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Political Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

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Parliamentary Activities

As a coalition partner, DUI was expected to suggest persons coming from the party to fill in various positions into the government or representative bodies. One of those vacancies to be filled was the place of vice-president of the Parliament. At first DUI decided to be the former and current MP Hisni Shaqiri, who back in 2001 left the Parliament and became an NLA fighter. This suggestion represented a very difficult thing for the other coalition partners to digest, since they previously publicly announced that they shall not support former NLA fighters who have held weapons during the crisis to be in important places in the political system of the country. After a longer period of non-officializing the suggestion, due to the openly stated non-satisfaction of SDSM, DUI changed its idea and suggested Mr. Agron Budzaku (the DUI parliamentary group coordinator) for that position. He was voted by the Parliament, together with the other vice-president coming from the LDP party, Mrs. Liljana Popovska¹. Coalition partners have also agreed Musa Djaferi and Agron Budzaku from DUI to be the new members of the President's Security Council.

The Committee for Mandate and Immunity issues formalized the coalition agreement between SDSM, DUI and LDP. It was agreed that parliamentary sessions shall be run on Macedonian language, while MPs of Albanian ethnic origin may discuss on Albanian as well. Translation shall be provided at all times.

Pressed by IMF, MPs did not pass the Law regarding persons who lost their jobs, intending to give financial support to persons who have working experience of 25 years and who have not reached the age of 55, up till the moment of their new employment. This move was seen as very unpopular for the government. On the other hand, in the effort to stimulate employment, the Parliament passed a law that is allowing benefits for the employers who employ new persons. Also, MPs adopted the Law for Ratification of the Protocol of Macedonian membership in World Trade Organization. It was voted unanimously, after which Macedonia was officially accepted in WTO this spring.

In March, the Parliament voted the new Law for passports. New passports shall provide for persons belonging to the Albanian ethnic group a trilingual passport by individual request. Trilingual use of languages shall be on the passport cover as well. This law was brought by consensus among the parties of the position. DPA was angry because their suggestion for everyone to have a trilingual passport was not passed, so they left the assembly and announced their withdrawal from the Assembly's work.

At the end of May, the Assembly voted the Law for Illegal Weapons collection. This law is viewed as a test for all political factors in the country who should actively be engaged in field to persuade the citizens to get rid of their private arsenals. Major motive is considered to be the rigorous penalties this law determines (up to 10 years). During weapons collection there will be no identification of the citizens who will deliver the weapons. The whole action shall be applied by an 11-member Coordinative body. Head

¹ In fact the first women vice-president

of this body is decided to be one of the former NLA leading commanders, who was a former member of the Yugoslav army as well, Gzim Ostreni. This body shall have 5 MPs, among which the President of security and defense, a government vice-president and three Ministers (Interiors, Defense and Justice) a representative of the Union of Local Selfgovernment Units and from NGOs.

During the month of June, the Parliament did not pass the amendments of the laws for courts and for executive proceedings, because for them to be voted a 2/3 majority is needed. Position did not succeed obtain the votes of the opposition as well, so VMRO-DPMNE MPs were sustained. Unfortunately these laws are the ones connected with the Framework Agreement implementation. Other laws that were passed, because no qualified majority is needed are the changes of the laws for elementary and high school, for administrative workers, labor etc.

Early Effects of Government Policy

Near the first 100 days of rule of the new government Prime Minister Crvenkovski gave an interview in which he commented current political events and situation. Regarding the VMRO demand for DUI² to sign the Framework Agreement as well, he commented that it is an absurd suggestion, since there is no point asking from every political structure that emerges in the future, to sign the same document. "That would mean that everything is back to the beginning over and again. We should now call upon the Constitution, since it is an amended one so this is the document that is further implemented"- he said. He estimated as a good sign of democracy the VMRO-DPMNE return in the Parliament, adding to the stability of the country and expressed hope for future opposition constructive behavior for all important political issues. "Thesis for national reconciliation are empty phrases if the content is not properly conceptualized. It should be said which points and program principles should be encompassed in that national reconciliation. Orientation of SDSM, but of majorpart Macedonia's citizens as well are peace, stability, territorial integrity, democratization, economic reforms, EU and NATO integration. These things are desirable for many persons, regardless the ethnic or religious background, so we could now talk of a common national front. For these things must exist a wide political, ethnic and social consensus"- he said.

When the public sector is in question, Crvenkovski pointed out a contradiction: "on one hand, we have to make large cuts of employees in the administration, but on the other it should start the realization of increase of not only the number of Albanians, but also to the other underrepresented ethnic groups in the public administration structure. That complicates things and also burdens the financial aspect of this matter. For realization of such a process takes time, it cannot be done overnight, so it should follow certain dynamics."

² The vice-prime minister from DUI Musa Djaferi stated that although DUI did not sign the FA, a special accent for FA implementation was given in their party program. He said that NLA was not the decisive factor for the prevention of the 2001 conflict. "This were other structures, who did not show responsibility up to which extent may the state arrive". "Unfortunately, in practice was shown that there are structures which can very unpredictably lead the country to conflict."

The "Lions" and their protests

The unit for immediate intervention "Lions" is the unit created under the auspices of the Ministry of Interiors in autumn 2001 and counts 1.200 persons in total. It was believed that the unit was filled predominantly with persons belonging or supporting the then ruling VMRO-DPMNE party, so it was viewed as a party police. Some of its members were of "dubious" background, even some had previous criminal activities. During the following months after the Lions creation, there were numerous cases of attacks against civilians done by this unit, or individual cases of misbehavior, even murders, which made this unit notorious. The international community representatives often suggested the previous government to dismiss this unit, but resistance was big, justifying this opinion with the "sacrifice for fatherland" these people did during the conflict. After elections, the new government faced the same problem, only this time it was announced that this unit shall cease to exist. A couple of months passed, leaving the unit to "vegetate", so with the indirect influence of the present opposition and using the dissatisfaction of the unit members, protests were organized and major roads were blocked. Unit members refused to give back their weapons, seeking permanent employment in the auspices of the security forces of the country. At the protest held at the second half of January, there was even a crucial point when the Lions pointed their guns to the police, being ready for battle. Fortunately tension was controlled, so that very day a meeting was held at the President's office with all the relevant members of government and Lion's representatives. Finally, it was agreed that half (600 persons) of the members shall be permanently employed in the Ministries of Defense and Interiors, while for the rest a selection must be made, especially regarding the ones who have had criminal records. In addition, it was to be checked how many persons are realistically members of this unit, since it was discovered that more members are shown in paper and more salaries are taken, than the actual number existing. That evening, Lions were asking for amnesty for those persons who did criminal acts while they were members of the unit, excluding the acts of murder, rape or drugs trafficking. Authorities refused this demand, stating that they have no legitimate right to grant amnesty to anyone.

