

Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research

**Issue N.11
December 2004**

BAROMETER

Political and Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

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In cooperation with the
Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Regional Office Macedonia

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Introducing the Law for Local Boundaries

After hard and long negotiations among political partners in government, followed by twelve days of marathon parliamentary intense discussions, in August 2004 was voted the new Law for Local Boundaries. The government proposal had 157 submitted amendments, mainly suggested by the opposition, out of which only six were accepted. The Law was supported by 61 MP votes (out of 120), who were representatives of the parties on power and cumulatively the “special majority” vote (the “Badenter” principle) was obtained as well. The only seven votes against the Law were from MPs coming from the Coalition “Za” (SDSM-LDP and smaller parties' coalition) who publicly opposed the idea of introducing the Law as it was proposed. (They were the SDSM MP Tito Petkovski and Mrs.Svetle Janeska from Struga, the LDP MP Liljana Popovska and Mr.Nelko Stojanovski from Struga, Mr.Trifun Kostovski, Kenan Hasipi from the Democratic Party of the Turks and Mr.Ivan Stoilkovich from the Democratic Party of the Serbs). During the act of voting, upset opposition MPs left the Parliament.

According to the new Law, the number of local communities has been reduced from 123 to 84, out of which one is the city of Skopje as a special local community. The most problematic parts of this Law and practically points of dispute were the solutions decided on the changed local boundaries of the cities of Struga, Kichevo and Skopje (see previous Barometers). Opposed MPs commented that these new boundaries are very harmful because are non-efficient, unnatural and antagonize the public in a great deal. Some negative reactions were coming from various experts on the matter, objecting that territorial division was made based solely on the ethnic domination principle, without respecting the real parameters for setting local boundaries (economy, landscape, urban-rural etc). In fact, by attaching neighboring rural communities to these three cities, an ethnic disbalance is achieved, influencing future representation and decision-making in elected local governing bodies, only in terms of ethnic representation of one group over the other. From its side, Skopje is practically becoming a bilingual city, since that enlargement increases the percent of 15% of ethnic Albanians in the capital to 27%.

During the negotiations for the Law, dissatisfaction escalated especially in the city of Struga, where the then Prime-minister Hari Kostov and the then Defense Minister Vlado Buckovski were proclaimed "persona non grata". In the effort to calm down the spirits Mr.Buckovski went to Struga to discuss with the SDSM branch office, while at first violent groups of citizens started to demonstrate in front of the building. Gradually, after Mr.Buckovski's statement on A1 TV station on the matter, the situation escalated in very violent riots. This was the reason why the police had to intervene in order to prevent tragic consequences.

Initiated Referendum and its Outcome

Dissatisfaction of some political forces about the process of negotiating among the political partners in government, coupled with the act of actual introducing of a new Law for Local Boundaries contributed to the idea of signatures collection for organizing a

referendum on the matter. This idea was promoted in February 2004 as a civic initiative by the referendum initiator Mr. Todor Petrov, leader of the World Macedonian Congress. The Macedonian Constitution demands collection of minimum 150.000 citizen's signatures in order to initiate a referendum, so support was collected for the previously formulated referendum question, which was posed in a rather confusing manner: "Are you for the Law for Local Boundaries from 1996?" (yes-no). The initiator was aiming to prevent the enacting of the new Law through a successful referendum, which would have prohibited the officials to initiate any new law on this matter within the time frame of one year. This endeavor at the beginning was proved not to be fruitful, since citizens were not massively responding to the call of this organization. However, after the new Law for Local Boundaries was voted in the summer, the World Macedonian Congress won the support of all the ethnic Macedonian opposition parties, including: VMRO-DPMNE, Liberal Party, Coalition "Third Way", other smaller parties and civic initiatives. Joined together, all parties managed to collect over the minimum number of signatures required in the last two weeks time (by Law, collection of signatures is determined to six month's period of time). Total number of collected signatures was 180.545, which succeeded in initiating the referendum.

According to the Law on Referendum, the President of the Parliament determining the referendum date on November 7th, while the referendum campaign started on October 7th. These terms practically cancelled the upcoming local elections, due to be held in November¹.

In case of referendum success, the new Law would have been suspended, and the old Law for Local Boundaries would have been on power again. Since the procedure of introducing a new law would have been postponed for at least one year, other important processes would have been postponed as well, like the local elections organizing, the decentralization process, further Framework Agreement implementation etc.

Another dilemma, posed during the referendum was the validity of any kind of such serious and far-reaching solutions, which are "not in the spirit of the Framework Agreement". This comment was circulating in the public and among the experts, since the whole system was already adjusted to the new circumstances and principles of decision-making, imposing the "specialized majority" rule as a condition to support any decision of this importance by the minority representatives as well. In addition, practice showed that the current Referendum Law lacked coverage of many practical issues (technical and operational) which caused confusion and various interpretations by legal experts.

Position parties decided to participate in the referendum public debate through debate programs organized by the electronic media and through public announcements and interviews in the printed media. Prime Minister Kostov publicly announced that if the referendum succeeds he will resign from his function, as an act of taking the responsibility for the government's failure.

¹ Later, they were postponed for March 2005.

Contrary to this, opposition parties decided to organize a caravan traveling throughout the country and organizing meetings. While agreeing on the campaign, it was noted that the World Macedonian Congress lead by Todor Petrov was practically pushed aside by the opposition parties (especially by the weaker ones in votes' support, like the "Third Way") who wanted to draw all the public attention to them during the meetings. Parties on power accused the opposition for not leading a campaign on the referendum issue, but on the contrary, for leading a pure fight for power, redirecting the topic of discussion on other matters and using the citizens' dissatisfaction for the bad economy of the country for their personal purposes and gains.

Other than the position and opposition parties, referendum campaign included a variety of interested parties, like diverse individuals and civic organizations. Most prominent civic movement, which positioned itself against the new Law, was the Civic Movement of Macedonia, openly backed up by Mr. Trifun Kostovski, prominent businessmen and an independent MP from the SDSM coalition list. Movement's efforts were directed towards gaining support for their position among prominent intellectuals and businessmen. Although the idea was to attract supporters of various ethnic background, the endeavor was not successful. All along the campaign period, this Movement was in a roundabout way announcing the probability of developing itself into a new political party, having Mr. Kostovski as the leader, but after the unsuccessful referendum, this idea was silenced. While campaigning, the Movement was not cooperating directly with the opposition, but they were more prone in participating in public TV debates on the issue.

