Strengthening Corporate Governance in North Macedonia: Sustainability Reporting and the Increasing Role of Audit Committees

November 9, 2023, Skopje, North Macedonia
The Road to Europe Program of Accounting Reform and Institutional Strengthening for Small and Medium Enterprises (REPARIS for SMEs) aims to support: (i) further improving access of SMEs in the Western Balkans to professional accounting and financial management services, and (ii) alignment of Western Balkans corporate financial reporting frameworks with relevant directives and regulations of the European Union (EU). Program beneficiaries are Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia.

REPARIS for SMEs builds on progress made under the completed EU-REPARIS Program (2015-2019). It is delivered by the World Bank Centre for Financial Reporting Reform (CFRR) based in Vienna, Austria in close cooperation with World Bank Country Offices in the beneficiary countries. Program activities include training, learning events, and technical assistance provided to public officials, regulators, accountants, auditors, professional accounting organizations, business support organizations, and chambers of commerce. The main components of the program are:

(A) Supporting the development and implementation of sustainable education and training programs.

(B) Support for the transposition and alignment of national legal frameworks and practices in financial reporting and auditing with the EU requirements.

(C) Encouraging a regional approach to the implementation of completed accounting and audit reforms.

(D) Landscape assessments of accounting advisory services and the Accounting and Auditing Reports on the Observance of Standards and Codes (A&A ROSCs).

Under component (B), the program brings together Board members and external auditors to discuss and identify possible solutions to challenges in improving financial reporting. These include, for example, the introduction of governance requirements from the EU acquis and the financial governance of public interest entities.
This Conference focuses on further implementation of corporate sustainability reporting measures that encompass social and environmental reporting and enhancing the role of audit committees. It aims to encourage discussions and sharing of good practice on these topics by bringing together various groups of relevant stakeholders. The Conference will discuss challenges and potential responses related to: (i) new provisions of the EU Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD),\(^1\) including new European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS);\(^2\) (ii) implementation of the EU sustainability reporting requirements, already transposed into local legislation (the “non-financial statement”); and (iii) the increasing role of audit committees in strengthening confidence in statutory audit and in financial and non-financial information.

Expanding the scope of sustainability reporting matters, the CSRD requires all large and listed EU companies (with an opt-out for listed SMEs until 2028) to introduce mandatory sustainability reporting standards. Entities will need to report in line with the new ESRS developed by the European Financial Reporting and Advisory Group (EFRAG) and adopted by the European Commission on July 31, 2023. External assurance on the sustainability information provided is required. Given the substantial regulatory change triggered by the CSRD, it is important that the profession and companies begin preparing for it as soon as possible. The conference will raise awareness of the CSRD and ESRS and consider what actions are needed in North Macedonia.

The conference will also discuss the increasing role of audit committees in connection to both financial and sustainability reporting. The audit committee is now instrumental in strengthening confidence in the statutory audit and in financial information. Overall, the audit committee is expected to become a key factor within the corporate governance framework, including both financial and sustainability reporting.

The Conference is organized in cooperation with the Institute of Certified Auditors of Republic of North Macedonia.\(^3\)

The language of the event is English with simultaneous interpretation into Macedonian.

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3. [https://iorrm.org.mk/](https://iorrm.org.mk/)
Registration and Welcome Coffee

Welcome Remarks

Iwona Warzecha | Senior Financial Management Specialist, Task Team Leader of the REPARIS for SMEs project, The World Bank
Filip Nikoloski | Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia
Dragan Dimitrov | President of the Institute of Certified Auditors of Republic of North Macedonia
Steffen Hudolin | Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia

New European Sustainability Reporting Requirements

Sustainability, and in particular climate, is the defining issue of our time. The overall objective is to reorient capital flows towards sustainable investment to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth; manage financial risks stemming from climate change, resource depletion, environmental degradation, and social issues; and foster transparency and long-termism in financial and economic activity. By 2030 the EU plans to cut emissions by 55 percent compared to 1990 levels and to achieve climate neutrality in 2050. The CSRD requires all large companies and all companies listed in the EU to disclose their business strategy on sustainability, and any sustainability targets they've set and indeed progress they make towards them. The presentation will provide a general overview on the content of the adopted ESSR and will outline key CSRD provisions.