Several months later, 170 former Lions, who have not succeeded to get employment in the ministries, protested again. This time their arguments were that their representatives who were in charge for negotiations with the government manipulated them and put at work persons who did not have the necessary quality and merit. The minister of Interiors was very firm in his position that no more persons should be accepted into state service, but these people started their hunger strike. Perhaps this move softened the government's position, but this remains to be seen in the next couple of days.

Reconstruction in Former Crisis Areas

Statistics say that in January in Macedonia there were 8433 internally displaced persons. About 5.000 of them still did not have a home to return to. The others have not yet returned of fear for their safety. The government is awaiting the 50,38 million Euro for further home reconstruction. Assisted by three foreign governments- The Netherlands,

Germany and Italy, further reconstruction of houses destroyed during the conflict is taking place this spring and summer in villages of the Kumanovo area. Houses belong to all three ethnic groups living in the area: Macedonians, Albanians and Serbs. Paralelly, meetings shall be held with the local population, to achieve mutual trust and confidence of people, to encourage their return.

Census Results

The President of the Steering Committee for census observation, Mr. Fotis Nanopoulos, confirmed the success of the realized census, announcing the first results of this statistical operation. It is estimated that analysis that shall be made by use of serious statistical methods shall be a relevant answer to all speculations regarding the census results, especially the part about the current ethnic composition of the country. Unfortunately, the dynamics of data input is not in accordance with the expectations, so complete results, especially those regarding the ethnic affiliation of the citizens shall be officially announced at a later date. New data show that at present Macedonia has got 2.038.059 inhabitants living in the country and in addition 23.741 foreigners.

New Public Prosecutor Elected

Soon after the new government came to power, released from its duties the then Public prosecutor, arguing this move with his poor performance, combined with a history of biased party influence on his work. One month later, a new Public prosecutor was elected. He was found in the face of a judge of the Bitola Supreme Court, known for his ability to say "no" to political pressures. While discussion for his election was on in the Parliament, the SDSM MPs stressed that he is expected to go on with his working principles and act by the Law. Opposition was against the election of Mr. Prcevski as a public prosecutor, arguing that he is not knowledgeable enough and that he is not fit for that position as a person. After the election, as the Public Prosecutor, he made a list of suggestions for the local public prosecutors throughout the country³. He also got nine deputies, out of which three are ethnic Albanians.

Threats for Destabilizing Spring

DPA high party representative Iljaz Halimi threatened that there shall be new offensive in spring if demanded radical changes are not done, regarding the improvement of Albanians rights. He said that in the last 100 days of the current government the process was moving backwards, so there should be another war even more severe to improve Albanians rights in Macedonia. Contrary to this, DUI representatives said that there is no possibility of a spring offensive.

VMRO-DPMNE former Minister of interiors Ljube Boskoski stated that currently in Macedonia operate 500-600 mujaheddins in the areas of Tetovo, Kumanovo and in the outskirts of Skopje. "Potentially there are still 20.000 NLA fighters under arms, who in majorpart are in Kosovo, but they do not give up the ideas of 2001." He thinks that this

³ This list was adopted by the Parliament in April.

fact can seriously destabilize the country's safety, so he called upon the government to approach this problem seriously and to make a defense strategy. He also suggested to the President of the Republic to go to Lipkovo region and meet the members of the new terrorist groups. As a response to this statement, NATO port-parole Craig Ratcliff stated that NATO and the international community are strongly convinced that there is no threat to the Macedonian security neither from internal nor from external sources. He criticized Mr.Boskovski's statement by saying that statements like that do not contribute to the country's stability and security, and invited him to share information with them if he has some prove. "NATO is aware of criminal groups and gangs who use violence and disrupt the planned activities, but they are no general threat for the country's security."

Security Status and the New EU Mission

In the year 2001 if one does not count the victims of the conflict, a total of 131 persons got killed, out of which 77 got killed by firearms. In 2003, the number of so far murdered persons is a dozen already. Employees from the Ministry of Interiors claim that if the number of unregistered weapons back in time was 1% of the total arsenal of the security forces in the state, but today unfortunately this figure is 20%.

Villages around Tetovo area still have criminal gangs who are controlling women trafficking and other illegal activities, so it is not rare to have cases of murdered or injured persons brought to the Tetovo hospital. Only in this area is estimated that there are over 50.000 kalashnikovs and guns. It is said that former NLA fighters still have in their possessions mortars, "soldiers" and nitroglycerin cannons. Macedonians in this area, are estimated to possess about 4 to 5.000 pieces of weaponry. That is why the Ministry of Interiors together with UNDP prepared a law for voluntary turning over the weapons, which was passed in May. Every local selfgovernment, which shall voluntarily collect the weapons, shall receive some kind of infrastructural help from the international community (school, health unit, roads, post office etc). The government's intention is to determine a time frame no bigger than 45 days in which weapons shall be handed over (delivered). Those who will deliver the weapons are guaranteed complete amnesty, while those who after this term shall possess weapons, shall be rigorously punished.

