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Political Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

Dr. Natasha Gaber-Damjanovska
Dr. Aneta Jovevska

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Census 2002

The long awaited and prepared census in the country was finally set to take place from November 1-15 2002. The National Statistical Bureau in its press release stated that the estimated cost for this operation shall be around 6,7 million EUR. In October started the preliminary census, scheduled for persons who are in military service and those who are currently serving their prison sentence. In order to make sure that the use of international norms and standards have been applied, together with standardization and confidentiality of data, impartiality of census performing, but also education and monitoring, in-field observation of the census shall be done by 45 foreign experts as well. This door to door census shall be performed with about 9012 persons who were supposed to be qualified as pollsters, and with 778 regional instructors as well. It was said that pollsters were chosen by their educational and ethnic structure and wherever possible, among the local population which should be polled. While selection has been made, suspicion about the way pollsters were employed for the census job was expressed by some media. In some of the cities throughout the country there were individuals complaining about irregularities regarding the selection criteria due to the preferable party affiliation (VMRO-DPMNE or DPA) of the potential pollsters. As known, another criteria was the pollsters to have a particular kind of training or education, and have an unemployed status, but this was not respected as well.

A positive approach regarding this complete operation was taken by foreign and domestic factors, in respect of avoiding politicization of the very operation of "counting" persons belonging to certain ethnic groups. The importance of this attitude was deriving from the fact that generally in almost all the Balkan countries there were and are many disputes regarding the number of minorities in a particular country, as well as about the types of forms (and methodology) which are supposed to be realized in-field. Unfortunately, the only openly direct exception in Macedonia was the Albanian language newspaper "Fakti", which even before the census started, wrote that according to their estimations, if the census shows less than 700.000 ethnic Albanians living in Macedonia, it shall be a

forgery. This position was criticized from internal political factors, as well as by international representatives (OSCE). So far data (from 1994) show that ethnic Albanians in Macedonia at that point of time were 441.000. Another worrisome prediction was given by the USA Institute for Peace, where in their latest report can be seen that this Institute anticipates further destabilization possibilities in Macedonia because of the census results. It is assumed that this census shall not be showing an enormous or unrealistic increase of the percent of Albanian population in Macedonia, which fact shall be contested and boycotted by the Albanian political factors. So far, the first official results are due to be officialized in spring next year.

Education Problems in the New School Year

As the school year started from September 1st, old accumulated, but also some new problems regarding the educational process emerged. Evidently, majorpart of these cases were largely influenced by manipulative indirect political involvement in the educational process. Especially critical were the events that took place prior the new government took office, since the "other" political factors took advantage of the "power vacuum". First case, which was in fact inherited as a status quo problem from the previous government, was the ethnically mixed elementary school in the Tetovo village Shemshovo. Ethnic Macedonian parents and children organized demonstrations, provoked by the voluntarism of the ethnic Albanian co-villagers to change the name of the school without consulting the relevant factors in charge, the ethnic Macedonian secretary working at the school was fired, the bilingual school board was changed by a single-language board in Albanian containing the "new" name of the school, and school director allowed the uncovering of the bust of the ethnic Albanian who originally was from the village and whose name the school took. While the school name changed in such a voluntary way as it did (the old name was the name of a Macedonian hero from the times of the fight against the Ottoman rule), the whole village was covered with flags from neighboring Republic of Albania. Macedonians thought that by these moves have been provoked by their neighbors. They said that they would not let their children go to school until this matter is resolved. Truth is that no legal procedure was obeyed in this case, and additionally Macedonians living in

this and other surrounding villages, whose children are attending at the school in question, were not consulted at all. Unfortunately the matter was dragged until December, which legally means that there is a great probability that the Macedonian children are most likely to lose this school year. The new Minister promised that he would settle the matter, since as he said "it is not in the authority of a school director to decide on such matters". Followed a change of the school Director, by appointing another one (ethnic Albanian again) who was trying to be more cooperative, but in fact he could not do much under the circumstances. Followed some negotiations, so by mediation of the Prime minister himself, there was a compromise solution found: the school to be renamed and to bear the name of the village- Shemshevo. Still, some "local powers" in the village disobeyed the agreement, producing a status quo as a result. In anger, Macedonian villagers withdrew their agreement in changing the school name in accordance with the village's name and parents and pupils said that out of protest they are going to block the highway Skopje-Tetovo, seeking for this problem to be finally resolved.

Many relevant factors agreed that in this case children are used for political purposes. OCSE reacted that these deeds are not in accordance and in the spirit of the framework agreement, where communities should jointly decide on matters like this. The Helsinki Committee for Human Rights publicly announced that the act of changing the school name out of the legally prescribed procedure, the sign language used¹, and building a monument in the school yard without previous respect of the prescribed procedure, represent a rude breach of the laws for education, for culture and of the Ohrid Framework Agreement². Only when the government threatened that due to disobedience the school might be closed for everyone, some minor results were showed: the board in question was taken out, the new one with the village name is prepared bilingually, the secretary was taken back to work. It only remains for the bust to be removed in the new location- where the new gym hall shall be. Uncertain for the final result regarding the bust, Macedonians insist that they will not send their children to school until this last thing is

¹ It was not made bilingually, but only in Albanian

² Which it is said that all of them insist on preservation of the multiethnic character of the country

resolved. In order not to waste a school year, temporarily their children started going to the neighboring school in Sirichino village. In the meantime ethnic Albanian local authorities promised that soon they should move the bust from the current place to another location.