Additionally, this session will inform the audience about the World Bank's sustainability agenda, including the expected outcomes and challenges, and will explore the synergies between sustainability reporting in the public and private sectors.

Paolo Mazzeo | Senior Technical Manager, European Financial Reporting and Advisory Group
Mediha Agar | Senior Public Sector Specialist, The World Bank

Moderators:
Andrei Busuioc | Senior Financial Management Specialist, The World Bank
Garik Sergeyan | Senior Financial Management Specialist, The World Bank
10:45 Coffee Break

Corporate Sustainability Reporting — Potential Impact and Related Challenges for North Macedonia

International investors with global investment portfolios are increasingly calling for high quality, transparent, reliable, and comparable reporting by companies on climate and other environmental, social, and governance (ESG) matters. The panel will discuss and debate the potential impact and related challenges for North Macedonia in the context of new European requirements.

Panelists:
Ornela Trajkoska Pendevska | Assistant Manager, Financial System Department, Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia
Dragan Davitkov | Partner, PwC
Dimitar Ristovski | Corporate Secretary of ALKALOID AD Skopje

Moderator:
Atanasko Atanasovski | Professor, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje

12:30 Lunch

The Critical Role of Audit Committees in Transparency and Accountability

The Audit Committee is an important link in the chain of parties ensuring proper reporting and the related assurance provided by auditors. Audit committee arrangements need to be proportionate to the task, and might vary according to the size, complexity, and risk profile of the entity. This session will outline the audit committee's role and responsibilities in relation to corporate financial and sustainability reporting and will provide insights towards meeting the challenges of implementing an effective audit committee following the provisions of the EU acquis and good international practice. The session will also offer a good practice example based on the activities of audit committees in Poland, highlighting relevant issues for the banking sector and large listed companies.

Danuta Dąbrowska | Independent Member of Supervisory Boards, Founding Partner at Oryx Group

Moderators:
Iwona Warzecha | Senior Financial Management Specialist, The World Bank
Garik Sergeyan | Senior Financial Management Specialist, The World Bank
Improving Audit Committee Effectiveness in North Macedonia Considering Actual Status and Good International Practice

Panel members will discuss the audit committee role and suggest areas with the greatest potential for audit committee members to improve their effectiveness in promoting high quality and transparent corporate and sustainability reporting and auditing in North Macedonia.

Panelists:
- Jane Ivanov | Audit Partner at Mazars in North Macedonia
- Lydia Nanush | Council Member of the Oversight Body of Auditors in North Macedonia
- Dragan Dimitrov | Certified Auditor, Managing Partner
- Zorica Bozinovska Lazarevska | Professor, Faculty of Economics, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Member of Audit Committee at Stopanska Banka AD Skopje

Moderator:

Closing Remarks
- Andrei Busuioc | Senior Financial Management Specialist, The World Bank

End of the Conference

Cocktail Reception

End of Cocktail Reception
BIOS OF THE SPEAKERS AND MODERATORS

(in order of appearance)

IWONA WARZECHA
Senior Financial Management Specialist, REPARIS for SMEs Team Leader, The World Bank

Iwona Warzecha is a Senior Financial Management Specialist at the World Bank’s Governance Global Practice and Team Leader of REPARIS for SMEs. She has vast experience in the implementation of country level diagnostic & advisory services in the area of public and private sector accounting and auditing in European countries; promoting International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS), International Public Sector Accounting Standards, and International Standards on Auditing to strengthen financial accountability, governance, and transparency. She provides advice and technical assistance to complex World Bank lending projects to enhance institutional capacity in financial management and corporate governance including for state-owned enterprises. Prior to joining the World Bank, she worked for PricewaterhouseCoopers performing audits and due diligence of banks and other financial institutions. Ms. Warzecha has led and contributed to several technical assistance projects and papers related to corporate financial reporting and auditing, public financial management, including tax administration, public sector accounting, and public financial accountability assessments. She holds a Master’s in Finance and Banking from the Academy of Economics in Katowice and obtained Association of Chartered Certified Accountants (ACCA) professional qualifications.

