

**POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL STABILITY AS A
PREREQUISITE FOR NORTH MACEDONIA TO ACHIEVE THE
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS OF THE UNITED
NATIONS**

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Abstract

Small states, such as North Macedonia, in contemporary and globalized international relations, face security challenges and threats that cannot be managed by traditional national defense and security infrastructure. In fact, small states in contemporary international relations face risks that require strong institutional frameworks, political stability and predictable and comprehensive strategies, instead of military doctrines, war tactics and huge military forces with heavy weapons. Pervasive corruption, institutional weakness and political instability are the leading internal security challenges for transitional and small states, such as North Macedonia. In this context, on the case study of North Macedonia, this paper will analyze peace, justice and strong institutions, as a prerequisite for internal political and social stability, as well as an important instrument in the process of realizing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN

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SDGs). This study will show the interconnection and conditionality between the stable political and institutional framework and the process of realization of the aforementioned global goals. Specifically, using the example of North Macedonia, the study will show that the Macedonian authorities must include individuals, community, internal and transnational security, and multidimensional factors, including the environment, global security, and non-state actors, as a focal point in establishing a new approach for effectively dealing with contemporary and emerging global, regional and local challenges, including achieving the UN SDGs.

Keywords: sustainable development goals, institutions, stability, human security, sustainability, North Macedonia, UN.

Sustainability from a modern perspective

The Republic of North Macedonia, as a young and open economy, with high import dependence, is largely influenced by global trends, which bring with them various opportunities and potential for progress, but at the same time represent a challenge for each society. As a potential consequence, these trends are driven by various threats and risks, such as climate change, health pandemics, military crises and migration intertwined with drastic changes in societies such as the digital and green transformation (Sozdavame idnina zajedno, 2023, p. 4).

Since its independence, the Republic of North Macedonia has made significant progress towards sustainable development and rational use of available natural resources, guided by several key strategic policy documents such as the National Development Plan 2007–2009 (Vlada na Republika Makedonija, 2007), National Strategy for Sustainable Development 2009–2030 (Ministerstvo za životna sredina i prostorno planiranje, 2010) and the Strategy for Regional Development 2009–2019 (Sobranie na Republika Makedonija, 2009). In 2015, the Government of North Macedonia reaffirmed its commitment to sustainable development, promising “to leave no one behind” and agreeing to implement the 2030 Agenda (Sustainable Development Goals - North Macedonia, 2019).

However, the Sustainable Development Goals represent a global framework for creating policies that eradicate all forms of poverty and inequality, protect the environment, and ensure prosperity and peace (Sustainable Development Goals - North Macedonia, 2019, p. 3). Contemporary globalized society, regardless of its national, ethnic, religious or other specific attributes, does not have a clear understanding of the stated Sustainable Development Goals. The complexity of global society means that sustainable development cannot be addressed from a single perspective, country or scientific discipline (Jelisavac Trošić, 2016, p. 111). From that position, global society is faced with a lack of perception concerning the importance of risks and threats it could face if it acts contrary to the declared principles within Sustainable Development Agenda. The 2030

Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted in September 2015 at the United Nations Summit on Sustainable Development, is universal, establishing 17 goals that should be implemented by all countries (Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, n.d. (henceforth referred to as the Agenda)). Through different social segments, the Agenda identifies concrete security challenges, threats and risks that directly or indirectly threaten survival and long-term sustainability. Sustainable Development Goals within the Agenda 2030 lead us to a new chapter of global development in which sustainability, for many real reasons, is placed as a prerequisite, in any domain of further development. Respectively, development in global frameworks is a prerequisite for the sustainability of human civilization and the established political, economic and social order based on the Charter of the United Nations (United Nations, 1945).

