

Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research

**Issue N.12
June 2005**

BAROMETER

Political and Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

Dr. Natasha Gaber-Damjanovska
Dr. Aneta Jovevska

In cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Regional Office Macedonia



C O N T E N T S

- 1. Local Elections 2005**
- 2. Candidacies and Coalitions**
- 3. Local Election Campaign**
- 4. Local Elections – First Round**
- 5. Local Elections – Second Round**
- 6. Constituting Local Community Bodies**
- 7. Parliamentary shifts and events**
- 8. Draft-laws in Preparation**
- 9. Reforms on the Way**
- 10. EU and NATO Integration Process**
- 11. Economic Trends**
- 12. Religious Communities' Current Issues**
- 13. VMRO-DPMNE New Platform and Party Rotations**
- 14. Education Issues**
- 15. Domestic and The Hague Tribunal Cases**
- 16. Domestic Corruption Trials**
- 17. The “Name” Issue**
- 18. The Kosovo Border Issue**
- 19. Public Opinion Polls**

Local Elections 2005

Local elections took place on March 13th, respecting to the new territorial division of local communities. Candidates competed for 85 mayor's positions (84 local communities and the City of Skopje as the 85th) and for about 1450 members of the local community councils. The capital city according to the new territorial division grew, including the gravitating villages of Saraj and Kondovo, so presently has 503.000 inhabitants, out of which 430.000 have the right to vote. According to ethnic affiliation, 104.000 are ethnic Albanians out of which 75.000 have the right to vote. All these novelties became substantial due to the mayor's electoral model adjustment. Namely, the new law presently determines a lower level of turnout (1/3) and a majority of the votes cast for a mayor to be elected at the first round. If by this threshold a mayor is not elected, at the second round compete the best two candidates, with the first past the post principle. Practically, this was an incentive to the candidates belonging to one ethnic group to turn for support to the local community inhabitants from the other ethnic group, in order to be swiftly elected. This idea was probable not only in areas predominantly inhabited by Macedonians, but also in cities in Western Macedonia predominantly inhabited by Albanians. Still, election conduct showed that parties in the first round decided to stick with their own parties, while in the second round if "their" candidate was not competing, they overwhelmingly abstained.

Other than the right of putting candidates by political parties, new legal regulations added to the existing candidacy procedures when groups of citizens wish to compete. The local community size determined the minimum necessary number of signatures that needed to be collected for the candidates: 100 signatures if the community has the size of up to 10.000 inhabitants; 150 signatures for a community up to 30.000; etc, finishing with the City of Skopje, where a candidacy would need 1000 signatures to be collected. Another legal novelty are the bilingual election forms, print for the areas where a certain ethnic community is numerically over 20% of the inhabitants. This rule is applied for the election organs as well. The number of members of the local council is also determined by the size of the community:

Number of inhabitants	Number of Community Council members
Up to 5000	9
5001-10.000	11
10.001-20.000	15
20.001-40.000	19
40.001-60.000	23
60.001-80.000	27
80.001-100.000	31
Over 100.000	33

According to the Ministry of Justice, up to the date of conclusion of the voter's lists about 1.711.293 citizens may realize their voter's right. The total number of polling stations is

2976. The capital has registered 432.207 voters in 536 polling stations. Out of the ten Skopje communities the largest is Aerodrom by having 62.324 voters.

Experts estimated that upcoming local elections due to the new legal framework of increased authority and responsibility of the future local authorities shall be a pretty attractive target to be conquered. It is said that local elections shall bring increased power, resources and responsibilities for the new mayors and their teams, as the future creators of development. In the new circumstances, mayors should learn to be good managers and on the other hand citizens shall address to the local authorities much more often in order to satisfy their day-to-day needs. Local authorities form now on shall be in a position to appoint schoolmasters, chiefs of police, shall issue building permits, shall determine the property tax, and shall take care of the infrastructure as well (schools, hospitals, health services, culture institutions, and sports facilities).