Campaigning "against" the new Law was expressed by some MPs coming from the parties in government as well. Examples were Mr. Tito Petkovski from SDSM and Mrs. Liljana Popovska from LDP. In the case of Mr. Petkovski the matter went deeper than the referendum itself, since his position was a mix of personal ambitions for the vacant party leadership position (since Mr. Crvenkovski became the President of the Republic). On the other hand, Mrs. Popovska's position was a personal opinion, later punished by the party, by revoking her position as the vice-president of the Parliament.

Although at the beginning representatives of the international community at the official level were treating the referendum issue as an "internal" matter, still their high representatives were trying to publicly transfer their position to the citizens and to the political elites of the country. As they were looking at the matter, "the referendum was one more opportunity for destabilizing the country unnecessarily. Instead, the country should direct itself towards closing as soon as possible all interethnic political issues and dedicating itself on the government reforms, in order to be included into the projections of the EU integration processes". Otherwise, the country was seen to be falling in the group of countries planned to join the EU at a much later phase. This was repeatedly stated by many foreign representatives and diplomats from Great Britain, Germany, France, Italy, EU, USA, etc. In addition, EU issued a Declaration to the citizens of Macedonia in which they were reminded what is expected from the country in its way to the European Union. EU showed respect for the citizen's rightful will of expressing their position on the matter, but delaying reforms, especially the decentralization process was seen to be seriously endangering further advancement of the country towards the EU.

In the same period DUI's leader Ali Ahmeti in his interview for "Utrinski Vesnik" stated that the referendum initiative should be acceptable for all citizens and not only for one ethnic group, since it could produce a conflict. He stressed that "we should all overcome the complex that we are continuously a danger one to the other".

At first DPA leaders opposed the claiming of the position parties that this referendum shall be reflecting the interest of only one ethnic community in the state, by deciding to participate in the referendum, although voting negatively to the posed question and initiating other (new) local boundaries redrawing. Practically, this party was aiming to help the opposition in reaching the legal threshold (50%+1 of the pool of voters) in order to make the referendum successful. Still, ethnic Albanian parties (DUI, DPA and PDP) at the end of the campaign reached a common agreement to boycott the referendum. At the same time, DUI representatives stated that although referendum is going to be boycotted, all polling stations shall be opened on November 7th.

On the last day of the referendum campaign, SDSM, LDP and their smaller coalition partners called the public to boycott the referendum, stressing the position that this question does not deserve any kind of answer. Partners stated that the probable success of the referendum shall create negative implications upon the country's stability and shall put in question the Framework Agreement implementation. Contrary to this, opposition parties called the public to massively go to the polling stations and vote.

A rather decisive event, which in great deal reflected to the referendum outcome, took place by the initiative of the United States of America. Namely, on November 4th, after the presidential elections, USA declared that they recognized the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name. It was added that this move was motivated by the will of USA to offer support to the country in such a delicate moment, as an act of confirmation that USA would like to see the Republic of Macedonia as a unitary and stable state. Similar signals for the use of the constitutional name were sent from the German Bundestag one week before this event. Additionally, a couple of other states have recognized the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name, amounting the number of such countries in 106. However, EU declared that it shall continue to address the state by the reference FYROM. The USA decision produced a large wave of reaction from the side of Greece.

In terms of technical matters for the referendum, State Electoral Committee determined the total number of voters in the country to 1.709.536. According to the Law on Referendum, in order a decision to be valid, turnout should reach 50%+1 or 854.769 citizens who voted. Accredited observers reached the figure of 10.617 out of which 315 were foreign observers. This number was double the figure of observers at the last presidential elections.

At the evening of November 7th SEC announced the preliminary results, where in total 436.202 citizens voted, out of which 409.886 voted "yes" while 21.476 voted "no". Turnout was estimated to 26,24%, while invalid voting tickets were 4.845. Ethnic

Albanians completely boycotted the referendum as well as large part of the other population. It was obvious that the referendum failed to gain the support requested. According to data, highest turnout was in Skopje, in the communities Kisela Voda (48.924), Cair (33.893), Gazi Baba (25.280), Karposh (21.661), Centar (18.626) and then follow the cities of Bitola (30.478), Strumica (25.084), Prilep (23.728), Ohrid (20.988), Kumanovo (20.566), Veles (19.095). Lowest turnout was noted in Debar (0,79%), Gostivar (3%) and Tetovo (5%). In Struga out of the total of 54.770 voters, voted 16.289 or 29,74%. In Kichevo out of the total of 33.785 voters, voted 9.969 or 29,51%. After results were officialized, EU congratulated the citizens of Macedonia for their position and encouraged them to proceed with their course towards the EU. The ambassadors of EU, OSCE, NATO and USA issued similar statements.

Prime-Minister Resigns

Eight days after the referendum, the Prime minister unexpectedly resigned from his function. Among the main reasons of his resignation he mentioned the problems he was facing towards DUI as a coalition partner. His complaint was that this party “understands the reason being in government only as an instrument for accomplishing urgent application of equal representation of their own ethnic community in the public administration”, but “while doing so, this party promotes ethnic and narrow party interests including nepotism and corruption behavior, without any practical will and measures to overcome this negative situation”. Another complaint was the practical inability of having the government functioning as a team, since all government participants do not entirely agree about the strategic interest and goals of the country and the remaining intertwined activities. Kostov stated that during the process of decision-making, instead of taking under consideration expert opinions, unfortunately prevailed political negotiating and pressures. An example is given when several systemic reform laws, as well as agreements with international financial arrangements and economic reforms that have already passed several readings in the Parliament, needed to be passed through government procedure. Practically, the government was blocked because DUI as a coalition partner was conditioning the support of these decisions with new employments (15 persons) in the public sector, coming from their own ethnic group (although according to the obligations taken by the country with the World Bank, the Ministry of Finance is strictly conditioned not to do so). As an example for corruptive behavior Kostov directly pointed to Mr. Agron Budzaku, DUI’s Minister for Transport and Communication, for which corruption (use of his discretionary right) he claimed to have proves.

Resignation provoked numerous comments and reactions from the media and the political parties, especially from DUI, which claimed to be very surprised with such a statement. Mr.Budzaku stated that he does not feel guilty on the matter, calling upon the behavior of other two minister of the government. The Public Prosecutor invited Mr.Kostov and all three ministers for a fact finding mission, although no charges have been pressed afterwards against any of them. Still, inevitably, coalition relations became troubled, since automatically together with the Prime minister the whole government resigned and new negotiations were at stake. Major shortcoming in the new government creation was

seen to be the absence of a newly elected SDSM party leader who would have the legitimacy of political negotiating, representation and important political decision-making. For that reason, SDSM hastily organized an early party congress in which the new leader was to be elected.