Another initiative by the ethnic Albanian pupils is to change the name of the ethnically mixed Tetovo high school, which for 46 years bears the name of the first Macedonian writer and educator Kiril Pejcinovik. However, the school Director stated that the new name should be a name acceptable by both ethnic groups.

New demonstrations and show of dissatisfaction were showed by the Albanian pupils of the "Cvetan Dimov" high school, who requested to have all Albanian speaking classes learning together in this school, instead of having them divided into different schools due to the lack of space. The whole matter was shifted to the Ministry of Education, seeking solution, while Macedonian teachers and the school director said that objectively at present there is not enough space for everyone. The Director of the Skopje state high school in Albanian language "Zef Lush Marku", announced that if next year all the Albanian speaking pupils are not going to be inscribed into high school, there shall be a boycott. He said that "not a single Albanian shall enter school unless to all of them who show a wish to go to school are granted permission to attend".

This was seen as a basic matter for Albanian pupils to protest, while Macedonian pupils were justifying their protests with their rage for the murder of the Tetovo high-school boy, while playing basketball (see below). It looked that situation might go out of control, when pupils of different nationalities started to protest consequently day by day, but what's more, a lot of street hooliganism and fights took place. It was done by pupils and students coming from both ethnic groups, so frequent were the cases when groups of pupils would beat up a single pupil from the "other" ethnic group, or city buses were attacked, windows were broken etc. Media and other political factors were stating that in fact by using the "power vacuum" some parties were playing with the pupils emotions, manipulating them for their own purposes. The three existing high school unions (two

Macedonian and one Albanian) were giving different signals to the public and to the pupils. Through their attitude it was sensed that various political influences are involved in the matter. Two of the three high school unions (one Albanian and one Macedonian) refused to meet under the initiative of the President Boris Trajkovski, by using different justification in not doing so.

Lately, the public was shaken again by the "phenomenon" of poisoning of the ethnic Albanian pupils in Kumanovo high schools. From 2nd to 12 December around 200 mostly female ethnic Albanian pupils went to the medical center, asking for help and describing their symptoms as poisoning, but no cause for such condition was found. The public commented that this sort of event is "an already seen scenario", that shows the same problematic elements like the similar event that took place in Tetovo six years ago. Back then, medical results showed no traces of real poisoning, and the foreign expert results showed exactly the same. Some experiences regarding alleged one-national poisonings have happened before in Kosovo, too. In order to solve the problem as impartially as he can, the new Minister of health Redjep Selmeni asked experts from the World Health organization to come to Macedonia and re-examine the material taken from the pupils. It is believed that the background of this event are the known requests of the Albanians for a separate single ethnic school center, for which the Ministry of Education is opposed. From its side, OSCE stated that "pupils poisoning in Kumanovo is an example how some individuals manipulate, and by events raise the tension, thus being able to ruin everything that has been so far achieved".

The New Assembly

Characteristic of the new Macedonian Assembly is that at present the President of the Parliament is the youngest by now (40 years of age). MPs in their largest numbers are economists and lawyers by profession, the number of women MPs is the highest up till now (a total of 22 women), and for the first time there is an ethnic Albanian women MP as well. Average age of MPs is 40 years of age, making it the youngest Parliament in pluralistic Macedonia so far. About 25 MPs have experience of the Assembly's work,

since they have previously been MPs. Politically speaking, the Parliament now has 14 parties' representatives and one independent MP. It is interesting that within the coalition "For Macedonia Together" lead by SDSM and LDP, are also included representatives of other ethnic minorities' parties (like the Serbs, the Bosniacs, the Turks and the Roma). All these MPs are now going to have a professionalized MP function, meaning that this MP function demands complete dedication, because is not compatible with other function or professional engagement. Starting from this Assembly, ethnic Albanian MPs shall be able to address to the parliament on their mother tongue on plenary and on committees' sessions. Eleven MPs are in fact the amnestied NLA commanders.

Again, MPs this time are going to be facing new, more rigorous procedures if they do not attend parliamentary sessions. Namely, if an MP is unjustifiably absent after three subsequent sessions, the monthly salary shall be diminished by 5%. The committees' sessions shall be scheduled 8 days in advance, so if an MP does not notify his presence in advance, his voting may not be proclaimed valid. Some of these solutions made other MPs react on these measures, stating that still, MPs work is more of a "gentlemen's agreement".

