and thus people organise their lifestyle according to these values passed from generation to generation. Taking into consideration this fact and the fact that for more than eight decades left-wing ideology has dominated Albanian public life, a group of intellectuals gathered and formulated a political concept that best represented these aspirations and political interests, always based on the political philosophy of the right\(^1\).

AlternAtivA is a political organisation which in the ideological spectrum belongs to the centre right. Its identity is best described by three notions:

- **Authentic**: a typical subject which has built its profile according to the needs of Albanians in North Macedonia;
- **Autochthonous**: it is built from capacities within the Republic of North Macedonia; and
- **Autonomous**: independent from all foreign and domestic influences, but open to communication and cooperation with all relevant parties\(^2\).

AlternAtivA was established in order to preserve and cultivate the culture, tradition and national values of Albanians, as well as to contribute to the development of a virtuous society in the Republic of North Macedonia.

As a political party, we highly value: preserving all the fundamental rights as defined and used within international law; respecting the right of each individual to express thoughts and become part of decision-making; strengthening the rule of law; preserving nature and the environment as they are the heritage of humanity from previous generations; giving more powers to local government; and others.

In addition, since its formation AlternAtivA has had clear and democratic goals when dealing with the organisation of the state:

- To turn North Macedonia into a symmetrical state, where society is compatible in relation to the state;
- To build an independent and professional judicial system;
- To advance human rights according to international law;
- To reach a clear separation of powers, good balance and prosperity;
- To guarantee the right to privacy as long as it does not threaten public safety;
- To advance women rights and their position in society as well as promote fair gender representation; and
- To transform the state from a mono-ethnic character to a fully functional multi-ethnic one, thus allowing all ethnicities to contribute and enjoy the benefits accordingly\(^3\).

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1 [https://alternativa.mk/deklarate-politike/](https://alternativa.mk/deklarate-politike/)
The history of the Republic of Macedonia from its inception after the second world war defined it by the rule of one-nation-one-state. The history of the second independent Republic of Macedonia which emerged from the former Yugoslav federation in 1991 also maintained its mono-ethnic model, as did the third Republic of Macedonia created after the Ohrid Agreement in 2001. The third republic had a goal of creating a cohesive multi-ethnic state but failed due to weak politicians and the lack of political will for its implementation. Finally, knowing the circumstances of the Fourth Republic of Macedonia, which now is known as North Macedonia as a result of the Prespa Agreement, and our entrance into the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation as well our European Union accession talks, AlternAtivA being an active actor on the political scene understood the political, economic and cultural circumstances of our state, and took into consideration national and geopolitical interests. It is always striving to transform the de facto mono-ethnic state into a symmetrical multi-ethnic one, ending once and for all the internal conflicts, and building a cohesive, inclusive and equal state for all communities.

Answers to questions on transparency
How open and transparent is your political party in everyday operations and functioning?

AlternAtivA since its foundation has always sought a proactive policy, always basing its existence in the three pillars (authentic, autochthonous and autonomous) that define its identity, political mission, and vision for the future.

Originating as a domestic political movement, we certainly know the people we represent, what they seek for themselves in terms of being politically represented, and, since we are autonomous in decision-making, all our decisions are taken in consultation with the representatives of our branches and their sub-branches.

Case scenario:

- Weekly meetings of the central committee (a committee that represents all 16 branches at the republic level) to discuss and take actions about daily political developments.
  - All propositions and actions are discussed by each branch separately, and conclusions are brought to the table by representatives which then in turn are discussed with the executive of the party.
  - Priorities are determined and actions taken accordingly.
  - The public relations department is notified which then issues news releases, statements, etc.
  - If there is a development which was not planned or expected or even discussed by the central committee the above-mentioned procedure is repeated.

One such example is the choosing of an MP candidate that would represent zone one (the Republic of North Macedonia is divided into seven different zones according to the voting system). All branches and sub-branches that constituted zone one according to the party’s organogram gave their proposals gathered from the members of each sub-branch and, after scrutinizing the list of proposals in the central committee, a decision was made in favour of the party’s General Secretary Skender Rexhepi, all sub-branches were notified and later all relevant media and eventually the general public (potential voters) were advised.

All the above describes a dynamic which sometimes makes it difficult for the party to function normally. For matters which are technical, certain members of the committee are authorised to act according to instructions by the committee itself or to act according to their best judgment and then report to the committee on the matters they have covered.

All of this is done in accordance with our belief that a right-wing political party does not allow decision-making to be left in the hands of the few!

This way all party officials are directly or indirectly included in the process of decision-making regarding issues that deal with their region or party positions depending on the circumstance.

Citizens and the public are notified through our channels of communication (television, Facebook pages and others).

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**How easy is it for citizens to contact your political party and find out information about party decisions or contact party functions?**

All our branches have their offices which are available five days a week to our party members and other citizens. Here they can get information about such matters as: issues dealing with their region; a party decision; or information dealing with any representative of our party in the government.8

Daily news about activities of the president or other representatives in the respective institution or department are published on the party website, different Facebook pages that bear the logo and name of our political party, statements issued to other news media, etc.9

Information regarding the executive of the party as well as members of the central committee is available on the party website. Citizens also can access the official website of the party and the official Facebook page where daily news and statements are published. Party decisions are communicated by a relevant representative, including in the form of news releases. Also, people have access to our party contacts. An example of how citizen complaints during the current pandemic crisis reached the party and were addressed by the party is its response to the heavy burden of electricity bills during a month that most of the population was not working or was not sure if they would be able to cope with electricity expenses. Letters reaching our official email, and complaints and requests reaching our offices through members or even direct from citizens prompted the president of the party to write an open and public letter to the chief executive officer of EVN (the national electricity distribution company) Stephen Peter.10

**How often and in which ways does your party communicate with members (internally) and with the general public (externally)?**

All 16 branch chairmen have their own network of sub-branch chairmen, branch executive committee, members of all sub-branches and different interest groups. All of them are organised through communication apps as groups, where important meeting notifications, party decisions, planned activities, etc. are shared.

When certain activities require a meeting with all members and activists, then branch offices are available for a gathering of that nature. Any time decisions are taken by the executive of the party and the central committee, branch chairmen organise a meeting and notify them, take their propositions and criticisms (if there are any), etc.11

Whenever there are decisions regarding a certain region in which a certain branch pertains, then party decisions are issued as news or party statements in the respective party Facebook pages dedicated to that branch or on the official website. This way not only party members and activists but also the general public are informed.12

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8 [https://AlternAtivA.mk/deget/](https://AlternAtivA.mk/deget/).
11 Articles 20 to 37: [https://AlternAtivA.mk/statuti/](https://AlternAtivA.mk/statuti/)
The general public has a chance to meet their zone members of parliament every last Friday of the month\textsuperscript{13} from 12pm to 3pm if they wish to be informed about party positions on certain issues. Generally, all our activities are shared through our website, Facebook pages or the news media. If citizens need to communicate with certain party officials on certain issues, they can always get their contact details through the party branch offices and officials.

**Should political parties publish biographies of all candidates on local/national elections?**

Yes, we believe so. We think that voters should and deserve to know who their representative is and in what capacity they can help them and their community. Because not all voters are acquainted with proposed candidates, we believe that political parties including ours should do their best to provide voters with biographies and life achievements of candidates. Beside education and professional achievements, as a conservative party we believe that it is equally important for us and for the values we represent that a candidate has a positive past and is socially responsible. If they fulfil all of the above and become candidates, then we represent them in the best way to the citizens, by sharing their biographies, enabling voters to know them in person, giving them as much media coverage (advertising spots, public debates etc.) as possible and facilitating other political activities practiced all around the democratic world.

**Where do you see your political party in 10 years from now both in terms of organisational set-up but also in terms of improved communications, policy development and responsiveness to citizens’ needs?**

As part of the party since its foundation, as an active member and holding different party positions, I am very well acquainted with its programme, mission and vision. One of the many reasons why we emerged on the political scene in North Macedonia is because there was/is no genuine right-wing and conservative political party representing the Albanian population\textsuperscript{14}.

For the last eight decades the left-wing narrative has dominated the political spectrum wherever Albanians have lived, even though the majority of our compatriots share conservative values and aspirations. As the late United States senator Barry Goldwater said in his book The Conscience of a Conservative, a politician knows his people. We share the conviction that Albanians, based on their political views, vision of the future and perception of the past, must be represented accordingly.