Candidacies and Coalitions

DUI and DPA have signed an agreement for fair elections, without the use of violence. Still, the wording of the agreement provoked negative reactions among the non-Albanian public. In the agreement was stated that “violence upon the will of the citizens is especially harmful for people who strive to get rid of the slavery”. DUI’s leader Ali Ahmeti justified his signature, with the good will of his party not to upset DPA with a possible different wording than the one already put in the agreement. PDP did not sign the Declaration, complaining that this was a secret coalition between DUI and DPA, which was considered undemocratic. However, at the end of January, DPA and PDP formed a preelectoral coalition due to “the opened issues of national interest, which produce political unity of the Albanians in Macedonia”. Media sources wrote about an informal meeting between DUI and the DPA vice-president Menduh Tachi where he offered to DUI to allow his party win the local elections, so he could give up to DUI the next parliamentary elections. It was said that the DUI leadership refused that offer.

Other two direct rivals are seen in the faces of the two VMRO parties VMRO-DPMNE and VMRO-People’s Party (see previous Barometers). Starting from the direct personal rivalry of the two leaders- Nikola Gruevski and Ljubco Georgievski the competition went down to all party branches, where both parties have mutually competing candidates. As expected, this lack of unity was beneficial to the position coalition.

Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE) publicly offered the Prime Minister Buckovski to sign a declaration for fair elections. In case of non signing, the party leader stated that he will consider that a space is left for serious doubts that the Government has intention to lead regular, fair and democratic local elections. From his side, Buckovski refused the offer, replying that “priority of the government is to organize fair and democratic elections”, especially because the capacity of the state for the Euroatlantic integrations shall be estimated according to the capability of running free and fair elections.

Party partners in the “Third Way” coalition split due to their misunderstandings about the Skopje candidate for mayor and the municipalities of Kumanovo and Kratovo. The

Democratic Alternative lead by Vasil Tupurkovski left the coalition, while the remaining two - Socialist party (Ljubisav Ivanov Zingo) and Democratic Union (Pavle Trajanov) signed a coalition agreement with VMRO-DPMNE. A couple of other parties joined as well, like the Democratic Party for Orthodox Unity of the Serbs and the Macedonians (leader Dragisha Miletich), the Bosniac Democratic Party (leader Alija Shahich) and the European Party. Already in coalition with VMRO-DPMNE is the Liberal Party (leader Stojan Andov).

Finally, the prominent businessman Trifun Kostovski was jointly supported by all opposition parties as a candidate for the future mayor of Skopje, regardless mutual disputes. VMRO-DPMNE decided to support him after the decision of the party's executive committee a couple of days before finalization of the candidates support. It is said that the decision was not unanimous, and that due to this decision a direct conflict between Gruevski and the second party person Ganka Samoilovska-Cvetanovska arose. Practically, the VMRO-DPMNE local election strategy was a reason for internal party breach later on.

For the mayor of Skopje candidacy, DUI proposed the engineer Sami Fajzulahu while DPA-PDP proposed Argetim Nagavci, and NDP Dzezair Shakiri. DUI as a party all in all proposed twenty candidates for mayors. The ruling coalition (SDSM-LDP and other parties) proposed Risto Penov (LDP), the current mayor of Skopje, for a third term, while six of the total of 76 other suggested candidates for mayors belonged to the smaller ethnic communities' parties coalition partners. Still, internal party disputes occurred when the list of candidate mayor was formed, especially for the municipalities of Kumanovo, Kicevo, Sveti Nikole, Ilinden, Centar and Bitola. At the end final decision was brought by party Central Committee, giving an end to the disunity rumors.

Local Election Campaign

Local election campaign cannot be characterized as one that was “up to the point”. This trend was seen in every competing party - position or opposition, since focus of the campaign were not issues relevant to local community priorities, but to more general policy issues. This was the case from the very beginning, when Prime minister Buckovski stated that strategic values of the coalition shall be EU and NATO integration, focused reform efforts (especially economic and judiciary system reforms) as well as struggle against corruption. Another example of the priority local elections issues is the DPA-PDP position for future constitutional changes, in order to create conditions for two-tier local self-government, in order to create regionalization of the country. Menduh Tachi explained that “this shall not be a geographic secession of Macedonia, but only following EU standards in this domain”. Contrary to this idea, DUI publicly disagreed, supporting only the decentralization process as described in the Constitution and the laws. This position was immediately publicly supported by the experts and the international community representatives. According to experts “current laws allow cooperation among the local communities on all levels, especially on economic level”.