In an interview for "Utrinski Vesnik", the new President of the Parliament announced that he is intends to promote many initiatives in order to improve the Parliament's functioning, like: amending the Assembly's Rules of Procedure (allowed number of vice-presidents, correcting some time frames etc), finishing the last elements agreed in fully implementing the Framework Agreement (new Law for territorial division of local units- 2/3 majority is needed to be passed, achieving decentralization of power, the law on passports, the law for use of symbols, and other, maybe 80 laws to be corrected or amended, in order full implementation to be achieved). Estimations are that this procedure is going to consume a lot of time and in fact be very hard to achieve and accept it. The government should decentralize about 10 domains from the Law for Local Self-government (laws for pre-school, elementary and high school education, the law for health insurance, economic, environmental, urbanistic and other legal acts, which duties are going to be taken over by the local power). At the same time, after the census

finalization, there should be a new territorial division of the local communities' boundaries. All these laws should be treated in package, but shall be in function after the local elections, due to take place in autumn 2004.

New Assembly's First Parliamentary Session

The new Macedonian fourth multi-party Assembly had its first session on October 3rd, initially lead by the previous Assembly President Stojan Andov. High security was provided, since there were some threats from certain groups that they will block the first session if former NLA commanders shall appear. That did not happen, and also Ali Ahmeti and his other two close co-workers were not there. VMRO-DPMNE MPs until the last moment were making their mind whether they are going to get in the hall or not, but finally they decided to appear. Unfortunately even from the very start, a scandal was provoked, media say by Mr.Andov himself. Albanian parties reacted that there was no translation for the comments and discussions they had (as already enacted by the Parliamentary rules of procedure), so in order to provide translation, the Assembly had to make a longer pause before it continued its work. Later, discussions between DPA and DUI were initiated because of the "concern" DPA has shown about the absence of Mr. Ahmeti and his co-workers. DUI replied that this was an internal party issue and that DPA should not worry on such matters. After that, the Assembly (without the previously announced blocking from VMRO-DPMNE) has confirmed all MP mandates and a Verification committee was established with the task to suggest the future President of the Assembly. According to the Committee's suggestion, and the majority parliamentary's votes (without the vote of VMRO-DPMNE) this duty was given to the SDSM MP Nikola Popovski. Vice-president seats were offered to DUI and VMRO-DPMNE, but the latter refused it, with the justification that they do not want to have anything with the former NLA.

Later in the Assembly's hallways, DPA leader Menduh Tachi stated to the media that DPA shall not continue coming to parliamentary sessions if all previous NLA commanders do not appear at the sessions. A couple of days ago, Mr. Arben Djaferi

stated for the Albanian speaking media that he intends to hand over his MP mandate to the next one on the DPA list, since he feels responsible of the failure of DPA on these elections. Rumors say that this is a public excuse used by this leader, in order to move and live in Prishtina. Same move was made by Abdurahman Aliti (PDP leader) who gave up his elected position, for the benefit of the next candidate on the party list. On the other hand, DUI leader Ali Ahmeti met with DPA leader Arben Djaferi to seek support in the common platform that is to be agreed in the new government with the coalition "For Macedonia". The two leaders also spoke about unifying positions in further application of the Ohrid Agreement. Djaferi suggested that DUI should take strong position and avoid turning into a mere clerk into the Crvenkovski's government.

Assembly Bodies

After agreement has been reached among the party parliamentary groups regarding the composition of the working bodies of the Assembly, the Committee for issues of election and appointment constituted 15 Assembly bodies. In each body were appointed presidents, members and their deputies, and was completed the personal composition of six international delegations.

Since one of the main tasks of the new Government is fight against corruption, the State Committee for Corruption Prevention was constituted, where seven experts participate. One of the members of this Committee pointed out the customs and tax services as one of the most corrupt in the country. According to her, tax corruption is the symbol if the business elite, which most often is connected with the Government, but is also involved into it. For this Committee a very interesting element are the anticorruption principles proclaimed by the winning coalition in their preelection program. One of the concrete steps of this Committee was to make a commitment on the side of the MPs, ministers and other elected or appointed persons to publicly declare their current economic situation and possessions. For that purpose questionnaires have been distributed to the government and the assembly, which were to be filled within a predetermined time frame. If a person does not disclose all the property there is, sanctions are to follow. And although the content of the questionnaires is protected, still SDSM and DUI representatives made

them public. This was not the case with majorpart of the VMRO DPMNE MPs including the former Prime Minister who stated that "he shall put in public the content of the form within a year from now, in order not to satisfy the petit-bourgeois appetites of SDSM".

According to the Framework Agreement, the Assembly determined the composition of the Committee for relations among ethnic groups, which numbers 19 persons chosen among the MPs. In this body members are Macedonians and Albanians (each group represented by seven persons) and five representatives of the ethnic groups mentioned in the Constitution's Preamble. Among other things, responsibility of this Committee is to give suggestions for solutions of any emerging problems in this domain. Again, according to the Constitution if a decision is not be possible to be reached among MPs of different ethnic origin, then the Committee shall arbitrate in finding the solution.