On the one hand, achieving Sustainable Development Goals will lead to a significantly improved security mosaic at the global level in the long term. For example, in the context of a world without poverty, it will affect the reduction of social differences and therefore the direct reduction of social inequality that often led to open conflicts, civil and interstate (Goodhand, 2001, as cited in Marks, 2016, p. 1). Doing something about these goals on a global level, including a world without hunger, will contribute to the further development of a humane and healthier civilization in the long run, but the success of sustainable development depends on the global political climate (Jelisavac Trošić, Tošović-Stevanović, & Ristanović, 2021, p. 202). In the context of health and well-being, health is an essential prerequisite for the sustainability of a nation, and potentially humanity as a whole. On the other hand, when it comes to the importance of well-being, it is almost impossible to create either social or state sustainability if the economic and financial capacities are unsustainable (Hussain, 2014). In this context, it is worth mentioning the perspective of classical economist Adam Smith who connects the economy with the institutional framework and states "Unlike gravity – which is a natural law – the market is an institution. Whether consciously or not, the market is the result of human activity, relations and choices" (Bouchet, 2017, p. 4). Education is also a prerequisite for starting any production process, from manual to the most modern – digital.

From a modern perspective, gender equality is essential in order to provide equal opportunities and chances to everyone in the modern world, both personally and professionally. In fact, gender equality is sometimes claimed as a basic principle of modern society, in way that encourages complacency about how far societies have progressed, but also feeds into hierarchies of countries and cultures (Phillips, 2018, p. 1). At the same time, clean water and sanitation are the basis of all prerequisites – that is, drinking water is a prerequisite for a healthy population. Access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is the most basic human need for health and well-being (Water and Sanitation - United Nations Sustainable Development, 2023). In the economic context, dignified work, economic growth, industries, innovations and infrastructure represent the foundation of economic and financial development throughout history, and thus

of sustainability, while the availability of clean energy is also one of the prerequisites for the initiation, growth and sustainability of economic systems, especially in contemporary international circumstances (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, Close the Gap Foundation, n.d.). Reduced inequality, responsible consumption and production, and dealing with climate change fall largely in the domain of economics, because without equality it is difficult to achieve social stability. With responsible consumption and production, it is easier to secure scarce natural resources, especially in the last twenty years, though we must take into account climate changes to avoid the accelerated collapse of existing systems at all levels. In this context, according to author's position based on the analysis of potential barriers in the process of achieving UN Sustainable Development Goals, the entire mentioned process is almost impossible without peace, justice and strong institutions, because without peace any social development is impossible, and without justice it is impossible to establish a critical mass for common and shared social values and interests, while, at the same time, without strong institutions the foundation which guaranties basic human rights, including achievement of human interests will be lacking.

Our goal, in the case study of North Macedonia, is to focus on the relationship between UN Goals of Sustainable Development (UN SAGs) and the national institutional framework, thus to provide explanation about conditionality ties between national institutional framework and the achievement of UN SDGs. Specifically, through the analysis of the institutional "efficiency and effectiveness" and sustainability of North Macedonia, we will answer the question of how strong state institutions are, regardless of whether countries are large or small political entities, crucial in the process of realizing the UN SDGs. This would confirm the thesis that a weak and unstable political and institutional national framework represents a barrier to achieving the UN's sustainable development goals. Using the example of North Macedonia, we will determine how much state capacities contribute to the realization of the global agenda of sustainable development goals at the local and regional level.

Table 1: United Nations Funds Allocated to the Sustainable Development Goals in North Macedonia

SDGs	Percent (%) of total	Available in US dollars
No poverty	6.3	1,600,000
Zero hunger	1.9	486,100
Good health and well being	12	3,100,000
Quality education	4.5	1,200,000
Gender equality	12.6	3,200,000
Clean water and sanitation	0.9	240,700
Affordable and clean energy	8.6	2,200,000

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Decent jobs and economic growth	8.6	2,000,000
Industry, innovation and infrastructure	1.2	299,400
Reduced inequalities	3.2	830,200
Sustainable cities and communities	12.2	3,100,000
Responsible consumption and production	0.1	16,700
Climate action	14.5	3,700,000
Life below water	0	0
Life on land	1.3	327,500
Peace and justice – strong institutions	8.4	2,200,000
Partnerships for the goals	3.7	959,700

Source: United Nations North Macedonia (n.d.)