By promoting our three pillars (authentic, autochthonous and autonomous) we actually show that Albanians in North Macedonia are different from the left-wing narrative (that our political organisation started after the second world war), and that our political representation is consistent and a continuation of different political movements and parties which adhered to the values and political narratives of many other European conservative movements and political parties\textsuperscript{15}.

\textsuperscript{13} https://www.sobranie.mk/content/PI/6.pdf, p. 8.

\textsuperscript{14} https://www.strugapost.com/2020/01/03/afirim-gashi-shqiptareve-u-mungon-e-djathta-e-mirefillte/.

\textsuperscript{15} http://shenja.tv/identiteti-politik-i-xhemijetit1/. 
Investing in our own political school\textsuperscript{16}, involving young potential political leaders in the chain of the organogram and making them part of the process of decision-making, setting up a system of meritocracy within our organisation, organising different reading groups of youngsters interested in political life and activism, enhancing cooperation with non-governmental organisations and other political foundations, creating and investing in our own think tanks, I believe that in the long run AlternAtivA is going to be the main representative force of conservatism in North Macedonia.

Ten years from now, being part of the European Union, I believe that political consciousness will increase among our citizens, thus raising the demands for a better quality of political representation, which in turn will oblige political parties including ours to be more responsive to citizen needs including their involvement in decision-making. Investing in our education system will enable us to include more intellectuals and professionals in our organisation, which in turn will improve our effort to promote our policies and even to formulate better ones.

Current practices in AlternAtivA
Having been established in a turbulent political period, AlternAtivA has since its beginning been fighting for transparency and accountability in politics. As described above, the membership and the whole organisation, according to the articles of our own constitution, have their duties and privileges meaning they have to actively participate in the process of decision-making and have the privilege of being informed about all the process of doing politics. When it comes to the general public, through its media centre, the party issues public statements about daily developments, holds press conferences to which all relevant media are invited, and publishes statements and news on its official website and different social network pages\(^{17}\). Through its platform VATRA\(^{18}\) it has organized so far a couple of hundred meetings in different cities and villages across North Macedonia with the sole purpose of discussing the painful reality of emigration (which is devastating to the future of this country and nation), thus actively involving citizens by hearing their complaints and suggestions.

in a later phase, the involvement of the intellectual class (regardless of political views) is anticipated to help in finding the best solutions with the promise that AlternAtivA will do its best to raise awareness politically, organise expert groups and thus involve all relevant actors in finding a sustainable solution to a decades-old problem.


\(^{18}\) https://alternativa.mk/platforma-vatra/.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
Being open to public scrutiny, allowing “outsiders” to comment on your organisation’s work or even challenge and criticise it is quite difficult for most organisations since at the very least it is time-consuming and requires a lot of energy in order to function normally. But for a political organisation which plans on governing and being of service to the public, being transparent is of the utmost importance in order to convince the public and thus earn its trust. But how to do that is quite a challenge.

I believe that the party leadership should be transparent to its members and the public whenever it can and whenever it serves the general public. Since it is impossible to always consult each member personally, the best practice is to establish a good hierarchical structure with the most valued asset being trust. If the leadership can prove that it is open to the members and to their suggestions and criticisms, then not a single decision, action or political stance would be contested by the members and thus this would be productive for the organisation itself. So trust and openness, to the best my belief, is the key to success in one’s political endeavour.

When it comes to the public then even though AlternAtivA does its best to inform them through the media about matters dealing with their daily lives, matters of state and other issues, even though it visits districts and communicates to meet with citizens about a wide area of topics, I think there is another more efficient way of actively including the public in fixing problems in their daily lives. I think that the involvement of local communities, which was a practice two or three decades ago, may help the communities and political parties as well in more ways than we think. Thus, political parties would be best informed about the needs and complaints of the citizens in the districts and possibly could even plan solutions to problems together with the communities. In this way, citizens may not be politically affiliated yet can actively contribute to solving daily problems dealing with their communities if not beyond them. There are countless examples how local communities are organised and communicate with local and other authorities, and how they influence political parties willing to get their votes by getting involved in decision-making regarding issues not only with their districts but with their nation too.
Social Democratic Union of Macedonia

By: Martin Popov

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Introduction
The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia is a political party that was established on 21 April 1991. Since then the party has won four general elections and has been the party that has always come to power when hard decisions needed to be made in order to navigate the country towards the adoption of Western values and democratisation.

The new leadership that came into power in 2013 with Zoran Zaev as president of the SDUM shifted the party towards more transparency and openness. The SDUM managed to impose new principles on our multi-ethnic society which led to unity and a shared vision for the future of the country.

Since June 2017, the SDUM has led the government in North Macedonia, and since then there have been two election cycles that the SDUM has won: municipal elections and presidential elections. It is worth noting that the SDUM in 2017 won in 57 municipalities out of 81, and also won the majority in most of the municipal councils. The SDUM also won the 2019 presidential elections.

During their transition which started the process of democratisation after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the Western Balkan have paid little attention to a main principal of democracy, which is transparency. This principal of the democratic system is the main tool that helps citizens to build trust in institutions in the country and in the political parties in general.

In fact, there is a high correlation between the transparency levels within the parties and the level of transparency in the institutions and the government. The transparency level is related to two main aspects: financial and decision-making. This is due to the fact that parties are the organisations that create transparency (regardless whether in power or in opposition), and the best way to determine the level of transparency in the parties is through answering a few questions in a case study that examines their level of transparency.

The purpose of this case study is to determine the level and practice of transparency in the SDUM and how it relates to the trust of citizens towards the party. The key questions that need to be researched in order to determine the level of transparency require an examination of: the level of transparency within the party in its everyday functioning, the main challenges for improving transparency within the party, financial reports and whether they are transparent enough, internal decision-making processes, areas needing improvements in order to increase transparency, internal communication with members as well as with the public in regards to decision-making, and examples of transparency procedures. All these questions will be covered in four main topics:

1. Law for financing political parties and practice,
2. Finances in campaigning,
3. Transparency in decision-making, and
4. Internal procedures for candidate selections.

In order to answer all these questions, I will use qualitative research methods and comparative analysis. The methodology will include the analysis of disclosed public documents, the law related to the finances of political party and its real practice, internal procedures for candidate selections, and methodology for internal communication with members as well as with the public. At the end, from the collected data and analysis I will be able to draw conclusions that will give a clear picture of the actual level of transparency within the party and create proposals on how to increase transparency in the areas that are covered in this case study and increase the trust of citizens in the party.
Answers to questions on transparency
The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia publishes annual reports on a regular basis. These reports are public and are a good example of the party's financial transparency. In 2019, the SDUM\(^1\) had a total income of MKD 77,892,153 (denar) (€1,266,539). The income is divided into the following sections: national budget funding of MKD 77,892,153 (€1,266,539); membership fees of MKD 13,161,740 (€214,012); and donations totalling MKD 3,601,022 (€58,553). These sources of funding are the main ones provided for in the law on financing political parties. These reports can be found on the website of the SDUM and are regularly posted in accordance with the law. On the same web site there are 11 reports related to the 2019 financial work of the SDUM. The reports cover: spending, financing campaigns for local and presidential elections, and donors to the SDUM including their names and the amount each has donated to the party.

The reports by the State Commission for Audit do not suggest any irregularities regarding the financing of the work of the SDUM. These reports are also published on the official website of the State Commission\(^2\). This is evidence that SDUM financial operations are in accordance to the law. In addition, the fact that all reports are published contributes to the increase in trust in the political party and its finances.

In regards to the transparency of the decision-making of the SDUM, the party always communicates decisions made by the bodies of the party through the media, and by using different channels to communicate with the members of the party. This way the party ensures transparency in its decisions, which is very important for building trust with the citizens and for always keeping the members of the party up to date.

The process of selecting candidates was changed in regards to increasing the transparency of the process itself, but most importantly to build trust among citizens and members in the process. All decisions and procedures were published and there were standardised forms for documents that needed to be filled or signed by members who wanted to be candidates for the party in the last parliamentary elections. These changes were also introduced to maintain the openness of the party for people who are not members of the party. All decisions regarding the process were made public and communicated with the public\(^3\).

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Current practices in the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia
Political Party Transparency in the Western Balkans

Law for financing political parties and practice

The law for financing political parties in the Republic of North Macedonia stipulates that political parties must manage finances in a way that is stipulated in the law itself, which requires that financing and its use are public and transparent and every citizen and state institution should be able to look into them. Political parties in North Macedonia are financed by public and private sources.

