



Overview of Alumni of the Academy for Public Policy and the Community Mobilisers placed on candidate lists for the Parliamentary Elections in 2024

I. Introduction

The Electoral Support Programme in North Macedonia is a project of the Government of Switzerland and implemented by the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES). The Programme's overall objective is to support democratic and credible election processes that facilitate political participation and social integration by enabling voters to freely select their representatives and hold them accountable.

The activities are designed to support this objective through the achievement of three outcomes:

- Outcome 1: Strengthened institutions conduct fair, transparent and efficient election processes;
- Outcome 2: Political parties present and apply citizen-oriented policies and election platforms;
- Outcome 3: Empowered citizens (especially youth and women) hold political parties and elected officials accountable.

The Programme works with a range of stakeholders – civil society organizations (CSOs), political parties, public authorities, and citizens – to further advance the knowledge and expertise about the electoral processes and international good practices.

Recognizing the significant electoral and political influence held by young people in developing democracies, the Electoral Support Programme seeks to empower the youth to effectively engage with political parties and policymakers, thus shaping policies in impactful ways. The initial phase of the Programme primarily focused on enhancing youth participation through initiatives such as the Academy for Public Policy and Community Mobilization programmes.



Through the Academy for Public Policy (APP), the Programme has collaborated with multiple political parties to enhance their abilities in devising electoral strategies grounded in evidence, as well as simultaneously, fostering connections with local communities, including women, youth, and other marginalized groups, through the implementation of innovative initiatives¹. Consequently, by facilitating structured discussions and exchanges among citizens, political entities, and government officials, the Programme has played a role in bolstering political transparency and inclusivity within the electoral process.

¹ The innovative initiatives intended to achieve greater community engagement at the local level, specifically focused on how the municipality governed, by informing and raising awareness of citizens, through discussions and demands for accountability. The initiatives employed a variety of actions such as collecting citizens' opinions on priority issues, outreach to decision-makers, implementing PR guerilla actions, signing petitions, developing digital tools, and organizing online and in-person community fora.

Overall, three generations of diverse party youth were supported in the period between 2019 to 2023.

Across the three cohorts, 75 young politicians from 15 political parties (SDSM, VMRO-DPMNE, LDP, DUI, Alliance for Albanians, Alternativa, Levica, DOM, BESA, NSDP, Party of the Vlachs, DPA, VMRO People's Party, United for Macedonia and Movement for National Unity of the Turks) and one citizens' initiative (For Our Kumanovo) participated in the project.

In addition, as a core pillar of the Electoral Support Programme, empowering citizens, especially the youth, to ensure the accountability of political parties and elected representatives, was prioritized since the start of its implementation in 2019. Substantial endeavors were directed towards mobilizing proactive young individuals and civil society to advocate for civic education, inclusion, monitoring, and activism within their local communities. This endeavor resulted in the formation of three successive cohorts of Community Mobilisers, with 88 young people from 43 civil society organizations taking part in the activities.



In addition to the APP and Community Mobilization programs, young individuals from the political parties were supported through the activities that were part of the comprehensive development program aiming to strengthen the Research and Analytical Centers of the political parties (RACs). Several capacity development workshops for young party members were supported by the Programme.

II. Objective and methodological approach

Monitoring the development of young political and civil society activists after capacity development support is essential for ensuring sustainability and impact of efforts and to cultivate effective leadership in politics and in civic engagement.

It's a proactive approach to nurturing the next generation of leaders and fostering a culture of accountability, learning, and innovation in governance. The Electoral Support Programme in the period 2025-2027 will support two more cohorts of Academy for Public Policy for young leaders from political parties and will implement two capacity development cycles for Community Mobilisers.

In that direction, tracking the development of young leaders and activists helps identify areas where additional support or training may be needed. It provides insights into specific skill gaps or challenges they encounter in their political careers and civic engagement efforts, enabling the Electoral Support Programme to tailor future capacity development programs accordingly.

There are various approaches that can be used to monitor whether leadership of the political parties recognizes and values acquired knowledge and skills from different development efforts. In the context of this document, IFES monitoring has focused on two specific aspects: a) the presence of upskilled individuals on the candidate lists, and b) their positioning on the lists for the parliamentary elections in 2024. The lists of all contestants are available on the <https://candidatelist.sec.mk/CandidateList>. The review of candidate lists resulted in the identification of six participants present on the lists.

In pursuit of a deeper comprehension of the effectiveness of the capacity development efforts supported by the Programme during Phase 1, IFES established direct contact with each of the six candidates. They were subsequently queried with the following questions:

- 1) How would you describe your experience with the Academy for Public Policy/Community Mobilization Programme?
- 2) In what way did the capacity development efforts helped you becoming a candidate for the parliamentary elections and how did it prepared you for taking part in the campaign and the electoral process?

