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Political Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

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Ohrid Agreement Implementation Phase

The last couple of months in Macedonia were spent in the sign of political parties' election preparation (coalition combinations, various activities for propaganda purposes), as well as in efforts of calming down the conflict atmosphere and introducing the legal changes that are in harmonization with the Ohrid Agreement. Of course, not always efforts have been productive, and the processes of introducing systemic changes through adjustments or changes in the legal framework were neither smooth nor fast.

At the Luxembourg consultative meeting, Mr. Solana suggested to the Macedonian Prime Minister Mr. Georgievski to speed up the Agreement implementation, which in practice meant that the laws for use of languages, for equal representation, for personal documents and the election laws should be introduced. If the suggested dynamics was followed, Mr. Solana was hoping that in May would have been created more relaxed conditions for election campaign. These issues were paralelly discussed with the ex-prime minister of Albania Ilir Meta, and with Ali Ahmeti. No representative of the ethnic Albanian political parties in Macedonia was present at those meetings. After the meeting, Mr. Meta stated that it was discussed about the reform advancement in the direction of: government decentralization, high education of Albanians in Macedonia and other issues, based on the Ohrid Agreement principles.

All present (77) MPs in the Macedonian Assembly on April 10th adopted the draft versions of the laws for election of parliamentary representatives and for the voter's list. In such a manner, the Assembly obliged the Government while preparing these laws, to take under consideration the remarks and suggestions of the working bodies in the Assembly, as well as the Assembly discussions. It is interesting that the session was held in a half empty hall, and when the moment for voting came, MPs were begged by the Assembly's vice-president to come inside and vote. During the draft Law preparation, all four parties were consulted through specially appointed party representatives.

A significant amount of time was spent in the process of negotiation among the four parties (VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, PDP and DPA) that signed the Framework (or "Ohrid") Agreement regarding the electoral model of the country and the final shaping of electoral constituencies. At first, ethnic Albanian parties (especially PDP) were insisting in having the whole country as one constituency, in which case all 120 seats available would be distributed on basis of closed party lists, and by use of the D'Hondt formula. Contrary to that, the other two parties were keener in having the country divided in electoral districts, but taken the precondition that the number of voters per district should comply to the estimated equal in potential votes "price" of a parliamentary seat. DPA came with a suggestion to have the country divided in six large constituencies, where each one of them is having approximately the same number of voters and is going to produce 20 seats, while there will be no threshold. After a couple of days negotiation about the district boundary lines, parties agreed on this proposed idea, which was adopted in the new Electoral districts Law.

But this was not the only issue under discussion in the package of election laws. It looked that all common misunderstandings on this package of laws were overcome, but still, at the last moment, when the laws came out of the government frames and came into the Assembly, its work was blocked. Blocking the Assembly's work might have influenced the agreed dynamics in introducing the package of election laws, which from its side may further delay the agreed election date timing. Speculations were saying that this delay might have been done on purpose, in order to postpone election day, or even to have the elections held by the old two-round mixed electoral model. Election Law was due to be voted the latest by July 15th, so the President of the Parliament should be able to dismiss the representative body and determine the election day on September 15th 2002.

SDSM as an opposition party was complaining that the Government was not respecting the previously arranged agreement regarding the manner of election and the composition of the electoral organs. After long negotiations, back-and-forth process development and the direct persistent mediation of the international representatives (EU representative Mr.

Le Roi and USA envoy James Holmes), an agreement has been reached concerning the final outlook of the new Election Law. Both major ethnic groups voted this Law on June 14, by obtaining the necessary majorities.

The last elements of this Law, which were the actual obstacle for voting it, were the issues of election mechanisms concerning the election of the presidents of the regional and lower electoral committees, as well as the President of the Central Electoral Committee. Opposition parties, like SDSM (Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia) and PDP (Party for Democratic Prosperity-ethnic Albanian party) were insisting on a 2/3 majority in order to decide on election of the committees' presidents (this was the previous party agreement). The logic behind it was the mistrust of the opposition regarding possible complaints on the electoral process, for which decision must be brought on these three levels. Also the agreement was that the President of the Republic shall appoint the President of the Central Electoral Committee and he/she may be either from the judges of the Supreme Court or a well-known legal expert. Instead, the Government limited the possibility of election only among the Supreme Court judges. Third point of dispute, this time between the Macedonian and Albanian block of parties was the outlook of the voting ticket, more precisely the language in which parties are going to be put and the ticket title. Also, parties on power wanted in the Law to prohibit pre-electoral coalition making, due to the fact that they saw the danger coming from competing parties that were gaining popularity and were able to win more seats together, in a common list.