Members of the Committee according to their party affiliation

Ordinary number	Party	Number of members
1	SDSM	3
2	DUI	4
3	DPA	2
4	VMRO-DPMNE	2
5	LDP	1
6	LP	1
7	PDP	1
8	Democ. Union of the Serbs	1
9	Party of the Egyptians	1
10	Party of the Democratic Action (Bosniac)	1
11	League of the Vlachs	1
12	Democratic party of the Turks	1
Total		19

Establishing the New Government

On October 7th, the President of the Republic handed over to Branko Crvenkovski, as the leader of the winning coalition "For Macedonia Together" with the most MP seats at the Assembly, the duty to form a government. A day before, Mr. Crvenkovski was chosen by

his party to be the person who shall be in charge to have the mandatory's duty. On that occasion, he stressed that "for all those who will break the law, especially if they are on leading positions from SDSM, rigorous measures shall follow. SDSM has made the quickest comeback in Europe, and that is why responsibility is big, while there is no second chance. If we repeat the old mistakes, then we did not deserve the power we are taking over". The wider public estimated that by this, he showed that he is trying to learn something from the bad experience of 1998.

General terms, under which distribution of various positions in government shall be shared, were previously arranged among the coalition "Za Makedonija". And although this coalition won 60 seats (that is exactly 50% of the MP seats) and needed very little additional support to achieve stable backup in the Assembly, still, it was decided that coalition shall be made with DUI, the party that won the significantly strongest support among the ethnic Albanians. In the meantime, VMRO-DPMNE publicly offered to SDSM an informal coalition if SDSM calls off the coalition with DUI. VMRO suggested that SDSM should make a coalition with persons coming from PDP or DPA, instead of DUI. In that case VMRO binded itself that they shall vote all the laws suggested by SDSM in the next three years and that they shall not organize any kind of protests against Mr. Crvenkovski's government. Argument for this offer was that the public should see first whether DUI is a democratic or a terrorist organization, since VMRO and LP "could not believe that SDSM is going to make coalition with Ali Ahmeti and his murders". SDSM refused the offer, stating that support for their party is won on elections and that VMRO are in no position to choose how the power is going to be divided. They thought that since commanders of the former ONA can be found in all existing parties of the Albanian spectrum, then it is illogical the division of "suitable" and "non-suitable" Albanians.

While negotiating, in the frames of DUI due to internal pressure prevailed the "military wing" of the party, in recruiting candidates for the government positions. Same thing is repeated in every other matter where appointed party persons were needed (like for vice-president of the Parliament for example). This put SDSM in a difficult position, due to

the public statements of this party that they shall not accept former NLA commanders into the executive power. Nevertheless, the present vice-prime minister is Musa Djaferi, who was the NLA representative for Western Europe and one of the leaders of this movement³. The second person in question is the suggested vice-minister of interiors Fatmir Dehari, who was also "in uniform", and is considered as one of the closest collaborators of Ali Ahmeti. The present Minister of health Redjep Selmani who is a surgeon who left his job during the crisis and went to Lipkovo, where he was treating the wounded NLA fighters. The present Minister of education Aziz Polozani is one of the founders of DUI, after he left PDP, whose MP he was during last year's crisis. The present Minister of justice Ismail Darlishta was not actively involved into the armed clashes and a couple of months before the elections he was a DPA member. His nomination caused complaints among the other party members.

Party negotiations for new government formation took a considerable amount of time to the parties who won the election, especially to SDSM and LDP in finding the right balance of power and ministries division among them on one side and DUI on the other. Plan is the government to have three vice-prime minister places, one for Euro-integration processes (SDSM), one for political system (DUI) and one for economic system (LDP). The cabinet shall have 18 persons in total. The first ministries (justice, labor and social policy, local self-government and economy) offered by the coalition "Za" were not completely accepted by DUI, who wanted to have "a more substantial role in government". It was said that this party seeks more of an important ministry, like the one of interiors, defense or exteriors. DUI has created a platform, on basis of which principles shall be based the future coalition cooperation between this party and SDSM and LDP. Finally, DUI got the Ministry of Transport and Communication, the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Education. The other ministries were distributed according to other, separate negotiations and arrangements among SDSM and LDP, together with their partners. This government structure got on high, decisive positions the most prominent party persons from each party. Majorpart of the ministers

³ He is also on the black list of the USA President.

have political background, with the only difference of the DUI candidates, who are generally unknown to the wider public.

For the parliamentary session on October 31st, the government mandatar Mr. Crvenkovski together with the suggested government composition submitted the government program for 2002-06. In it were mentioned the future priorities, the measures and activities through which is planned the program accomplishment. Priorities are: return of peace, stability and safety for every citizen; establishing the rule of law and respect for the Constitution; application of all the laws in the whole territory of the country; creating conditions for getting out of the economic crisis; opening possibilities for economic prosperity. On the list of strategic goals, are listed: full NATO and EU membership, full implementation of the Framework Agreement, return of the displaced persons, raising trust among persons of different ethnic background, defending human rights and freedoms, strengthening the reputation and competitiveness of the system institution through selection of competent and responsible persons for those positions. Also, the government plans to create a strategy for increase of the level of employment and radical poverty reduction through concrete measures and activities; continuation of the country's economic reforms; finishing the privatization process; further building of market economy mechanisms etc. A special part of the program is dedicated to the fight against corruption, which shall be based in positioning responsible and non-corrupt persons on decision-making positions. Attention is to be given to removing the corruption generators, as well as strengthening the institutional capacity of the system on the local level as well. All coalition partners, including DUI previously accepted this program.