Public sources of finance come straight from the budget of the country, which is 0.15 per cent of the annual income of the government. Private sources for financing come from donations, bank loans, and selling promotional and propaganda material.

A total of 30 per cent of the amount of money that is allocated from the budget for the political parties is distributed to political parties that have won more than one per cent of the vote in the last elections. The remaining 70 per cent is distributed among the parties that have won seats in the parliament or the city council, depending on the number of seats they have won. The law provides that the public money that parties get can be spent only in accordance with the laws that refer to financial operations; but parties can also spend the money according to their internal acts and constitutions. This is the first obstacle to transparency within the parties, something that I will evaluate later in this case study.

This part of the law gives the parties the right to manage their spending of public money in accordance with internal acts and procedures. The main issue here is the fact that parties can make internal rules for spending money that are different from the law on public procurement. This law provides straightforward procedures for all institutions that spend public money; but political parties do not fall into this group. Political parties have more space to manoeuver with their spending and to choose economic operators for different procurements.

Another source of public finances for political parties is the money allocated to the Research and Analytical Centre. A total of €280,000 is allocated from the annual budget of the country which is then distributed to the four parties which won the most seats in the parliament. The allocation of the money for these four parties is governed by a different law, which also strictly controls the spending of the money. Each party that gets money for their Research and Analysis Centre can spend their money in two categories: 40 per cent of the budget allocated to the party is used for salaries and other costs regarding the normal operation of their centre. The remaining 60 per cent is used for research, projects, debates, and other activities that are the core of the Research and Analysis Centre.

On top of the allocated finances from the budget of the country for the Research and Analysis Centre, there is an additional €10,000 annually that is used for building the capacity of the people employed in the centre.

In the case of the Research and Analysis Centre, once again we do not see limitations on which laws apply in regards to spending this public money. Since the Research and Analysis Centre is established within the party structure, all internal acts for procurements apply to the centre as well. One of the ways that parties can accumulate finances from private sources is through membership fees. The amount of money on an annual basis that can be accumulated by parties from membership fees is limited by law, which is not to exceed one average salary.

Parties can get financing from donations but again the amount is restricted by law. The amount of money that can be donated to the parties should not exceed the net sum of 60 average salaries for companies, and 30 average salaries for individuals per year.
In regards to donations, each party is obligated to maintain a register of donations which must be published on its website. The register is published every six months, which helps political parties to be more transparent in regards to their donations and avoid abuses by illegal money transfers to the parties. By publishing the donation list, every citizen can access the list, and it helps state institutions to monitor the party’s finances and determine whether there are suspicious acts or donations.

According to law, there are some limitations in regards to the financing that political parties can receive from other governments, international institutions and organisations, and state and local institutions beyond the finances allocated from the budget of the country, public funds and others. This is to avoid any influence from third parties and organisations over the political parties.

Each political party is supposed to submit a yearly financial report to all institutions that are responsible for monitoring their financial work. Also, they are required to publish their reports no later than 30 April for the previous year. If a political party does not publish its report, it is subject to the withdrawal of its public finances.

**Finances in campaigning**

In the process of elections, parties are supposed to act according to the law for elections. This law contains a separate part that applies to the spending of finances for the campaign.

Each party is supposed to open a separate bank account for the upcoming elections. All transactions are supposed to be done through this account. Donations from citizens or companies are supposed to go into this account so that it can be clearly seen where the money comes from and on what it is spent.

In case any party breaks the law the State Commission for Prevention of Corruption takes action. This means that if any suspicion arises in regards to the money spent on campaigning, the commission will start an investigation to check the financing of the campaign.

In North Macedonia, the law for elections also provides for equal media coverage. This is important because in order to have media coverage political parties need to pay. All the media are obligated to publish their prices for media coverage of campaigns which means there cannot be any hidden costs. Because of this practice the State Commission against Corruption is able to calculate the amount of money spent on television coverage and advertisements by the political parties.

This legal obligation helps political parties to have equal representation in media coverage, and most importantly it helps to avoid the bigger parties having more coverage. In reality, smaller parties have less money and find it difficult to finance their media campaigns, which results in them having unequal representation in front of the voters.

The law for elections also provides for the distribution of media time for each party based on the results of the last elections. This means that the two parties that won the most votes in the last elections get four minutes of media coverage, but also the same amount is given to the two opposition parties that won the most votes.
All invoices from the media are actually paid by the State Election Commission. Each party is required to provide the invoice to the commission which covers the expenses. This method provides a transparent approach to how the parties cover their media campaign expenses and there is no room for manipulation by the parties. Also, it prevents political parties from paying more for more media coverage for their campaigns.

**The laws on financing political parties in practice**

The Social Democratic Union of Macedonia has been regularly publishing its annual reports, list of donations, and election reports on its website.

On the SDUM website citizens can find the details in regards to the finances of the political parties. Another instrument that is obligatory for political parties is the yearly audit report, which again is made public. These reports are made by the State Commission for Audit which looks into details in regards to the financial operations of the political parties. These reports are published by the commission and contain findings in the form of recommendations. If there are issues with the financial operations of a party, the commission publicly states the articles of the law that have been broken.

The Law for Public Information also applies to the political parties. This means that any citizen, the media or an institution in accordance with the law can request any information regarding the financial operations of a political party, and within 30 days the political party must give a clear and detailed answer. Even though a party is required by law to publish its reports regarding the spending of public finances or private finances, there is also another way for citizens to get the required information. If citizens or institutions suspect something, they can immediately request information; they do not have to wait for the annual report to be published.

**Transparency in decision-making**

Parties are transparent to some degree in their decision-making. In the case of the SDUM, most decisions made regarding the public interest are announced publicly; but those that relate to strategic approaches to different issues or internal decisions are not publicly announced. Most of the decisions are made by the central board of the party which consists of 90 members representing all local branches. The highest body of the party is the congress, which has 890 members. The practice of the party is to publicly announce any decisions made by the central board or the congress; but decisions made by the executive committee remain confidential. Most of the executive committee meetings are held behind closed doors and without any public announcements. This is understandable because we do not want to see political parties publicly announcing their strategies knowing that this could be used by the opposition to gain an advantage in regards to the decision made.

The trust of the people in political parties starts from the trust of the members in the leadership. If members question the ability of the leadership and its decisions, we will see disappointment among members which obviously will be reflected in the public as well. Therefore, the SDUM has an internal communication system by which each president of the local branch is aware of the decisions the executive board makes, and also includes them in the sessions of the central board. In order to have a systematic approach to the implementation of decisions, each local branch reports on their implementation through sophisticated software that is used on a daily basis. This sophisticated software is also used for reporting on activities at the local level.

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The executive board also provides certain monthly activities that the local branches are supposed to implement so there is a systematic approach to activities all around the country.

The use of the software for local branches to report on their activities helps to monitor the activities at the local level, as well as having live reports about activities, issues that arise, and other information. By having this system, the party leadership can make decisions based on these reports and provide decisions based on factual situations and needs.

The SDUM has another innovative method for implementing decisions made by the executive board, which in fact also provides transparency in its decisions. Each member of the party leadership is responsible for different local branches in order to ensure that we have thoroughly followed and implemented decisions.

Also, since the SDUM established its Research and Analysis Centre we are able to monitor the work of all officials and institutions that are led by members and representatives of the SDUM. This system is established in order that the party leadership can intervene when there are issues regarding the implementation of a programme at the local or central level. The software helps the party leadership to access details of the accomplishments of programmes in real time.

Another very positive side of having this system is the fact that it improves the coordination between the party and local and central governments. It also helps to monitor the implementation of decisions made by the party leadership in regards to local and central government. It is important to note that through this system the party achieves transparency in the implementation of strategic decisions of activities, projects, policies and other matters.

In regards to the finances of the local branches it is important to mention that the financial work of the local branches is centralised. This means that the party’s main account covers expenses for everyday activities and the normal running of the local branch. It is important to mention this because the work of the local branches is also included in the financial operations in the annual reports of the party.

**Internal procedures for candidate selections**

The SDUM for the first time this year has established a new practice for candidate selections for the parliamentary elections. The previous practice followed the internal acts and constitution of the party which involved a decision by the central board to start the procedure through the local branches, the collection of proposals through the local branches, the proposal of the list for candidates for parliament, the approval of the list by the central board, and a final decision for approval of the list by the congress.