From a financial point of view, the information presented in the Table 1 largely testifies to how much has been done in terms of achieving the goals of sustainable development within the framework of the United Nations, in the example of North Macedonia, i.e. how much funding has been allocated to this poor country. Let us assume that the tabular presentation is analyzed from the perspective of the economic performance of North Macedonia and the current financial problems that this country is facing. In that case, it will be straightforward to determine that it is a symbolic amount of material resources with which it is almost impossible to start the process of sustainable development policy at the strategic, even tactical/political level. It is a symbolic allocation of funds, primarily because North Macedonia is a so-called developing country, with which the authorities in Skopje, regardless of their commitment, could contribute to achieving Sustainable Development Goals to a very limited extent. The above table does not represent a criticism of the United Nations financial framework in the process of achieving UN SDGs. It is only the financial part of the so-called mosaic, which represents a certain proof of the readiness of modern humanity, including the national and international institutional infrastructure, to tackle the challenges in the process of achieving UN's sustainable development goals. In fact, according to the author's assessment, the basis of the issue is not in the process of distributing finances within the UN, but in a general approach that does not accurately recognize intra-state and regional challenges in the bulky process of achieving the UN SDGs. The tabular example of the allocation of funds for North Macedonia for national activities within the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals represents not only the reality of limited financial resources, but also strategic unpreparedness. In fact, at the level of the United

Nations, there is a lack of specific national and regional approaches focused on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal to concretely face the obstacles on the way of achieving these goals. In this way, it will be possible to solve specific national and regional obstacles that slow down or block the process of achieving the UN SDGs. For example, some political entities face a lack of material resources, others face a lack of political will, while the third group could consist of political entities that are not at all interested in the actual realization of UN SDG's, despite their declarative promises.

The political instability of North Macedonia as a mountain standing in the way of sustainability goals

The political instability of North Macedonia has existed for almost ten years, that is, since 2014, when mass protests against the previous ruling elite led by former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski began. From 2014 to 2017, there was a complete institutional blockade due to strong political animosities and disagreements between the government and the opposition (N1 Belgrade, 2017). In the case of North Macedonia political instability, we could refer to the following definition “Political instability is a natural tendency of a government to collapse either because of conflicts or growing struggles, sometimes violent, between various political parties. Political instability also occurs if there is a rapid change of government and policy, increasing the likelihood of subsequent instability” (Governmental Instability | AG Global Strategies, n.d.). Since 2017, the political crisis has continued because institutions function in a kind of ad-hoc format, while national interests, in most cases, are reduced to the daily political struggle of party leaders. The German newspaper *Deutsche Welle* states in an analysis that political uncertainty in the country blocks the adoption of essential reforms, which results in the disappointment and frustration of the majority of the population (Braj, 2023). Political instability is a determinant that greatly limits state actors ability to deal with problems efficiently and effectively (DeRouen & Goldfinch, 2012, p. 501). The political instability of North Macedonia is not only an internal challenge that significantly limits the capacities of this country on the path of integration into the European Union, but is also a factor that additionally generates internal security challenges and risks, which are also closely related to the goals of sustainable development defined within the framework of the United Nations. Gjurovski’s research entitled “Security risks and threats – treatment, phenomenology and mapping”, (Gjurovski et al. (2020) in which he argues that in the case of North Macedonia, as many as 44% of the sources of security risks are within the state, while 39% are regional security risks. Only 17% are sources of risk as a consequence of globalization. In the atmosphere of numerous political instabilities that have colored the lives of Macedonians in previous years, the progress that politicians talk about is barely felt, according to a BBC report (Dušej Ristev & Anđelković, 2022). Political clientelism has become an essential instrument in the labor market of North Macedonia. In contrast, political animosities have become the “main game in town”, where gaining political power is the only priority of the local political elite. When it comes specifically to political instability and its

consequences for the institutional framework, the European Commission Annual Report for North Macedonia states: “The work of the Parliament was marred by political polarization, which delayed the adoption of many legal regulations “. The same report also states, "A particular focus is needed on ensuring effective implementation of existing legislation rather than launching ad hoc initiatives” (European Commission, 2022, p. 4).