As expected, the parties VMRO-DPMNE, LP and DPA heavily criticized the suggested program. During the debate, in his speech the former Prime minister Ljupco Georgievski sent severe criticism to the international community, accusing her for a 'Hollywood scenario' under which together with SDSM participated in removing the previous government from power. This speech provoked a statement by the President of the Republic who dissociated himself from that position: "I am sorry that a modern party

with a Euroatlantic orientation wonders around in an unknown direction, by the very words of its own leader".

After long discussions, Mr. Crvenkovski's the new government was voted by obtaining a majority of 72 votes⁴. Against voted 28 MPs from the parties VMRO-DPMNE, LP and DPA and immediately after that left the Assembly. VMRO and LP announced previously that they shall not attend to the Assembly's sessions up till the New Year, out of protest for the inclusion of DUI in government. According to them, a political option that promotes terror and violence must not participate into government, because by doing so the Macedonian state is humiliated. The wider public estimated this move as very surprising, reason being that opposition's place should be in Parliament, where it shall have the only chance to make constructive criticism. OCSE had a similar reaction: "It is a democratic right of every party to bring such a decision. But we are not sure that voters would like to see their elected representatives how they avoid participating in the process of bringing parliamentary decisions. It is a duty of the opposition which is elected by one third of the citizen's votes to represent them into the Assembly".

EU initiative for speeding up the Framework Agreement Implementation

The EU initiative for organizing a new leader's meeting for speeding up the Framework Agreement implementation met various reactions among the parties. For SDSM this meeting would be desirable, in order to seek guarantees from DUI for further development of events especially in the crisis regions. This idea for a leader's meeting leaves a space for Ali Ahmeti's inclusion, who is so far contacting the government only through the vice-prime minister Musa Djaferi. Also, the opposition demanded for Mr. Ahmeti to sign the Framework Agreement. VMRO-DPMNE port-parole Mr. Gjorcev stated that not only the Macedonian, but also the Albanian side as well needed to be reminded which are their Framework Agreement responsibilities. "Priority should be given to refugees return to their homes and stopping the ethnic cleansing in crisis regions". Otherwise, this party said that it has nothing against a meeting of this kind, but

⁴ Out of the total of 120 MPs.

before the event takes place, it should be seen who will be present and on which topics shall be discussed. The DUI port-parole Mr. Budzaku reminded that his party is the most active one in applying the Framework Agreement and did not exclude the possibility of Mr. Ahmeti's presence on such a meeting. DPA representative Mr. Dika stated that his party (DPA) still has not a position on this matter, but if there is a necessity imposed about supplementary mechanisms in the Framework Agreement implementation, they are ready to be included in such talks. From its side, the President's port-parole announced in more details Mr. Trajkovski's readiness to organize a meeting of the signatories of the Framework Agreement, but only on leadership level. It was said that at that meeting Ali Ahmeti shall not be invited, because he is not a signatory of that document. According to the journal "Fakti" the international community is trying to find a way to arrange a formal signing of the Agreement by DUI. This might be achieved through a future signing of a government declaration that shall ensure that both LDP and DUI shall be binded. It is agreed that the meeting shall take place on December 26.

Government Strategy Against Poverty

Official numbers are showing that around 500.000 inhabitants of Macedonia are currently living in poverty, and each one of them has less than 2 EUR per day to pay his expenses and survive. As poor are treated 82.000 families and 75.000 get social aid, since none from the family is employed. For that reason, the Minister of Finance Mr. Goshev promoted in from of the World Bank representatives the government strategy for poverty reduction. This is planned to be achieved through simulating favorable loans to small and medium enterprises, which shall result with new employments. As long term measures shall be used the stable course of the foreign currencies towards the denar, maintaining low inflation and stable prices. Government priorities shall be: enhanced fiscal discipline, rationalization in state expenditure, judiciary efficiency and strategy against corruption. Mr. Portman, the WB Director in charge for Macedonia, stated that other than in the field of education, areas in which the country should be active are health, social services, and creation of favorable business conditions and small and medium enterprise development.

Macedonia and the World Bank shall conclude a new three years arrangements for which are planned 50 million USD each year for Bank financed projects.

Privatization problems

The moment it came on power, the new government faced numerous difficulties in coping with large "holes" into the budget, accompanied by numerous illegal or suspicious privatization of factories, abuse of the state powers for personal purposes or gains and huge illogical expenses made by big public companies. In several cases, state land has been given for use in return for extremely little sums of money (the cases in Struga, the mountain Kozuf, some places in Eastern Macedonia etc). This land (urbanized or non-urbanized, agricultural or not) was given to persons who according to the former prime minister were people of "merit" who were "deserving" such a privilege.

Flats that were built by state money, the so called "social" flats, intended for poor people who otherwise would not have been able to solve their housing problem, were given to persons who under any circumstances would not have fallen under this category of persons. Previously, an official competition was made for people to apply for these flats, with the total number of 3000. Instead of those in need, some who have been granted such a privilege, were persons close to the up to then ruling party VMRO-DPMNE. It was a clear breach of the law also regarding the procedure, since those who have had their request turned down, were not even notified, nor given the appropriate legal correspondence paper, on basis of which they could have filed a complaint to the organ in charge. The new government proclaimed this competition as non-valid, issued a decision under which are broken 594 contracts of obtaining social flats and announced that the whole procedure is going to be repeated, this time respecting all legal norms and procedures. Sadly, this move made unhappy those families who really deserved to get these flats, since they shall have to wait for another procedure to finish.