SDSM Party Leadership Elections

Although SDSM intended to have a new early party congress and to organize leadership elections after the local elections, resignation of Prime-minister Kostov speeded up the party plan. For operational reasons and efficient decision-making in all policy sectors the party planned for new leader to be the Prime minister as well. At the beginning, many prominent party names were mentioned to be nominated as candidates, thus creating intense discussions and rows in the party Presidency, which finally proposed four names: Mr.Jani Makraduli, Mrs.Radmila Sekerinska, Mr.Vlado Buckovski and Mr.Tito Petkovski. Already on the party Central Committee Mr.Jani Makraduli recalled his nomination, directing his votes of support to Mrs. Sekerinska.

On November 26th SDSM organized the early Congress in which the 697 delegates for the first time were in a position to choose among several candidates for the party leading position, instead of one. This situation was the main reason of the expressed nervousness of the candidates, who at the first round showed the following results: Tito Petkovski 144, Radmila Sekerinska 189, Vlado Buckovski 338 votes. Because Mr.Buckovski was missing one vote to be elected at the first round, voting had to take place in two rounds including the two best candidates. At the second round Buckovski got 391 and Sekerinska 265 votes, after which he was officially pronounced for the party leader.

Party elections inevitably brought very high competitiveness among the candidates and a lot of pressure and lobbying, while pressure was done at the level of local party committees. Even Mr.Petkovski as a candidate in his interview for Radio Free Europe expressed doubts about the “fair and democratic atmosphere” during party elections. It was obvious that there was obvious backup to the winner by the former SDSM leader Mr.Crvenkovski. Fact is that party elections lead to unnecessary clashes in the party, in the moment when unity was a necessity. Mrs. Sekerinska as the second candidate (the vice-Prime minister and the person in charge for EU integration processes in the government), was evidently disappointed from the lobbying and the elections outcome. She announced her intention not to participate in the future government. At last, disputes were overcome through the mediation of the foreign representatives present in the country, for the sake of establishing a new competent government, including Mrs. Sekerinska at the same position.

New Government Reshuffle

Immediately after his election as a party leader, Mr.Buckovski received the mandate to form a new government by the President of the Republic. Negotiations with the up to then coalition partners lasted ten days, during which major issue was the insisting of DUI as a coalition partner to have Mr.Agron Budzaku at the same ministerial position in the

Ministry of Transport and Communications. The mandatar was categorically against this candidacy, due to the “moral aspect of responsibility” of the case, suggesting to the party to offer another name for that position. Finally, Buckovski had to announce the list of candidate ministers among which Mr.Budzaku was included. Things got an unexpected twist when at the last moment Mr.Budzaku personally resigned from his candidacy, letting another party colleague to be nominated for the function.

The new government was voted on December 17th obtaining 71 vote of support (out of 120) after severe discussions and comments from opposition MPs. It is interesting that other than the parties on power, vote of support was gained from two MPs coming from the PDP party and one from the Socialist party. Government composition remained more or less the same in terms of the ministries divided among coalition partners. DUI got one ministerial position more than the previous government, presently obtaining the Ministry of Local Selfgovernment, Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Economy, Ministry of Education and Science and the Ministry for Transport and Communications. SDSM got the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Exteriors, Ministry of Interiors, Ministry of Culture and Ministry of Finance. LDP got the Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Labor and Social Policy. In addition, this new government is having four vice-prime ministers, responsible for particular domains, like: Mrs. Radmila Sekerinska (SDSM) for EU integration, Mr.Musa Djaferi (DUI) for Framework Agreement implementation, Mr. Minco Jordanov (businessman) for economic development and Mr.Jovan Manasijevski (LDP) for political system.

During his speech in front of the Parliament, Mr.Buckovski promised to achieve team work of the new government. By the budget projection for next year it is anticipated growth of the industrial production up to 6 or 7%. This shall be enabled trough opening of the dormant industrial capacities, as well as export raise of the iron, steel and textile products. Efforts shall be directed in maintaining the inflation to 1,5% and that re-opening of the big industrial capacities shall diminish the level of unemployment. Government promised determination to create an investment beneficial climate through securing the country's stability.

At his interview in “Utrinski Vesnik”, the Prime-minister announced that in the future all key political issues shall be previously agreed among the coalition partners in informal meetings, before the start of government sessions. In that way, meetings with Mr.Ahmeti and Mr.Penov shall become practice, thus avoiding the discreditation of particular ministers. By offering to DUI as a partner some ministries, which do not have a “direct” link to “ethnic” issues, partners want to show that all parties in the future shall take common responsibility on all society domains.

Opposition MPs estimated the Prime-minister's speech as a “list of wishes” for which realization there is no real basis. There were also objections regarding personal party choices for ministerial positions, especially for Mr.Jordanov who had opinions different than the government policy in the domain of economy (about inflation) and also as a businessman he is expected to protect economic interests of his own economic lobby. Complaints were heard about DUI's candidate minister for agriculture, who was known

from the 2001 conflict, when he stopped the water supplies for Kumanovo for a longer period of time.

Party Restructuring in VMRO-DPMNE

Although the issue of leadership in the largest right-wing party has been decided at the moment of election of the new, young leader Nikola Gruevski, internal party interest groups have been visibly divided in at least two groups (see previous Barometer). The first, loyal to the new party leader, while the other, predominantly consisted of the current party MPs is more prone in supporting the former VMRO-DPMNE leader Ljubco Georgievski. Division spread further throughout the country in all branch offices of the party, threatening to create complete parallelism.

Mr. Georgievski was claiming that Mr. Gruevski is losing his legitimacy in representing the party so at first he was trying to initiate an early party congress, in which leadership was to be shifted again. He expressed extreme dissatisfaction with the strategy of the new leadership, convinced that “the general disaster towards which Macedonia is directing itself can be changed only through VMRO-DPMNE”. Finally, party congress was not initiated, due to the reasonable doubt that it would not have been in compliance with the party Statute and decisions shall not have valid legal consequences. The annual celebration of the party founding was celebrated separately by both leaders—the former and the present one, serving as a way for both of them to check their influence and rating amongst their party supporters.