Other areas in the country during the last couple of months were not filled with tranquility as well. Last December, a bomb exploded in Kumanovo, just in front of the high school, at the moment when was expected the class to end. Fortunately, the children avoided the threat, but an accidental person passing by was killed. In January, DUI Skopje headquarters were racketeered. Strong explosion in February blew up part of the building of the Struga court. ANA took responsibility for this act. Later, two persons were arrested and put on trial for it. In March a NATO jeep has driven into a mine in the Kumanovo area. Two Polish soldiers were killed and two Macedonian civilians. In June, a mine killed one soldier and wounded another, near the border. Another bomb exploded in Kumanovo again, damaging 22 flats at the city center. Again in June granates blew up the petrol company in the Tetovo village Lesok, owned by a Macedonian. During the same period, the police, while resisting and using a gun to prevent his arrest killed a well-known criminal from Aracinovo. He was known to be terrorizing ethnic Albanians

businessmen as well. As an act of revenge, his gang broke into the Aracinovo police station, harassing the policemen who were of various ethnic origin and also their supporters beat up two groups of journalists coming from two TV stations. Journalists were very angry because Concordia mission was simply observing the event, while the raged persons from Aracinovo were beating them up. A couple of days later, two bombs exploded simultaneously in different parts of Skopje. None was hurt.

Such a security momentum imposed a further presence of another military mission, this time sponsored by EU. After President Trajkovski has officially invited EU to take over the NATO peace mission "Allied Harmony", this April arrived the first EU military mission named "Concordia". Troops number about 450 soldiers and at first it was expected for the mission to end by the end of this year. General estimation is that although Macedonia has done a lot in the security area compared to last year, still there are some individuals and extremist political and criminal groups who would like Macedonia to have a chaotic situation. That is why there might be another repeated six months mandate for Concordia, after which Macedonia shall ask for a civilian mission. As a good sign in the line of preserving the country's stability was the May meeting in Ohrid where a general strategy for preserving borders security was agreed by the countries of the region, backed by EU, NATO and USA. Also, Macedonia, Albania and Croatia signed the trilateral agreement called Adriatic charter. This document, inspired by USA, allows political, military and other help for access to the Alliance. Important is that it additionally contains firm determination of these countries territorial integrity, sovereignty and stability.

Economic Situation and the IMF Visit

Technical negotiations with IMF and the Ministry of Finance started at the end of January. Main topic was the macroeconomic policy in the year 2003. Most of the negotiation time was spent on matters of budget cuts and the Macedonian Trade-Union request for introducing a law for the factories that produce losses. At the end of the negotiations a Letter of Intentions was signed, which was later approved by the IMF board. The money approved by the Arrangement were expected in March, but what is more important, majorpart of the donor's money agreed are to be activated jointly. Although this year, the Government intends to concentrate on the issues of poverty reduction and increase of employment, the Minister of Finance stated that he is not expecting spectacular results by the end of this year. Still, some start of economic growth is expected (up to 3%), together with up to 3% inflation and slow decline of the number of unemployed.

According to the EU Commission for the West Balkan states it is stated that the economic climate in Macedonia is improving. One of the first tests of this government was the stand-by arrangement with IMF. It was said that Macedonia should improve the implementation of the new legal framework and to fulfill its duties from the FA. Although the government faces many challenges, like the fight against corruption, finishing the privatization process, public sector reforms etc, still the economic climate getting better.

Social Agreement

After signing the social agreement between the government and the trade union representative (in December 2002), started the formation of the adequate joint bodies, as agreed. The economic-social council was formed as a three-part body consisted of the Government, the Trade Union and the Chamber of Commerce. Its president is the Minister for labor and social policy Mr. Manasijevski. The basic idea was to create a joint body where all partners' opinions shall be respected and where mature, constructive and compromise solutions shall be brought. By this, the Trade Union has provided itself with possibility of influence in all phases from designing to implementation of the policy socio-economic decisions. This body is expected to form four working groups which will work on separate issues agreed by the Agreement, like the public sector salary system⁴, the system of payments for social security, health care and the taxes, the group for health care reforms preparation, the group for solving the problems of those enterprises which have large unpaid social care and health system contributions. Additionally, a special Trade Union committee at the Trade union prepared a new set of rules to be added in the Labor law, in order to fill in some current gaps in the legal system and increase worker's rights. This is of utmost importance, because -as the President of the Trade Union said-many problems are awaiting: finishing the privatization process by the end of this year, opening the issue of public sector privatization, social reforms realization, introducing changes in the Labor law, revision of criminal privatizations, etc. Government plans to end the privatization process by the end of this calendar year, after which date the Privatization Agency shall cease to exist. What remained to be agreed was the law for people who have lost their jobs in the big companies, which were closed down. As mentioned above, this effort was not fruitful.

The new government as soon as it got in office, met massive unproductive employment in all the state run organizations by the previous government. Only last year, the previous government employed 11.217 new persons in the public sector, although there was a commitment towards IMF to diminish the current number of administrative workers. Now major problem is how to diminish the current, bigger number and also how to adjust the worker's (ethnic) composition with the obligations deriving from the Framework Agreement. The National Electric Company announced that in the next six months due to its bad economic situation is obliged to fire 1100 persons. In this company from 1999 to 2002 the previous government employed 2129 persons, often in non-suitable places according to the education of the employed. Firing these persons will be a very hard task for the Government, since large wave of dissatisfaction is expected, as well as pressure from the Trade Union.

Battle Against Corruption

Many indictments were raised and numerous arrests took place after the new government got in office. Since many of these indictments were against prominent VMRO-DPMNE

⁴ Currently, too many differences in salaries exist, for the same working place and qualifications. Also, there are managing problems and problems in quality of performed duties.

members, the party complained that a totalitarian campaign against them was organized. At the same time VMRO reminded that SDSM also had many scandals during their previous rule.