Political instability is one of the leading internal challenges to North Macedonia that largely determine institutional dysfunction, and at the same time have a direct negative impact on institutional efficiency, including real contribution to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. From a scientific point of view, such circumstances make North Macedonia a UN partner within the 2030 Agenda, with a primarily limited contribution to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals defined in the universal framework of the United Nations. The internal problems and challenges facing North Macedonia further encourage the proliferation of challenges and issues mentioned in the framework of the sustainable goals, such as hunger, inequality, economic unsustainability, political instability and institutional inefficiency. In fact, political instability is not only a phenomenon that deals with the absence of cooperation between the government and the opposition, including the lack of political consensus, but also a phenomenon, in the case of North Macedonia, which in the long term destroys the functionality of the system and social cohesion. North Macedonia is facing a lack of minimum political consensus that feeds political instability. This kind of political instability initially prevents the normal functioning of institutions in this country and greatly contributes to domestic corruption. Political instability weakens the ability of the government and public organizations to fight corruption (Bohn, 2006), where conflict between parties weakens designed policies (Yahya & Gomaa, 2016). In fact, according to Salem A. Al-Jundi, Ahmed Shuhaiber and Shaban S. Al-Emara, the political instability is closely related to the pervasive corruption, even in the case of North Macedonia: the parliament is weak in investigating the problem of administrative corruption; there is no real political will to fight against administrative corruption; and conflicts between parties have weakened the campaign against administrative corruption (Al-Jundi et. al. 2022, p. 173).

Institutional challenges facing the Republic of North Macedonia – subject or object of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda?

Nation-states should adapt their national security strategies so that they can efficiently and effectively face current security challenges, threats and risks. These security risks do not threaten the national borders and territorial integrity of nation-states (Arnaudov, 2023b, p. 290), but are domestic systemic challenges that determine double security problems. In the case of North Macedonia, pervasive institutional inefficiency and ineffectiveness represent the main problem of the functionality of this state as a whole, which arose as a consequence of the phenomenon of partocracy and corruption at all levels. In that context, we must also point out that stable institutions give society

resilience to both external and internal shocks, while, on the other hand, dysfunctional institutions pave the way for and can even be a source of conflict (Trubshaw, 2021). At the same time, corruption is defined as key manipulation of policies, public entities, and administrative procedures in public finances by politicians in order that they might stay in power and increase their wealth, while corporate corruption investigates the corrupt practices by private firms, including bribery, fraud, cartels, and corrupt ties to governmental offices (Transparency International, 2021).

But, in the case of North Macedonia, in addition to pervasive corruption and partocracy, there are other internal problems, such as a weak public health system and poor economic performances (Arnaudov, 2022c, 114). The weak public institutional framework, according to the assessment of the authors, represents the main internal issue of North Macedonia which, simultaneously generates other existing domestic challenges, threats and issues.

According to the European Commission Annual Report related to the EU integration process of North Macedonia states: “North Macedonia remains moderately prepared in terms of its public administration reform as it has made limited progress in implementing last year’s recommendations given by the European Commission” (European Commission 2022, p. 4). On the other hand, according to the same report, corruption continues to carry out its mandate proactively. In particular, corruption in North Macedonia continues to create pervasive negative consequences when it comes to the functioning of the political, institutional and social system. Corruption remains prevalent in many areas and is an issue for concern (Press Corner: Key findings of the 2023 Report on North Macedonia, 2023, p. 1). The report states that capacity levels must be increased in order to successfully fight corruption and organized crime. In this context, the German newspaper *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* states that the citizens of North Macedonia are accustomed to corruption being a permanent evil in that country (BG, 2023a). In fact the report claims there is no progress in the judiciary and the fight against corruption, while the changes to the Criminal Code (Amendment of the Criminal Code, 2023), which were voted in a quick parliamentary procedure, had significant influence on both progress in judiciary and the fight against corruption (European Commission, 2023). Progress has yet to be made in the fight against corruption as corruption is still widespread in many areas and a cause for concern (Beta, 2023). The report concluded, “The country is between a certain and a moderate level of preparation in the prevention and fight against corruption” (Radio Slobodna Evropa, 2023), at the same time pointing out that corruption remains widespread in many areas, which is worrying. In addition to corruption, report singled out the Judicial Council of North Macedonia for the controversial removal of the body’s president, which raised concerns about adverse political influence on the body's work (European Commission, 2023).