Georgievski's fraction decided to officially secede from VMRO-DPMNE and form a new party, officialized by the name of VMRO-People's Party. Even though Mr. Georgievski did not appear on the new party founding, it was understood that he shall be the leader and that the ambition of this party is to take over the support obtained so far by VMRO-DPMNE. Final division took place in the Parliament, where a significant number of VMRO-DPMNE MPs announced that they shall transfer themselves to the new party in formation, thus forming a new parliamentary group. However, current Election Law determines that if an MP by his own decision leaves the party by which proportional list he was elected, he is obliged to return his mandate. Seceded MPs disregarded this provision and officially demanded change of this article of the Law, by seeking support for the idea of party transfer to be allowed without having the obligation to return the mandate, even from the position parties MPs as well. At the same time, this matter was brought to the Constitutional Court which finally at the end of December decided to delete this provision from the Election Law. Consequently, the new VMRO-People's Party became a new party in Parliament, without even participating at the last parliamentary elections. Needless to say that this decision was not viewed positively by the wider public, especially because many citizens already had in mind the events that took place in 2000, when the then coalition on power was dismantled, leaving Mr. Georgievski as the then Prime-minister to practically negotiate with the then MPs to support him for the possible new government. The public was then disappointed by the level of open bargaining for corruption and promotion of personal economic gains and

interest, only for the sake of maintaining the same political players in office, regardless of the will of the citizens expressed at the previous elections.

Republican Party Emerging

Mrs. Dosta Dimovska, former vice-president of VMRO-DPMNE, after abandoning the party, formed the civic organization Movement for Euroatlantic Macedonia (DEAM) (See previous Barometers). However, since civic activism has not been proved as very fruitful politically, during the second half of October, Mrs. Dimovska founded a new political party named Democratic Republican Union of Macedonia (DRUM). On that occasion she stated that "DRUM relies on the political beliefs, values and principles of the western and Macedonian republicanism, of the conservative, people's and liberal parties. DRUM is a completely new civic political option, it is not a national party, but addresses to all layers and groups in the state, regardless of national, religious and ethnic background." Her motivation to found a new party emerged after the "unsuccessful efforts for consolidation of VMRO-DPMNE", because "we still have things to say in politics, so founding a new political party which shall act as a constructive opposition, shall articulate in the best way possible our goals and interests". This is Mrs. Dimovska's political come-back after her dispute with Mr.Georgievski during the conflict in 2001, when she resigned from all her functions. This party is said to be ready to make coalitions with other parties for the upcoming local elections, excluding all parties of the left.

PDP Appoints a New Leader

The so far PDP leader Mr.Bedzeti resigned from his function, explaining that he would like to return to his educational activities in the frames of the University. Still, unofficially impressions are that the party membership has been greatly dissatisfied with his work, so he was suggested to leave the leader's position quietly. On an early congress of the party, as the only candidate was elected Mr.Abduladi Vejseli, prominent businessmen and one of the main sponsors of this party. On the occasion, he stated that he does not intend to change anything in the party program, but that methods of work in the party are going to be changed, especially regarding more concrete, transparent and new program for the next local elections. For that aim, intention is to consolidate party structures, and be more present in field. Mr.Vejseli pointed out that since PDP was in power before 2001, there was much better representation of the Albanian potential, due to the knowledge and dignity those participants in power had, compared to today's structures in power. He stressed that Albanians in the country have is much bigger potential than the one represented now in power, and that the Albanian people do not deserve such humiliation, happening to them presently. "Why we should not be better represented now, instead of how we were represented 15 years ago"-he asks. "I give to the Albanian electorate the comparison how the government looked like when PDP was on power, how was it when DPA was on power and how it is now, when DUI is on power".

An interesting fact is that PDP MPs voted for the new government, explaining this position with the support given to the new Prime-minister, because he promised a many

of things compatible to the PDP party program, and due to the priority given to economic issues. In the meantime, some other processes that have been evolving in DUI, discouraged previous PDP members and motivated them to come back to their "old" party of origin. On the other side, since DPA is seen to enjoy less and less the support of the foreign factor, some of the disappointed members of that party view their opportunity in PDP as well. All this is in compliance with the rumor that both stronger ethnic Albanian parties at the moment do not satisfy the needs of their voters anymore, boosts the opportunity of either revitalization of PDP or forming a new, ethnic Albanian party soon.

Fractionism in the Liberal Party

A group of prominent party activists from the Liberal party publicly announced the creation of a party fraction within the party auspices. This group explained their position by the dissatisfaction of the direct personal domination in party policy by the party leader Mr.Andov. The accused Mr.Andov publicly opposed these statements.

Local Election Coalitions in the Making

Mr.Ljubco Georgievski as the leader of VMRO-People's party officially offered a coalition to VMRO-DPMNE for the upcoming local elections on March 13th. Justification for this offer was the aim of "taking local power over from SDSM". He declared that the "common enemy" in the face of SDSM has higher priority than their mutual misunderstandings. This offer was indirectly refused by the VMRO-DPMNE leader Mr.Gruevski, who reminded Mr.Georgievski where his party headquarters are, so he is welcome to make the offer in person, instead of through the media.

From his side, the VMRO-DPMNE leader signed a written coalition agreement with the Liberal Party and Mr.Stojan Andov as its representative. This document is offered to other opposition parties to be signed, in order to "meet the real needs of the citizens, instead of dealing only with matters of "high politics", like the current government does". Couple of days later, in this coalition joined the Democratic Party for Orthodox Unity of the Serbs and the Macedonians (leader Dragisha Miletich) and the Bosniac Democratic Party (leader Alija Shahich). Veljo Tantarov, the leader of the Agricultural party announced signing of the coalition as well.

EU and NATO Integration Processes

The year 2004 shall be remembered as a year with many activities in the domain of NATO and EU integration efforts of the country. Regarding the EU efforts, the so far milestones show a concrete progress: 2001 March, signing the Stabilization and Association Agreement; 2003 Thessaloniki Summit, establishing West Balkans as a EU priority area; 2004 March, EU application submission; 2004 October, the EU questionnaire arrives; beginning of 2005 is the period when answers shall be finalized and sent back for review; during 2005, the "avis" expected. EU Questionnaire was brought to Skopje by Mr. Romano Prodi, the president of the EU Commission, who on

that occasion stated that widening of Europe shall not stop in Zagreb, and that Macedonia's road to EU integration is traced, so the only thing missing is the "last kilometer". He also stated that "not always the road was simple and straight ahead for Macedonia, but in the key moment, when decisions were made, Macedonians knew how to look to the future and not turn back to the past", and that "decentralization is not an instrument to serve for country's division or diminishing its unitary character, by it are posed more firm foundations of the local democracy".

During the past period, the Government has prepared and adopted many strategic documents, among which: Strategic Defense Review, Strategy for the Courts, Strategy for the Roma, Strategy for Education, Strategy for Gender Issues, National Action Plan for Employment 2004-2005, Strategy for Agriculture, National Program for Culture, Strategy for EU Integration and many other documents, which serve as basis for introducing reforms and change in many areas of Macedonian society. In terms of meeting the standards required, for liberalization of the visa regime towards Macedonian citizens, it is expected that at the end of 2005, Macedonia shall start issuing passports with new, modern safety standards (electronic chip and laser engravings).

