

Society

Policy Brief: Independent lists in North Macedonia could boost local democracy

by EWB 31. 10. 2023.



Skopje, North Macedonia; Photo: Flickr / Chet Kroon

VIENNA – The limited success of “Green Human City” (GHC) and “Chance for Centar” (CfC) leads to the main finding that independent lists can boost local democracy, concludes the Policy Brief „[Tackling the local beyond partisan politics. Can independent lists in North Macedonia boost local democracy](#)” published published within the WB2EU Network.

The Policy Brief recommends forming strategic coalitions with established political parties based on policies, not loyalty. By doing this, these independent movements will silence the accusations that they are „hidden servants“ of the major party.

According to recommendations, wider cooperation with different actors and on various topics is necessary. The “Green Humane City” and “Chance for Centar” movements should continue to deliver on their campaign promises, especially through increased collaboration with other political parties (not just those present in municipal councils).

„Both movements declare themselves independent and aim to return power from the political and business elite to the citizens“ the authors note.

According to authors, movements like GHC and CfC enable citizens to get involved in policy-making at the local level. The key , in getting people involved in this process, is to connect with them.

That is why Policy Brief also recommend that “Chance for Centar” should follow “Green Humane City’s” good practise of conducting public opinion research to gather information first-hand about the increased communication between the Ministry of Information Society and Administration and reluctant institutions in order to convince them of the benefits of being a part of the digital system and offer digital services.

Policy Brief mentions the importance of actions of GHC and CfC, because they developed concrete plans to deal with concrete issues. GHC has worked on an air pollution reduction plan, CfC has suggested projects that would increase public safety, and they have also suggested publishing a job position systematization.

Authors point out the difference between GHC and CfC’s actions, because CfC had only one amendment intervention, while four out of five

amendments proposed by GHC were accepted. „This difference could be attributed to the fact that GHC is backed by established organisations with their own human and financial resources“ authors said.

They stated that capacities of independent organisations, such as civil society organizations can have significant influence on these lists.

Unlike GHC, CfC consists of lone activists and specialists.

Authors underline that „the successes of the movements GHC and CfC contribute to increasing citizens' trust in independent candidate lists as a true “third voting option” and alleviating the so-called “wasted vote syndrome”.

Precisely because the citizens' trust in candidates is in the first place, there is a fear that democratic process could be compromised if independent movements do not act in accordance with needs of citizens.

To get citizen input on the movements' activity, communication channels must be developed between the movements and their constituents through newsletters, social media, and local gatherings.

Policy Brief mentions that „both initiatives have a presence on social media platforms, especially Facebook, in terms of frequency of posts and two-way communication with citizens“. Also, GHC is active on the Discord platform, which, as the authors pointed out „primarily targets young people“.

As transparency is an important part of democracy, the authors refer that CfC should to imitate the model of GHC with regard to transparency and accountability. It is important

to mention that one of the priorities of CfC is „Transparency embedded in the publication of relevant information“, but transparency is absent in work of councillors in the municipal council.

„GHC and CfC would contribute to strengthening democratic capacity, reducing the chance of manipulation, and encouraging local debate on the issues faced by citizens“the authors state.

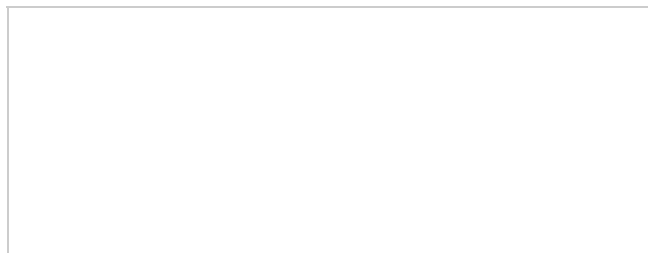
„Nevertheless, as can be seen from these two examples, it is much easier to successfully promote the interests of citizens who are not aligned with political parties at the local level rather than the central one“ the Policy Brief concludes.

The Policy Brief is published in the framework of the WB2EU project. The project aims at the establishment of a network of renowned think-tanks, do-tanks, universities, higher education institutes and policy centres from the Western Balkans, neighbouring countries and EU member states that will be most decisive for the enlargement process and Europeanisation of the region in the upcoming years. The WB2EU project is co-funded by the European Commission under its Erasmus+ Jean Monnet programme.

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