As I mentioned, this year for the first time we established a different procedure in addition to the acts and constitutional procedures. This procedure was publicly announced and voted on by the central board.

The new procedure consisted of forming a commission that included experts from different areas, former members of the party leadership, and former MPs. This commission established procedures for applying to be a member of the parliament, which included a standardised CV, a letter of intention, signed statements for accepting the ethical code of conduct of the SDUM and acceptance of candidacy for MP.
The commission formulated two sets of criteria: criteria for grading the applications and criteria for interviews. The first criteria contained two mandatory provisions: full documentation and party belief. Those who passed this eliminating phase went further for grading by professional experience, education, motivation, and diversity.

Once this grading was done by the commission the next phase was inviting the potential candidates for an interview. The diversity of the commission was an advantage in the interview because we had different points of view represented. It is important to mention that the commission had the same criteria for grading the interviews, with a straightforward grading scale. Once this phase was done the commission prepared a final ranking list which was proposed to the executive board of the party. The final decision for proposing the list for potential candidates was based on this ranking list which was then proposed to the central board and the congress of the party.

The main idea behind this different and open approach was the fact that people had lost trust in the candidates for MPs proposed by the party. The low level of trust was the trigger that the party needed to take a different approach in order to start building the trust of members and citizens in the party system in regards to the creation of the lists for MPs. The procedure also continued the strategic approach of the party in regards to openness, which meant that people who were not members of the party could apply to represent the party in the parliament. Such an open and transparent approach to the selection of candidates will definitely help regain the trust of the citizens in the SDUM list of candidates. Each stage was publicly announced which included publicly announcing the number of applicants (2,000 applicants), announcing how many people passed the first phase (900 applicants) and the second phase (ranked list of 180 people).
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
Trust in political parties in North Macedonia is at a low level and in fact most of it is due to the transparency of the work of the party, both financial and decision-making. The SDUM has been changing a lot in the past few years in regards to its own work, which means increasing transparency in decision-making and finances.

In fact, this is not enough. We can see that the public seems to have very little interest in the financial work of the political party. The only ones that show an interest in this topic are the media. The media need to play a bigger role in raising the issues in regards to the finances of the political parties. I believe that publishing the annual financial reports is not enough because citizens do not really understand these reports. They are meant for people who understand finances; therefore political parties need to prepare reports that will be understandable for each citizen. This could include clear and straightforward reports with graphs and data regarding the spending of money throughout the year.

Also, political parties need to distinguish between the spending of public money and private sources. In regards to public money, political parties need to be more cautious and could follow strict procedures that need to be included in legislation. On the other hand, private sources of financing of political parties should remain within their internal acts and procedures.

Another important issue that needs to be addressed in regards to the finances of political parties and their spending is the publication of the companies that cooperate with political parties. This way the public, especially the institutions that are responsible for monitoring the implementation of the laws and the audits of the political parties, will be able to link any companies that are working for state institutions and are also working for political parties. This is one way we can prevent any abuse of state institutions in favour of the political parties and their financial work. On the other hand, state funds for political parties have played a big role in their day-to-day operations and their campaigning. These funds prevent the abuse of power by political parties that are leading the government. State funding prevents political parties from trying to find different illegal sources for financing. Also, it prevents opposition parties from taking illegal actions in regards to financing the everyday operations of the party as well as their campaigns. By financing the political parties from the budget of the country we can clearly see from the reports where the money is spent and where the money is coming from because each political party is required to publish its report.

The SDUM audit by the State Commission for Audit so far has not found any suspicious activities in regards to the financial operations of the party. This clearly shows that the party remains within the framework of the law regarding the financial operations of the parties.

In regards to transparency in the decision-making process, the SDUM has made great progress. As I described above, we now see more coordinated actions from the party itself and more transparency which help build trust among members and people who are leaning towards the SDUM. I can say that this approach has helped build trust in the party leadership, and it has also helped build cohesion within the party structures.

This approach of transparency in the decision-making process has also been reflected in the way the party leads the government. However, the main issue in regards to this is that in order to have systemic change and for this practice to become sustainable we need to see change from other political parties as well.
For now, we can say that while the SDUM is in power this system will be practised, but on the other hand there is no systemic sustainable solution to this matter. In comparison, we have other parties that have concentrated power in their leader and as a result we see no transparency in their decision-making processes. When the party itself is not transparent, we cannot expect to have transparent government without a long-term systemic solution to this matter. Finally, in regards to the new practices introduced for SDUM candidacy selection, we must say that the process proved the party is ready for such a step forward. The main issue and reason for such a change was the low trust in the candidacy selection process. The low trust in candidates was due to the system that was used to prepare the lists. The party took the initiative to start a new process which will be a systemic solution that will help to build trust in the system itself. Once we have people, as well as members, believing in the system we can expect the trust in candidates to increase.

The SDUM has managed to do exactly what was expected. In fact, during the entire process there were a lot of doubts from members and citizens in regards to this process; but the readiness to make the change was greater than the doubts. Members started to take this process seriously once it started the selection phases. This was the turning point when we saw trust had been regained.

On the other hand, this process has helped to recruit people that might not get the chance to be on the SDUM list because they had not been part of the party’s bodies at the local or central levels. The process proved to be the right one because we managed to choose candidates who were not active members of the party but who have great skills and experience.

This year for the first time we introduced a 50/50 gender balance on the candidacy lists. This process of candidate selection helped in this regard. The main issue with this principle was the fact that most of our coalition party partners proposed candidates they believed should be on the list, undermining the principle that our party put forward. This caused serious problems for the SDUM in regards to choosing its candidates for the list because the party needed to fill in the gaps regarding the 50/50 principle. Again, in regards to this principle we saw that even though 26 parties are in coalition with the SDUM, they do not share the same principle. Due to this the SDUM was the only one that needed to make sure that this principle was actually established. I conclude that the level of transparency both in financial and decision-making processes requires a systemic and sustainable approach in order to bring any change in regards to the trust of citizens in political parties. One lesson learnt is that being transparent when on the opposite side you have a party or parties that are not transparent puts you at a disadvantage. Regardless of this fact, the SDUM has been determined to continue to increase the transparency level in every area because we strongly believe that the issue with the trust of citizens in political parties will be improved through this mechanism.
The Democrats

By: Vladimir Pavićević
Introduction
Democratic Montenegro (also known as the Democrats) was founded as a political party in 2015. The key idea of a newly established political party was to overcome divisions which had been making Montenegro an unstable and divided country for a long time. The party leadership announced that this aim could only be achieved if Montenegro became a consolidated democratic country based on the principles of the rule of law, respect for basic human rights and freedoms, and an open and functional social market economy.

The Democrats participated in the parliamentary elections in 2016 for the first time. The support of 10.01 per cent of voters and eight (out of 81) seats in the Assembly of Montenegro positioned us as the second biggest single political party on the Montenegrin political scene. This result was attributed to a group of mainly young people who invested a lot of enthusiasm and effort in restoring confidence in politics and politicians, hence gaining a diverse voting body eager to see Montenegro as a democratic, modern and well developed European country.

The party has developed an extensive infrastructure in almost all parts of Montenegro. This includes a headquarters in the capital city of Podgorica and local branches in 22 out of 23 municipalities in Montenegro. We consider the infrastructure as one of the main reasons for the results that the party has achieved in some of the local elections organised in the last five years, as well as overall support reflected in public opinion polls.

In the local elections organised in Kotor and Budva in 2016, the Democrats won sufficient votes that the mayors of Kotor and Budva were later elected from the list of Democratic Montenegro. The same result was repeated in the next year, with the local elections in Herceg Novi, where the overall support for the Democrats was higher than previously in Kotor and Budva (support of voters increased by 26.8 per cent). Today Democratic Montenegro is a leading party in the ruling coalition in Herceg Novi and the mayor comes from its leadership there.

After another similar result, this time in the local elections in Berane in 2018, the Democrats became one of the key members of the ruling coalition and took the position of the president of the local assembly. In 2019 we participated in the local elections in Tuzi, the newest municipality in Montenegro, and we decided to be a part of the local governance there as well, supporting the Albanian national minority which constitutes the majority in that municipality. Thanks to the one seat we have in the local assembly in Tuzi, the ruling party Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS) became an opposition political party in that municipality.

Having in mind the results of all elections organised in the last five years, clearly the Democrats have taken a lead within opposition political parties and have emerged as the most serious threat to the ruling party in Montenegro.