At the Istanbul summit in June 2004 was stated that Macedonia has a chance to get an invitation for NATO membership on the next summit, due to be held in two years' time, if by then Alliance standards shall be met. Macedonian authorities announced that together with the Alliance shall train the new Iraqi Army, shall increase military presence in Afghanistan and shall participate in the EU peace mission in Bosnia-Herzegovina, starting from next year. Istanbul summit is viewed as great success, since Macedonia has set the time frame for reforms, while the first real chance is the annual national program for joining NATO, due to be presented in April next year. Macedonia's political criterion for advancement is the Framework Agreement implementation, together with the standard criteria like: defense reforms, rule of law, economy improvements, democracy development, etc. Further defense reforms agenda is set for: further reform of the security system; transfer the border management from the Army to the police; preparing a National Defense Strategy.

By initiative of the President of the Republic Mr. Branko Crvenkovski, on November 10th in Ohrid was signed the Declaration for Euroatlantic strategic interest of Macedonia. In this document parties signatories binded themselves for: guaranteeing the territorial sovereignty and integrity as well as unitary character of the state; reaffirming the Framework Agreement solutions for developing stable interethnic relations; achieving tolerance and coexistence; sharing the Euroatlantic perspective; developing regional cooperation as a precondition for good neighborly relations; organizing fair, democratic and peaceful local elections as a step towards the process of decentralization; transfer of duties and responsibilities from central to local level, etc.

All relevant political parties in Macedonia signed the common Declaration by which was demonstrated political unity on the Macedonian strategic goals. It was agreed to be formed a special council on state level, to coordinate the process, in order all political parties to follow the process more closely and to reach a consensus on matters of wider

state interest. However, Mr. Gruevski refused the President's invitation, so VMRO-DPMNE together with the other smaller opposition parties signed the Declaration in Skopje, instead of going to Ohrid and signing the document together with all the other parties.

Framework Agreement Implementation

The International Crisis Group issued a report in August, in which estimated that the process of decentralization is the last step towards overcoming the heritage of the conflict in 2001. ISG estimates that transfer of power to local level is the guarantee for permanent peace and consolidation of the country. As other serious priorities were mentioned: securing real economic growth, diminishing the level of unemployment, internal party democratization and general further society democratization. According to ISG, presidential elections have shown that the country has a certain level of maturity and stability, since no presidential candidate questioned the Framework Agreement, while main issues were directed towards the future of the country. Election of Branko Crvenkovski is not questioned since "even if the results are not perfect, and even if accusations for irregularities are true, the outcome would not have been changed, because Crvenkovski was chosen with over 60% of the votes". Political parties are considered as the most weak point in the country's democratic system. They are viewed as political machines that create loyalty by securing employments to their supporters, and are only campaigning mechanisms, instead of factors for further democracy development. ICG is concerned that Macedonia due to the personalities on power (Crvenkovski as the President and Kostov as the Prime minister) shall develop a semi-presidential system that has weak parliamentary control over the executive power.

The only remaining laws that need to be passed in order to finalize the whole process of the Framework Agreement implementation are the law on financing the units of local self-government and the law for use of the symbols of the ethnic communities by the local authorities. According to the second law under preparation, in the future local authorities shall be able to put at the entrance of the public local buildings symbols (flag and coat of arms) by which is marked the identity of the majority ethnic group living in that local community. This shall be done in compliance with existing international rules. In Framework Agreement implementation process is still included the effort of adequate representation (employment) of ethnic groups in the public administration of the country. So far, about 2000 persons, coming from the ethnic communities living in the country, predominantly ethnic Albanians, have been employed in the police and defense forces.

In addition, although it is not an explicit condition in the Framework Agreement, the Ministry of Justice has prepared a draft Law for the use of languages of the communities. This law is not put in procedure for adoption yet, since bilinguallism already functions in the local communities, in the state administration, in the courts' procedures, in elementary and higher education, in issuing public documents (ID, passport, driver's license), in the work of the Parliament and its committees. Regarding the aspect of language use, already have been introduced about twenty laws in various domains, so there is a doubt by the authorities whether a separate law for the use of languages is necessary.

At the beginning of the summer, the Ministry of Interiors started issuing bilingual birth, marriage and death certificates in six communities (Tetovo, Struga, Debar, Gostivar, Kichevo and Kumanovo). This means that since a particular ethnic community is over 20% of the community's population other than the official Macedonian language, the language of that community is applied as well. Same principle is applied for all ethnic communities in the case of issuing identity cards, where the name shall be written bilingual- Macedonian as well as the other language and alphabet. According to the old Law for local boundaries, where local units were 123, in 43 of them official communication is already done bilingually- in Macedonian and in Albanian, which practically means that currently 93% of the ethnic Albanians in Macedonia apply their right of official use of their language.

Unfavorable Economic Trends

Economic performance is one of the weakest spots of Macedonian society for quite some time. Data from the last census in 2002 confirm the bad economic picture of the state. Out of two million of inhabitants 1.071.439 persons are supported by another person, out of which 119.091 are individuals from 20 to 24 years of age. Economically active are 460.544 persons, out of which 394.365 are employees, while 16.112 are employers. The number of pensioners is 256.473 persons.

The so far effects from this government rule still show the same negative trend. Macedonia has: low foreign direct investment, low annual growth (hardly 2%), high trade deficit, high unemployment rate 37%, is dependent on foreign aid, has low savings rates and an external debt of 1,8 billion USD. The country needs a development strategy, improvement of competition and macroeconomic policy strategy. However, it is assumed that comes a period of political stabilization, and that Macedonia is out of the political "final status" vicious circle. Interesting trend is seen in the public opinion polls (see the last part of this text) where citizens agree that improved economic conditions will greatly improve all other society domains, including interethnic relations and the country's security.

As Prime minister Buckovski stated, main priority of the new government shall be the improvement of the economy. Structural reforms are already set up in the Ministry of Finance, due to be applied in 2005. It is expected that the Republic of Macedonia shall sign a new arrangement with IMF in January 2005. Macedonia's position in the negotiations shall be: lower inflation, projected growth from 4 to 4,5%, deficit of the central budget of about 1%, deficit of public expenditures of about 1,5 to 2%. Structural reforms in the Customs are under way: developing internal control, double control, anonymous phone for complaints, awards for the honest customers etc. Starting from January 2005 shall be established the new, private pension system as the second pillar of this system.

Negotiations between the Macedonian government and UNMIC have started, in order to conclude a temporary protocol for free trade between Kosovo civil administration and

Macedonia. Kosovo - Macedonia trade exchange is moving between 140 and 160 million EUR annually, out of which Macedonia exports 130 million EUR. The agreement is to be signed at the beginning of next year.