In addition to EU Commission’s assessments, US State Department is another state institution that fosters strategic relations with North Macedonia (The United States and North Macedonia: A NATO Ally and Strategic Partner in the Balkans - United States Department of State, 2023), and also refers to

corruption in North Macedonia as an essential domestic issue. The United States Ambassador in North Macedonia stated that there is an epidemic of corruption in that country, present in all pores of society (BG, 2023b). In the past 32 years of mutual relations between North Macedonia and the United States, the United States has allocated almost 500 million dollars for the rule of law and good governance (Редакција eМагазин, 2023) in North Macedonia, and we are seeing an epidemic of corruption in this country. Such statements by the strategic partners of North Macedonia speak to the actual level of corruption in that country. Challenges related to corruption, the rule of law, and the functionality of state institutions, still exist, and require permanent efforts to build a stable and transparent democratic system (Maričić, 2023). Based on this, in the case of North Macedonia, without strong institutions, it is almost impossible to ensure poverty reduction, economic growth and development, including strategies for energy diversification, as well as social stability, peace, and justice, which are, to a large extent, key points from the list of Sustainable Development Goals related to North Macedonia.

Also, the assessment of the World Bank indicates that “North Macedonia’s institutional efficiency depends of the system’s shifting from a reactive, ad hoc approach to a more organized, consistent, and integrated one, guided by a long-term strategic vision” (Popovski & Gjurovski, 2023a). The World Bank highlighted several conclusions about North Macedonia’s approach to sustainable growth: consumption has slowed due to rising living costs, the industrial sector is facing a reduction in external demand, public finances are overburdened due to the increase in costs of borrowing and development support is conditioned by the lack of reforms blocked in the Assembly. In fact, the conclusions of the World Bank testify to the internal challenges faced by North Macedonia, which at the same time represent a barrier to this country’s self-sustainability, which leads us to its unwillingness to achieve the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, as a clear connection between the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional framework and UN SDG on national level (World Bank Group, 2023).

From the economic perspective, the readiness of this country for its agile role in the process of achieving the UN SDGs is questionable, bearing in mind the fact that the economic performance of North Macedonia was still one of the worst in Europe (Bieber & Tzifakis, 2019). In this context Gocevski and Gjurovski argued, “security and peace theories unequivocally indicate that one of the key factors for the promotion and preservation of peace in the world is precisely raising the level of economic development of countries” (Gocevski and Gjurovski, 2017, p. 47). At the same time, there is broad agreement in the literature that weak institutions (rule of law, bureaucratic quality, corruption, government rejection of contracts, and civil liberties) hinder economic development while strong ones lead to prosperity (Jankauskas & Šeputienė, 2009, p. 142). In recent years, a large number of studies have provided substantial evidence that the institutional quality is an important determinant of economic growth.

Economic growth forecasts for North Macedonia are 1.8% for 2023, while growth of 2.5% is expected in 2024 (World Bank Group, 2023b), with projected growth of 2.9% in 2025 (World Bank Group, 2023b), which, according to the World Bank report, is the lowest economic growth in the Western Balkans (Čančarević, 2023). North Macedonia should target economic growth with the aim of development and long-term sustainability (Trošić & Arnaudov, 2024). The economic challenges facing North Macedonia also create new internal challenges. First, they lead to pronounced social inequality and eventual instability in Macedonian society, regardless of the ethnic, national and religious structure of the population. Second, they directly affect migration flows, i.e. large waves of emigration from this country, which threatens the labor market in the medium term, while in the long term, makes institutional professionalization almost impossible, due to the lack of a professional and qualified workforce. In addition, North Macedonia must meet significant external debt payments amid challenging financing conditions. And, in addition to all of aforementioned challenges facing North Macedonia, it is important to point out that in 2020, 24% of the population was unable to heat their homes due to poverty, which is more than three times higher than the European Union rate of 7% (Popovski & Gjurovski, 2023a).

In these circumstances, at the basic domestic level, North Macedonia is not ready to face modern security challenges and risks, nor, on a micro level, to contribute to the achievement of the defined SDGs within the framework of the United Nations.

The analysis of corruption and economy that we have showed is not the only problem. There are many other obstacles in the case of North Macedonia that are worth understanding for the thesis of the paper.