The party has applied for membership in the European People's Party.
Answers to questions on transparency
Openness and transparency were defined as two of the key principles of Democratic Montenegro. According to the constitution, the operations of the Democrats are based on openness in its work as well as in its democratic organisational structure and decision-making processes.

The central point of this study is the issue of openness and transparency in Democratic Montenegro when it comes to the question of financing the party. What I would also like to point out is that the democratic structure and functioning of Democratic Montenegro party bodies are closely connected to the open and transparent financial conduct of the Democrats.

Concerning the funding sources of Democratic Montenegro and the availability of financial information to the public, article 84 of the party constitution is clear. It stipulates:

The Democrats are financed from:
- the state budget;
- budgets of the municipalities;
- membership fees;
- voluntary contributions;
- gifts;
- other sources in accordance with the law1.

By the decision of the main board of Democratic Montenegro, membership fees and voluntary contributions were actually suspended as sources of party financing2.

All funding sources of the Democrats and all reports on the operations of the Democrats are available to the public in accordance with laws and ethical standards. What makes this party different from all other political organisations in Montenegro is its maximum level of transparency when it comes to the issues of party finances and absolute administrative and financial legality. External and internal audits of the party’s finances are conducted regularly. In terms of external audits and controls, two institutions conduct them within their legally prescribed competences, the State Audit Institution and the Agency for Prevention of Corruption. Furthermore, the non-governmental organisation (NGO) MANS (Network for the Affirmation of the NGO Sector) also performs these controls. In addition, internal audit and control represents one of the competences of the supervisory board of Democratic Montenegro.

According to the Law on the State Audit Institution, the functioning of political parties in Montenegro is controlled by the State Audit Institution. Article 5 of the law stipulates:

In audit procedures, the State Audit Institution:
- performs an examination of the documents, transactions, internal control and internal audit systems, accounting and financial procedures and other records of the audit entities with the aim to ensure whether financial statements are true, objective and prepared in compliance with accepted accounting standards;
- determines the regularity of the financial and other activities of the audited entities with the aim to evaluate compliance with applicable laws and other regulations;
- determines the performance of the level of achievement of the set objectives of the operations or of specific financial transactions, programmes, projects, and usage of human, financial and other resources of the audited entities as well as the ratio between the planned and achieved effects of the objectives and results3.

1 The Statute of Democratic Montenegro, the Democrats, Podgorica, 2015.
2 According to the constitution, the party president has no competence regarding party finances.
According to its competences the State Audit Institution of Montenegro audits the annual consolidated finance documentation of the Democrats every year. In all its reports it has always confirmed that Democratic Montenegro’s finances have been correct, accurate, transparent and fully in compliance with the law. Not a single euro was used unlawfully. This is especially important considering that the State Audit Institution is not an entirely independent institution as some of its senators are linked to the ruling party. One of the members of the senate of the State Audit Institution is a DPS official who was a key actor in the “Recording” affair.

Furthermore, the Law on Financing of Political Entities and Election Campaigns provides that control over the financing of political entities and election campaigns shall be performed by the anti-corruption agency (article 4). The Democrats’ finances during campaigns in the previous five years have been fully and comprehensively supervised and controlled by the agency. After rigorous field and desk controls that include verification of every single euro spent in campaigns, each of the Agency for Prevention of Corruption’s reports on the functioning of the Democrats has been positive. In short, the agency found that the Democrats’ reports were perfect. It is important to note that the Agency for Prevention of Corruption is negatively assessed in major international reports, such as European Commission reports and reports of critically oriented Montenegrin NGOs, due to its close linkages with the ruling party.

Furthermore, party financing was checked by the NGO MANS. MANS is one of the leading non-governmental organisations that fights against corruption and organised crime in Montenegro. We regularly provide this NGO with all of our financial reports on the money spent in our election campaigns at both the state and local levels. They have never had any single remark or negative report.

In addition, the Democrats’ constitution defines the supervisory board (article 43) as the party body which should:
- perform internal control of finances of Democratic Montenegro and the use of the party financial resources at all levels;
- control the use of property that is in the party's ownership;
- control and confirm annual reports on the Democrats’ finances;
- provide instructions for the financial functioning of the Democrats' bodies.\(^5\)

It is clear from article 43 of the Democrats’ constitution that the supervisory board has the monitoring of the party’s finances as one of its key competences. It consists of a president and four members elected at the party congress. All evidence and opinions mentioned in the reports of the State Audit Institution and the Agency for Prevention of Corruption were confirmed by the supervisory board of Democratic Montenegro.

What is of special importance for this paper is that all these reports can be found online either on the web pages of the state institutions competent for audit, monitoring and controlling the Democrats’ finances or on the web page of Democratic Montenegro as well as in the documentation of the Democrats which is easily accessible for anyone interested in these issues.

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Current practices in the Democrats
Concerning good practices, the Democrats regularly incorporate lessons learned and there are at least three interesting points to be underlined.

First, it is written in one of the Democrats’ reports published last year that the party is proud that no single cent in cash has been withdrawn from the party account since Democratic Montenegro was founded. This is an absolute exception compared to the functioning of other political parties in Montenegro. Democratic Montenegro is the only political organisation in Montenegro that is not using cash. All payments are always done through the bank account.

This is one of the major proofs that the Democrats have fully integrated principles of openness, transparency and accountability into their financial functioning.

Secondly, there is a link between democratic decision-making procedures of Democratic Montenegro and the transparent character of the Democrats’ finances.

Democratic Montenegro has a very complex organisational structure guaranteeing democratic and transparent decision-making processes. Its organisational structure encompasses the congress, the presidency, the main board, the president and local organisations in almost all of the municipalities in Montenegro and these all participate in decision-making processes about all key Democrat decisions.

For example, one of the competences of the party presidency, according to the party constitution, is to propose the electoral list of the Democrats for parliamentary elections. Then the party main board approves the list of candidates for parliamentary elections. But nominations for the electoral list come from the party’s local subcommittees where every single member is invited to take part. Then the local party organisation completes a proposal of nominees and sends it to the party presidency. In addition, the party president organises internal secret voting for the nominating candidates at both the state and local levels, which must be acknowledged by the party presidency. This means that around 3,000 party members participate in drafting the final electoral list for the parliamentary elections.

So, there is an inclusive and democratic process of drafting the electoral list for parliamentary elections that involves around 10,000 members, which ends with the final approval by the party’s main board. In addition, the party congress’s competence is to adopt strategies, decisions, declarations and other documents as a final step in decision-making processes within the Democratic Montenegro party structure.

The latest party congress was organised in May 2019 and it gathered around 1,800 delegates from all over Montenegro. Clearly, no single decision, including the most important ones such as the decision on the list for parliamentary elections, can be made without the involvement and influence of a great number of the party members active within different party bodies. This all ensures the highest level of transparency and openness in Democratic Montenegro.

This element of the internal organisational structure perfectly fits with the aims that the Democrats are striving for in Montenegrin politics. To remind, the Democrats plead for:

- a democratic state where the freely expressed will of the citizens is the only source of legitimate power;
- a modern state based on the rule of law and political pluralism;
- a socially responsible state, based on a functional market economy;
- transparency and openness in conducting public affairs.
Thirdly, Democratic Montenegro is oriented towards direct communication with citizens. Door-to-door campaigning implies continuous dedicated work including visits to households all over Montenegro. Each visit represents a chance for a party member or a voter or an ordinary citizen to ask some questions and to make remarks to party officials. This is also an important mechanism that contributes to the transparency and openness in the functioning of the Democrats.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
Democratic Montenegro is a political organisation founded on the principles of openness and transparency. Relevant external and internal authorities have confirmed that the party finances have been transparent to a greater extent. All reports on financial aspects of the functioning of Democratic Montenegro are positive and publicly available.

Importantly, and linked to transparency in financial conduct, decision-making procedures within the party are based on the principles of inclusion and participation of its members. That provides legitimacy to every single Democrat decision.

Hence, when the principles of openness and transparency are assessed one can clearly conclude that the operations of the Democrats represent an excellent example and can serve as a role model to others. Also, the very fact that transparent financing of the Democrats is connected to the democratic character of the decision-making procedures within the party is equally important. When all funding sources are available to the public and the party functions in a manner that encourages participation and a democratic approach, this creates an environment for each party member to develop and strengthen their sense of accountability, which is immensely important for politicians. Still, there are always possibilities for improvements.