Still, many facts indicated the contrary. The Ministry of Finance found out that the state reserves were not passed by inventory in the last couple of years. In addition, these reserves were used for corruption activities or for direct subventions, which are against the Law. Oddly, there was no spending strategy for the stocked goods, so responsibility shall be sought from the persons who worked there. VMRO-DPMNE Secretary General Vojo Mihajlovski was put in prison on the accusation of big money frauds in the health fund. An indictment was raised against him, for serious allegations that large sums of money were transferred from the health fund to the party fund. The former director of the State Electrical Company Lambe Arnaudov is imprisoned for fraud amounting the sum of one million Euro. The state committee against corruption was looking at the case of the sale of Macedonian oil refinery OKTA out of which purchase was suspicious a provision of 10 million Euro. Macedonian Customs made the first internal control after taking over from the previous government, but also the inspectors in charge at the Ministry of interiors have made controls. Many personal mistakes, deviant behavior and crime activities were found. Result from all this is the state impoverishment, making rich some firms and individuals, bringing disloyal competition in the market. The general director stated that he will personally be responsible to change these conditions in the future. Shortages are found especially during the years 2000, 2001 and up till November 2002⁵. DPA, former VMRO-DPMNE coalition partner was not immune from the same deeds. That is why an international indictment was raised against Besnik Fetaj, former Minister of Economy who was recently extradited to Macedonia from Croatia.

Ideas for "Ethnic" Academies?

At the specially organized discussion forums, some Albanian intellectuals and politicians publicly announced that they are considering of founding an Academy of their own (Albanian), since they expressed their doubts about the policy of accepting Academy members in MAAS⁶ (MANU). The Forum of the Union of Albanian Intellectuals in Macedonia stated that the highest scientific institution in the country is one-national. Forum members were angry because since the forming of MANU not a single Albanian was received as a member. (Although it is an issue whether there were such application for admittance) The President of the Forum thought that there is a need for changing the name of the Academy in order to exist a separate sector, which would work on affirmation of the Albanian history and the national characteristics of the Albanians in Macedonia.

As a reaction to this, the member of the academy Mr. Blaze Ristovski stated that MANU has well known and acknowledged members who are Vlachs, Serbians, Turks, Albanians, Jews, Germans, Poles and others, and that among the external composition there is eve

⁵ Unpaid declarations are found, amounting the sum of 270 million denars, goods with unpaid customs, import of 20.000 old cars without customs paid on the level requested by law etc.

⁶ Macedonian Academy of Arts and Sciences

bigger ethnic variety, where is a very distinguished member of the Academy who is an ethnic Albanian. According to Mr. Ristovski, Academy membership cannot be obtained by some ethnic keys or some representative political percents of the citizens, but only and exclusively according to internationally accepted criteria in arts and sciences and upon strict legal procedures. He said that there is a big misunderstanding when is the question of the character of the Academy and the procedure of admittance. At scientific conferences and gatherings are invited Albanians living in Macedonia as well, and some are included in the projects done here, take part in the publications etc. "MANU has departments by scientific areas and for ethnicity, but does not have special institutes according to the ethnic composition of its members." No suggestion for membership was submitted by the Albanian community when the competition was on, and additionally only the departments may give their suggestions, which as an activity is running presently. On the idea of founding "an adequate institution for science and arts of the Albanians in Macedonia", Mr. Ristovski stressed that the freedom of associating is granted, but it is hard to anticipate for a relatively small minority to form a parallel "national" academy of arts and sciences. One should have in mind that the Albanian state after many decades of free state development formed a national academy only recently and still has only two departments, and not a single person from the Albanians living in Macedonia is accepted.

Education issues

Many months have passed, but the Shemshovo village case is still pending. The buste of the ethnic Albanian teacher Jumni Jonuzi in spite of the things agreed, was not dislocated from the schoolyard. Instead, it was said that it is awaited for the new sports hall to be built, after which the bust shall be removed and placed there. On the other hand, the Macedonians from the village are very discontent because their requests have not been met, as opposed to the ethnic Albanian persistence of doing what they intend to. Therefore Macedonians asked for resignation of the current Minister of Education Azis Polozani who is from DUI. Other than that, the school sign on Macedonian language where is put the changed name of the school that now bears the village name of Shemshovo, is written as pronounced in Albanian, which was seen as an act of provocation. In the meantime Macedonian children were not going to this school, so in order not to lose the school year, they have been sent to the neighboring village of Siricino, where is not enough space for all the children and conditions re not adequate for an educational process for so many children to take place. Prime minister Crvenkovski pointed out that the Shemshevo case was an inherited problem, which the Government wanted to solve in a different way, not like the so far practice. That meant reaching solution through political persuading, without application of repressive methods, because only that method ensured permanent results. "Unfortunately, this case has not reached complete resolution yet."

Poisoning of school children of Albanian ethnic origin in Kumanovo was repeated at the end of 2002. Experts of the WHO did not discover any cause for such poisoning, since no infection or toxic material was found. Samples were took from 215 high school children, but it was not possible to identify a single case.

The deputy-minister for education stated that the process of legalization of the Tetovo university has been open. Estimation is that there is political climate for it, but final decision shall be made only after it shall be registered in court and shall pass the evaluation and accreditation processes. DUI has already signed an agreement between the party and the Tetovo university structures, in order to set the principles, which should be respected by this institution in order to be legalized. This institution has the ambition to be financed by the state, based on the student's interests and shall aim towards development of high education in Albanian language. Other basic principles are high quality of education and appropriate international standards and norms, which need to be met by this institution. For that purpose, an Initiative Committee was established.

Framework Agreement Implementation Plan

At the beginning of the year President Trajkovski gathered the parties signatories of the Framework Agreement at a meeting to discuss the process. At the meeting were absent the VMRO-DPMNE and DPA leaders Georgievski and Djaferi. Albanian parties showed dissatisfaction for the non-use of Albanian language as second official language in the state, minimum presence of Albanians in the state administration, dragging the process of introducing some laws in time. Still, dynamics of legal project preparation and harmonization was agreed. Priority was given to the laws of the area of decentralization and of the adequate representation of the ethnic communities in the public administration. The Government on January 15th accepted the plan for application of the FA. Plan realization is awaiting money from the donor's conference, although the government already spends part of the budget money for that purpose. Here are included the implementation obligations, especially particular points in them, the principles of the laws and the Constitution, as well as the confidence-building measures.