FILIP NIKOLOSKI
Deputy Minister, Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia

Filip Nikoloski is Deputy Minister of the Ministry of Finance of North Macedonia. He graduated from the Faculty of Economics, Department of Management at Ss. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje in 2001. He is skilled in strategic planning and tactical execution, P&L operations and management, multi-million asset management, asset allocation, pension counseling, investment counseling, financial analysis, budgeting, subscription of bonds, as well as risk management. Among the licenses he has acquired throughout his work experience are the ACI Dealing Certificate issued by ACI International in 2005, the license for Authorized Investment Advisor awarded by the Securities and Exchange Commission in 2007,
as well as the Certificate CEED Top Class Management Program (by USAID and SEAF) in 2010. Mr. Nikoloski has also acquired a Certificate of Global Securities from Commerzbank, Certificate for International Financial Operations at Bankakademie in Frankfurt, Corporate Governance Certificate under the Company Law issued by Pro Agens, and holds numerous other awards and certificates in the field of investment funds and financial management. He has an extensive career background in the field of investment banking, financial analysis, and asset management. Thus, in the period October 2002 – May 2017, he held different positions at Komercijalna Banka (KB), as a financial analyst and Head of the Investment Banking Department up to May 2009, after which he became a member of the Management Board thereof and the Second General Manager of KB First Pension Company Skopje. Mr. Nikoloski held this position until May 2017, a period in which the value of the assets managed by both open pension funds within the Pension Company increased from EUR 80 million to EUR 450 million. From 2017 until he took office as Deputy Minister of Finance, he worked as an independent financial analyst and investment advisor. He was appointed as Deputy Minister of Finance in February 2022. In addition to his native Macedonian language, he is fluent in five other languages, Vlach, English, Italian, Serbian and Croatian.

DRAGAN DIMITROV
President of the Institute of Certified Auditors of Republic of North Macedonia

Dragan Dimitrov currently serves as President of the Institute of Certified Auditors of Republic of North Macedonia (ICARM). He earlier worked at the National Bank of North Macedonia for four years, on a USAID banking development project for one year, then over two years on a USAID project to improve accounting and auditing. Since 2000, he has been actively engaged in the auditing of financial statements in BDO DOO Skopje, apart from two years interruption when he served as CEO in State Bank AD Kumanovo. He actively participates in the training of accountants and auditors applying for International Accounting Standards (IAS)/IFRS and the International Standards on Auditing (ISA) in Macedonia. He has also been engaged in many M&A projects, due diligence, corporate finance, and restructuring engagements, etc. He has an MSc in Economics and is a certified appraiser and forensic expert.
STEFFEN HUDOLIN
Head of Cooperation, Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia

Steffen Hudolin is the Head of Cooperation in the Delegation of the European Union to North Macedonia. His responsibilities are centered around financial support to the country’s EU integration path and oversight of its impact and achievements in the reform process. Mr. Hudolin previously served two diplomatic mandates in Serbia as a member of the EU Delegation, dealing with EU legal and financial matters. In between those two mandates, he was the Policy and Financial Coordinator in the Serbia Unit of the Directorate-General for Neighbourhood and Enlargement in Brussels. Before starting his diplomatic career in the Western Balkans in 2004 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Mr. Hudolin was an official of the European Commission in the Directorate-General for Economics and Finances in Luxembourg. He completed his first degree in Economics and Finances in 1995, followed by a Master of Laws in European Integration in 2012. Mr. Hudolin is fluent in German, English, and Serbian.