International mediators were exhausted by the negotiation marathon, but finally it was decided that: the President of the Central Electoral Committee shall be appointed by the President of the Republic and may be not only a judge, but also a well known professional in legal matters; presidents of regional and community committees are to be elected by a 2/3 majority by the Central Electoral Committee. Only if decision cannot be reached, they are to be appointed by a simple majority decision; the voting ticket at the top shall contain the number of the electoral district and the Macedonian flag, while parties representing ethnic groups other than the Macedonian, can use both the

Macedonian and the name in the other language (this implies the use of Albanian language, but also the use of other languages, like Turkish, Serbian, Roma etc). This refers to the areas where the ethnic groups other than the Macedonian are competing with their party lists. Coalitioning among parties was left free and open. Voting instructions shall be placed at the polling station in all the languages of ethnic groups mentioned in the Constitution's preamble. For election regularity enhancing purposes, voters IDs are banned and spray use is introduced.

Other than that, the Law finally determined that the composition of the other 8 CEC seats shall be as follows: two judges from the Supreme Court, two judges from the Appellate Court and the rest of 4 members of the body shall be appointed half-half by the political parties of the position and the opposition. SDSM was insisting the list of judges to be already finalized, prior to its submission to the Parliament, that from its side will simply formally confirm the selection. This element is considered as very important, since from its composition depend further down the composition of all the other election bodies. In spite of this, VMRO-DPMNE requested the courts to submit lists with double the names necessary for election, and then to be left to the Parliamentary Committee for election and appointments (where in fact they have the majority) to make the selection. At the end, concession has been made to SDSM's offered idea.

The whole package of laws that were adopted in order to harmonize the legal system of the country with the Ohrid Agreement principles have 15 laws in total. They were all finally passed by June 20th. Here are included laws that directly affect official use of language, education, personal documentation, use of symbols, laws on local finances, local elections, etc. With these laws is arranged the use of Albanian language in order to communicate with the regional office of the central government in charge for a particular municipality. The set of election laws was especially important in this respect (Law for Parliamentary Elections, but also the Law on Electoral Districts and the Law on Voter's Lists).

What is still missing are the Rules of Procedure of the Macedonian Assembly, which met many difficulties in its preparation phase, due to the "different aspects of interpreting and understanding" the Agreement's principles. This was the outcome of the recent discussions in the Committee for rules, procedures and mandate-immunity issues, because all parties who participated were not able to reach consensus on the provisions tackling the language use. Ethnic Albanian parties' representatives demanded other than the MPs on parliamentary sessions and on the parliamentary committees meetings, also ministers and guests to be able to address on Albanian language. It was asked the same to be applied for all documents and suggestions, interpellations, MPs questions etc. SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE MPs position was that the second half of these demands was not agreed under the Framework Agreement principles. They also added that by widening the scope of their requests on use of the Albanian language, they in fact indirectly deny the practical application of this right, since it is impossible for all these requests to be passed jointly. SDSM representative Mr. Gjorgji Spasov said that during the Ohrid negotiations it was agreed for the right of "addressing" (and not "speaking") in Albanian at parliamentary sessions and in the working bodies, and this does not concern the written communication. Evidently, consensus has not been reached in the Assembly's working group, so the duty for introducing the new rules shall be inherited by the new Parliament to decide on their final version.

Similar problem has produced the law that regulates the passport of the Republic of Macedonia. Different parties dispute it whether this issue should be discussed again, since this item was agreed previously, with the presence of USA envoy Mr. Holmes. Firstly, this was a DPA initiative supported by PDP as well, but also with a roundabout approval of VMRO-DPMNE. Ljube Boskovski, the Minister for Interiors during a Government session at the last moment unexpectedly suggested the country to have two types of passports regarding the cover page: one written in Macedonian and English, and the other in Macedonian, Albanian and English. This move was heavily criticized by the Macedonian opposition parties and by the general public, but also reactions came from some VMRO-DPMNE MPs. The President of the Republic publicly stated that this suggestion was not among the things agreed in the Framework Agreement and that he

will put veto if the Law is going to be voted anyway. His position is that this new suggestion is directly contrary to the decision agreed by the four party representatives "to have a single unified passport, which shall reflect the unitary character of the country". Mr. Trajkovski reminded that the personal identity of the passport bearer is expressed on the third page where it is agreed that personal details shall be trilingual, while all the other data including the cover page are representing the country itself and its character. Cover page was agreed to be in Macedonian and in one of the languages used worldwide. A fear was expressed by his side that recently, the Framework Agreement is interpreted very loosely and in accordance to anybody's wishes, particularly because these moves are used for preelectoral propaganda purposes. After these turbulent reactions, the Government decided to pull back their idea. Followed a threatening press release by DPA, where Mr. Dhaferi was even stressing the possible conflict revival, or federalization of the country, if their demand is not to be met. This attitude was not at all welcomed by SDSM, as well as by the international factor, who made a small effort to mediate. Proven unsuccessful, discrete negotiations stopped and DPA party representatives were warned by Mr. Robertson, during his Skopje visit.

Adoption of the laws package was celebrated with shooting all night long in the DPA headquarters in Tetovo. Even the police was not able to silence them down, since when they tried to intervene, they were threatened by weapons by the celebrators.