The ensuing chapter integrates both qualitative and quantitative findings, complemented by concise profiles of the candidates.

III. Findings

Six individuals who have previously participated in either the Academy for Public Policy or the Community Mobilization activities are included in the candidate lists of various political parties and coalitions for the 2024 Parliamentary Elections. Below is a comprehensive list detailing these alumni, their placement on the candidate lists, the probability of their election, and their involvement with the Electoral Support Programme².

In addition to these, four other individuals who participated in workshops dedicated to young party members, and organized in cooperation with the RACs, are part of the candidate lists for the parliamentary elections. A short description of their involvement with the Programme is provided as well.

The gender distribution between the individuals is equal, i.e. out of the ten in total, five are female and five are male. Eight of them are Macedonians and two are Albanians. They represent a total of six political parties: VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, DUI, Democratic Movement, Levica and Demokrati.

Herolind Sakipi

Political party: Democratic Movement (part of the coalition VLEN)

Electoral district: 2

Place on the candidate list: 8

Affiliation with the Programme: Community Mobilizers second generation



Herolind Sakipi was part of the second generation of Community Mobilizers. He participated in all three modules and implemented the innovative initiative titled: “Open lists – my vote for my representative in parliament.” The goal of the initiative was to raise awareness and spark a discussion amongst the citizens about open lists and to propose changes to the Electoral Code in that regard. Through survey, the initiative examined the knowledge of citizens regarding the open list and their opinion on introduction of open lists for the 2021 local elections. Additional discussions were organized with MPs, political party youths, NGOs, members of the working group within the Ministry of Justice, State Election Commission, which were also invited to share more information about the concept of open lists on a public discussion. All activities within the initiative, including consolidated report from the survey and realized discussions/meetings were promoted on social media. The initiative was based in Kumanovo and the total budget was 104.600 denars.

² Set in alphabetical order.

More information on Sakipi's innovative initiative can be found at: <https://electoralsupportprogramme.mk/en/municipality/%d0%ba%d1%83%d0%bc%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%be%d0%b2%d0%be/>.

Herolind became a member of Democratic Movement and currently holds the position Municipal coordinator for political activity and structure of the party branch in Lipkovo. He is on the candidate list for the Coalition VLEN in the electoral district 2 and is placed in the eighth spot. His chances of winning a parliamentary mandate are low.

Herolind recounts his fulfilling experience as a community mobilizer, emphasizing the role in identifying community needs and challenges through meetings and conversations. He describes efforts to forge partnerships with local organizations, citing an initiative to change the electoral code as an example. This initiative demonstrated the potential for positive change through community cooperation. In conclusion, he reflects on his journey as marked by challenges and achievements, underscoring the importance of community collaboration in driving progress and development.

Herolind shares his interest in electoral processes, which led him to secure a grant and project through the Community Mobilization program, focused on changes in the electoral code and implementing the open list model. Throughout the year-long project, he gained valuable experience, made new connections, and encountered various challenges that contributed to his personal and professional growth. Inspired by this experience, he decided to pursue political engagement and successfully secured a spot on the candidate list for Member of Parliament as part of the Democratic Movement political party within the "VLEN" coalition.

Ilija Blazhevski

Political party: Demokrati

Electoral district: 1

Place on the candidate list: 4

Affiliation with the Programme: APP second generation



Ilija Blazhevski participated in the first generation of the Academy for Public Policy. He attended the first two modules but was absent from the third one and was not given a certification for completion of the Academy. Blazhevski submitted the following proposal for an initiative: "To address the incidence of increasing cases of domestic violence in Drachevo settlement".

Ilija Blazhevski is a member of Demokrati and currently part of the Central Committee of the party. He is on the candidate list of the party in the electoral district 1, placed on the fourth spot. It is considered highly unlikely that Blazhevski will enter Parliament.

Ilija reflects positively on his experience with the Academy for Public Policy, considering it a valuable opportunity to engage with diverse political perspectives, acquire new knowledge, and hone skills through debates and interactions with top lecturers and political opponents. He recommends participation in the academy to all young individuals involved in politics, emphasizing the benefits it offers.

Ilija credits the skills gained from the Academy for helping him secure the fourth place on the party list in the first electoral constituency. He praises the lecturers for their extensive knowledge and experience, noting that he learned new inventive methods and approaches for election campaigns. He expresses hope that implementing these methods will contribute to a successful campaign and electoral victory.