PAOLO MAZZEO
Senior Technical Manager, European Financial Reporting and Advisory Group

Paolo Mazzeo is Senior Technical Manager at EFRAG where he supports the definition of the European standards for sustainability reporting, including the standards for SMEs and sector standards. He also works on supporting implementation guidance to illustrate how the ESRS requirements may be implemented. Mr. Mazzeo is an honors graduate in economics from the University of Salento - Italy, he also holds a Master’s degree in Sustainability Management. He began his professional career at KPMG as a manager responsible for several projects, including assurance of sustainability and non-financial reporting, internal control system on sustainability information, materiality analysis process, sustainable supply chain, and sustainability risk assessment. He has a profound knowledge of the main sustainability reporting guidelines and frameworks. In 2017 he joined Ferrovie dello Stato Italiane (a leading group in the transport sector in Europe) where he was responsible for the reporting and control process of sustainability information and he contributed to the implementation of the EU Taxonomy requirements and to define the group green/sustainable bond framework. Mr. Mazzeo is a statutory auditor and has experience as a financial auditor for statutory and non-statutory purposes under both the Italian Accounting Principles and under the IAS/IFRS
Accounting Principles. He is a member of the PTF-ESRS Expert Working Groups that provide input for the development of draft European sustainability reporting standards.

MEDIHA AGAR
Senior Public Sector Specialist, Focal Point for North Macedonia and Kosovo, Governance Global Practice, The World Bank Focal

Mediha Agar has been working on public sector reform areas including fiscal consolidation, public financial management, state-owned enterprise governance, decentralization, and accountability for more than 15 years in the World Bank. As part of this agenda, she has led and contributed to various development policy operations, public expenditure reviews, PEFAs, and public investment management, state-owned enterprise governance, and other technical assistance products in ECA countries. During the last five years she has been covering Western Balkan countries’ public sector reform agenda. Ms. Agar received Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Economics from the Middle East Technical University. She started her professional life in the Capital Markets Board of Turkey. She joined the World Bank as an Economist as part of the PREM-Macro and Fiscal Group. During 2018-2022, she worked as a senior public sector specialist and served as Governance Focal Point for the Western Balkans. Currently she is the Governance Focal Point for North Macedonia and Kosovo.

ANDREI BUSUIOC
Senior Financial Management Specialist, World Bank

Andrei Busuioc has been Central Asia Financial Management Coordinator for the World Bank since July 2020. He is responsible for leading the financial management function in Central Asia, while continuing to lead and support corporate financial reporting and state-owned enterprise governance activities. Mr. Busuioc has extensive experience in accounting and auditing in the private and public sectors, as well as university lecturing on accounting and auditing. He worked at the CFRR from 2008 to 2020 where he led activities supporting country-level financial reporting and state-owned enterprise governance reforms. He has led several A&A ROSCs and contributed significantly to many more, especially in his thematic areas of expertise of audit regulation and state-owned enterprise governance. He is a PhD in Economics, is an ACCA fellow member, and holds a postgraduate diploma in public financial management from SOAS, University of London.
Garik Sergeyan is a Senior Financial Management Specialist at the World Bank CFRR. He has over 20 years of work experience in financial management in different industries, including 17 years at the World Bank. Previously he worked as a Financial Management Coordinator for Central Asia, covering the financial management aspects of World Bank projects in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. He also worked as World Bank Country Financial Management Specialist for Armenia and Georgia. He has about six years of teaching experience of professional accounting courses (performance management and financial management) and work experience including with non-governmental organizations, SMEs, local government, and a large industrial company. He is an ACCA fellow and has an MBA degree.

Ornela Trajkoska Pendevska works as assistant manager of the Financial System Department in the Ministry of Finance. She has Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Economics from the Faculty of Economics, Skopje. She joined the Ministry of Finance in the Financial System Department as an intern, becoming an Advisor within the same sector in 2019, and an assistant manager in 2022. In this role, she coordinates and manages the sector, actively participates in the preparation of legislation in the field of banking, the capital market, insurance, payment transactions, accounting and auditing, as well as in the procedures for issuing licenses, permits, and consents for financial companies, leasing companies, supervision of financial companies, and the preparation of opinions, information, and analysis on the financial system.
DRAGAN DAVITKOV
Partner, Territory Assurance Leader for PwC North Macedonia and PwC Albania & Kosovo.