Census Dilemmas

Census is agreed to be held in the first half of April 2003, but the dilemma concerning language use is not yet being resolved. Albanians insist the census forms to be only in Albanian language, and not bilingual: Macedonian and Albanian. It is also unclear whether the census shall comprise only Macedonian citizens living in the country or those living abroad as well. The Minister of Justice who comes from the PDP party presented his view on the matter. He said that he supports the idea of having three types of census forms: in Macedonian, in Albanian, and a bilingual one- Macedonian and in another language of the other communities mentioned in the Constitution (Turkish,

Roma, Vlach etc). He added that census should be held only in the country and not abroad, - a solution which corresponds with foreign international practice. Regarding this position the SDSM representative Mr. Nikola Popovski stated that already existing legal provisions on the census form design are acceptable, since they are printed and filled on Macedonian or bilingual. He saw the demand for the forms to be solely on Albanian language as unacceptable, because this kind of commitment is not taken by signing the Framework Agreement. The VMRO-DPMNE representative Mr. Trajko Veljanovski shared this opinion as well. He said that the Macedonian language is official on the whole territory of the country, and that ethnic Albanians may choose to have the census on Albanian language, but paralelly with the Macedonian. That means that census forms are to be printed and filled in both languages. Otherwise, both parties are seeing the Minister's suggestion as an attempt to ban the use of Macedonian language as an official one. Legal experts have supported the opinion of SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE representatives, saying that the Minister's suggestion is a "private" or "party" one, because his position is bases on the mistaken reading of Amendment 5 of the Constitution.

Rearranged Pluralism Within Ethnic Albanian Political Forces

Violence and armed clashes emerged in the last couple of months among certain groups within the Albanian population in Macedonia. It is believed that these armed incidents were occurring among the former NLA fighters and members of the narrow DPA leadership. In one of these attacks (04.05.2002) was damaged the private house of the vice-president of DPA Menduh Tachi, who is the closest collaborator of Arbeh Dhaferi. In this by far largest conflict were officially at least four casualties and even several victims. What really happened the public never knew. Police was allowed to go on site only six hours after the event, when blood traces were cleaned. In the DPA statement was only confirmed the attack on the house by unidentified persons aiming to provoke fratricidal war among the Albanians in Macedonia. It is speculated that the commander Izair Samii from Shemsevo village initiated the attack, shortly after he was granted amnesty. At the same time the former NLA headquarters issued a statement by which

they condemn violence that emerged in Tetovo, qualifying it as harmful for the Ohrid Agreement implementation. In fact, this incident announced the open competition for domination of various structures of power over the Albanian population, for influence redistribution. As a final result, DPA publicly announced their withdrawal from Ali Ahmeti's Coordinative Council. That event diminished Ahmeti's aspirations to dominate and coordinate all the political spectrum of the Albanians in Macedonia. DPA felt that their dominant position is losing ground as a result of the efforts of primarily their political competition- PDP and NDP in that direction. This party estimated that these political forces do not care about the interests of the ethnic Albanians, but only "for the protection of their interests and the sick desire to come to power at any price". After several criticizing statements coming from PDP representatives, DPA vice-prime minister achieved the dismissal from their function of ten PDP general managers. On this provocation, PDP decided to stay calm and proceed in functioning within the current government, although at times they were thinking of leaving.

From his side, Ali Ahmeti estimated that behind the last incidents in Tetovo are persons and groups who want to prevent the reform processes in the country. For Radio Free Europe he stated that everybody should work on problems solving and not on their creation. In spite of the mutual accusations, he calls for calming down passions and for emphasized dedication on the Albanian question. He stressed that Albanians in Macedonia should not lose support of the foreign factor. At the newspaper "Fakti" he also asked the three Albanian parties to sign a joint statement with which they shall dissociate themselves from mutual accusations. All these efforts were not proven fruitful, simply announcing the dismantlement of the joint positions in policymaking in Macedonia. Future elections and practical involvement into the legal policy mainstream shall show whether unity shall be established again or not. But prevailing opinions are that this year's elections are going to be "hot" especially between the two strong political forces within each ethnic group in the country.

Former NLA commander accused the current government for the recent incidents in Tetovo area, as well as for the border incidents. For radio "Free Europe" he stated that

NLA is dismissed and that after the disarmament they have initiated no incidents whatsoever. He added that real provokers are people paid by the government structures.

Further intensification of relations in the Albanian block produced the incident in Slupcane village, where the village mayor was kidnapped. He, together with a couple of members of the community council, although they were elected as DPA representatives, decided to join NDP. A couple of days prior to kidnapping, they changed their mind again, deciding to return to DPA. This was the reason why three armed men, who were aiming to put pressure on him to change his opinion again, kidnaped him. Their pressure was not efficient this time, so after a while he has been released.