Framework Agreement implementation was a subject of misinterpretation as well. In the roughly determined "Albanian" side elements of the FA agreement were later modified in its understanding and interpretation, giving space to a wider than agreed range of elements interpreted wide and loose. On the other hand, the roughly determined "Macedonian" side is accusing the FA of absence of concept for the needs of theoretic explanation of the principles agreed, as well as having some mistrust to the possible practical outcome of the things agreed. Some columnists think that part of the problem is the existing divisions and unstable legitimacy of the Albanian political representatives, among which is not made a distinction between the neoromantic ethnic radical ideals and the position of political responsibility for democratic development and rights for every citizen. It is hard for every Albanian political factor to balance the various interests, especially the ones between the urban and rural ethnic Albanian population. In this picture should be added the bad influence the Kosovar crime circles are making to the Macedonian milieu.

New local community borders are to be decided by the end of this year. Regarding this matter three systemic laws are to be adopted in the next period: the law for territorial division of the community borders, the law for financing the local selfgovernment units,

and finally the law for the city of Skopje, which is expected to be introduced at the first half of 2004. Local communities are unable to additionally fundraise from the citizens, due to the bad economic situation in the country. It is still unknown how many local units the country shall have in the future. Decentralization of powers shall be the basic principle applied with the novelties. In the specially prepared document, are exactly determined over 80 projects in every sphere, starting from urbanism, civil protection, fire brigades etc, which shall be transferred to local authorities gradually. Local elections are due for November 2004. A clear division between local and state powers is to be made, in order to be avoided the political stimulation of regionalism and introducing a two-level local selfgovernment. Intention is the citizens to get better service in education, health etc.

The new government has still got public and international support due to its composition (SDSM and LDP with DUI) and its joint formulation of how the Framework Agreement shall be further implemented. Another strongpoint is the maintained popularity for the anticorruption campaign, which lead to arrest of many prominent persons of the VMRO-DPMNE party. Other domains show weaknesses in the sense of lack of ideas and adaptability and slowness in introducing change.

At the end of January, with an absolute majority was voted the Draft-Decision for marking the 100 years of Macedonian statehood 1903-2003. Discussion was quite vivid, but what is very interesting is that for the first time MPs of Albanian ethnic origin discussed that although up till now very few Albanians were participating in the celebrations every year, this year they would like to participate in the celebration of the Krushevo 1903 republic, since they were active in the resistance against the Ottoman Empire of that time, and especially because they as an ethnic group were comprised in the Krushevo Manifesto.

Religious-Political Issues

Talks between the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Serbian Orthodox Church have once more come to a dead end. Meetings held in May between the two churches were not even commented publicly by the two parties. MOC has handed over to SOC the so far abuses and financial malversations done by the previous bishop Jovan, who is now appointed by the SOC as exarch in Macedonia. SOC reaction was negative.

Followed a very rude official reaction by the SOC against the autocephalous status of MOC, that raged the Macedonian public opinion. VMRO-DPMNE suggested a declaration to the Assembly regarding the MOC preservation of autocephalous status. Position parties SDSM and LDP voted against this Declaration, thinking that at this point of time discussions regarding the name and status of the church would be considered non-serious. Their position was that the Assembly and the state should not mix in such things.

The EU Process

This year the Government plans to realize three projects regarding the process of European integration: "National strategy for integration of Macedonia in EU", "Program for harmonization of the national legal system with the EU for 2003" and "Strategy of public information about the process of EU integration". Paralelly, the vice-prime minister Shekerinska is creating a twinning-system to achieve improvement of the rhtm of EU integration.

EU greeted the improvement of the security in the country. Police is back to the former crisis regions, where the local population supports actions that are taken. Main recommendations of the EU Commission to Macedonia in May were: further Framework Agreement implementation, continuation of the decentralization process and public announcement of the census results. Same as for Macedonia, the EU summit in Porto Carras in June this year is seen as of utmost importance for the countries of the region. Government is supported in its efforts to fight against crime and corruption. Public opinion is that the government shall have to seriously consider the necessary reforms and apply them, otherwise "other" scenarios may prevail and ruin the country anew.

National Strategy at Last?

Mid-June was the period when VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM agreed to have talks for reaching political consensus for important political issues of the country and concerning the creation of longer-term strategy for Macedonia. Areas of special importance for SDSM were stated to be the national security, EU integration and foreign policy, while VMRO-DPMNE focuses on the economic area, security, the FA realization and laws deriving from it, the Macedonian Orthodox church, safe return of internally displaced people. It is generally estimated that consensus on these issues is more than necessary. Should be said that these changes of the nature of relations between the two parties occurred after the personal changes of the VMRO-DPMNE party leadership. Crvenkovski and Gruevski agreed that from now on shall work together for the benefit of state interests. Regardless who is in power and who in opposition, the interest of the state shall be primary and their political battle shall be a battle of ideas.

The Abolition

The "tapping" scandal of about one hundred persons of public and political life in Macedonia⁷, was presented to the public two years ago (January 2001) by the leader of the then opposition SDSM party Branko Crvenkovski. Meanwhile, this affair did not achieve its resolution by the then party on power VMRO-DPMNE, so after the 2002 elections one of the priorities of the new government was locating the responsibility of the key actors in this event. In the moment when the first appearance in court was to be called, according to the indictment acts against the director of the Intelligence Agency Dosta Dimovska (a prominent VMRO-DPMNE member) and the former head of the fifth department of the Ministry of Interiors Aleksandar Cvetkov as persons directly involved in the affair, President Trajkovski unexpectedly took advantage of his right to grant abolition. He applied the abolition to this case, because he estimated that in this particular

⁷ Among which the President of the Republic Boris Trajkovski

case existed the reasons stated in Article 11 of the Law for Pardon where it is anticipated that the President may grant pardon when it is in the Republic's interest or when special circumstances regarding the person or the deed indicate that pardon is justified. According to the explanation, while bringing this Decision for releasing from prosecution, the President was lead by the fact that the case was instrumentalized by party-political purposes and selectively applied, which according to him, remained the conviction that are camouflaged the real persons who ordered it and did it. This position is enforced even more with the statements given to the media by the organs in charge that they do not possess documents and prove for the case. The President argued that further continuation of the search may damage the security system, especially "when in question the estimated attack upon the Agency's Director".

