

The ownership structure of 408 offshore companies in North Macedonia includes other legal entities registered in 28 foreign countries, mostly European „specific jurisdictions “, known as „tax havens “ which offer the highest level of discretion. In this part of the series we are writing about these companies, their ownership structure, current status, basic activity. According to the data provided from Central Registry, many of these companies are owners of other companies, which leads to other companies etc. Although some of them are in bankruptcy, some other are inactive, still, most of them are active and provide significant turnover of funds. Part of these companies make a profit and some of them are operating with a loss. By the way, a significant number of them are working around zero - no profit and no loss. The official documents about these offshore companies shows that they can be grouped into several categories, based on different characteristics and parameters: reputable foreign and international groups, companies with mixed capital, companies related to local and regional businessmen... Moreover, some of them are related to former and current politicians and officials, and even to political parties. Otherwise, we have already placed this topic in correlation with the legal changes adopted two years ago, which require all companies owned by foreign (offshore) companies to report an individual as a final owner in the Register of Real Owners, which is important for the procedure of identification to the real owners by banks, lawyers, notaries and authorized entities in the country. After the publication of part I of this research, the Register of Real Owners was officially put into use, but in the next period it should be build and networking.

### **International groups**

The official owners from more than half of the offshore companies in this country are coming from three European countries with offshore elements. Specifically, we found 408 legally active companies in the Macedonian trade register and 260 of them have co-owners from Netherlands (102), Switzerland (92) and Cyprus (66). The rest of these companies have owners from Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, and also from classic offshore zones in Asia and the Atlantic - Delaware, the British Virgin Islands, Panama, the United Arab Emirates, Hong Kong. Among them, there are many well-known and reputable international companies and groups, which operate through a representative office, a new company or they realize a greenfield investment in a new production plant. Many of these companies have invested through their home country, but most of them operate through companies from other offshore countries. In that way, they act indirectly in third countries such as North Macedonia.

For example, “Lukoil” is a well-known russian oil company, but it in the beginning it was

registered through the dutch company “Lukoil Europe“, and recently the owner of the macedonian company I the swiss company “Litasko“. The english-american audit company “Deloitte“ operates through a cypriot entity, american company “Lear Corporation“ built a factory in Tetovo for car seat covers through a Dutch company. Neither the Japanese brand “Sony“ , chinese “Huawei“, or the spanish brand “Zara“ in this country have nominal bosses from the home countries. The nominal owners of all of them are from Netherlands. Despite the fact that most of these foreign companies with a well-known ownership structure make a large turnover of funds, and often high profits, still, some of them have worked problematically. That is the case with an apple and bone fruit growing company “Taurus Farms“, which was registered in this country in 2010 as a german investment, although in its ownership structure there is no german company, but entities from Cyprus and Liechtenstein.

However, the financial statements shows that the company in 2018 made a big loss and falls into bankruptcy. According to the information from the bankruptcy trustee, the company is not going to liquidation, but to restart, because it was accepted the plan for reorganization from the dominant creditors. This means that this company, which also owns grape growing company from Gevgelija “Shuklev-Company“, may soon start operating with new owners.

### **Large factories**

Various factories and large industrial facilities are owned by many foreign companies and businessmen, located in specific jurisdictions. Even, they have a large influence in entire business branches. Perfect example for this is “Feni“ from Kavadarci, which employs about a 1.000 people and participates with almost two percent of GDP. This plant since 2019 is named as “Euronikel Industry“ by the company that took over within the bankruptcy procedure. This company management informed us that the founder and ultimate owner of “Feni“ is “Global Special Opportunities Ltd (GSOL)“, which is a private equity fund with a long-term investment range established in 2009. This fund includes a number of European financial institutions, and, according to management of “Euronikel industry“, nobody has a decision rights, but all power is concentrate in the Board of Directors. The identity for the Board’s members is reported to the institutions, says from the company.