During the campaign, Mevljan Tairi, DPA's party list leader in Skopje stated that "finally Albanians can institutionally discriminate the Macedonians who live in Tetovo, Gostivar and in other municipalities, as they do to us here in Skopje". He also added that "Macedonians shall not only lose their jobs in the Tetovo medical center, but in all public companies in Tetovo and Gostivar, because that is the case with the Albanians in Skopje". To this reacted a group of ethnic Macedonian political parties from Tetovo, who stated that the process of change of Macedonian employees is already finished, since all top positions of the local authorities are held by ethnic Albanians, and out of the 32 employees only 7 are ethnic Macedonians, while no Roma or Turk work there. Due to reactions caused by the domestic public and international representatives, DPA as a party felt obliged to justify Tairi's statement. Mr. Taci stated that "this is not a party position" and that "DPA is for dialogue and peaceful resolution". He also guaranteed that if DPA wins in Tetovo and Gostivar, Macedonians shall keep their working positions.

While campaigning, VMRO-People's Party unofficial leader Ljubco Georgievski in a speech near Bitola stated that "after the elections in Macedonia shall rein the institutional violence, because the Albanian extremists shall officially take the local power". He also added that it was needed 40 to 50 years for Gostivar to become an Albanian dominating city, but now for Struga and Kicevo four year's term shall be enough. "Turks, Roma and Macedonian Muslims shall be forced to declare themselves as Albanians, while Macedonians shall be forced to massively migrate".

A peculiar fact is that these elections had seven candidates for mayors against which is currently lead a court case, but the compete, since according to the Law, until a final decision is brought, the presumption of innocence is protecting them. The most evident examples are the candidate for mayor of the Roma community in Skopje – Amdi Bajram (who is convicted to four years of jail) and Semi Habibi, an independent candidate for Tetovo (extradited from Germany, accused for terrorism). Procedurally, the Central Electoral Committee is not obliged to check on every candidate, but only to those who will be eventually elected. In case of been elected, but also been proven guilty, then according to the Law the mandate ceases and early elections are to be held. In spite of all irregularities and controversies, when elections in Shuto Orizari finally finished, it was seen that Amdi Bajram won the mayor's seat by 70 vote's difference from the other candidate. However, in the meantime he was arrested, due to the final court decision to start serving his four year's sentence. For that reason, by the force of law, elections in Shuto Orizari are to be held again in 70 day's time.

Local Elections – First Round

Although initial information were showing that the election process was developing without problems, still as results were summarizing, numerous irregularities and complaints went in public. Most complaints and protests were coming from the side of the opposition, at the beginning only from VMRO-People's party. Later, complaints started coming from other opposition parties as well: DPA-PDP, the united opposition under the leadership of VMRO-DPMNE and especially the campaign team of the independent candidate for Skopje mayor- Trifun Kostovski. As summed up results were

showing certain similar votes support when in question the ethnic Macedonian position-opposition side, it caused intense negative reactions by the opposition parties, claiming that the government made a large electoral fraud. On the other hand, there was an obvious predominant support for Trifun Kostovski for the Skopje mayor position, compared to the votes obtained by the position candidate Risto Penov (proportion was 1:1,8). Opposition reactions intensified when the summing up of the total of the Skopje votes cast was moving on the edge of fulfilling the first round threshold, in order for Kostovski to be elected.

The observing NGO “Most” was claiming that according to a test electronic program they have, Mr. Kostovski was elected from the first round, while official results were showing that he did not reach the threshold required. Concretely, in Skopje voted 51,96% (or 224.997 voters, out of the total of 432.207 voters in the city of Skopje), but the city electoral committee announced that Mr.Kostovski got 109.360 votes or 48,6% (as opposed to Mr.Penov-63.113 votes or 28,05%). As numbers showed Mr.Kostovski still needed 3.138 votes more in order to fulfill the first round condition. As the ten Skopje municipalities were showing results were as follows:

Municipality	Kostovski	Penov
Gjorce Petrov	11.334	5.707
Centar	12.106	8.327
Cair	5.885	3.299
Butel	7.877	4.829
Kisela Voda	15.615	7.684
Aerodrom	18.841	10.748
Karpos	15.159	10.611
Gazi Baba	18.573	8.291
Shuto Orizari	3.001	3.018
Saraj	969	599

The other candidates got: Artim Nagavci (DUI)-19.924 (8,86%), Semi Fejzula (DPA-PDP)-18.251(8,11%), Dzezair Shakiri (NDP)-4.855 (2,15%). As the total sum of these data was incredibly late (it took the city committee several days to do it), including the big pressure from the public, especially the opposition as well as the doubts this behavior produced, the State Electoral Committee dismissed the president of the city committee.