PDP as a party is also passing through some changes that shook its structure. Due to illness, the so far party leader Imer Imeri asked to be dismissed from his function. This move provoked a direct confrontation between the two party blocks: the Skopje one led by Abdurahman Aliti and the Tetovo one. Both blocks suggested their candidates for the function- Mr. Aliti from one side and Mr. Bedzeti on the other, but at the Central Committee meeting in Kumanovo no voting took place. Mr. Aliti was chosen by acclamation, an act that raged the other party group, which left the site. Later, Mr. Polozani who was among them, stated that "the way of election of the new leader was not in accordance with the PDP Statute and that this event is a public shame for the party and his personal ethics principles". Commenting his election, Mr. Aliti said that these are only rumors, "fortunately by a small and insignificant number of persons". He also called Ali Ahmeti and the NDP leader Kastriot Hadziredza to create a joint coalition at the next elections.

Weeks later, in the auspices of DPA are received three former commanders of NLA, more concretely the ones who are mentioned to be under suspicion that they have performed some of the crimes the Hague Tribunal is interested about. What's more, one of them, former commander Leka is planned to be the carrier of the DPA party list in the Tetovo area. Many parties heavily criticized this decision, especially the opposition ones. SDSM called upon VMRO-DPMNE to discard their government coalition with DPA, due

to the reasoning that this party is in fact in coalition with NLA. The matter got even more complicated when DPA vice-president Mr. Taci stated that these people have been members of the DPA party even before the conflict.

Ali Ahmeti, this time as a leader of the newly formed Union for Democratic Integration (on 05.06.2002 in Tetovo), in his interview for VOA has said that the transfer of some former NLA commanders in DPA should not be considered worrisome. He stressed the importance of having honest and democratic elections, so the wishes of the electorate shall be respected. Stability of Macedonia is his primary goal, in order to create democratic standards where all the citizens are to be equally treated by law. The party has not yet decided where shall be ideologically located in the political spectrum, but earlier he said he had social-democratic beliefs. The Orhid Agreement serves as a platform on the basis of which this party shall be focusing its future efforts, since it is believed that this is their future. This document is seen as the only alternative for the future, since it was mediated and supported by the international community as well. His estimation was that the war in Macedonia finally ended and that all citizens, regardless of ethnicity, seek peace, secure future and normal working conditions. UDI as a party has a twenty-member presidency, containing former PDP MPs, but also former NLA creators. Forming this party does not mean that the Coordinative Council shall cease to exist. UDI's seat is in Skopje, where the first party branch shall be established soon. Although Macedonian parties rushed to deny that they shall have any kind of post-election coalition with this party, Mr. Polozani stated that Mr. Georgievski and Mr. Crvenkovski "should not get carried away", since coalition with them is unavoidable. Ahmeti's latest idea is to form a wide opposition front called "For Victory", in which he will try to comprise all political or non-political structures of the Albanians, who do not agree with the policy of DPA. At the same time his intention is to make selection of the PDP and NDP people who according to him, have been compromised with their political activities. There is a great possibility that his party shall not be registered at the Skopje court, due to the pressure parties on power are putting to this decision.

Another new party in the Albanian political block is the Republican Party, lead by Mr. Mevljan Tairi, who used to be a PDP MP. This party is of right wing provenience and claims to have a civic concept. Mr. Tairi stated that he would have nothing against being part of the Coordinative Council, but that he thinks that it is extremely hard a joint agreement of all Albanian parties for common election participation in one list to be reached.

Emerging Other New Parties and Coalitions

Due to the upcoming elections, an increase in number of newly formed political parties is visible. In the last four years only, even 42 new parties are registered. So far, only two parties have been denied registration. One is DPA, which formally functions with the old registered name PDPA-NDP and the second is NDP. Both programs are denied registration as too nationalistic. At this moment, at the courts in total are registered 58 political parties, 4 are in their registration phase (People's Movement for Macedonia, All-Macedonian Worker's Party, Movement for Restoration of Macedonia and the Tourist Management Alliance), and one has already announced its recent registration.

A new party at the political scene is the Democratic Center as well. Initiators for forming of this party were a group of MPs, who got their mandate in the Assembly through the Democratic Alternative. The party's presidency has six members: president (Mr. Karangelevski), four vice-presidents and a secretary. Mr. Karangelevski stated that he is expecting that in the next elections his party will be able to win 20 seats. The party identifies itself as a party of the center, struggling for civic society. Another new party of liberal orientation is the Green party, announcing that it shall have civic orientation, and shall promote community development, having the individual as part of it. Other leading principles are the rule of law, the market economic orientation, free citizen's associating and respect of minority rights.