President's move caused turbulent reactions and polemics in the wider public. As expected, this move had repercussions upon the already damaged relations between the President and the Government⁸. The abolition act caused big dilemmas among some legal experts regarding the acts validity⁹. Some law professors stated that the chief of state has the right to apply the abolition, as well as the pardon, but it is important how he applies it. Opinion is that the President owes an explanation to the public, especially because he has a history of irregular elections indicating that he "abuses power".

The Prime minister Mr. Crvenkovski commented that by this deed practically is pointed who is the author of the criminal act of rude citizen's rights breach in 2001. Estimation is that this is an immeasurable and irresponsible breach of the constitutional authorizations and of basic principles of the rule of law, with heavy political implications. Other political parties reacted differently on this President's move, but generally they were all surprised. VMRO-DPMNE stated that move is the President's business, but the surprise could not be hid. LDP called upon respect of the laws, and asked for respect of the laws by everyone without exception. An LP representative, who was one of the tapped as well, stated that "this is only the beginning of the breach of human rights in the name of political interests". DPA port-parole stated that there is a lack of transparency and that Trajkovski applies the right of pardon selectively. DUI had no comment, since on that time they were not involved in the political life of the country. Other smaller parties asked for a President's impeachment. Some foreign representatives denied their involvement in the story, while the USA embassy gave "no comment".

With this event were intensified the dilemmas about possible motives and reasons for such a controversial move. Among other, this move was seen as a president's effort to

⁸ Namely, it is known that due to the irregularities present during presidential elections in 1999, for a long time President Trajkovski by SDSM was named "the citizen" instead of chief of state. Relations normalized during the 2001 crisis when the "big coalition" government was formed. After parliamentary elections due to certain misunderstandings and lack of coordination between the President's cabinet and the Government, during appointing new members in the working group in charge to negotiate with the Greek government regarding the name issue, an open confrontation emerged. So, by this last move cohabitation was again put in question.

⁹ Especially disputable moment is the fact that nowhere under the act is to be found the President's signature, but only the typed name and surname. In its place the secretary general Zoran Jolevski had his signature, who verified that the act is true to the original.

improve his position in VMRO-DPMNE again. Speculations were saying that Trajkovski and Dimovska belong to the same fraction group in the party so alternatives were two: either to work for another president mandate for Trajkovski or to create a new political party, which shall absorb the dissatisfied VMRO-DPMNE members. In the light of the forthcoming VMRO-DPMNE congress this move was also calculated.

Parliament's majority asked from the President to explain his deed in front of MPs. Trajkovski from the parliament's stand directed critics towards the ruling majority, the government and the court system. Denying any proves for criminal responsibility of Dimovska, he said that abolition was made in order to prevent efforts of a center of political power to influence the country's security system.

Followed a resignation of Mrs. Dimovska from the position Director of the Intelligence Agency, explaining her move as an effort to create conditions for normal Agency's functioning without pressures and to overcome the isolation problems. The obvious previous arrangement was proved by the President's appointment of another person on her place who belonged to the same party. Still, she is intending to return in the Macedonian political scene, this time as a president of the newly formed Movement for European Macedonia. Fact is that she is still a member of VMRO-DPMNE¹⁰ and for now has no ambition to transform this new NGO to a political party. The only reserve for this possibility is said to be if Mr. Gruevski as a new party leader "abandons the basic party principles".

This unprecedented event stimulated the Government to initiate a procedure for deleting Article 11 of the Law for Pardon, that gives such discretionary powers to the President. The Assembly's Committee for Political System supported the idea, but still the suggested changes did not get sufficient support. Together with the opposition, deleting of this article was not supported by DUI and by LDP as well. This made SDSM withdraw its proposal.

Tapping legalization

The "tapping" affair stimulated once more the debate for tapping legalization. Since the Macedonian Constitution prohibits this possibility, the minister of interiors Kostov suggested change of the constitutional Article 17. According to this change, the police may apply all special inquiries like following or tapping only on basis of a court decision and under conditions and procedure defined by law. This shall be according to EU standards and applied in case of protection of the state interests and because of more efficient struggle against organized crime and corruption. This article guaranteed the secrecy of letters and other types of communication, except when the state security is in question. But this initiative did not obtain enough votes support¹¹, because no political consensus between position and opposition was achieved. Opposition boycotted the government suggestion, by stating that the wording of the articles were too widely put

¹⁰ Although she only got a last minute invitation to the party Congress. 80 votes were necessary, while only 63 were obtained by SDSM, DUI, LDP and PDP

and that volunteerism should be avoided. By the end of June finally opposition and position agreed and passed the change required.

Party Congresses

First half of the year 2003 passed in the sign of party congresses and intra-party elections for the highest party bodies, or various party merging. That happened in both larger parties of the Macedonian block and in the LDP party, but also in PDP, DUI and DPA. The two present parties on power SDSM and LDP had no shifts in the party leading positions (as leaders remained Branko Crvenkovski for SDSM and Risto Penov for LDP), same as the ethnic Albanian party DUI. Different than this, VMRO-DPMNE leader Ljubco Georgevski resigned from his position, initiating radical changes in the party's top leadership.

SDSM Party Congress

In conditions where SDSM won the last 2002 parliamentary elections, the regular Fourth Congress passed without any surprises. On February 8th party elections were held together with determining a platform for the future party activities. Although during congress preparations Crvenkovski's long term rival Tito Petkovski expressed a wish to compete with him for the leader's position, still he did not succeed to get sufficient support from the party base. Crvenkovski was chosen again by obtaining large majority support (663 votes of the total of 673 delegates). Party secretary was chosen Lazar Elenovski who was the former mayor of Gevgelija. A new central committee having 75 members was chosen as well, in which stood the leading party group. At his speech, Mr. Crvenkovski promised that he shall justify his reelection: "A huge task is awaiting for us, full of work, challenges and risks, but we are not afraid". It was also said that SDSM is facing big responsibility deriving from its new role in the political scene. In his address he pointed out the following major priorities: "stable, secure and successful development of the state; economic development where unpopular measures shall be applied; struggle against abuse of power and crime. -Only in such conditions we may create an environment where priority shall be given to respect of the Constitution and laws, and not towards parties or ethnic groups." Before the voting, he stressed to the delegates to keep in mind that SDSM is not a single-nation party, so voting should show sensibility to those differences and candidates of no Macedonian ethnic origin should be accepted. The new Statute, is expected to enable more firm communication of the party central office with the branches, and imposing of the role of corrector to the moves of its own government. Intention is from the very start to eliminate the danger of party life cessation, after taking over the state power. For that purpose new party functions have been established: organizational and international relations secretary, as well as regional secretaries. The right for party fraction is legalized, as well as their carriers, who shall not bear any consequences whatsoever.