As far as local community councils seats are concerned, in total all over the country position lists (Coalition “Za”) got 279.463 which is for 20.000 more votes than the two largest opposition parties (VMRO-DPMNE and VMRO-People’s Party) 263.507.

In the first round immediately were elected 17 (out of 84) mayors: Coalition “Za” 11, DUI 3, Independent candidates, VMRO-DPMNE and the united opposition and DPA-PDP won one seat each. Still, complaints have been submitted in four of them, including other places around the country as well. Position and opposition confronted each other though the media. Mr.Manasijevski, the Government’s vice-president commented on the results, stating that it is pathetic Mr.Gruevki’s (VMRO-DPMNE) effort to hook himself

on the votes won by Mr.Kostovski, since it is obvious that this party's share in the total votes won by him is between 20-25%, adding that the thesis for fraud cannot be "sold" as a campaign content between the two rounds and to substitute the lack of concrete programs. At a press-conference ruling parties stated that "there is no state fraud, but only a forged winner atmosphere". Prime Minister Buckovski claimed that possible irregularities are averaged up to 3% all over the country, which was estimated by Kostovski's headquarters as an effort to cover the election fraud, since OSCE/ODIHR on the other hand estimated that irregularities amount up to 10%. Special envoy Mr.Sahlin stated that EU is surprised and disappointed by the irregularities in the first round. He claimed that although in the largest part of the country elections were held in a proper manner, still there are local communities where there were many irregularities. "after what happened in the first round one gets the impression that it is more important who shall win the battle for Shuto Orizari than to win the battle for Europe. People in communities like Lipkovo and Shuto Orizari still did not understand that rules must be obeyed and that still do not have political culture and awareness"-he added.

After complaints have been processed, the State Electoral Committee announced that elections shall be repeated in a couple of Skopje communities, in which the number of voters are in total 5840. By this theoretically Mr.Kostovski had the opportunity to win the mayor's position by the first round although practically it was not likely to happen (since he needed at least 114.571 voted in order to be elected at the first round, while now he got 108.819 votes-disregarding the polling stations where elections are to be repeated, and lacking 5752 votes more, which were practically impossible to obtain them). In addition to this, elections were to be repeated in other 13 communities (30 polling stations) mainly in the North-West of the country. The SEC dismissed about thirty election committees (about 150 persons) due to irregularities in their work. Both from the Ministry of Interiors and citizens were submitted 20 criminal charges against perpetrators who disturbed the elections and the voting. The Public Prosecutor publicly called upon the citizens to report all irregularities to his office. Still, after the repeated voting took place, it was seen that Mr.Kostovski did not achieve to win in the first round.

Due to the confusion and the irregularities present in the first round, EU representatives expressed concern and disappointment. They all stressed that the government must improve conditions for free and fair elections in which no irregularities should occur, showing that the country is stabilized. "As these elections are important for the decentralization process, the regularity of these elections is an important precondition for the country to obtain the desired candidate status." These remarks were supported by the State Department as well. Although in major part of the country elections have been estimated to be regular, Mr.Boucher called upon the Macedonian government to investigate all breaches of the law, and to punish the perpetrators.

According to the Helsinki Committee, during the first round, largest problems were present in the rural areas, mostly inhabited by Albanians or Roma. Concretely, the process of voting was violently interrupted, the voting safety procedures were not held, there was ballot box stuffing, often was voted by proxy, there was breach of the secrecy of voting, many unidentified persons were present in and around the polling stations, the

help to the illiterate persons was inadequate, no Macedonian flags were put, polling stations were closed earlier and votes counting was not according the Law. Especially worrisome was the unequal position of women in the process of voting. In villages like Saraj and Kondovo Albanian women did not appear in the polling stations at all, or voted by the assistance of their husbands. This would mean that about 100.000 votes around the country, or about 40.000 votes in Skopje territory were leaving a possibility to be manipulated.