Our party aims to develop an information system that will enable us to publish all our incomes and expenditures in real time. We will try to be the first political organisation not only in Montenegro but in the Western Balkans region with a modern and functional website on which it will be possible for interested stakeholders to track all transactions.

Of course, all information available on our website will have to be filtered through Montenegrin legislation guaranteeing respect of privacy and legal obligations towards our partners. We will try to make such an information system that will strengthen our orientation towards principles of openness and transparency and respect of the legislation which protects privacy of individuals and legal subjects and other basic human and civil rights guaranteed by the country's constitution. We would welcome suggestions and support in this direction.

Concerning the challenges in the implementation of the principles of openness and transparency in our work, we have not experienced any particular obstacles so far. This could be explained by the fact that the Democrats, as a young political organisation, were in a position to overcome possible negative challenges by using the experiences of others. From the very beginning we have defined principles of openness and transparency in our work as our top priority and this has proven to be a good foundation.

And finally, a useful question may be where we see our party in 10 years from now in terms of the operation of the party with a focus on the principles of openness, transparency and inclusion. We see the Democrats as a modern political organisation using a developed information system, which will enable all stakeholders to have easy access to our financial information. We think this information system should be available to others so that they can get a chance to make an easy search through it and to provide a certain kind of external control of our activities. The information system we will try to implement will have clear instructions and forms for submitting disciplinary and criminal charges if someone discovers a violation of laws and internal rules in our work. In order to fully implement this aim we will follow the best practices of the most developed political organisations in the world. And of course we are ready to share our experiences with others, especially with our partner organisations from the Western Balkans region and Europe.
Free Citizens Movement

By: Stefan Simić
Introduction
In this article we address the challenges which the Free Citizens Movement (FCM) is facing in its political programme. The article consists of three sections in which we discuss the positive and negative processes taking place within the Movement.

The FCM is a citizens’ association formed on 21 May 2017. The founder and first president was Saša Janković, who was previously known in Serbia as a former ombudsman. The current president of the FCM is actor Sergej Trifunović. The FCM has 54 committees throughout Serbia. The target group of the Movement is mostly pro-European Union people. Lately we have more and more members from rural areas, which implies that the Movement is becoming recognised as a political option in rural areas as well.

In this article we deal with the field of communications in which the FCM has potentially the biggest chance to reach citizens, but only if it manages to apply it in the right way. Two different means of communication exist within the Movement – internal (communication aimed at Movement members) and external (communication aimed at public opinion and potential voters). Internal communication is something that the FCM can be satisfied with so far. However, there is room for progress in this field.

The field where FCM has the biggest problems, thus where it has the greatest chance for progress, is external communications. The Free Citizens Movement is a young organisation that has had in its short history two presidents who greatly exceeded the popularity of the organisation itself. The current president of the Movement does not use his popularity only in a political way. This study discusses the finances of the Movement as well. This is the most controversial topic within all political organisations, and therefore is a source of serious distrust among citizens towards political actors. Considering the fact that the FCM is a group of citizens, the process of its financial management is even more complicated. The primary source of the Movement’s financing should be from membership fees; unfortunately, in the FCM this is not the case yet and the question is why. The Movement should establish a system different to what we have seen so far in political activism and should apply the approach of absolute transparency in its work. In order to implement this type of system, certain laws must also be amended.

The idea of absolute transparency is discussed in the second part of this paper, as along with the internal functioning of the organs of the Movement and transparency and democracy in decision-making. The FCM poses a democratic approach in its decision-making. Having in mind that the FCM is a young organisation, there is still a lot of room for progress, above all in the development of new organs. The Movement still does not have an ethics committee and a main board, which are crucial for normal functioning. Due to the absence of these organs, the Movement went through a series of internal disagreements that could have been prevented by the existence of these organs. This section also discusses concrete suggestions for the improvement of the internal functioning of the Movement.

1 https://pokretslobodnih.rs/kontakt/mreza.
Answers to questions on transparency
Communication within the Free Citizens Movement

At the time of writing, the FCM had 2,865 members. Considering this number, it classifies as a small political organisation. Members are divided into: active and informed, non-active and informed, and inactive and uninformed. For some groups, certain information is well known, while for others, information must be disseminated in a completely different way. They are all connected by the common fact that at some point they decided to become members of the Free Citizens Movement. To understand the reason for the emergence of the Movement, we must return to the very beginning.

The FCM was created on 21 May 2017 when the first president, Saša Janković, was elected. This election followed his second place finish in the Serbian presidential election when he won 597,728 votes. This result was considered great, considering the election conditions at that point. Among opposition supporters, Janković was perceived as a potential new leader. This was due to the popularity which he gained during his role as ombudsman where he was frequently pointing out irregularities and human rights violations by the state administration and officials. Therefore, he resigned from his second term as ombudsman and entered politics. It is important to say that his candidacy was supported by 100 prominent individuals from different public spheres, when this event became known as the "Appel 100". He went through numerous media attacks and was a major tabloid topic as long as he opposed the ruling coalition.

Financing of the Free Citizens Movement

The financing of the Free Citizens Movement differs from other political parties because these relations are regulated by different laws. The Law on Financing of Political Activities regulates the sources and means of financing, records and control of political financing activities of the parties, coalitions and groups of citizens (article 1 of the Law on Financing of Political Activities). This law has two areas: public and private financing. Besides membership fees, there are other permitted means of financing political activity.

Article 10 of the Law on Financing of Political Activities states:
1. The maximum annual benefit that an individual can give to political entities for normal functioning is a maximum of 20 average monthly earnings;
2. The maximum annual benefit that a legal entity can give to political entities for normal functioning is a maximum of 200 average monthly earnings;
3. Benefits with an annual value greater than one average monthly earnings are made public.

The Free Citizens Movement is classified as a citizens association. In order to register as a party in Serbia, you need to collect 10,000 signatures. They must all be certified by a public notary, which costs around €30,000. When we consider that it always costs thousands of euros more because it happens that the signatures are not all valid, then we come to a figure of around €35,000. As a citizens association, FCM funding is governed by the Law on Associations. The disadvantage of this law is that there is no minimum and maximum amount that organisations can receive as a donation. Article 36 of the Law on Associations states:
• The Association may acquire assets from membership fees, voluntary contributions, donations and gifts (in cash or in kind), financial subventions, leaseholds, interest on deposits, rents, dividends and other legally permitted means.
• Individuals and legal entities giving contributions and gifts to associations may be exempted from appropriate tax obligations in accordance with the law regarding public revenue.

Current practices in the Free Citizens Movement
After the resignation of Janković from the position of FCM president, a popular actor, Sergej Trifunović, succeeded him. Janković is a lawyer who spent two terms serving as the ombudsman, during which he gained an insight to the flaws of the state system. Trifunović, as a well-known actor and artist, already had his reputation built. He is also the founder of the charity foundation “Support Life” which raises funds for the treatment of ill children in Serbia. Both of them were regularly attacked by the tabloids controlled by the ruling party.

Different personalities and different types of media attacks dictate different types of communication between politicians and citizens, therefore it is very important to be familiar with the professional background of these politicians. As a lawyer and former ombudsman, in public appearances Janković usually wears a suit and a tie and presents the image of a serious politician to his potential voters. He always used social networks to post serious messages, in some situations when he did not do so, this caused confusion among his “followers”.

The situation with Trifunović is the opposite. He is an actor who, upon his election as the president of the Movement, continued to act in the same manner as before. He often swears during his public appearances, almost never wears suits, and is still in the acting business. One of the most important things in his communication with the public is that he is an actor who does not know much about politics. However, he learns a lot and has a team to work with and compensate for this lack of political knowledge. He does not hesitate to admit that he is not familiar with a particular topic, which is a novelty in political life in Serbia. Citizens get bored with politicians who strive to be the personification of an ideal, all-knowing person. Trifunović’s behaviour presents him as just another ordinary person, which makes him look like every other citizen of this country. He does things that other politicians cannot imagine doing, for example: it is normal for him to come to the TV studio with a torn shirt, and he drinks beer at opposition rallies. All these are reasons why he often ends up in the tabloid newspapers; however his rating never gets affected by it. This is precisely how he shows himself to be a common person who makes mistakes. People often recognise themselves in these situations.