The parties Democratic Union, Democratic Center (a group of former Democratic Alternative MPs) and the Green party have made a coalition with the League for

Democracy, at the same time promoting the new coalition "For the Fatherland". These parties are jointly focusing on the center of the political spectrum, hoping to win support by voters who are either undecided or not keen to vote any of the two bigger parties of Macedonian provenience (VMRO-DPMNE or SDSM). The block declared that in case they win an absolute majority in Parliament, they do not wish to have a post-election coalition with any ethnic Albanian party, since the democratic center does not wish to collaborate with terrorists who would be in government (due to infiltration of NLA former fighters in all ethnic Albanian parties). At the same time they deny to be of nationalistic beliefs, while they enhance the principles of protecting national and state interests, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country, state decriminalization, introducing clearly expressed political will and systemic measures. Further, their program supports the economic turnpoint by relying on domestic resources and productive employment, as well as giving a chance to all capable professional and creative persons. Initially, negotiations for creating a third block of parties were stuck in inter-party disputes for the leadership position in this coalition. Mr. Pavle Trajanov (the leader of the Democratic Union) was accused that he self-willingly promoted himself as the coalition leader. Contrary to this, he claimed that this third block shall not have one leader, but that this coalition shall function on equal basis. Finally, it was stated that a collective presidency should be created, which shall jointly discuss and decide. VMRO-real announced that it will join this coalition block, after the decision to leave the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and DPA coalition. (*Explanation: VMRO-Real was a party that joined the "grand" coalition in 2001, in order together with SDSM and the other bigger parties in it to lead the country in early elections. This was not achieved, so after SDSM got out of government, VMRO-Real had an internal split. One wing with the leader Boris Zmejkovski stayed in government, while the other with the leader Boris Stojmenov got out of it and renamed the breakup wing in VMRO-Macedonian Party*).

From its side, SDSM (the Social-Democratic party) has already signed a coalition agreement with the Liberal Democratic Party. This collaboration is a more permanent one, since it dates back from the local elections in 2000. Other, smaller parties joined this coalition, deriving from the smaller ethnic groups living in the country (Democratic

Union of Vlachs, Democratic Party of the Bosniacs, United Party of the Roma etc). Further negotiations are taking place, so it is expected that a couple of other parties will join, like: the Democratic Party of the Serbs, the Democratic Party of the Turks, the Party for Complete Emancipation of Romas, the Pensioners Party and the Workers-peasant Party. With these parties, the list of coalition partners is not finished, since SDSM says that they are open for further collaboration with all the parties interested to introduce changes in Macedonia.

Due to the dissatisfactory attitude and negotiation for concrete election coalition building, relations between SDSM and the Socialist party went through a critical phase. It is said that the socialists have requested six candidates of their own to be placed in more "secure" positions on the joint party lists, as well as some other demands, which were not accepted by the social-democrats. The reason behind it was that the Socialist party was seen as a party that was functioning on two track simultaneously- acting like opposition, but yet behaving rather differently and using the media under their control in an ambiguous way. What's more, SDSM claimed that this party intended to make a coalition with VMRO-DPMNE after the elections, rather than staying in "For Macedonia Together". Finally, the big probability that the socialists may not join the coalition "For Macedonia Together" at the next elections came true, since at the joint meeting SDSM announced that they do not wish to collaborate with the Socialists. The Socialist leader Ljubosav Ivanov, denied the accusations, blaming SDSM for having different program orientations than their own, since his party did not vote "pro" the Ohrid Agreement.

After the announcement of inclusion into main party politics of former NLA commanders in DPA, as well as in Ali Ahmeti's party (UDI), VMRO-DPMNE porte-parole publicly offered SDSM a joint election list in district 6, where ethnic Albanians as voters are predominant. Although smaller Macedonian parties criticized this move and SDSM rejected the offer, still, Mr. Georgievski again offered a grand post-election-coalition to SDSM, claiming that this is done in order to "save the Macedonian national interest". However, the social democrats' leader Mr. Crvenkovski refused this offer. Media and the

public commented negatively this supposed coalition, in the light of the danger of complete breakup of the country along ethnic lines.

The Hague Tribunal Activities

The Hague tribunal has made a decision to take over the five investigations now prepared by the Macedonian legal organs. The Macedonian Public Prosecutor is expecting to be officially informed through the domestic courts about the Hague Tribunal decision to take over the jurisdiction on five cases regarding the last year's conflict. Four of these cases are referring to acts that were done by NLA (event at the village of Trebos, molesting of five civilian road workers near Grupcin, water supply cutting for the city of Kumanovo, as well as the huge case regarding commanding and operating the former NLA in which are comprised the cases of Vejce, Karpalak and Brioni) and one case referring to the Macedonian police (the case of Ljuboten village).

Crisis Reflections

Unfortunately events especially in some areas of the city of Tetovo and its neighboring villages in the last couple of months have shown that situation is not completely calming down. Armed incidents, robberies, further destruction of the houses belonging to Macedonians, even destroying or burning the houses of Macedonians which have been restored by international humanitarian organizations. When robberies are concerned victims are ethnic Albanians as well. House reconstruction is progressing slower than expected, and ethnically is not "balanced", since those who are coming back are more often ethnic Albanians than Macedonians. Macedonian villagers (especially from Aracinovo and Matejce) are too scared to go back to their houses, due to the frequent threats and intimidation coming from their co-villagers. Estimations are that still, many individuals have arms in their possessions, which allows the whole area to function in such a manner. Parties have already discussed the possibility of introducing a special law, which shall regulate a new weapon collection. This initiative is to be done in coordination

with similar efforts in Kosovo. Paralelly, NATO mandate "Amber Fox" in Macedonia was once again prolonged until October 2002.