In accordance with the pre-electoral promises of the then opposition parties, the new Government has repeated its position that every privatization, for which shall be found

out that exceeds the legally allowed limits, a revising process shall be opened. In this sense the Prime minister Mr. Crvenkovski announced that in connection with the privatization of "Nova Makedonija" (several newspapers and publishing house) the Government intends to break up the sales contract with the Slovenian firm "Jug Uslugi", because there were some indications that privatization is performed in an illegal manner and because part of the agreement terms have not been obeyed by the buyers. For this controversial privatization the Ministry of Interiors submitted four criminal charges for abuse during the selling of this publishing house. Among the arrested is the president of the managing board Nikola Tasev (quite close to VMRO-DPMNE), who lately resigned of that position. The former director of the Privatization agency at the time when this publishing house was sold is arrested as well. Another case of this sort is the case of the Bitola firm "Lozar" where Mr. Crvenkovski visited and stated that "in no case a selective approach shall be used, for all cases in doubt, because the aim of this Government is to go back where it legally belongs".

In the long list of privatization that await a revising procedure, special place has the contract regarding the refinery OKTA, concluded in 1999 with the Greek state company "Hellenic Petroleum". This agreement, non-transparent and damaging, was contested even from the very start by the then opposition. Disagreement for the conclusion of this contract was expressed by the then President Mr. Gligorov, who used his right to veto. In spite of all these pressures the then Government and the Assembly approved this agreement. The European Commission many times expressed critics for the oil monopoly, which is guaranteed by the state to OKTA. From Macedonia is requested to establish equal conditions of all participants in the oil business, otherwise the Agreement for Stabilization and Association may be suspended. According to latest estimations by the new Cabinet, only by this bad deal, state treasury is damaged for the sum of 120 million EUR. That is why the state of Macedonia issued a request to the European Commission to call off the monopoly as soon as possible. At the same time, the Constitutional court decided in favor of the "Makpetrol" charges against OKTA, in which is demanded to have the agreement declared invalid, because the monopoly position is guaranteed until 2005.

Border Issues

The foreign ministers of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Yugoslavia on November 24th officially put a marking stone on the three-border junction among the states' territories. This act symbolized the official start of the border demarcation between Yugoslavia and Macedonia, which agreement was signed one year ago. Mrs.Mitreva and Mr.Svilanovich were also talking about the demarcation of both countries in the Kosovo part and repeated that UNMIC is to be included, but there is no place for the local government in this operation. Mr.Svilanovich stated that both governments are flexible when it comes to issues that can help people who live in both sides of the border, but if intention is to speak about sovereignty issues or the status, then there is nothing to talk about. These statements did not pass without a comment from the side of DUI, who qualified it as something that is done in a haste and tendentious. Mr. Budzaku thought that demarcation might be a source of future problems.

DUI Structure Spreading

The Council of Europe in its report regarding Macedonia, states that political parties in Macedonia are divided on ethnic basis, so that is the reason why the preelectoral campaign did not contribute in overcoming the interethnic division. That is why suggestion is that parties in the country should be urged to become multiethnic, and that this should be a basic criterion for their court registration. So far, out of the registered (68) political parties 39 are Macedonian, 10 are Albanian, 5 are Roma, 3 parties each have the Serbs and the Turks, and 2 parties each have the Vlachs and the Bosniacs. That is why of special interest were the new DUI branch offices established in Eastern Macedonia (in Kocani and Berovo) and where members were only pure Macedonians. Public comments were rather controversial and opposed, but the DUI port parole Mr. Budzaku said that "this is an initiative of the Macedonian citizens per se. By this shall be achieved multiethnic democratization in the country. This is our prove that we are a party of civic orientation, which does not solely refer to the Albanian citizen". Daily press was

speculating that controversial local persons who are wishing for new business contacts and quick gains took these initiatives. It remains to be seen how this process shall evolve.

Change of NATO Mission

Before the Prague summit, Macedonia has been given signals that although the country shall not be invited for NATO membership this round, still it is expected that this is going to be achieved in the next round, where most probably Macedonia together with Croatia and Albania shall be invited to join in the Alliance. To enhance the process, US Ambassador in NATO, Mr. Nicholas Barnes, together with a bigger delegation from the State Department and the Pentagon visited Macedonia. It was stated that in the Alliance there is an interest in establishing special relations with Macedonia after the Prague summit and that in the meantime NATO should built special relations with the country. Mr. Bigman, the NATO Ambassador stated that the chances Macedonia to become a NATO member are very realistic. "The majority of Macedonians want it, and NATO wants it as well. The actual condition is for the country to reach the necessary standards and to reach the goals described in the Prime minister's speech in the Parliament. Practically, acceptance into the NATO structure depends on the country itself"-he says.