According to our investigation, GSOL is present in North Macedonia through several companies which lead to the Bahamas. One of them is the “Euronikel“, also owned by “Global Special Opportunity LTD“, and managed by Andreas Tsagaris and Gerasim Kujindziev. This company works with loss in the two years after the foundation in 2018, so the lost in 2019 is over 2 billion denars.

This company - "Euronikel", and their owner "Global Special Opportunity", are appear as owners of the company "Euronikel Industry", founded in 2019, as a company for the production of non-ferrous metals. The difference is that "Euronikel Industry" makes profit. For example, the company in fiscal 2019 realized a revenues of over 10 billion denars and a profit of 647 million denars. Managers of this company are also Tsagaris and Kujundziev. But, the "chain" of companies related with „Feni“ does not stop there. So, "Euronikel " is owner of the company "Novo Feni", where co-owner is another company named "Nova Refraktori", registered in Pehchevo, which other co-owner is "Vatrostalna" of Mihajlo Mihajlovski. From other side, "Euronikel Industry" owns the construction company "Nova Engineering" and consulting company "Dolina na nikelot", whose managers are Borka Petrovska and Ljubomir Mitrovic.

## **Mines**

According to the official data, a lot of mines in our countries are owned by foreign companies that operate through offshore destinations. For example, "CMC Europe", founded by the same dutch company, owns the mine "SASA" located in Makedonska Kamenica. Interesting is that "SASA" as a separate entity makes profit, but especially the company - owner "CMC Europe", which generated revenues of over 4 billion denars and had almost no expenditures. From "SASA" management says that since 2017 the final owner of the holding company "CMC Europe", registered in the Netherlands, is actually the British company "Central Asia Metals PLC", which, as they say is listed on the London Stock Exchange. Regarding the financial operations, they explain that "CMC Europe" does not generate income from its own business activities, but only from the profit/dividend from "SASA".

The well-known mine from Radovish - "Bucim", on the other hand, since 2009 is owned by a company registered in the exotic St. Vincent and the Grenadines. The owner of the mine is "Solvay Industries Esti", which, as claimed from "Bucim", is part of the "Solvay Investment Group" based in Switzerland, owned by the Bronstein family. In any case, the co-manager of the mine is Nikolajcho Nikolov, who as a individual owns the trading company "Nikex", which in owns "Mantovo Resort", "Okis Hemija", etc.

Another company with a similar mining activity is "Diatomak", owned by "Metallix" from Switzerland . Thomas Hoelscher appears as a registered manager of the company . He also owns another company in Probistip named as "TH-Mining". At the same time, he is manager of AD "Strmos", a mine in Probistip, which was bought 2 years ago on the stock exchange for 2 million euros. Automatically, the concession of "Strmos" for exploitation of volcanic

tuff in Rankovce was transferred to “Diatomak”.

The mines “Zletovo” and “Toranica” were owned by “Indo Minerals”, which owner is dutch company “Markov”, a part of the “Binani Group”. After the company ended year 2015 with a loss of 130 million denars, while in same time the company was announcing investments of 225 million denars, “Indo Minerals” felled into bankruptcy, which is not closed to this day. However, in 2016 the two mines were taken over by the Bulgarian “Minstroy”, which is also part of the medical marijuana business in this country.

### **Regional tycoons**

Another common feature for some of the high-potential domestic companies involved in major investment projects is the fact that they were or still are owned by offshore firms of local and regional tycoons. One of them is “Comtrade Distribution”, founded in 2007 for information technology, owned by the “Dutch Comtrade Group BV”, and managed by Dejan Dimov. According to the Public Procurement Bureau, the company recently concluded four contracts for public procurement in total of 18 million denars. Officially, the founder and owner of “Comtrade” is the Serbian businessman Veselin Jefrosimovic, who in 2012 bought the shares of “Fersped” in value of 2.5 million euros in “Alfa” television. Jefrosimovic also entered in ownership structure of the news portal “Telegraf”, but in 2016 he got out from both media. Today, the television is operating with new owners from Hungary, while the portal has no longer existing.