Julija Dimitrievska

Political party: Levica

Electoral district: 2

Place on the candidate list: 18

Affiliation with the Programme: APP third generation



Julija Dimitrievska took part in the third generation of the Academy for Public Policy. She participated in all three modules and was awarded a certification for attending the Academy. Dimitrievska proposed the initiative “Improving the accessibility of the road infrastructure by marking local streets and/or installing audible signals at intersections (by the traffic lights)”, which she implemented and completed and presented a public policy brief. Dimitrievska's public policy brief addresses the problem of poor traffic infrastructure in Kumanovo, which creates difficulties for blind people. She had meetings with representatives of associations for people with special needs and representatives from the Municipality. The proposed solutions were planned to be presented and discussed in the meetings of the municipal council, whose competence is traffic at the city level. The complete policy brief of Dimitrievska can be found at <https://electoralsupportprogramme.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Compendium-of-Public-Policy-Briefs-final-ENG-version-1.pdf> (pages 74-77).

Julija Dimitrievska is a member of Levica and its youth branch Crvena Mladina. She is part of the candidate list of the party in the electoral district 2, holding the 18 spot, which makes her high unlikely to become a Member of Parliament.

Dimitrievska highlights three key benefits from participating in the Academy: education, forming new friendships, and enhancing communication skills.

Participating in the Academy provided Julija with new knowledge in politics and media, along with improved communication and rhetorical skills. She believes that applying these acquired abilities in practice will be beneficial for their future endeavors.

Karolina Maksimovska

Political party: SDSM

Electoral district: 6

Place on the candidate list: 7

Affiliation with the Programme: Community Mobilizers third generation



Karolina Maksimovska was part of the third generation of Community Mobilizers through the organization Association for Rural Development Local Action Group LAG SCARDUS from Jegunovce. She attended all three modules and implemented the innovative initiative titled: “A chance for young people – Now!” The initiative monitored the realization of the electoral promise “Opening of a mini-industrial zone in the settlement of Podbregje”, which was aimed at revitalizing the local economy in the municipality of Jegunovce and opening new jobs for young people. Community mobilization activities included field research, meetings with local self-government, lobbying, mobilizing the youth and the local population by reminding them of the promise and sharing the monitoring results, public debates with affected stakeholders, etc. The initiative was based in Jegunovce, and the total budget was 300.000 denars. More information on Maksimovska’s innovative initiative can be found at: <https://electoralsupportprogramme.mk/en/single-initiative-2022/?ID=4032> .

Karolina Maksimovska became a member of SDSM and its youth branch SDMM. She is placed on the candidate list of the party and its coalition in the electoral district 2. Holding the seventh spot on the list, she is not likely to become a Member of Parliament.

Karolina reflects on her experience as a community mobilizer, emphasizing the program as a positive experience. She notes personal growth in skills and overcoming challenges previously doubted as successes from the six-month participation in the program. Additionally, the experience enhanced her ability to communicate effectively with the community, benefiting her personally as well.

Looking back to her experience as a community mobilizer, Karolina highlighting how it enhanced her communication skills and contacts, which she views as valuable assets. She believes that this experience will benefit her in politics by facilitating direct communication with citizens and stakeholders. She emphasizes the importance of youth involvement in politics and expresses her determination and motivation to run for candidacy, motivated by her belief in young people's potential to contribute positively to political processes and societal improvement.

Mario Janeski

Political party: Levica

Electoral district: 2

Place on the candidate list: 4

Affiliation with the Programme: APP third generation



Mario Janeski participated in the third generation of the Academy for Public Policy. He attended all three modules and received a certification for attending the Academy. Janeski proposed the following initiative: “Provide facilities and program for persons with mental disabilities in cooperation with non-government organizations.” He managed to implement the initiative, complete and present a public policy brief. This

addresses the problem of not having a day care center for people with intellectual disabilities in Bitola. To investigate the problem, Janeski held meetings with municipal officials, councilors, and family members who have people with intellectual disabilities. In conclusion, one of the councilors decided to submit a proposal to the Council of the Municipality of Bitola to start the process for technical specifications and for locating facilities within the competence of the Municipality. Janeski's complete policy brief can be found at <https://electoralsupportprogramme.mk/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Compendium-of-Public-Policy-Briefs-final-ENG-version-1.pdf> (pages 18-21).

Mario Janeski is a member of Levica and is currently the President of its youth branch Crvena Mladina. He is on the candidate list of the party in the electoral district 2 and holds the fourth spot. The probabilities of Janeski entering Parliament are low.

Mario reflects on his positive experience with the Academy for Public Policy, highlighting several reasons for his satisfaction. He emphasizes the opportunity to interact closely with young people from other political parties, which improved his perception of political opponents. Additionally, he found value in hearing lectures from individuals with diverse political backgrounds, including former politicians from both the left and right spectrum, which broadened his understanding of different political perspectives.

Mario expresses how the Academy provided him with a detailed understanding of the process involved in creating public policies, a crucial aspect for any aspiring young politician. He emphasizes the importance of this knowledge for future political engagement, as it equips him with the necessary skills to eventually implement and develop policies that serve the public interest.