After longer negotiations about who (NATO or the new EU forces) shall take over the "Amber Fox" mission in Macedonia after December 15th , it was agreed that this time NATO shall have again a transformed mission under the name "Allied Harmony". Prior to that, there have been talks of possible change of the forces present in Macedonia, in order to be shifted from NATO to EU forces, which would have been their first mandate. This matter was vigorously discussed even among the Alliance partners, promoted and pushed more ambitiously by some EU countries. The agreed new NATO mission shall have operational and non-operational part of the new forces that shall replace the "Amber Fox" mission. The operational part shall have 24 field teams each having four members. Their task is to create a sense of security and stability, together with those who are for support of the command in Skopje. The non-operational part shall consist of those who

shall give help and advice towards restructuring of the Macedonian armed forces, helping them reach NATO standards.

Macedonia and Greece the "name issue"

Although a couple of months have already passed after the automatic extension of the Interim agreement validity between Greece and Macedonia, still dialogue in the UN frames regarding the "name issue" has still not restarted. Dialogue prolongation was also postponed for other, objective reasons as well. During the first months of the year Greece was changing its UN ambassador, and then followed the Macedonian elections. And when it was expected Mr. Niemitz⁵ to determine the date for dialogue continuation, from the Macedonian President's cabinet was issued the information that instead of the up till that moment negotiator Mr. Toshevski, a new expert team shall be formed, where Mr. Frckovski⁶ shall be the team leader. In the meantime, while in the media were mentioned various speculations regarding the platform this team shall have, arrived reaction coming from the side of the newly formed government. The President was reminded that in this dialogue the Government should be included as well, since this matter does not exclusively fall under the Presidents duties. Practically, through this matter the actual cohabitation atmosphere between the President and the Government became visible. The vice-prime minister Ms. Shekerinska confirmed the Government's efforts as carriers of the executive power for good collaboration with the President: "We shall act honestly, openly and constructively, and shall consult for all duties in all spheres in which we share responsibility". So far, in spite of all the media articles and speculations, there is still no official body created to continue the talks with Greece.

From its side DUI as a party asked the President to have their representative in the name negotiating team. This demand came at the meeting of DUI's port parole Mr. Budzaku with the President, where a couple of other issues were discussed: the names of the state Security Council members, participation in embassies staff etc. Although it is a

⁵ The mediator in charge for these talks

⁶ The ex-minister of exteriors and present President's counselor

President's autonomous right to choose who shall be a member of the Security Council, still DUI expects to have two of its own representatives in that body, taken under consideration the significant number of votes this party gained at the last elections. DUI suggested Hazbi Lika, Musa Dzaferi, Gzim Ostreni and Argon Buxaku, as candidates for members of the state Security Council. The President is supposed to select two of the four suggested names to participate in this body. Most reactions provoked the name of Gzim Ostreni, who during the conflict was the leader of the general staff of ONA and of Hazbi Lika, who was an ONA commander.

Tetovo Area Security Problems

The aftermath of the conflict in Macedonia brought a lot of uneasiness among the people belonging to all ethnic groups, especially in the city of Tetovo and the surrounding areas. Crime has been in constant raise, various gangs were creating chaos and disorder, and the danger is that a lot of people are in illegal possession of arms, which are not hesitating to use at any circumstances. Villages under the Shara mountain are still considered as a "grey" zone, which is still out of control of the state and where events of criminal nature are more often happening. Victims are people from all ethnic groups. The most tragic event happened at the end of October, when two young persons got killed, one Albanian and the other Macedonian. The first apparently was a result of an accident, which happened during a routine car control by the police, which occurred because the car in question had no plates. The driver showed no intention to stop, on the contrary augmented the speed, going straight forward to the policeman, and it is said that there were shots directed to him coming from the car. The policeman responded by jumping aside and shooting at the back of the car. Unfortunately, the young boy sitting at the back was shot. After this event, a couple of days later, most probably as an act of revenge, a group of four persons fully armed, randomly shoot at a group of ethnic Macedonian boys who were playing basketball on the street. That was how the Macedonian boy got killed. All this was happening during the "power vacuum" of the old government that was leaving and the new that was in the process of establishing.

Internally Displaced Persons

Problems of internally displaced persons in Macedonia continue. In the recent period, again due to the power vacuum and the emptied state budget, there were even difficulties in covering their basic needs, especially food and other supplies. People expressed disappointment by the slowness of their house reconstruction, combined with the fear of some families who had mobilized persons during the conflict by the Macedonian forces to go back to the villages of their origin. The Prime minister and the Minister of defense were commenting on this matter: "If conditions for return of these people are not met, that would mean that we have helped in achieving the idea of creation of ethnically pure Albanian villages".

So far, the demining project has shown results, by having cleaned 3,5 million square meters of land and by finding around 600 non-exploded pieces of weaponry and 14 mines. Remaining to be cleaned are 42 villages or settlements, in fact about 6 million square meters of land. Priority has the cultivable soil and especially the citizen's homes that have been forcefully moved out from during the conflict.

The new government reaffirmed the need for a new law for disarmament, which shall be named Law for voluntary collecting of illegal and re-registration of the legal weapons. All three major coalition partners support this Law. Estimation is that there must be a serious disarmament effort since there are weapons not only among the Albanian, but among the Macedonian population as well. Paralelly it is stated that initiators have no illusions that they shall be able to solve the problem immediately. It is clear that this process shall last much longer than the predetermined 30 or 45 days.