Trough Netherlands, the “Balfin Group” of Albanian businessman and billionaire Samir Mane is present in North Macedonia. Specifically, “Balfin” long time owns the company for electrical products named “Neptun”, where as owners are appearing Arsim Paparniku and Ilir Paparniku. In addition, “Balfin”, Paparniku and another Dutch company - “Piaz Investment VV”, own the real estate management company “Skopje East Gate Seg”, which is building a new shopping center on the place of “Skopski saem”.

The controversial Montenegrin businessman Miodrag Davidovic -Daka was very popular during this period, mostly because his company “Jelak Gradba”, according to the Real Estate Cadastre, owns almost 6,000 square meters of land in Tetovo. At this area, the new urban plan allows construction of residential and commercial buildings. Precisely, Davidovic is the manager of “Jelak Gradba”, owned by the Panamanian “Adastra Group”. This Panamanian company also owns “Hronos sum”, run by Branko Rudovic. In the Central Registry of Montenegro, Rudovic stands as the manager of “Nexan”, which is wholly owned by Daka. This category also includes “Balkan Energy Group”, which through several legal entities from JSC “Toplifikacija” took over the production, supply and distribution of heat.

Initially, BEG was owned by the offshore companies “Bitar Holding “and “Project Management“, and after a few years another offshore company - “Kadricod Investments Limited“ - became a shareholder. They are all linked to the “Sintez Group” of the controversial Russian businessman Leonid Lebedev.

### **Mixed capital**

In the ownership structure of many companies with offshore component, there are Macedonian companies and citizens, who have a real foreign partner or they own a foreign partner company. In many cases, according to the official data, the Macedonian partner as an individual independently owns other companies. Some of these companies were initially established by an individual from this country, and after that, they became a property of an offshore company. One of these companies is the consulting firm for management activities “SV Partner Fund“. The first owner and manager after it’s establishment in 2012 was Johnny Todorovski, but later he was replaced by two companies - “Todorovski Management” from the Netherlands and “MJMA Consulting LTD” from the United Kingdom. This company also appears as an owner of “Sun Wireless“, established in 2009 for telecommunications activities, where Gjoshe Premetarov and Dushko Konchaliev are partners, and the manager is Vesna Stojanovska.

In that direction, it should be mentioned the textile “Macedonia Garment Industry“, which is in the bankruptcy procedure. This company is owned by “Detel Holding BV“, two companies from Britain and Canada, as well as a dozen other individuals from the country and abroad. One of them is John Jonovski, an owner of “Phalanx Capital“, whose name was once mentioned as part of the “Panama Papers” case, because he owned a company in this country called “Phalanx Capital Inc.”

From this aspect, the milk processing company “Frismak” is owned by the Dutch “Scerjon Investments BV“, as well as by well-known domestic company “Rudine“. At the moment, “Frismak” has almost no activity, but “Rudine” is making large profits. It is owned by Ivana Markovska and Martin Markovski, but previously was owned by their father Dimitar Markovski, who also owns a company in Croatia. Fifteen years ago, he was accused of finance loss of 20 million euros through the sale of a frozen meet, but the lawsuit still has no final solution.

Finally, the connection between a foreign offshore company and a domestic individual is noticed in a company located in the United Arab Emirates, which bought part of the facilities and machinery of “OHIS” for 7.1 million euros. According to the documents, that is the company “Chemical Engineering“, owned by “Steel And Pressure Engineering” and

Gorjan Maksimovski, who individually owns other companies also. It should be noted that "Chemical Engineering" entered in the group of most successful companies in the country with only one employee with a profit of 437 thousand euros for one year.

### **IT- companies**

If the activity of the companies owned by offshore companies will be taken as a basic criterion, then dominate the IT-companies. Some of them are originally foreign companies, which operate in the country on the principle of outsourcing - hiring labor. But, other companies have domestic partners, and maybe in behind stands 100% domestic businessmen, hiding behind foreign companies.