Emigration flows are another internal challenge facing North Macedonia, which arose as a consequence of the three previously mentioned challenges, the economic situation in the country, partocracy and political instability, as well as widespread corruption. North Macedonia cooperates with Serbia and Albania in the field of illegal migration and dealing with the negative emigration trends of their qualified and working-age populations (Jelisavac Trošić, Arnaudov, 2023, p. 274). Based on the results of the last population census, held in September 2021, North Macedonia lost 185,834 people a decrease of 9.2% in a period of twenty years (Čančarević, 2022), which, from a strategic point of view, represents a huge internal issue for the current economic flows, potential economic growth and national investment strategies (Arnaudov, 2023a, p. 81). Arnaudov writes, “during the last twenty years, North Macedonia has been facing the problem of emigration, because a significant number of the population decided to leave the country due to poor living conditions, primarily low living standards, lack of jobs for qualified individuals, political clientelism, but also institutional inefficiency, which creates additional insecurity in the society of this country” (Arnaudov, 2023a, p. 83).

The trend of constant growth in the number of migrants from the Balkans is also confirmed by data of the European Statistics Agency (EUROSTAT)

(Vučković, 2022). Countries such as Serbia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and North Macedonia still show a high emigration character, despite a significant drop in emigration at the beginning of the 21st century (Ljuboja, 2015). These data at the level of the Balkans, but also at the level of North Macedonia, testify not only to the lack of quality of life that modern generations strive for, but also to the limited extent to which the national authorities work to increase the quality of life, in accordance with modern standards, which are largely defined as a part of the goals within the framework of the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda.

In his paper, “Security risks and threats – Treatment, phenomenology and mapping”, Gjurovski explored which determinants affect the security of North Macedonia: taking control of the essential resource base in the Republic of North Macedonia; fragile leadership structures burdened with significant mortgages to foreign power centers; constant epidemics affecting the population; insufficient education system impacting the training of security personnel; continuous decline of the standard of living; mass emigration of youth; politization of state institutions and those in the security sector and the lack of culture of constructive dialogue (Gjurovski et al. (2020).

In fact, these are actually the real consequences of institutional unsustainability in North Macedonia, which directly affect each other and represent domestic security challenges and risks that threaten the functionality of the country as a political entity. As such, the mentioned challenges, threats and risks are important because they have a double impact when it comes to the Sustainable Development Goals defined by the United Nations.

On the one hand, these challenges and risks are already listed as a global challenge in the very content of the Sustainable Development Goals (Peace, justice and strong institutions - United Nations Sustainable Development, 2023b), while, on the other hand, make the institutional efficiency and effectiveness of North Macedonia unprepared to face modern security challenges and threats in the long term, and therefore unprepared for active work and contribution to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The circumstances that North Macedonia has been facing in the last twenty years, such as widespread corruption, political instability, institutional unsustainability, low economic growth and development, and emigration of a qualified and able-bodied population (Gjurovski & Arnaudov, 2022d), make it irresponsible to talk about the contribution of this country in the implementation and realization of the goals of sustainable development, even in the case where strategic documents in that direction have been adopted at the national level.

In fact, these are complex and multiple challenges that should be addressed by leaders and bodies of the United Nations as an umbrella organization dedicated to achieving the goals of sustainable development. From the UN perspective, we are referring to the lack of strategic approach, mentioned at the beginning of the paper. That is, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, including the agenda, do not provide potential mechanisms for solving the real obstacles in the process of achieving them, which we have mentioned on the

example of North Macedonia. On a global scale, there are numerous national and regional challenges, threats and risks that *de facto* threaten the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda. Therefore, it is important to analyse a country like North Macedonia, which is institutionally not ready to work on the implementation of the sustainable development goals, and additionally generate challenges and threats internally.

Legislative contribution of North Macedonia to the UN Sustainable Development Goals

Although North Macedonia faces numerous challenges, there is a certain level of commitment to global development goals, focused on the level of North Macedonia through a strategy that is being created, called National Development Strategy 2024–2044. According to this document, political actors, civil organizations and Macedonian society as a whole are simultaneously involved to achieve these goals. The national development strategy is a roadmap and vision for the Republic of North Macedonia in the period 2024–2044. As stated on the official page dedicated to this document, it is a plan for the future of the society of North Macedonia, a plan which is non-partisan and at the same time inter-ethnic, gender and socially comprehensive; a vision for the future of North Macedonia that reflects the aspirations, expectations and perceptions of the desired society; a strategy that covers the biggest economic, political, social and environmental challenges in North Macedonia; and a platform that includes everyone from society in North Macedonia, regardless of the generation they belong to, gender, party or origin (Nacionalna razvojna strategija (NRS), n.d.):

So far, work has been completed in the following defined strategic areas; 24 thematic studies relevant to this document were done; over 40 visionary workshops were organized in which over 5000 citizens participated; more than 10 expert debates, with over 200 experts from relevant fields, took place; the analysis of the current situation was prepared by the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts; and at the same time a digital platform was established for public consultations and active involvement of citizens in the processes of creating the National Development Strategy (Nacionalna razvojna strategija (NRS), n.d.).