Between the two rounds, Prime Minister Buckovski urged the citizens to go out and vote, stressing that strategic priority of the Government is NATO and EU integration. "The country shall go forward with mayors elected either from the position, opposition or independent, but important is that they are elected in a free and fair manner. If that does not occur, everyone shall lose. Responsibility for the elections bare all political parties who compete, but especially election organs and the Government."-he said. He also tried to organize a meeting with all political parties, aiming to make a political deal for free and fair elections before the second round. However, DPA and VMRO-DPMNE parties boycotted the meeting, while the VMRO-People's Party representative left the meeting immediately. At the repeated effort, opposition parties held a meeting with the Prime minister, but DPA was not persuaded to take part in the second round. Buckovski commented that "DPA has a mistaken tactics", as the party insisted to have complete repeated elections in 16 local communities in the country. Again, VMRO-DPMNE leader did not join the meeting.

Between the two rounds, DPA-PDP organized massive protests in Tetovo, again seeking annulment of the first round election results in all areas in the country where ethnic Albanians are living. These parties stated that it would be better for the Central Electoral Committee to annul the election results, instead to have a civil war between the Albanians in the second round. Menduh Tachi said that if CEC do not make this move, DPD-PDP dare not participate in the second round, - it would be better for DUI to win and to avoid bloodshed.

Local Elections – Second Round

Before the second round started, special EU envoy Michael Sahlin sent a message to all political parties in the country to show their political maturity by letting citizens decide the election outcome. Second round had about 5500 observers, out of which 5192 domestic and 260 foreign, mostly through ODIHR. Foreign political representatives stressed that the second round shall be very closely monitored because the country's image shown in the first round was shadowed. As the country set up strategic purposes linked to joining the EU, it must show political maturity and run the elections properly. Regarding the DPA announcement for boycotting the second round, Mr.Sahlin stated that he is not supporting this position.

Mr.Penov from the "Za" coalition publicly announced that due to his respect towards voter's will, he is withdrawing from the second round competition. "I shall not allow due to the fear of a possible alleged fraud in Skopje to hold whole Macedonia as a hostage".

Expressing his will to cooperate with the new mayor, he stated that he will prepare his office to receive the new mayor. (This demission is not linked to a potential resignation of the LDP party leadership.) Finally, Mr.Kostovski won at the second round, by gaining 96.180 votes (76,37%), as opposed to Mr.Penov who got 26.036 votes (20,67%), regardless his withdrawal. Turnout was 125.938 votes or 29,14% of the total. Opposition leader Nikola Gruevski after the second round stated that he is convinced that effort for fraud and the fraud that has already been made prevented the downfall of the government, adding that the defeat in these elections should be a strong message to them. DPA-PDP stated that among the Albanians “crime and the immorality won”. This party stated that DUI leadership shall berry the “moral and historic responsibility of tearing down the face of the Albanians in Macedonia”.

Second round turnout was 52,66% or 614.010 votes cast. Some areas had even 70 to 90% turnout (like in Pehchevo, Gevgelija, Dojran, Cucer-Sandev, Berovo, Delcevo, Zelino). Lowest turnout was noted in Vrapchishte, Tearce, Kisela Voda, Gostivar, Butel and Karpos. In total most mayors derive from the position parties: SDSM 36 in total, VMRO-DPMNE 21, DUI 15, VMRO-People’s Party 3, DPA-PDP 2 (in spite of the party decision to boycott the second round), independent candidates 7 and Union of the Roma in Macedonia 1. Out of the ten Skopje local communities, all but one was won by the opposition parties. This was the case in most of the bigger urban areas, with the exception of Kumanovo, where the seat was won by SDSM, and of Ohrid and Strumica, where the position victory was considered significant, since these two cities were so far predominantly inclined to VMRO parties. In the Albanian political block, the domination of DUI was evident.

The State Election Committee after the finalization of the two rounds stated that the coalition lead by SDSM won 36 mayor’s position, the opposition coalition lead by VMRO-DPMNE won 19, DUI 11, VMRO-People’s Party 3, DPA-PDP 2, while four independent mayors are elected as well.