One of the most famous and largest IT-companies in the country is „Seavus“, which recently was bought by the Czech company "Aricoma", part of the "Karel Komarek Group". This company was founded twenty years ago by Igor Lestar, but during the sale the company was owned by „Seavus Group Holding BV from the Netherlands“. As an individual, Lestar is the owner of "Klim Media Group", which owns the news portal "Makfax".

In addition, the Dutch "Seavus Group Holding" in 2019 founded the company "Ratsel Group" with activities of holding companies. In the meantime, there has been a change in the ownership, so currently the owner is another Dutch company - "Ratsel International BV", while the manager is Mite Markov, owner of "Sengalt Invest". "Ratsel Group", on the other hand, appears as an owner in several other companies, such as "Enta Seal", "Euroevents", "Okki Technologies" ...

Related to Lestar, he used to own another IT- company, which is now owned by a Maltese company. It is "I-Products", a company founded in 2016, whose present owner is "Seavus Products Limited", and the managers are Bojan Tasevski and Ana Stanojevska. This company is registered at the same address as the other previously mentioned companies related to Lestar. Some of the mentioned companies are also connected with the IT company "B-Technologies", which is owned by "BTOBET Limited" from the distant tax oasis Gibraltar. The manager of this company is Monika Stefanovska, who is also the manager of "Landscape DOOEL", established this year by the real estate company "Ratsel Balkan", which is owned by "Ratsel Group". Previously, the owners of "B-Technology" were "Seavus Group" and "Ratsel Group".

### **Domestic oligarchs**

A lot of offshore companies are related to large domestic businessmen. One of them is Trifun Kostovski, whose company based in Switzerland was the main shareholder in the already failed "Eurostandard Bank". It is "Gofi DOOEL", whose formal owner is "Gofi-Group

of Finance and Investment S.A. Melide “, and the manager is Trifun Kostovski’s son – Kosta Kostovski. The Swiss “Gofi“, together with Gjoko Stojanovski, owns “Nova Holding“, while his son, the younger Kostovski, is the owner and manager of “Nova Zoi“. One of the most famous construction companies in the country, on the other hand, leads to Liechtenstein. Formally, “Nastel“ is owned by the foreign “Euro Swiss Credit AG“ and domestic company “Alpina Engineering“, which also owns the Liechtenstein “Euro Swiss Credit AG“. The manager of “Nastel“ and “Alpina Engineering“ is Zoran Azmanov, who is presented on the official website of “Nastel“ as a “representative of the founder“. At the same time, he is listed as a member of the management boards of “Euro Swiss Credit“, “Alpina Engineering“, “Intex“.

In Belize is the headquarters of the company “Grundal Limited“, which is a co-owner of the Macedonian company founded in 2011 for engineering and technical consulting “Bel Trade“. The second partner of this company is Mite Nikolov, a businessman from Stip known as Mite Brilliant (according to the oil factory that he owned until the sale of “Vitaminka“ from Prilep). The manager of “Bel Trade“ is his son Misho Nikolov, who is also a partner in “MZ Investment Group“ and “Arabeska“ together with Zoran Mileski – Kicheec, convicted in the “Reket“ case.

The part of offshore network is also the family of Metodija Smilenski, who was sentenced to four years in prison, because, according to the court, he has made an illegal transfer of money from to his company in Vienna. His son Goran Smilenski now is the manager of the real estate company “Imobiliare Center“, whose owners are “Dan Trading“ from Vienna, Austria, and “Sigma Group Foundation“ from Mauren, Liechtenstein.

The company from Cyprus owns textile company “Kimiko“ from Struga, which contains the name of Georgi Miladinov, convicted together with his brother Dimitar Miladinov in the case “Izgrev“. “Kimiko“ is in bankruptcy, but currently “Kimiko Company“ of Kiril Miladinov is active. The daughter company of “Kimiko Company“ – “Sloma Investor“, is operating with a loss and it has a debt to the Public Revenue Office of 7.3 million denars.