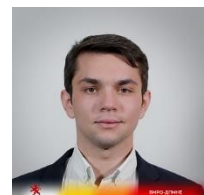
Todor Koneski

Political party: VMRO-DPMNE

Electoral district: 1

Place on the candidate list: 20

Affiliation with the Programme: APP first generation



Todor Koneski was part of the first generation of the Academy for Public Policy. He finished all three modules and was awarded a certification for attending the Academy. Koneski proposed to work on the following initiative: "Solutions for safe and eco-friendly transportation in Skopje (bike)".

Todor Koneski is a member of VMRO-DPMNE and currently holds the position of Secretary for international cooperation of the Youth Forces Union of the party. Koneski is on the candidate list of the party and its coalition in the electoral district 1. Being placed on the last 20 spot on the list, it is highly unlikely that Koneski will become Member of Parliament.

Todor reflects on his experience as part of the first generation of a unique learning format, highlighting its formative nature for both participants and organizers. He notes the additional challenge of navigating the program amidst the onset of the Covid-19 crisis. Despite this, he found the experience pleasant, featuring insights from experienced professionals in politics and fostering positive relationships with peers from different political parties. He also mentions maintaining personal contacts with representatives from almost all parties involved, despite not formally communicating as a group.

Todor highlights the practical aspect of his experience at the Academy as the most beneficial for his political endeavors, particularly in his candidacy for parliament and broader political engagements. He emphasizes the fusion of theory and practice within the Academy, which provided valuable insights into policy implementation and project management. Participating in mock debates was particularly instrumental in preparing him for campaign challenges, such as responding to unexpected questions and presenting compelling arguments against political opponents.

Workshop: Youth Leadership - Participation to Decision Making (2022)

In September 2022, the project organized a workshop in cooperation with the Research and Analytical Center of DUI, intended for their young party members. During the workshop, participants had the opportunity to work on and strengthened their leadership skills, citizen involvement and communication, as well as their participation in policy-making and decision-making processes. One participant in the capacity development efforts, **Mjellma Ejupi**, is included in the candidate list of the European Front Coalition led by DUI. She is a candidate in the fourth electoral district, placed on the seventh spot, which makes it highly unlikely for her to become Member of Parliament.

Workshop: Mobilizing the potential of young party members for the upcoming parliamentary elections: communicating public policies – argumentation and presentation (2024)

In March 2024, in cooperation with the RAC of VMRO-DPMNE, a workshop was organized for the members of the youth wing of the party. The activity covered topics in the field of media, communication and youth policies, public relations and communication in politics, public speaking, participation in press conferences and TV interviews, digital media, as well as the approach and successful strategies for effective use of social networks. Four participants from the training are placed on the candidate lists of the party for the 2024 parliamentary elections, as follows:

Aleksandra Nikolovska is placed on the candidate list of the VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition in the electoral district 1. Holding the 19th spot on the list, it is considered highly unlikely to become a Member of Parliament.

Dragana Bojkovska is a candidate of VMRO-DPMNE led coalition in the third electoral district, placed on the 12th spot on the list. Taking into consideration the traditionally high support that the party receives in this electoral district, the possibility of winning a parliamentary mandate for Bojkovska is high.³

Sergej Popov is the president of the Youth Forces Union of VMRO-DPMNE and is on the candidate list of the party and its coalition in the electoral district 1. Being placed on the 13th spot on the list, there is a possibility that Popov will become Member of Parliament.⁴

Todor Koneski was already covered in the previous part as he participated in the first generation of the Academy for Public Policy.

IV. Lessons learned

- Acknowledging the positive experience from the participants in the Programme's activities during the Main Phase 1, as well as the substantial electoral and political impact wielded by young individuals, the Electoral Support Programme should continue supporting these programmes and empower young people to engage actively with political parties and policymakers, thereby influencing policies in meaningful ways.
- Both capacity building programmes proved valuable for the participants as they effectively equipped individuals with the necessary skills for political engagement, as well as helped them build relationships with peers, experts, and political opponents, which can prove instrumental in their future political efforts and engagements;
- The knowledge gained and new strategies and methods learned from their respective experiences helped participants in developing innovative methods for engaging with voters and contributing to the party election campaign;
- Taking part in the APP or interacting with local communities, young politicians are exposed to various viewpoints and experiences, whether through learning programs or community engagement, thus enriching the political landscape, and fostering direct communication and increased understanding among politicians from different parties;
- Taking into consideration that the participants in both programs are young party members, whose engagement is more intensive at local level, there is an opportunity for alumni and community mobilisers to be placed on the candidate lists for the local elections scheduled in 2025.

³ In the aftermath of the elections, Bojkovska managed to win a parliamentary mandate as the party secured 14 of the 20 MP seats in the electoral district.

⁴ The party won ten mandates from this electoral district. As some of the candidates that are high on the list are expected to go in the Government and vacate their seats in Parliament, it is possible that Popov might be elected additionally.