As attracting foreign direct investments is one of the government priorities, next year is expected to finally start the functioning of the Bunardzik free zone, as well as initiating investments in energy projects. One of the most important is the oil pipeline AMBO project, planned to be built from Burgas, Bulgaria, to pass through Macedonia, reaching Valona port in Albania. The part of AMBO passing through Macedonia shall be managed by "Brown and Ruth" and shall amount the value of 1,2 billion USD. Naturally, geopolitics shall also play their role, since the level of safety of the countries through which AMBO shall be passing shall be raised. The competing pipeline is passing through Burgas to Alexandroupolis, Greece. Which of the two projects shall start first depends on the speed companies appear as interested investors, and of securing technical conditions for oil transport.

Religious Communities' Current Problems

Due to many unresolved and accumulated problems in the Skopje area of the Islamic Religious Community, a Coordinative body of the dissatisfied imams has been formed. This body collected and submitted to the Reis ul ulema Efendi Emini (head of IRC) 194 signatures of imams (being over half of all 287 employed in the Skopje area), demanding the change of Zenun Berisha, the Skopje mufti. Other mentioned serious problems were: the imams' status, of which majorpart were not receiving a salary for quite some time, neither is their working status regulated by the mufti; the mufti was accused for financial malversations and abuse of various funds and donations; the elections of mufti Berisha which were said to be a major election fraud; the non-institutional functioning of IRC according to its own Constitution and the state Constitution, etc. Revolted imams were upset about new employments by Berisha of unknown persons who have non-typical long beards, and who bring new elements in religious practices, thus losing the authenticity of the local religious habits. Another complaint was that in 14 central Skopje mosques service is lead only on Albanian language, as opposed to believers of other ethnic origin like Turks, Bosniacs and Roms, who do not get service in their mother tongue, although they regularly pay membership dues. It is said that regular believers are not approving the moves of the Skopje mufti as well. According to the IRC Constitution regulations, since necessary majority for that purpose has already been collected, Reis ul ulema Emini was supposed to release Mufti Berisha from his duties and to schedule new elections.

First signals from the head of the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) Efendi Emini were that he shall sign the petition, but later on he backed off without explanation. Due to this move, Skopje believers and imams announced that they did not wish to open the mosques to him and to mufti Zenun Berisha on October 15th, the first day of Ramazan. Imams at first wanted to completely boycott the Ramazan ceremonials, but since the believers insisted, they cancelled only the central ceremony in the Jahja Pasha Mosque. At the same time they also stressed that they "are not backing off their permanent struggle for their legal and legitimate demands based on the normative acts and the constitution of

IRC". Mufti Zenun Berisha by them was considered practically changed, due to the majority of collected signatures. Muamer Vejseli, the imam from Idrizovo stated that the only remaining procedural thing the Rijaset of the IRC needs to do is to confirm the will of the majority of Skopje imams who signed the petition for releasing of Berisha and to initiate new elections.

Things perplexed unexpectedly when mufti Berisha in order to turn the attention from his possible change started putting pressures to change the reis ul ulema Arif Emini and replace him with a candidate from Tetovo². As the date for releasing the Skopje mufti was getting closer, things in IRC escalated when an anonymous group armed with kalashnikovs and lead by Berisha went into the offices of IRC and threatened Efendi Emini. By use of pressure, Emini was forced to sign a decision for employing three "islamists" suggested by Berisha, although this decision was immediately revoked by the Rijaset. At the Rijaset meeting Emini agreed to submit his resignation, but stated that he will not leave IRC until Berisha and his clan do not leave as well. Berisha also offered payment of all debts so far and a salary raise to the dissatisfied Skopje imams. The Coordinative body refused this deal, justifying this by the obligation of respecting the Constitution of the IRC and demanded a special financial supervision committee for the enormous sums of money and income from the property of the IRC.

Still, the public remained confused by the silence and non-reaction of Efendi Emini towards the aggressiveness of mufti Berisha, and even not notifying the Ministry of Interiors about the violent intrusion, by that raising suspicions about a possible involvement in financial doubts of Efendi Emini as well. It was also inexplicable why Emini by his signature confirmed that Berisha was elected for a Skopje mufti, since in five different documents of the Electoral committee clearly is stated that elections have been a fraud.

General impression of the public for all these events is that in fact in the auspices of the IRC there is a battle between two concepts. One being the insisting of respect of the Constitution of the IRC, institutional solving of the problems, traditional practicing of Islam, as opposed to the other, which secretly supports practicing more radical Islam, according to some theologians, closer to the fundamentalists of the Arab world. Suspicion is that these were efforts to introduce in Macedonia a different Islam, non-typical for this region. Serious accusations came from Brussels, from the European expert for terrorism, commenting on the connections of the Skopje mufti Zenun Berisha with the Al Qaeda fundamentalists. Some theologians from Skopje previously mentioned this as well. He is considered as a person who is involved in creating dormant Al Qaeda cell in Macedonia.

At the last minute, the meeting for the assembly of the Skopje area has been cancelled for January, due to the agreement between Efendi Emini, Berisha and several persons from the Rijaset, that immediately after Kurban-Bajram the Assembly shall announce new elections for the Skopje area mufti. This position made Muamer Vejseli the representative of the Coordinative body very upset, since this maneuver gave time to

² In order to change Emini, support is needed from at least 7 out of the total of 13 mufti organizations throughout the country, a majority that is not easy to achieve.

interested parties to continue the pressures. It remains to be seen how the situation shall be resolved next year.

The degraded by the Macedonian Orthodox Church bishop Jovan Vransikovski (see previous Barometers) without obtaining a legal permit started building a church in the weekend-houses area of Nizopole near Bitola. The Prespa-Pelagonija eparchy submitted a complaint to the official state organ, because by law a building for religious purposes may be erected only by previous agreement from the Macedonian Orthodox Church. This time, the state reacted more efficiently than the previous times, since the building was torn down by the inspection. This event provoked political reactions from neighboring Serbia, both by church and state representatives.

The same bishop showed up at the Skopje Fair Exhibition for the “Days of the Religious Communities in Macedonia”. Evidently intending to provoke, since he was not invited to the event, managed to upset the representatives of the Macedonian Orthodox Church, who left the event. Still, all other religious communities present at the exhibition, sent their representatives jointly to the MOC central offices, confirming their support to the MOC Archbishop and isolating Mr. Vraniskovski for his actions.