The Hague Tribunal Cases

The three-member Court Council in Hague finally decided to take over all the so far initiated cases, dossiers and other documentation that refers to last year crisis. The Court Council has obviously tried to make a balance in their request, respecting the Macedonian courts as well, so the cases taken over are the following: accusations against the ten high-

ranking NLA persons among which is Ali Ahmeti; the second one is the case of closing the Lipkovo lake dam, in which case in the middle of the hot summer water supply was closed for the city of Kumanovo (100.000 inhabitants, ethnically mixed); the third refers to the torturing of four road workers of the construction company "Mavrovo", (where indictments have been raised only against two persons who are detained at present); the fourth case is about the alleged mass graves in Ljubanci and Neprosteno. The Tribunal has categorically denied the prosecutor's request for Macedonian authorities to stop immediately all present and future investigation activities for crimes committed last year. Again, the Tribunal thought that it would have had an intense frustrating effect upon the Macedonian judiciary, so it is banned as an option. By written request of the Hague tribunal, the Macedonian criminal courts decided and transferred the cases in question to it. That was made in the Skopje courts for four of the cases, and the Tetovo court transferred the fifth to Hague.

The "Rashtanski Vineyards" Case

While the last year crisis was evolving, a strange and still unclarified event happened near Skopje, at the Rashtanski vineyards, where directly was involved the ex-minister of interiors Ljube Boshkoski. At present, this case became the top priority issue to be clarified and resolved by the newly appointed Minister of Interiors Hari Kostov. Namely, according to the official version of the Ministry (by the previous Minister) a police patrol on March 2nd 2001 near Skopje was attacked by an armed mujaheddin group and that the patrol shot back and "neutralized" all the attackers. It was said that potential goals of this group of alleged terrorists were high-ranking officials and important foreign embassies. Of course, this information from the very beginning sounded odd and provoked doubts. Later, information started to arrive that this group were in fact Pakistani refugees, economic emigrants, who have illegally crossed the border. NATO ambassador Mr. Bigman said that this case "cries for investigation", which shows that the official case version needs to be checked again. Relatives of the killed Pakistani citizens through their government were seeking for the truth as well. Culmination of events happened recently, when the Macedonian General consulate in Karachi was attacked (05.12.2002), three

persons, Pakistani citizens were brutally killed and after that the building was blown up. Some messages found written on the wall were indicating that "Al Qaeda" was involved in the case, still police sources in Karachi are pretty reserved in saying that this was an act performed by this organization. A more likely version is that this event might have been supported by some of the relatives of the killed persons in Rashtanski vineyards (since some were protesting about this case recently), or this event might have had a very personal motivation (regarding the fact that no ethnic Macedonian was killed).

Church Issues

The former bishop Jovan who created big turbulence in the frames of the Macedonian Orthodox Church is accused by the Veles eparchy that by his departure he took a large sum of money from the eparchy's safe for his own needs and that he additionally made non-reasonable luxurious expenses for his behalf, like purchase of three luxurious cars, etc. What's more he took antiquities that belonged to previous bishops and high-ranking persons in the Macedonian Orthodox Church. Combined with other complaints coming from other eparchies where he used to work before, there is a great possibility that he will be put on trial for his financial malversations. This kind of behavior burdens additionally the political controversies that are linked with the name of this person.

Regarding the broken communication with MOC and the other sister churches, Archbishop Stephan for the national radio stated that "when MOC talks with the Serbian Orthodox Church we feel that we speak at the same time with the Greek one". "Our demands have always been identical and refer to solving the independent status of MOC, although it is well known that to the Greeks the most suitable thing would be for our holy church to be named Ohrid Archbishopry". Until lately, for the Serbian Orthodox Church our church was MOC, but lately they publicly address us and recognize us as autonomous Ohrid Archbishopry". He also stressed that MOC is expecting to have the Russian Orthodox Church to be included in the dispute.

Public Opinion Polls

According to the latest poll (results published on 05.12.2002) performed by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, the new government currently enjoys the support of 72% of the polled. According to ethnic affiliation of the respondents, this support is present in 68% among the Macedonians and 83% among the Albanians. As the main reason for lesser degree of support shown by the Macedonians to the new government (14%) is mentioned DUI's presence in the executive power. From their side, Albanians mostly show mistrust (8%) because they do not believe that the Government shall be able to solve the economic problems. As one of the most important principles, which should be taken care by the government, respondents said (in 83%) that it is the fight against corruption. Other priorities are: the rule of law (Macedonians-82%, Albanians 93%); gaining back the trust for the state institutions (M-68%, A-73%); Framework Agreement implementation (M-19%, A-97%); EU and NATO membership (M-33%, A-72%); return of the displaced persons (M-88%, A-52%). Out of the new group of politicians who have presently important positions, the one who has got the most support (76%) is Nikola Popovski, the President of the Parliament. Opposition boycott is not supported by 64% of the total number of respondents, while 20% cannot decide and 16% support this move.