Dragan Davitkov is a Territory Assurance Leader for PwC North Macedonia and PwC Albania & Kosovo. He has more than 22 years of experience in providing auditing, assurance, and consulting services to companies and organizations operating within different sectors. His professional experience includes numerous engagements in the region including North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, Kosovo, Montenegro, and Russia. He worked in the PwC office in Amsterdam, Netherlands for three years where he generated significant knowledge and experience practicing alternative delivery models of serving PwC clients. Following this, he is bringing his hands-on transformation mindset in the practice of assurance to his home country and the region. As part of this transformation, Mr. Davitkov oversees the operations of the SEE Competency Center in Skopje and is further enhancing the “go to network” strategy. Dragan holds a Bachelor of Science in Economics, he is a Certified Auditor and CPA in North Macedonia. He is currently President of the Board of Directors of the American Chamber of Commerce in North Macedonia. Mr. Davitkov is also a member of the Managing Board of the Institute of Certified Auditors of North Macedonia and was Council Member of the Audit Oversight Regulator in North Macedonia.

DIMITAR RISTOVSKI
Corporate Secretary of ALKALOID AD Skopje

Dimitar Ristovski is Corporate Secretary of ALKALOID AD Skopje since 2022. He is concurrently Coordinator of the ESG Board of ALKALOID AD Skopje, a team that unites all relevant company sectors and is responsible for the introduction of all standards necessary for the implementation of ESG reporting in ALKALOID AD Skopje. Despite the complexity of the entire operation, the set goal, the preparation of the company’s first ESG Report, was successfully accomplished and in March 2023, ALKALOID AD Skopje published its first ESG Report for 2022. He holds a BA in Law, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje and a Master’s in Development and International Cooperation from the Department of Economics, University of Bologna.
ATANASKO ATANASOVSKI
Professor, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje

Atanasko Atanasovski is full-time professor at University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, North Macedonia. Mr. Atanasovski supported CFRR workshops and EU REPARIS activities in Macedonia and the region from 2012 to 2019. He also supported World Bank A&A ROSC activities and the REPARIS program in Macedonia, focused on implementation of continuous professional development and a professional certification program for ICARM and updating the translation of IFRS and ISA into Macedonian. He served as coordinator for ICARM’s examination program from 2009 to 2020. Mr. Atanasovski has public practice experience with Deloitte as well as academic experience in teaching financial accounting and reporting courses since 2007. Since 2022 he is the senior expert responsible for drafting the Law on Accounting in North Macedonia and aligning requirements for company accounting in the country with the EU Accounting Directive. Mr. Atanasovski is an ACCA affiliate and holds a PhD in Accounting.

VLADIMIR HRLE

Vladimir Hrle works on various corporate governance, sustainability, and disclosure matters, and regularly participates in a range of World Bank Group initiatives and tools, such as the Joint Capital Markets Program (J-CAP); the Integrated State-Owned Enterprises Framework (Corporate Governance and Accountability Module); International Development Agency Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations Tools-Doing Upstream Corporate Governance in Fragile and Conflict-Affected Situations; SME governance; REPARIS; disclosure and transparency including International Sustainability Standards Board and EU standards benchmarking; and ESG and climate risk. He also serves as a country coordinator with the Sustainable Banking and Finance Network, an IFC coordinated voluntary community of financial sector regulators, central banks, ministries of finance, ministries of environment, and industry associations from emerging markets. Mr. Hrle is a qualified lawyer with over 15 years of experience working for international and regional law firms and advising on regulatory compliance, corporate dispute resolution and international law, and matters concerning international judicial and arbitral bodies. During his practice, he has acted as an external
compliance ombudsman for multinational companies and led a corporate liability project component of a landmark EU-backed effort to tackle corruption. He is a certified tutor of the Council of Europe’s Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals Program and holds a postgraduate degree from the University of Amsterdam in International and EU law.