All in all, the number of internally displaced persons due to last year's conflict, in June this year (2002) was 13.837, out of which 2.514 are still living in collective centers, and additional 8.000 persons at this moment are refugees in Kosovo. The total number of these persons is about 20.000, while a bit more than half are ethnic Albanians and the others are ethnic Macedonians.

In the villages where the ethnically mixed police forces were gradually entering according to the plan, and increasing patrolling hours, many villages were putting on very evident places only the Albanian flag. OSCE representatives, among other factors, has openly expressed their discontent, stating the this act does not help in the confidence building process. OSCE porte-parole has said that their representatives are constantly repeating to the villagers that as long as there is a law in force covering the use of symbols, it has to be obeyed, up till a new law is introduced. Unfortunately, OSCE efforts in this respect have not been fruitful. On the other hand, slowly and steadily police patrols are progressing in more and more villages, according to the return plan. Incidents were not numerous, nor big, so the OSCE porte-parole expressed satisfaction for the way these activities are progressing.

EU Estimations

The European Union in its first Annual report on Macedonia after signing the Agreement for Stabilization and Association with the European Union, stated numerous negative remarks regarding the economic, political and security condition of the state. Among other things, there is no clear competencies division among the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interiors. This conclusion derived from their uncoordinated reactions during the crisis, which contributed even more for bigger security problems. The Ministry of Defense is accused for making a big budget deficit by making large weapons orders, while the Ministry of Interiors is criticized for creating the "Lions" –special forces which

although have been legalized their behavior resembles of paramilitary forces (due to that were accused by human rights' organizations for serious breaches). Therefore the Commission requested their dissolution and creation of other official multiethnic police forces.

In this report, as an extremely widespread problem is mentioned the corruption, which puts in question all state institutions' credibility. As a special problem is mentioned the administration politicization (due to naming strictly party members into higher positions in the administration), instead of its rationalization and professionalization. Since so far no actions have been taken to fight corruption, the Commission recommends for an urgently created strategy for fighting against this phenomenon. For the first time in such a report is made an analysis of the domestic political parties' profile. Remarks have been made about the big concentration of power and influence of party leaders in government and their exaggerated influence over the government decisions.

Judicial system has been found not ethnically representative enough, but also inefficient, due to the overloaded by cases courts. As the Assembly of Macedonia appoints the judges, it is said that this does not always guarantee judge's professional and political independence. The Republic's Court Council was especially criticized, for its lack of transparency and objectivity. "Macedonian institutions demonstrate weakness as regards to the basic democratic principles and the rule of law", it is said further in the report, while the public prosecutor's independence is proclaimed "formal".

The Commission seeks radical reforms in the media as well, in which "top positions are in fact political appointments". Media are seen as structurally fable, not independent and producing bad results. Opinion prevails that media carry their part of the blame to further incite last years' conflict by their coverage.

Although it is estimated that progress has been made in regards to the standards of minority protection, still the Commission gives remarks to the security forces for

excessive use of force, bad treatment of prisoners, robbing and burning houses etc. At the same time, it is said that serious breach of human rights is performed by NLA as well.

Fight Against Corruption

As a reflection of the impact of corruption in the country, a constituting assembly was set, initiated by ICG, Transparency International, the Open Society Foundation, about 120 other NGOs, foreign embassies and domestic intellectuals under the motto "Macedonia Without Corruption". The aim of this project is to improve the anticorruption legal frame in the country and to harmonize it with the one existing in EU. Coalition's goal is to create a National Anticorruption strategy, which shall be publicly presented, shall be open to suggestion to the public and to all political parties as well.

Although there was open pressure by the international community upon the Macedonian government in the struggle against organized crime, still the parliamentary majority on April 17th this year did not accept the crucial amendments of the basis text of the Law against corruption. These amendments were referring to: shorter time frames for forming a Commission for fight against corruption and for examining the property of the elected or appointed state officials in the last ten years. According to SDSM MPs, the timing for putting this Law in action is purposefully set by the ruling coalition not to have legal authority over them in the time of their rule. In fact, this Law is giving amnesty to the current parties on power. Such a conclusion came due to the fact that this Law shall be put in function 6 months after it is published at the "Official Journal of the Republic of Macedonia", when the Commission in question is to be established.

Cedomir Krlevski, the leader of the VMRO-DPMNE parliamentary group suggested a shocking parliamentary decision: for each act of voting, each MP shall be awarded additional 100 denars (or 1,60 EUR). Many opposition MPs and the general public found this decision scandalous, but these opinions did not prevent the parliamentarian majority to vote for it.