Education Issues

Although Tetovo University, a controversy that has been dragged on since 1995, was finally legalized, other events, linked to the actual building and location of the university premises (the former Tetovo tobacco factory) continue to upset the public opinion, especially among ethnic Macedonians. Namely, the Association of Albanian Historians and the newly formed Organizational Committee were preparing to mark the 60th anniversary of the events that took place immediately after the liberation of Tetovo in November 1944 that took place in the Tetovo Tobacco factory. The initiative included a scientific symposium for clarification of the then historic events of imprisonment of some persons, where were included members of the then fascist movement Bali Combtar. In their honor, the Association decided to erect a monument in the tobacco factory grounds, and to name it "the square of the victims for the Albanian cause", which location is in fact a territory usurped by the Tetovo university. This move raged the public opinion, since even today there are living witnesses, photographs and other proves to oppose the "glorification" of such persons and events.

Before the Tetovo University legalization, non-recognized were 13 faculties, out of which after the Parliament brought a decision to include this University as the third state university five were recognized. Legalized have been 644 diplomas, but things got more complicated then over one hundred students who were studying medicine and stomatology seeked to further their studies in Tetovo. Contrary to this, political factors urged them to seek a solution in the system, although the Dean of the Skopje medical faculty says that they could not recognize any illegal medical education, neither accept more students than the already determined 25% quota. In fact the number of students inscribed in Tetovo are 500, while last year 85% of them were from Kosovo. The issue is still remaining pending.

The “Kondovo” Case

In the period during the referendum campaign media started informing that in Kondovo, a village near Skopje appeared smaller groups of armed and uniformed persons. These groups controlled the movement of citizens in and out of the village, not allowing the mixed police forces to regularly patrol. Since nervousness was raising due to the referendum campaign, at first it was estimated that these groups were intended to play a role on the referendum outcome. This was the reason why at first these groups were officially ignored by the authorities.

However, even after the referendum outcome, these groups did not withdraw, on the contrary, their number increased. Media followed the events continuously, although ethnic Macedonian media were not allowed to visit and report and their report material was taken and destroyed. In addition, young children were urged to carry weapons and control the communication links to the village. Informal reports were stating that in the village were settled persons of criminal background, wanted from the Macedonian authorities, as well as from UNMIC in Kosovo. The leader was Agim Krasnici, a DPA activist, but many members of this group were Kosovar Albanians. It was said that DPA was using this group to politically compete with DUI, aiming to raise its popularity. DUI was called upon some “obligations” towards these people, presumably financial.

At first, DPA and DUI accused media for stirring up unease among the population, but later by pressure from the international factor, Mehduh Thachi (DPA vice-president) was the first person to contact them. The DPA party leadership heavily criticized this visit, but later on meetings continued, involving Mr.Ahmeti (DUI) and Mr.Dhaferi (DPA) as well. Ethnic Albanian leaders were instructed by the international factor not to articulate this group’s demands into political claimings.

Parliamentary opposition parties demanded urgent Parliament session to discuss the current situation. However, the majority did not agree to put this issue on the agenda. Ljubco Georgievski estimated the event like “continuation of the crisis from 2001”. "Intention is to control the communications Skopje-Tetovo and the problem shall escalate next spring"-he stressed. “Proxima” representatives estimated that Kondovo case is in exclusive hands of the government and the Ministry of Interiors to be solved. “If negotiations are not fruitful, then police intervention is inevitable”- they said. The President of the Republic demanded urgent action, since by his estimation Kondovo is a potential danger for the stability of the country, and obviously all political means have been exhausted.

At last, even politicians from Kosovo got involved in solving the “Kondovo” case. Most prominent was Ramush Haradinaj, the newly elected Kosovo Prime minister who sent direct threat to the Kondovo group to leave the village. To this position joined the Kondovo villagers who had enough of this group’s pressure.

Finally, after several rounds of negotiations, the group took off the uniforms and left the village. However, in public was not known what happened with the light and heavy weaponry owned by them. This is especially worrisome, since couple of days before ending the case, in Albania was caught a group which was smuggling heavy weaponry for a longer period of time, which rockets earth-air were said to be intended to arrive to Kondovo. Dhaferi stated that in Kondovo “there are no criminals, only dissatisfied citizens, while the demonstration of force was due to the dissatisfaction of the application of the Framework Agreement”. Ahmeti stated that “through institutionalized way should be fulfilled the demands of the families of the persons killed and disabled during the conflict, while, former NLA fighters should get employment in the Ministry of Interiors and Defense”.

Public Opinion Polls

Results that follow are public opinion polls realized by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research in various periods of time, tackling various issues of importance to the country, ranging from security and interethnic relations, through government performance and the dynamics of NATO and EU integration of the country.

Public Opinion Prior to the Referendum Campaign

The poll conducted (October 2004) just at the brink of initiating the legally determined public debate time frame, showed the attitude of the public towards the referendum issue. Seen through the summarized results, today one may rightfully argue that the recognition of the Republic of Macedonia by USA, coupled with the general citizen's apathy and disappointment due to social and economic reasons, the public campaign and the appeals of the international community representatives have assisted the referendum failure. Still, as can be seen through the answers obtained, citizens of Macedonian ethnic origin were dissatisfied with the Law in question.

How acceptable is the Law for local boundaries?

1. Entirely 14% (Albanians-45%)
2. Partly 31%
3. Not at all 47% (Macedonians-60%)
4. Don't know its content 8%

Why is/or is not acceptable?

1. Favors Albanians and their interest 6%
2. Satisfies the needs of my people 5%
3. Local authorities will work better 5% (A-18%)
4. Leads towards the partition of Macedonia 17%
5. It was introduced by using the ethnic criteria for drawing local boundaries 8%
6. Because of the solutions for Skopje, Struga and Kichevo 4%
7. Endangers Macedonia 5%
8. Procedure was badly lead 4%
9. Doesn't know 38% (A-47%)

10. Does not know its content 8%

These results show a rather abstract fear of putting Macedonia in danger (22% total) or that the Law especially favors ethnic Albanians and their interests.

Is the Law leading towards MK partition?

1. Yes 54% (Macedonians-70%)
2. No 28% (Albanians-65%)
3. Don't know 18% (Albanians-27%)

As results show, ethnic Macedonians were much more worried that the new Law shall lead to the partition of the country, compared to the answers of ethnic Albanians who much more prefer the negative answer.

How have you arrived to that conclusion?

1. Through media 32%
2. Friends talks 17%
3. Political leader's statements 10%
4. Assembly meetings 13%
5. I read the Law 9%
6. Other 3%
7. Don't know the Law content 8%
8. No reply 10%

Obviously media formed the public opinion on the matter, jointly with the positions of political parties and prominent politicians. It is disappointing to see that in another question 43% of the polled said that media worsen interethnic relations in the country.