**DANUTA DĄBROWSKA**
Independent Member of Supervisory Boards, Founding Partner at Oryx Group

Danuta Dąbrowska is a Member of the Supervisory Board of Budimex and Chair of the Audit Committee. She is also a Member of the Supervisory Board of Santander Bank Polska since 2014, and Member of its Audit and Remuneration Committees. She was Supervisory Board Member of Herkules S.A from 2012 to 2017 and Member of the Audit Committee and Chairwoman of Remuneration Committee from 2014. Ms. Dąbrowska joined Arthur Andersen & Co in 1991 as a Financial Assistant in the Audit Department and then joined Coopers & Lybrand in 1993 as Senior Specialist in the Business Assurance Department, followed by promotions to Supervisor, Senior Supervisor, and Manager in the Business Assurance Department and Corporate Finance Department. From 1997 to 2003, she held the position of Head of Financial and Business control at Ericsson, working from Warsaw and Stockholm, with responsibility for Poland and Asian markets. From 2004 she was Chief Financial Officer with responsibility for Eastern Europe and the Middle East at ECCO Sko A/S. Between 2009 and 2019 she held the position of Vice-President Finance, Eastern Europe & the Middle East at Pandora A/S. In 2022 she co-founded Oryx Group, a company providing outsourced CFO services. Ms. Dąbrowska is a graduate of the Food Technology Faculty of the University of Horticulture and Food Industry in Budapest. She became a member of ACCA in 1999. She has completed various programs including Advanced Strategic Management, Strategic Finance and High Performance Leadership at IMD, Switzerland and ‘Best-In-Retail’ Program at Harvard Business School.
JANE IVANOV
Audit Partner at Mazars in North Macedonia

Jane Ivanov has 19 years’ successful experience in providing high quality service in audit, tax and accounting in North Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. He is member of the Management Board of the Institute of Certified Auditors in North Macedonia. Mr. Ivanov is a certified auditor, certified accountant, and certified appraiser who is very experienced in applying IFRS and ISRS standards. He has experience in providing professional consultancy service in financial reporting, special assurance services and compliance, accounting training and consulting, financial advisory, financial due diligence. Mr. Ivanov’s wide-ranging expertise includes different sectors such as wholesale & retail trade, banking, insurance, financial services, energy, production, consumer goods, leisure etc.

LYDIA NANUSH
Council Member of the Oversight Body of Auditors in North Macedonia

Lydia Nanush currently serves as a council member of the Oversight Body of Auditors in North Macedonia and standing expert group member from Eastern Europe with UNCTAD in the Intergovernmental Working Group of Experts on the International Standards of Accounting and Reporting (ISAR). As managing director and country leader of Deloitte North Macedonia for 17 years she has experience in financial consulting, transaction support, and audit. She was a senior consultant of USAID-funded projects on the implementation of IFRS and ISA for seven years. Ms. Nanush graduated from the Faculty of Economics at the University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Skopje with a major in finance and banking; her graduate studies, with a major in accounting, were at Northern Illinois University in the USA under the Fulbright fellowship program. She is licensed as a certified auditor and certified accountant.
Zorica Bozhinovska Lazarevska, Ph.D., is Head of Doctorate Studies in Economics at the Faculty of Economics, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje, Republic of North Macedonia. Since June 2023 she is also a member of the Senate at the University. She is a course coordinator for auditing, principles of accounting, internal audit, governmental audit, fraud examination, etc. Her research interest lies in the fields of accounting and auditing. She has undertaken study visits at many institutions around the world. She is the author or co-author of six university textbooks. Her academic and research work has been presented at various international conferences and published in scientific journals. She has participated in a range of projects relating to the development of accounting and auditing education in the Republic of Macedonia. She was elected Vice-Dean for Finance from 2005 to 2010. She was elected president of the Audit Committee at Stopanska Banka AD Skopje from 2006 to 2012. She was then appointed member of the Council for Advancement and Oversight of the Audit from 2012 to 2020. She was appointed as member of the Audit Committee at Stopanska Banka AD Skopje in 2020.