Border Problems With Kosovo

Additional tension between the Kosovo newly elected authorities and Macedonia was brought due to the need for border demarcation. In the moment when were detalized the practical elements of the border demarcation of Macedonia and FRY, that is the two borders between FRY (Serbia and Montenegro) and Bulgaria, and after the EU grant approval for performing the necessary operations, in the border town of Vitina, about 1200 local Albanians protested. They claimed that they have a problem in working on their land around the border area, so they demanded the Agreement for border determination between Macedonia and FRY not to be carried out. Macedonian authorities have been making efforts in collaboration with UNMIC to arrange the practical problems of Kosovar Albanians who own land that falls in the Macedonian side of the border, in order to allow them to work on it and be able to pass the border with special passes and create new border crossings for easier communication. Unfortunately, this issue was getting a more politicized dimension, allowing the local authorities from the other side of the border to seek for a different kind of pressure and putting in question the already signed agreement (at the beginning of 2001). Political support on the validity of this Agreement was given by all the international factors at the moment of signing, but it was repeated again this year. Still, as a final outcome of this position, the Kosovar Assembly adopted a Resolution in which it was said that the agreement between FRY and Macedonia last year is not recognized. Prior to the actual voting, the President of the Kosovar Assembly rejected the possibility of reading the letters sent to it by the Security Council and EU. This move was the reason the Macedonian Army to raise its combat readiness towards Kosovo. From its side, the UNMIC representative Mr. Steiner immediately annulled this Resolution and declared it legally void. USA Secretary of State estimated the Kosovar Resolution as provocative and without legal basis, repeating that the USA position regarding this matter remains unchanged. The Macedonian Assembly was discussing the Kosovar Resolution, and finally issued a Declaration against it, for which the ethnic Albanian MPs did not vote. The EU parliamentarian Mrs. Doris Pack, who led the EU Assembly delegation for cooperation with South Eastern Europe (01.06.2002), criticized this attitude as unacceptable.

Poverty in Macedonia

According to the Poverty Reduction Strategy prepared by a group of experts, poverty rate in Macedonia has reached 24,6%, which means that every fifth family in the country is poor, and that they are unable to find the means to have an acceptable standard of living. The fact that in the last ten years poverty level in the country was raised from 2% to more than 20%, puts Macedonia in the group of the poorest European countries.

Poverty rate in Macedonia in 2000 – 24,6%

Number of families receiving social aid- 78.000

Poor families whose head is without education- 42,6%

Poor families whose head is younger than 40- 28,8%

As sources of poverty in the country were seen: diminished state economic power, decline of salaries and standard of living, increase of the level of salaries gap, the way privatization and structural reforms are lead, the businesses' inability to pay their obligations on time.

Campaign has Started

Mr. Stojan Andov, the president of the Parliament, has announced that elections might be hold in September 22nd, which has produced reactions among the opposition parties, but among international representatives as well. The main concern is that at that date good quality monitoring cannot be held, due to the upcoming Kosovo elections set for that same date. Opposition was stressing the probability of purposefully postponing the election date, in order for the position parties to have more opportunities to make election frauds. Finally Kosovo elections were postponed for October, thus leaving the Macedonian election timetable free for the monitors, although it is much more certain that these elections are going to take place on the date previously arranged- September 15th. Still Mr. Andov is still giving ambiguous press releases, stating that he might be

prevented for setting the election date, due to procedural reasons, like: non introducing the Framework Agreement laws on time or not getting the name of the CEC president on time (that is prior or the latest on July 7th) by the President of the Republic. Since laws have been voted and the President is already narrowing down his list of choice for the CEC President, it is expected that finally elections shall be formally set for September 15th.

OSCE (ODIHR) is gradually preparing for very serious election observation, expecting around 750 observers who will be in the country for a shorter period of time and other 50 long term observers. It is expected that an official invitation for observing shall be obtained by the Government. There will be additional agreement on how the observers' safety shall be achieved. One version might be that part of the NATO mission in Macedonia "Amber Fox" shall take care about this aspect.

Although still early and unofficially, all parties have started the election campaign, hoping to pass their messages to the electorate prior to the upcoming summer holidays. VMRO-DPMNE has started its campaign in Ohrid, where the annual party conference was held on the weekend of June 15-16th. Its leader Mr. Georgievski said that Macedonia is living through a conflict situation which will last ten years more. The Ohrid Agreement is not seen as the end of the Macedonian agony, since solving Kosovo problems shall surely last three more years. At this meeting was agreed the electoral strategy of the party, setting the date for beginning of their campaign after August 20th and starting from Ohrid.