The ratings between political organisation leaders and political organisations are largely disproportionate. This is a case which the FCM and most of the political parties in Serbia are facing. Party leaders are often more recognisable than the organisations they lead. Since its founding, the Free Citizens Movement has been led by two personalities far more popular than the Movement itself, which is considered normal for a young organisation. Therefore, external communication depends solely on them. Trifunović addresses the public mainly through social media such as Twitter where he has around 100,000 followers. He has around 140,000 followers on Instagram. This represents a large number of people which can get a specific message that we want to send from the Movement. Any announcement which the Movement makes is far more visible if Trifunović shares it online. The Free Citizens Movement on Twitter has about 25,000 followers, which is a quarter of the Movement’s president. A similar situation exists on Instagram as well. This aspect of communication on one hand offers great potential while on the other it is the greatest challenge. Trifunović has atypical communication with people on Twitter which often leads to a situation where people are talking more about his status and comments than about some important FCM announcement.

The FCM is visible on the most popular social networks: Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Internal communication within the Free Citizens Movement is very successful, because there is an established system which works fine. Communication between local committees is maintained on a daily basis. The presidency, the executive committee, the department committees, the local committees, the youth group and the public relations team meet once a week. At these

4 https://www.danas.rs/politika/izbori-2020/ko-je-jaci-od-partije/
meetings plans for the coming week are agreed. The presidency and the executive committee communicate on a daily basis because they have to monitor and react to daily political events. Each committee is joined in Viber groups through which they communicate. Communication with the broader membership is mainly conducted through messages and calls. This is usually done when it comes to important notices or decisions. When it comes to member views on a particular issue, the FCM mainly uses online surveys that are sent via email. Through these surveys, they can answer questions and leave additional comments. This was very helpful when the FCM decided to boycott the 2020 parliamentary election, which was made in consultation with all members.

When we talk about financing, the Free Citizens Movement is currently funded from the City of Belgrade budget. In the last city elections, the FCM, along with members of several political parties and individuals, formed the Citizens Group and this coalition contested the elections. After the elections, eight FCM members joined the Belgrade City Assembly. According to the agreement which established the Citizens Group, the Free Citizens Movement accounted for 30 per cent of the total financial income belonging to the Citizens Group. The monthly income is 250,000 dinars (about €2,100).

All political organisations face the same problem – membership fees. Serbia has a problem with public distrust stemming from corruption, weak institutions and a lack of transparency. This distrust also applies to organisations so the monitoring of the collection of membership dues is also important. When the Free Citizens Movement was founded, the agreement was that all founders (84 people) pay 2,000 dinars a month (€15). The annual membership fee was 1,000 dinars (€8). For the first two months, all of the founders adhered to this agreement; however by the third month, the figure had fallen by half, and after six months, the monthly membership fee was paid only by the founders who had held offices in the Movement (around 25 people). After Trifunović became the president of the Movement, the founders ceased to exist as such due to changes of the constitution, and the practice of paying a monthly membership fee was stopped. In 2019, 20 per cent of members paid a membership fee that currently stands at 1,200 dinars (€10) annually.

Currently, the organisational structure of the Free Citizens Movement includes:

- **Assembly**
  The Movement’s assembly consists of all the Movement’s members. The assembly meets regularly once a year. Movement members are represented in the assembly through delegates. The presidency determines the number of delegates which are assigned based on the number of members. Their term of office is four years.

- **Presidency**
  The presidency establishes and guides the policy of the Movement. It currently has seven members and is elected by the FCM assembly.

- **President**
  The president of the Movement is elected by the assembly, by secret ballot. The assembly may decide to elect the president by public voting.

- **Executive board**
  The term of office of the executive board is four years. The four-year mandate begins with the election of the president of the executive board. The board consists of the president and deputy president of the executive board and up to 21 members. The presidency elects the members of the executive board on the proposal of the president of the executive board.

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5 https://www.danas.rs/ekonomija/problem-srbije-su-korupcija-slabe-institucije-i-nedostatak-transparentnosti/
6 https://pokretslobodnih.rs/organizacija/dokumenta-pokreta
• **Political council**
  The political council is accountable for its work to the presidency and assembly of the Movement. It consists of distinguished individuals from different public spheres and currently has nine members. The council is more visible in the media than other bodies. Members of the political council are prominent people in society and often represent the Movement in the media.

• **New Free Citizens Movement branches**
  Members of the main board and the ethics committee will be proposed at coming meetings of the FCM assembly. According to the constitution of the FCM, no member can be excluded from the Movement. There is no sanction for a violation of the constitution or acts that are contrary to the goals and policies of the FCM. These two organs are necessary for the better functioning and democratic performance of the Movement.

Daily decisions, consisting of media statements and news releases, are generally dealt over the phone. The group of people included in this day-to-day communication consists of members of the presidency and the public relations team that coordinates daily tasks, communicates with officials who give media statements, and consults with FCM experts depending on the topic.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
Communication with citizens is crucial for the future of the Movement. This is the aspect which has the greatest potential for progress, considering the number of followers on social networks on the one hand and the popularity of the Movement’s president on the other. The Movement has the potential to become the most visible political option on social networks and to base its link with citizens through this type of communication. New times require new approaches. Therefore, it is also recommended that the president of the Movement continues with the approach of informal communication with citizens through social networks because it has been noted that this type of interaction suits citizens and provides them with useful information. However, it is necessary to stop cursing in public. The function of the president of the political Movement carries responsibility, therefore swearing is counterproductive. According to internal research done by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy for the Movement, swearing in communications is counterproductive and represents a sign of weakness. Furthermore, research has shown that it gives the Movement a frivolous image, and the president himself appears to be someone who did not grow up to be a part of the government. In addition to social media (such as Twitter and Instagram), the Movement should also turn to communication via different means of digital communication, such as Viber. A Viber group must be created where all interested citizens can join and be advised about the Movement’s announcements, events etc. Furthermore, this group could be used to conduct research and launch petitions. Other organisations’ experiences have shown that proper communication through Viber can bring success.

Regarding finances, a strategy is currently being developed within the Movement which would lead to more effective payments of membership fees. Given that the FCM will boycott the upcoming elections, membership fees will be crucial for the Movement’s survival. The following ideas are currently under consideration:

• All members of FCM (officials) should pay monthly 1,000 dinars (€8) (100 people);
• Movement members (non-officials) should pay 1,200 dinars (€10) (2,700 people), annually.

Often FCM members independently assist the Movement through such means as printing material at their own expense, buying drinks and food, or using their own cars. In order to increasing donations, we believe that the key is transparency. It is recommended that the FCM develop a section on “Financing” on its official website, where all the bills paid by the Movement will be publicly available in an open data format. This is very important because every donor will be able to enter the site and see what the money has been spent on. Also, the donors should be sent a thank-you note on a monthly basis, including a financial report for the following month.

If the FCM implements all these recommendations, it has the potential to win the state government. Therefore, it is necessary to get started as soon as possible with their implementation. The FCM has achieved certain results in the short time since it was founded; unfortunately, that was not enough. In the future, the FCM does not have to become a mass party, not because it lacks the potential for something like that, but because its role in the political life of Serbia is different. The FCM should become a kind of corrector on the political scene, with a role to say clearly what is not good and to be the leader of changes. Additionally, it is necessary for the FCM to distance itself from the political clichés and to introduce innovation into the political life of Serbia. This could be possible if these recommendations are implemented.
Socialist Party of Serbia

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Introduction
The purpose this paper is to provide the perspective of the Socialist Party of Serbia (SPS) on raising transparency in the areas of communication, internal party functioning and financial reporting. We will aim to showcase some current good practices of the SPS and also practices which could be improved in these three areas. We will attempt to respond to several questions and challenges on political party transparency raised by the Westminster Foundation for Democracy as part of its regional project on political party transparency.

As a political party, the SPS was established on 18 July 1990. It is a party with a centre-left political orientation. The main programmatic goal of the party is a stable and democratic Serbia aiming to join the European Union. The SPS is a party which is historically the successor of the Communist Party of Serbia. The party is based on the legacy of support for the partisan and liberation movement in Serbia during the second world war. The SPS holds a unique position in the political spectrum of parties of Serbia because it continues the 100-year-old political ideology of the social democratic party of Dimitrije Tucovic and the Yugoslav Socialist Workers Party from 1919.

In the early 1990s the SPS was one of the initiators of pluralism. The party policies now show a strong focus on social protection, workers’ rights, free education and healthcare and putting the citizens’ interests at the centre of its work.