The document, is divided as follows: Competitive and innovative economy, territorial development, social and demographic balance, governance in the function of citizens, safe and resilient society, green and digital transformation. The document is structured in 23 thematic units (Nacionalna razvojna strategija (NRS), n.d.) which includes economic aspects (economic development, energetic diversification, public finances and fiscal policy, transport and infrastructure, labor market, regional development, competitiveness, tourism, agriculture, green economy and jobs), institutional framework (ICT sector, social policy, rule of law and fight against corruption, education, public institutions), healthcare challenges (waste management, sports and youth, water management, healthcare system), and science and education.

If the implementation of this document is efficient and effective, North Macedonia although a country with limited political, economic, financial and institutional capacities, will join the list of countries that already have a comprehensive strategic approach to sustainable development and that already clearly map the existing challenges, threats and risks for modern society and for modern states. On a micro level, this document will greatly contribute North Macedonia understanding the existing risks and threats, and also to the process of raising civil and political awareness to create a strong, functional and resilient institutional system, completely independent of foreign political and financial-interest influences. Although formally there is a National Development Strategy 2024–2044, in practice this does not mean that North Macedonia and its institutions are doing anything when it comes to the UN Sustainable Development Goals, including addressing domestic challenges, threats, and risks.

Conclusion

Based on the data and information provided in this paper, including the presented domestic challenges, threats and risks North Macedonia is facing, to a large extent it is justified to assume that this country is partially institutionally prepared to deal with the proclaimed Sustainable Development Goals of the United Nations.

Existing challenges: In the case of North Macedonia, existing challenges include internal challenges and threats, which represents the biggest barrier for this country to face modern security risks and challenges. The internal challenges and threats of North Macedonia also represent the biggest barrier to the efficiency and effectiveness of this country in the process of realization and implementation of sustainable development goals that determine the sustainability of North Macedonia, on a micro level, but also the sustainability of the international order in this format, on a macro level.

Future challenges: In the context of sustainable development goals defined at the level of the United Nations, but also at the level of the National Development Strategy 2024–2044 analyzed in this paper, the authors understand that the biggest future challenge for the Republic of North Macedonia would be institutional efficiency and effectiveness. Without overcoming challenges such as political instability, pervasive corruption and emigration of the working-age and qualified population, it is almost impossible to ensure the implementation of the set goals at the global and domestic level.

Limited funds: The limited resources that North Macedonia has, which are presented in the table, are not sufficient for a developing country to implement the goals of sustainable development. The fact that it is a developing country, and a state with significantly limited institutional and financial capacities, indicates that the realization of the defined goals in the case of North Macedonia is limited, determined in a negative direction by limited funds at the global level, limited funds at the internal level, limited funds in the process of creating sustainable institutional capacities.

The potential of the strategy: The National Development Strategy 2024–2044 of North Macedonia is the first document of such a framework for this country since its independence in 1991. It is a comprehensive document that covers all segments of state and social functioning, which directly gives a broad but clear picture of the challenges, risks and threats this country is facing, of the existing capacities, but also of the necessary steps that must be taken to achieve the set goals. Although it is a document that is still in the process of preparation, its inclusivity determines the quality and potential contribution, whose final drafting and then implementation will determine institutional effectiveness and efficiency, by solving existing internal challenges and threats.

Recommendations: In general, a modern safety, security and resilience framework for North Macedonia must encompass individuals, community, internal and transnational security, multidimensional factors including environment, global security, and non-state actors (Popovski & Gjurovski, 2023b). In this context, the authorities of North Macedonia should focus on the creation of a strategy that will directly deal with overcoming political instability to reaching political consensus for a platform that will be directly focused on widespread corruption and partocracy and, finally, on establishing economic and financial framework that will enable North Macedonia to implement its own National Development Strategy, as well as Sustainable Development Goals defined within the framework of the United Nations.

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