During the same weekend the Liberal Democratic Party promoted its party election program, which is based on three pillars: reducing poverty and unemployment, achieving integral (personal and general) safety, and promotion of democracy and the rule of law. Mr. Penov stressed that their program is very clear- change of government as a precondition for getting out of the current crisis and leading responsible policy. Expectations for positive changes have been destroyed, because starting from 1998 Macedonia is constantly under threat- he says. There was crime, violence, electoral

frauds, suspicious privatization, and people losing their jobs over night. Changes were seen through ideas for the country's splitting, reexamination of the historical roots which brought the country to war and suffering, while at the same time palaces have been built, ranches have been bought and factories were robbed. Mr. Goshev said that their coalition with SDSM shall ban the thieves and anti-Macedonians from power". He announced that the new government in the first 100 days shall start with realization of strategy for drastic reduction of poverty. At the same time he expects to realize an economic program which will secure at least 5-6% growth annually. He also offered signing an agreement with the trade unions and the employers, as well as leading stable economic policy, forming an agency for public acquisitions, making reforms in public administration domain etc. In the first 300 days he promised to start the plan for economic infrastructure development in rural parts of the country.

SDSM was also active, announcing that this time in their lists there will be new persons, who shall possess personal qualities. This party also plans direct meetings with citizens, paralelly organizing big rallies. The first big meeting where it was estimated that couple of tens of thousands persons came, was held in Skopje on June 28th. There were introduced the SDSM and LDP coalition partners and all parties' leaders took the floor. SDSM leader Mr. Crvenkovski said that "the time came when we should show the door to those who are breaking up the country, to those who rearrange our history, who destroyed our present lives and take away our future, to those who divide us, steal and step over others. On these elections power shall not be shared, but the future of this state and of these people shall be saved. On these elections shall be confronted honest Macedonia and the criminals, patriots and traitors".

Church issues

Turbulent public reactions have been produced after negotiations that took place in Nish, between representatives of the Macedonian and the Serbian Orthodox Churches. Outcome of this meeting was a document, which was signed by the three bishops coming from the MOC and representatives of the SOC. Since this document practically denied

the autocephalous status of MOC, lowering it down under the auspices of SOS, and what's more it arranged its renaming from MOC to Ohrid Archbishopry, public reactions and pressure became very big. The three bishops were subdued to heavy public criticism, so finally the MOC Synod did not accept this previously signed text. All three bishops actively participated in media debates, trying to justify their position, but it was obvious that the general public, the believers and other factors were still against this position. Situation became worse when bishops started stating political statements, especially because some of them were seen as directly interrelated with high positioned persons of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party. Next move came from bishop Jovan, who is in charge for the Veles-Vardar eparchy. Based on his individual initiative, he responded positively to the letter sent by the SOC individually to all bishops and accepted an individual eucharistic and canon unity with the SOC, thus breaking the unity of the MOC. The MOC Synod invited him to repent and come back, but he showed no interest for it, on the contrary. Followed mass believer's demonstrations against him in Veles, where the people publicly asked him to leave their eparchy. So far, bishop Jovan shows no intention in doing so. The difficult aspect of these events is that in fact MOC Synod is subdued to heavy political influence and has great degree of disunity within. Perhaps this was the last moment when division of the country and of the nation is tested, prior to elections. It remains to be seen how the Synod shall react in the future, especially because the archbishop is extremely silent and avoids any media statements.

Public Opinion Research

According to an international research realized in 2001 and 2002 through "Vitosha Research" and US AID, more than 4/5 of the citizens of Macedonia think that corruption in the country is mostly widespread among the customs officials. Second persons of this list are the government ministers, and third are the parliamentarians. According to the percent of answers (75%) at the fourth place are mentioned the tax officials. For the polled Macedonian citizens, journalists are the least corrupt (only 17% answered positively). As a main reason for corruption citizens point that fact that those who are in power tend to make fast earnings. This two-year research was realized in eight countries:

Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. In all these countries respondents have put customs officials as the center of corruption. The largest level of optimism for reducing corruption have shown Croatia and Montenegro, while the highest pessimism is noted among the polled in Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.

This research has also shown that 3% of the state gross-product is gone to corruption channels. If according to government data in 1999 the domestic gross-product reached the value of 3,720 billion USD, then bribery took away 111,9 million USD. In fact, estimations are that through these channels every year are lost more than 100 million USD. Some experts even say that corruption in Macedonia is growing, thus reaching even 5%, which means 200 million USD annually.

Another telephone research that was done in mid-April by the agency "Partner" (Utrinski Vesnik, April 19th, 2002), as major problems in the country, the polled mentioned the following: unemployment 25,5%, the Albanian issue 14,3%, incapable politicians 14%, bad state management 12,8%, crime 11,4%, bad economic conditions 11,3%, losing political independence 5,8%. When political party support is in question, the rating is: VMRO-DPMNE 13,1%, SDSM 26,6%, Democratic Alternative 2,4%, LDP 2%, DPA 1,8%, Socialist party 1,4%, PDP 0,6%, Democratic Union 0,8%, NDP 0,3%, VMRO-Real 0,5%, VMRO-Macedonian 0,6%, Democratic party of Macedonia 0,3%, New Democracy 0,1%. The other respondents (a bit less than 50%) are still undecided.