### **Director and prime minister**

Except they lead to controversial businessmen, some of offshore companies in this country, directly or indirectly, have links to former and current politicians and officials. In that context, can be mentioned the former director of the Macedonian Customs, Dragan Daravelski, who lives and works in Belgrade for many years, although he was sentenced in the country in absense to 7 years in prison. Among other things, he owned “JURISDD“ and “Sachs Brokers“, but both companies have already been liquidated.

However, another company related to Daravelski still exists. It is “Skotiha Tihama Oversis Limited”, registered in Skopje for management of its own real estate. The owner is the Cypriot company of the same name, and the manager is Milan Dobosavljevic, while the previous managers were Edward Petrovski and Kosta Topuzovski. This company has been inactive for a long time, it has assets of 15 million denars and at the same time owes 2.7 million euros on the basis of unpaid tax.

According to the official data, at the same address with “Skotiha” is registered the retail company “ITZ Center”, which is owned by a company of the same name from Belgrade, while the manager is Daravelski’s son - Tomislav Daravelski. At the same time, the younger Daravelski appears as an authorized person of “Jugooprema AD-Skopje” together with Marko Daravelski. This joint stock company also has its own property management activity. We have to mention that Tomislav Daravelski is a non-executive member of the Board of Directors of “AD Kozjak”, which deals with the construction of residential and non-residential buildings. This joint stock company, on the other hand, appears as the owner of “Kep Investment”, established in 2018 with headquarters in Kumanovo. The second partner in “Kep Investment” is the company “Europrofil” in ownership of Ljubco Georgievski, who was prime minister of the VMRO-DPMNE government from 1998 to 2002, when Daravelski was director of customs.

Specifically, “Europrofil” is owned by “Vip Project”, whose owner is Georgievski. At the same time, “Vip Project” appears as the owner of “Edilha” from Strumica together with the businessman Goran Micevski. This company, on the other hand, appears as the owner of “GM Invest Group” and “Mega Invest” from Strumica. Micevski, Georgievski’s partner, also owns several other companies.

### **Party donor**

Several offshore companies are also connected with former officials in the current ruling political party SDSM. Some of them are legitimate and transparent companies, as is the case with the renowned Dutch products of small cleaning and sweeping machines “Green Machine”, which in 2019 founded a company for wholesale trade with machines together with the company from Veles named “Brako”. This company is owned by Kocho Angjushev, who was deputy prime minister in the previous government.

Former Minister of Information and Administration and Vice President of SDSM, Damjan Manchevski, became general manager in the office of a foreign company that formally comes from a specific jurisdiction. It is the IT company “Mak-System”, which, as Manchevski himself said, is the world’s leading provider of medical software for the

management of blood products, plasma, tissues and cells, which owner recently become the global “Carlisle Group”. However, the Macedonian company operates through a company from Luxembourg called “SPACE-SBDA”. Company owned by “Langen Holding” based in the Netherlands, which was recently bought by the Belgian “Katoen Nati”, is connected with political party DUI of Ali Ahmeti. This company is an owner of “Support Solutions”, which, according to the State Audit Office, donated 25,000 euros to DUI in the 2016 parliamentary elections. At the same time, in “Support Solutions”, a daughter-company of the “Langen Holding”, has worked Arifton Fida, a brother of former director of the Agency for Foreign Investments Visar Fida, named exactly as DUI staff.

By the way, “Langen Holding” in this country owns the real estate company “Flora MK”, which has the same manager as “Support Solutions” - Sophie van Kerchove. In addition, the Dutch company owns “Buvetex MK”, established in 2017 for non-specialized wholesale trade. Unlike the others, “Buveteks” has low business and financial activity.

Source: en.scoop.mk