How shall you react during the referendum?

1. Shall vote "yes" 44% (Macedonians-58%)
2. Shall vote "no" 10%
3. Shall abstain 24% (Albanians-54%)
4. Haven't decided yet 23% (Macedonians-22%, Albanians-23%)

Do you know the referendum question?

1. Yes 55%
2. No 45%

What shall the international community do if the referendum succeeds?

1. Shall initiate a new Framework Agreement 8%
2. Shall start new Macedonian-Albanian negotiations 20%
3. Shall freeze NATO/EU accession for MK 21% (A-30%)
4. Shall do nothing 34% (M-42%)
5. D.know 16%

Your attitude towards the FA?

1. Was acceptable for me and is acceptable now 29% (A-80%)
2. Was unacceptable but now I don't mind it 8%
3. Was acceptable, but now it bothers me 8%
4. Was unacceptable and it is still 40% (M-51%)
5. D.know 16%

EU and NATO Integration

At the poll in January 2004, to the question "When the EU membership application should be sent", citizens replied:

1. Immediately- 52%
2. Later- 35%
3. Never- 3%
4. Don't know 10%

This trend cuts through all social layers and ethnic groups. According to party affiliation, the answer "immediately" was more than the average preferred by supporters of SDSM (60%) and DUI (72%) while the answer "later" was less frequented among VMRO-DPMNE (39%) supporters. As known, the application was submitted in spring of 2004.

Who can best help Macedonia?

	October 2001	May 2002	January 2004
EU	22%	35%	41%
NATO	10% (Alb.36%)	18% (Alb.39%)	7%
UN	11%	20%	5%
World Bank	17%	9%	12%
IMF	7%	5%	7%
OSCE	1%	2%	0%
Nobody/don't know	32%	11%	25%

As results show in a very obvious way, citizens of Macedonia mostly hope for help and assistance from the European Union.

What do citizens expect from the process of EU integration?

1. Peace and safe future 22%
2. Economic development 37%
3. New jobs 7%
4. EU membership 6%
5. Democracy and the rule of law 5%
6. Other 11%
7. Nothing 6%

Would you like Macedonia to become an EU member?

1. Yes 92%
2. No 3%
3. D/know 5%

What would Macedonia gain from being an EU member?

1. Bigger international reputation 14%
2. Bigger influence upon its destiny 7%
3. Better economic development 45% (M-50%)
4. Bigger democracy and human rights 17% (A-49%)
5. Sooner resolving the problem with Greece 5%
6. Other 0,19%
7. Nothing 4%
8. Don't know 8%

What would Macedonia lose as EU member?

1. Its international reputation 1%
2. Less influence upon its destiny 15%
3. Shall worsen its economic position 1%
4. Less democracy and human rights 1%
5. Has nothing to lose 65%
6. Don't know 17%

How close is Macedonia is to EU membership? (poll realized in April 2002)

1. The most far 33%
2. Far 43%
3. Neither far nor close 21%
4. Close 3%
5. The closest 1%

Would you like Macedonia to become a NATO member? (Poll realized in November 2004)

- | | |
|---------------|--------------------------------------|
| 1. Yes- | 78% (Albanians-87%; Macedonians-74%) |
| 2. No- | 10% |
| 3. Don't know | 12% |

What should Macedonia do, to become a NATO member?

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| 1. To improve the economic conditions | 21% |
| 2. To achieve political stability | 12% |
| 3. To implement the FA | 10% (Alb.24%) |
| 4. To reform the Macedonian Army | 8% |
| 5. To reform the judiciary system | 3% |
| 6. All of the above | 35% |
| 7. All that is needed is a NATO | |
| 8. Political decision | 9% |

What shall Macedonia gain by a NATO membership?

- | | |
|--|-----|
| 1. Protection of its territory and sovereignty | 27% |
| 2. Foreign investment increase | 17% |
| 3. Protection guarantee if attacked by another country | 16% |

- 4. Guarantee against interethnic clashes 12% (Alb.21%)
- 5. Improvements of the Macedonian Army 6%
- 6. Nothing 10%
- 7. Don't know 12%

What shall Macedonia lose by a NATO membership?

- 1. Nothing 41%
- 2. Independent decision making 25%
- 3. Increased defense spending 21%
- 4. Other/don't know 13%

When shall Macedonia be invited for a NATO membership?

- 1. In 2006 24%
- 2. It shall be invited, but not soon 52%
- 3. Never 14% (VMRO-24%)
- 4. Don't know 10%

What is the current largest security threat?

- 1. Poverty/Unemployment 31% (M-A average)
- 2. Ethnic extremism 25%
- 3. Organized crime 15%
- 4. Corruption 15%
- 5. Terrorism 9%
- 6. Illegal weapons possession 5%

Shall possible Kosovo independence endanger Macedonia?

- 1. Yes 53% (M-65%, A-13%)
- 2. No 30% (M-16%, A-72%)
- 3. Don't know 17%

Government Performance (poll realized in October 2004)

General work of the Government?

- 1. Insufficient 41%
- 2. Sufficient 28%
- 3. Good 22%
- 4. Very good 6%
- 5. Excellent 1%

General work of the Government in:

	Insufficient	Sufficient	Good	Very good	Excellent
Economy	56%	27%	13%		
Security	30%	26%	27%	13%	
Interethnic relations	36%	26% (A-35%)	23%	8%	
Struggle against	52%	25%	17%	4%	

corruption					
Foreign policy	28%	27%	26%	11%	1%
EU integration	29%	24%	24%	12%	

Note: Missing percents fall under the category “Don’t know”

As obvious, government so far is rather unsuccessful in the domains of economy and the struggle against corruption, while some results are visible in the areas of foreign policy and EU integration efforts.

Which is presently the largest problem in Macedonia?

	July 2000	Oct.2001	Apr.2002	Nov.2003	Oct.2004
Unemployment	38%	10%	32%	51%	39%
Economic problems	17%	14%		15%	19%
Social welfare, health, education	11%		10%		
Interethnic problems/conflict	7%	55%	2%	2%	5%
State security/stability	6%		12%	2%	3%
Other	6%	9%	10%		3%
Crime, corruption		3%		2%	7%
Bad government		4%			
The Framework Agreem.		5%			
Poverty, low standard	15%		26%	13%	13%
Decentraliz, referendum					3%
System crisis/no rule of law					7%

As data confirm once more, throughout time major concern of the citizens of Macedonia are the economic problems, the poverty and the unemployment. The only exception is the year of the conflict (2001) when major concern were the interethnic problems.