In the preliminary ODIHR report after the second round completion, are pointed out both positive and negative conclusions. As positive are mentioned the submitted criminal charges against perpetrators from the first round, legal terms for results announcing were respected, complaints have been processed in due time, as well as improved technical preparations for the election process. As negative, were mentioned the 14% of the polling stations, marked “bad” and “very bad” the process of voting. In these cases, voting tickets were stolen, there was ballot box stuffing, group voting, voter’s intimidation, absence of secrecy in voting, identical signatures in voter’s lists were found and parties’ influence in the work of the electoral bodies.

After finalization of the second round, State Department declared that improvements have been made, in comparison with the first round. However, some irregularities have been noted, especially in the western part of the country. Due to that, the State Department called upon all political parties’ leaders from that region to condemn the efforts of their supporters to weaken the democratic system through the breach of election rules and codes. OSCE/ODIHR repeated the negative impression of the second round of

elections, although it was estimated that it was better run than the first time. It was said that there was breach of the equal and universal right to vote, including secrecy of voting.

Special EU envoy Michael Sahlin in front of the OSCE Council generally commenting the local elections stated that although elections were held in a peaceful atmosphere, still they do not represent success for the state, due to two types of irregularities: active fraud and passive institutional failure. Under active fraud he mentioned ballot box stuffing, voter's intimidation, and violent behavior towards election officials. Under the second is mentioned the failure of the state to ensure security in the polling stations, as well as to prevent group and proxy voting. All this confirms the weak state of the rule of law in the country.

After elections termination, DPA-PDP submitted to the Assembly a draft-law for annulations of the election results in 16 local communities, due to "numerous irregularities". Since this suggestion was not at first supported in the Assembly's committee, but also was not put on the agenda when these parties requested, MPs belonging to these parties left the Assembly. The DPA party vice-president Menduh Tachi stated that DPA is leaving the Assembly "forever". Practically, the suggestion for introducing such a law had no legal basis, since the final instance decision for the elections is brought by the Supreme Court and is final. Any other intervention should not have been valid. In practice, this was not the first time for DPA to boycott the Assembly.

As a response to the concerns given by the international community, the government is preparing a white book containing all elections irregularities and comments given by ODIHR, in order to amend the elections regulations in the directions of improving the process. For that reason, in the auspices of the Ministry of Justice, a working group has been established, to work on amending and codification of all election laws (national, local, presidential and referendum).

These local elections have however shown some improvements. In the next four years in all the local community councils around the country shall be sitting 22,2% women counselors. This is considered as a big success if one compares the previous figures, when women counselors were 8,4%. What's more, two women, one ethnic Macedonian and one ethnic Albanian achieved to be reelected as mayors. Surprisingly, in rural areas women are better represented (26-44%), while in urban areas the figure is around 13%.

Constituting Local Community Bodies

The more or less even distribution of position-opposition local council seats in some communities initiated operational problems from the very start. Namely, in Skopje, Shtip and in Bitola it was very hard to reach common consensus about the council's president position. The hardest and longest process was in Skopje, where finally as Council President was elected a councilor from the Democratic Alternative supported by SDSM and the other parties in government. The VMRO-DPMNE representative did not achieve to get larger majority of councilor's support.

Parliamentary shifts and events

After the decision of the Constitutional court by which free transfer of MPs from one parliamentary group to another was legalized (although according to the election system all MPs are elected based on a PR closed party list), twelve MPs broke away from VMRO-DPMNE and formed a new party group - VMRO-People's Party, gravitating around Ljubco Georgievski, the former VMRO-DPMNE leader. This issue was vividly discussed in the public for quite some time, since it was questioned the morality of the act of transfer, due to the fact that these MPs were elected with the votes of another party, and up to this moment according to the Election Law if an MP resigned from a party, he was obliged to give back his mandate to the party through which list he was elected. Evidently, by this transfer VMRO-People's Party became the most numerous opposition party in the Assembly, without even taking part in the elections. Another group that broke away from VMRO-DPMNE is the independent group consisted of five MPs, gravitating around Marian Gjorcev, a prominent former VMRO-DPMNE member.

The Assembly's vice-president Hisni Shakiri (DUI) resigned from his position, accusing his party for corruption, nepotism and populism. He connected his position with the resignation of the former Prime-minister (see previous Barometer) stating that DUI should have found strength to deal with the issue of corruption, but unfortunately it did not succeed. After the resignation, his place was filled by the DUI MP Gzim Ostreni, while Hisni Shakiri in June formed a party on his own.