The accepted Platform determines that SDSM in the future shall strive for national and political unity around the basic national and state issues. "New progressive majority" and creation of "national unity" were the two novelties included into program principles of the party. "New progressive majority" meant an effort to be determined on which layers

of Macedonian society above all, SDSM counts in realization of its ideological projects. Some distinguished party members think that "...in Macedonia political parties tend to call all political layers to vote for their program. In the case where 90% of the population is relatively poor, it is very hard to address them as various groups and layers, other than pointing priorities out based on the activity level and the way in which is obtained peace, stability, economic modernization, political development." The second dimension stresses the need for national unity, which is not to be understood only as ethnic unity. "SDSM is for national unity, but upon clearly positioned political foundations and goals- this means that we could count as our allies all who are for peace, stability, struggle against crime, who are for building a common defense strategy, for joining NATO and for EU integration. Based on this is even possible an ethnic unity in the country, because such unity among all parties, regardless of ethnic origin, shall be supported by all who wish well to Macedonia."

VMRO-DPMNE Party Congress

VMRO-DPMNE election fiasco as well as its direct involvement of the party leadership in numerous affairs and scandals announced the party crisis. Final major contribution in this was Ljubco Georgievski's column in the daily journal "Dnevnik" from March 21st, where he in spite of all the estimations coming from domestic and foreign political factors about gradual calming down of the security and political situation in Macedonia, was talking about future radicalization of the situation, which would start from Kosovo and would spill over Macedonia. In the text, the most scandalous position was that the only alternative for Macedonia is creation of ethnically pure state through exchange of territories with Albania, while the remaining part would be an ethnically clean state. The public was shocked, since according to him, the best way to get out of the crisis is holding a Balkan conference with the participation of EU, USA and Russia, for change of borders and creation of ethnic pure states¹². He also stated that if this conference will not be held, a new military conflict with the Albanians and an internal clash shall occur, after which Macedonia's agony shall culminate in complete dismantlement of the Macedonian nation and state. He named the Framework Agreement as "cancer with metastasis" which shall put an end to the unitary nature of the Macedonian state and shall turn Macedonia to a federalized binational state. As argument he mentioned the demographic decline of the ethnic Macedonians vis-à-vis the Albanians, massive mechanic influx of Albanians from Kosovo and Albania in Macedonia, and ethnic cleansing of Macedonians in areas where they are a minority. By him, a secure sign of economic collapse of the state is the fact that only Macedonians fulfill their obligations to the state, so he concludes: "the destroying energy that our neighbors Albanians carry in them is a big stone tied up around our neck, because of which we could never move from the place we are now." Exit from this situation he sees in the following: Macedonia to seek EU membership up till 2005; most urgent application of the concept of territories exchange; Macedonia to be defined as a "state of the Macedonian people and the other equal to them citizens". Georgievski denied that the previous government administration was involved in corruption and

¹² Needs to be mentioned here that this idea was not new, since it was promoted in 2001 during the crisis, by the then President of the Macedonian Academy who made it public.

crime, saying that these were big stories told by the international community and the NGOs.

Georgievski's thesis divided the Albanian block. DPA leader Djaferi named his idea as "fantastic", criticizing the government as incapable to pull the country out of the crisis. In the same line of thinking was Mr. Thachi, DPA vice-president, ethnically clean states are the formula for future stability, so he proclaimed the FA dead and announced destabilization of the country. DUI's leader Ahmeti estimated the idea as "worrisome" stating that in 21st century walls cannot be of help, but they "simply divide our communities". PDP leader Aliti cynically congratulated Georgievski for his "bravery". These DPA and VMRO-DPMNE moves by SDSM were estimated as a synchronized action for division of the country, which effort was prevented in 2001. Both of them declared that the concept of multiethnic state has no perspective, so according to them it is real the dilemma whether to abandon the so far course of multiethnic state and tolerance and to be exchanged with the concept of territorial division. Crvenkovski said that these scenarios directly encourage extremism and radicalism, create a call for a new war and for "activation of the criminal and political underground in Macedonia". International community representatives in their joint statement called upon consistent performance of the obligations of the Framework Agreement. "The FA is not only an option among the others, but it is the only way ahead. Political parties and their representatives who signed the document are responsible to actively engage in this process and make it successful...alternative scenarios shall destroy the so far progress and shall block the way towards Brussels".

All these events were the reason that Georgievski announced his early retirement from the political scene. As reasons for his resignation, he mentioned: his damaged authority, his bad rating in the international community, and the feel to be a traitor to a vision and a dream for Macedonia, which is gone after the Framework Agreement. Naturally, as the main reason he mentioned the shortage of 200.000 votes which the party needs for a new victory, so he estimated that if he remains a leader "not only shall occur early elections, but the party may remain in opposition in the next elections as well". He pointed out that the party needs a young non-compromised leader who shall fight for early elections and win. It was no secret that in this position Georgievski saw his former young Minister of Finance Mr. Nikola Gruevski, since during his mandate, he presented himself as a person that knows how to pull practical moves, how to change things, introduce reforms, and endure in their application. Still, the second person who appeared as a counter-candidate to Gruevski, was the present coordinator of the VMRO-DPMNE MP group Marijan Gjorcev. In his speech Gjorcev was criticizing the party by saying "for the elections defeat Macedonian people are not guilty, it is us who are". But since Georgievski openly stood behind young Gruevski as a candidate¹³, finally he became the party leader. After the election, Gruevski stated that he shall be constructive in opposition activities and shall refresh the party with new people and called his opponent Gjorcev to work together towards a further party unity. The new leader did not use patriotic rhetoric and had a more modern political vocabulary in his speech. At this Congress Georgievski became

¹³ "At this point of time Macedonia needs a technocratic opposition leader, like Greece's Simitis" said Georgievski.

the honorary party president, after 13 years of being this party's leader. By the wider public, his resignation was seen as of symbolic significance, which would probably lead to more substantial democratic processes in the country.