In relation to internal organisation, the party congress is the highest party body which enables all its members to make the most important decisions related to party elections and party positions. The congress holds a meeting every four years to elect the main party organs and party functions. Exceptionally, the party congress can be summoned by 10 per cent of the members. The statutory commission, which has 11 members, guarantees internal democratic practices by ensuring all procedures are followed during the party congress. Vertical and horizontal organisation of the party gives an opportunity for members to elect and become elected all the way from municipal and city branches of the party through to promotion to the commissions and on to council level. Recommendations by the more senior members and mentors in the party are also a frequent way for junior members to progress in the SPS.

The main board of the SPS represents our voters’ base and reflects the traditional urban Serbia in the highest governing body. On the basis of the party constitution, the main party board should have representation which ensures that at least 30 per cent of its members come from rural areas, 25 per cent of its members should be female representatives, 15 per cent should be youth below the age of 30 and 15 per cent should come from urban areas, academia and representatives from cultural institutions. The executive board has 62 members and convenes before the meeting of the SPS main board. When needed, there are also meetings dealing with current events in relation to the execution of decisions by the congress or the main board.

The SPS presidency has 37 members and convenes to prepare for the main executive board meetings. The main board convenes once in three months and, when needed, more frequently depending on the events on Serbia’s political stage.

The party executive board deals with operational tasks and with elections. It prepares sessions of the main board and elects presidents and members of the councils and commissions of the party.

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2 SPS party constitution, article 37.
The SPS presidency has 40 members which include those elected by the main board and those who are there ex officio. The ex officio members are the party president, deputy president, vice-presidents, the female forum president, the youth council president and the president of the executive board. The council of the Socialist Youth of Serbia has existed since 1992. The SPS women’s group exists and its operations are to be reorganised after the general election to best suit our internal structure. The SPS has a membership base of about 100,000 which covers the entire territory of Serbia.
Answers to questions on transparency
The Socialist Party of Serbia has inherited a method of internal communication with its members which takes place at several levels. The party communicates regularly with voters. The most useful way of receiving feedback from voters and members are direct meetings of the SPS leadership with the members of municipal and provincial organisations and direct conversations with citizens. Direct contact and communication with party members and citizens is an irreplaceable practice in the work of the SPS and a practice which we employ constantly.

As a political party we strive internally to provide guidance to party employees, volunteers and members of the SPS leadership on how to use digital platforms to communicate with citizens and sympathisers. This is mainly conducted by means of social networks such as Instagram³, Facebook⁴ and Twitter⁵.

Communication of political messages is ensured via regular SPS press conferences. The president and deputy prime minister of Serbia aim to communicate once a week. Following every meeting of the party main board, the party’s president, together with the entire SPS leadership, provide answers to questions asked by journalists at the party’s headquarters.

Regular ongoing communication between the party and the municipal organisations is within the competence of the executive board and presidency members. It is a two-way communication process. During elections the party vice-presidents are tasked by the president to cover specific territorial regions of Serbia. Municipal board members receive minutes from all meetings of the executive board and the main board which are held at headquarters.

Currently the party is working on the modernisation of communication channels at the municipal level. This should ensure that all information is available on the website (www.sps.org.rs) under a special link for the local branches of the party. This is one area which the SPS is aiming to improve. The party also aims to provide biographies and backgrounds of the key SPS members and members of the parliamentary group on its party website. This is another area we are considering improving. SPS ministers in the government of the Republic of Serbia have their own accounts on Facebook and they are responsible for maintaining them. There is no party guidance on how they should use social networks. Some ministers have active accounts on Instagram and some do not.

Generally speaking, the majority of SPS members are supportive of the idea that party activities should be broadcast on digital media. To ensure this, strategic use of staff, resources and additional financial resources are also necessary.

Members of the SPS youth council have their accounts on Instagram, Facebook and Twitter, where they communicate with their target group and convey their perception of current political events or initiatives. In organisational terms, the Socialist Youth of Serbia functions in accordance with its own rules of procedure⁶.

Since the Covid-19 pandemic drove everyone into quarantine and almost entirely halted Serbia’s public life in March and April 2020, political parties have been forced to enable and improve their existing ways of internal communication and find alternative ones.

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3 https://www.instagram.com/socijalisti/
4 SPS Facebook page is followed by 26,000 people and can be accessed at https://www.facebook.com/socijalistiSPS/?ref=br_rs.
5 https://twitter.com/socijalisti
Under the current circumstances, we have used Viber messaging and Zoom teleconferences because it was impossible to operate successfully otherwise. Therefore it is expected that, in the coming period, the SPS will find additional technical solutions so it will be possible to broadcast live parts of party meetings and watch them by means of digital media, for example, via Instagram live.
Current Practices the Socialist Party of Serbia
In answering the question on how the SPS responds to public calls for more financial transparency, we can say that the party has done this by means of systematic changes and by working on greater responsibility of employees in the party’s organisation.

Access to the financial operations and party funding from 2019 is available on the party website. A new rule book is in place stipulating that all municipal organisations shall bear responsibility for possible debts and unforeseen expenses or for penalties for improper financial reporting if this arises. Education programmes internally within the party have been carried out in the fields of tax paying, financial discipline and understanding the procedures and the requirements which the party has under the law on political party financing. The yearly financial audit findings and a complete insight into the 2018 SPS financial report are available on the party website. The party website also contains an insight into the list of all SPS donors and a public call for future donors to help fund the party’s operations from their personal resources.

Currently, a good practice in the area of communications is that vice-presidents have been given the task of regularly visiting areas during general elections so that communications between the leadership and party members is direct at the national level.

As the Covid-19 pandemic spread in March and April 2020, there was an innovation applied in communication with citizens in the sense that, when called by seniors who did not live in urban areas, members of the SPS youth paid them organised visits and brought them food, drinks and medicine.

One good practice in the internal functioning of the SPS which could be further expanded includes daily consultations via an SPS Viber group named “Think Tank SPS”.

The Viber group has 30 senior members and the topics we discuss are current political issues relevant to public life in Serbia, for example: how to modernise the existing health system, keeping what was best from the previous one while improving the services and financing of all health centres; and how to come up with a well-balanced answer to right-wing parties being occasionally hostile to migrants, or to some migrants being hostile to the population.

Further in the area of communication, the SPS youth council successfully prepares, prints and distributes its youth bulletin every three months. The bulletin deals with the promotion of SPS youth members and the topics that are current among young people in Serbia. The bulletins are distributed in places where youths spend their time and it is organised by the party’s young volunteers. At the level of municipal organisations, it is used as a way of commencing communication with politically undecided youths and those who are passive voters.

Another good practice of SPS youth is that they conduct forestry activities twice a year, along with SPS municipal organisations, in order to contribute to the global and local struggle for sustainable development and raise awareness of the harmful effects of climate change.

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7 The financial and audit reports are in the Documents drop-down box on the party website at https://www.sps.org.rs/forum-zena/.
Proposals, recommendations and conclusions
We consider the SPS to be a well-established and organised party with close to 100 years of political history. Despite its tradition, there is always room for improvement, change and adaptation in the way the party operates, communicates and reaches out to voters.

In order to improve the existing practice of its Viber group which operates similar to a think tank, one recommendation could be to create a steering committee to develop specific ideas for work and to ensure resources for its operation which could lead to the creation of a formal party think tank. The SPS think tank could develop and work on methods to familiarise citizens with its policies, ensure greater participation in party events and promote the political engagement of young voters.

The think tank could and should establish contacts with relevant sister parties and political institutions in the region and in the European Union.

In order to improve the existing practice of communication with citizens, the SPS could consider broadcasting part of its meetings on digital networks direct and live, with the possibility of providing comments and making direct suggestions and proposals.

In addition, transcripts of some current topics and particular meetings of the SPS main board and presidency could be posted on the party’s website and social networks to increase transparency.

In order to further raise the profile of SPS MPs, the party could propose initiating public hearing on relevant topics. At the same time, these activities could serve the purpose of educating members and citizens about the work and the ways of operation of the National Assembly of Serbia.

Gender inclusion topics could be promoted by way of organising events between the SPS leadership and female members of parliament where, in an open dialogue, their suggestions for and objections to that particular environment and about the overall position of women in Serbia would be established. Measures which are thus agreed can then, with the approval of the SPS leadership, be posted on party accounts on digital media.

As for internal party democracy and how to improve it in the coming period after the general elections which are scheduled to take place on 21 June 2020, the party will hold its announced internal party elections. The results achieved by the party in the 2020 general elections will, to a large extent, affect the outcome of its internal elections.