The party itself did not support Georgievski's ideas of ethnically clean state. Many commented his ideas of division of the country as anachronic, like the policy he lead while on power (wrong political estimations, increased corruption etc), which drove to catastrophical election results. Remarks are that he opened a front against everybody, including the international community. Older party members estimate that it would take at least two years to reconsolidate the party and to put it back on its feet. They criticized the party that while in power, forgot the state itself, the citizens, and everyone seeked ways to get richer in an easier way.

Second LDP Congress

At the Second¹⁴ election assembly the so far party leader Mr. Risto Penov, who competed alone, got again the support of his co-workers for the next four years. Problems emerged when about ten prominent party members (deriving from the former Liberal Party) did not obtain enough support to get into the new Central Committee. In order to overcome misunderstandings, Penov suggested ad hok statutory changes by which the Central Committee as a body grew to have ten members more, thus allowing those who got insufficient support to get in this body after all.

Movements in the Albanian Political Block

After voting the Law for Passports, (for which DPA showed a large amount of discontent and after the "harmonious" anti-government) and anti FA statements with VMRO-DPMNE, in April DPA had frozen its participation in the Assembly. VMRO-DPMNE has done the same at the end of the year 2002. DPA decided to politically put in a state of rest all the party structure, to withdraw all MPs from the Assembly, to have mayors and members of local councils act as individuals and not as party members, to fulfill their duties administratively, and the high party representatives to act as individual intellectuals. At the general party meeting, DPA party did not accept Djaferi's and Tachi's resignation from their party position, making the public suspicious of their honest intentions to be really withdrawn from their functions.

Contrary to DPA's dissatisfaction, Ali Ahmeti stated that there shall be no destabilization of Macedonia. Main argument was that behind Macedonia stand strong parties that

¹⁴ Although this is a second LDP party congress, this party is not new in the political scene. From 1996-98 it functioned as a party under Petar Goshev's leadership, having him covering the former wing of the previous Democratic Party of Macedonia (before that he was a former leader of SDSM) and the other liberal wing lead by Stojan Andov. Breach emerged among this two wings, provoking Andov to leave the party and reappear his Liberal party again. Later (in 1998) this party started to appear as Liberal-democratic party with Penov as leader. Before local elections in 2000 this party made a stronger, long-term coalition with SDSM. This successful collaboration continued during national elections in 2002, when this party got in power together with their coalition partners.

receive strong support by the citizens of the country and that supportive are also EU, NATO and USA.

At the beginning of the summer, VMRO-DPMNE came back to Parliament, while DPA announced the same.

NDP has joined DUI or in fact "melted" into it, since the party ceased to exist under its name. The former leader of NDP (Hadziredza) on the press conference after joining in DUI put a milder tone to his former claims for federalization of the state and other demands, putting emphasis to the primary importance of the FA implementation.

On its Fourth conference, the Party for Democratic Prosperity elected a new leader. Abdulmenaf Bedzeti used to be minister in other, former governments, is a prominent expert in his field and the support he got from his party was absolute. As future issues on which he promised to focus his attention were enumerated: the problem of high education in Albanian language; decentralization and new territorial division of the country; regulating legal and financial situation of the parties, struggle against organized crime etc. He also put special accent to future reforms in the economy sector.

Public Opinion Polls

A poll conducted at the end of January by the Institute for Democracy, Solidarity and Civic Society has showed drastic popularity decline of the former ruling party VMRO-DPMNE. Namely, at the question "If elections were this weekend, which party would you vote?" this party has showed support of only 5% of the polled citizens, while SDSM got 32,5%. DUI (12,6%) has still got the largest support among the ethnic Albanian population, compared to the support for the other parties (DPA-4,6%). LDP showed 0,7% and LP 0,2% of support. Other, smaller parties were mentioned in 3,1% of the cases. Over one fourth of the polled (29,4%) did not know which party would they vote and every tenth citizen (12%) would not like to vote at all. Over half of the polled (56%) stated that Macedonia is now moving towards a positive direction, as opposed to 32% who thought the opposite. Encouraging is to see that majorpart of the population (82%) approves the way the struggle against corruption is lead. Since in this period media have spoken a lot about the idea of possible "national reconciliation" between the two major parties of the ethnic Macedonian block- VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM regarding strategic matters (efforts for introducing peace and stability in the country, joining EU and NATO) a question has been posed about this issue as well. About 80% have again stated that they support such an idea, while 13% replied negatively.

According to the March poll, made by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, 48% of the polled think that Macedonia is more stable now, than two years ago. 29% think that stability is at the same level, while 16% think that it is less stable. Regarding the future NATO membership timetable, around 48% of the polled think that Macedonia shall become a member, but not soon, 17% think that membership will come soon, and 19% think that membership will never happen. Over half (68%) of the citizens would like to see Macedonia as a NATO member. Those who replied

negatively were 21% of the polled. Complete trust in the Macedonian Army declared to have 48% of the respondents, partly trust 38% and complete mistrust have 14%. As major threats for the national security were enumerated: unemployment and poverty (24%), organized crime (18%), ethnic extremism (18%), terrorism (14%), corruption (13%), illegal weapons (11%), and other (1%).

According to the UNDP poll conducted in May 2003, main worry of the citizens is unemployment (79%), then follow poverty (66%), regional instability (55%) and crime (43%). 77% of the polled said that they would participate or support demonstrations against unemployment, against lowering the salaries (67%) or against closing down enterprises or bad privatizations (66%). On the question whether people expect this government to improve the level of employment 40% stated that they do not expect more significant changes, 34% thought that situation shall be worsened, while 20% think that there is a possibility for improvement.