In April, the Minister of Exteriors Ilinka Mitreva had an opposition interpellation. This move was interpreted as a demand for political responsibility for: the supported by the minister, but yet inadequate DUI party suggestion for the Macedonian ambassador position in Bulgaria; for the execution of the three Macedonian citizens in Iraq by Al Khaeda and for the big delay of introducing a new law on external affairs. Still, after one day of discussions, interpellation was not successful.

During the same month, was introduced the Law for Crisis Management. According to this Law, the Government is to decide about the way of dealing with the crisis situation, the Assembly has a control function, while the President is in charge to decide for the eventual use of the Army. There are three bodies which take part in the process of dealing with crisis: Managing Committee (coordination and management), Estimation group (estimating the situation), and the Direction or the Center for crisis management (creates conditions for realization of the things decided in the previous two bodies). As for the use of the Army, it is said that only one Army unit is put in function (and not the whole Army), based on previously decided purpose of intervention, capacities and time frame of intervention.

Mrs.Liljana Popvska, an MP from the Liberal-Democratic Party resigned from her position in the party's Executive Committee. She explained that her act was dissatisfaction for the further centralization of the party, instead of its democratization. Her estimations are that in the party are developing complex processes in which a problematic environment and atmosphere has been created. However, she remained in the

party, in the Assembly as an MP and in the party's Central Committee. It is known that LDP as a party didn't approve Mrs. Popovska's position for the referendum held last year and for that reason the party dismissed her from her Assembly vice-president position.

Adding to the general discussion about systemic changes, VMRO-People's Party suggested a change in the Macedonian Assembly, by adding a second house- the Senate. It is proposed the Senate to have 20 senators (in addition to the already existing 120 MPs in the Assembly), who should have an 8 year mandate, in order to allow them to avoid the "political burden" in their work. The idea is this second house to have a control role for all bills and policies passed, expecting "further democracy strengthening and avoiding further party influence in the system". This suggestion partly went hand-in-hand with some ideas coming from the parties of the ethnic Albanian opposition block, but it was not supported by the position and the other, smaller parties.

Draft-laws in Preparation

This year is planned the introduction of a new law for weapons. According to the suggested novelties, all citizens who already have a permit for a weapon, should renew it under the new legal conditions. A special committee shall decide on the matter, while those who request having a gun for reasons of personal safety shall be allowed to carry it only at home, and not in public. Also, the draft law enumerates the reasons based on which a permit may be issued, in order to avoid any discretionary decisions. Prime Minister Buckovski estimated that there should be one more weapon-collection initiative in Macedonia, due to the partial success of the previous ones. Reason for the lower level of success was the non-cooperation by the DPA mayors, who up to now held 99% of the local communities, thus not applying the recommendations issued during the campaigns. Previous two campaigns were held in 2001 (August 26th to September 26th) and in 2003 (November 1st to December 15th).

In the reformed frames of the criminal penalty area is included the important draft law for the witness protection program. This law is considered as a significant step against the raising organized crime and offers change or secret protection of the witness identity, change of his place of living, etc, in order to be protected his integrity and the integrity of his family. Those who might disclose data concerning this category of protected witnesses may face a penalty of at least four years or up to lifelong imprisonment.

The only obligations that remain pending as part of the Framework Agreement agenda, are the laws regulating the use of symbols of the ethnic communities in local communities where they are over 50% and the use of language in local communities where one ethnic community consists over 20% of the local population. Both draft laws have already been prepared by the Ministry of Justice. The first draft has reached government consensus and shall be forwarded to the parliament soon. According to the solution offered, the symbols of the citizens who are not a majority on state level may be used on local level, where these ethnic groups are a majority (practically over 50%). In front of the Assembly, the Government and the ministries shall be positioned only the state flag. As the flag of an ethnic community the law describes "the flag that the ethnic

entity has chosen and uses it for expressing its identity and specificities". In practice, this would mean that 19 local communities in the country shall put together with the national, other flags as well, (flag of the ethnic group, but also a special flag of the local community as well, if there is one). In 16 local communities together with the Macedonian, there shall be the Albanian flag, in two the Turkish and in one the Roma flag. Opposition parties disapproved the draft, stating that is unacceptable for a local community to use an official flag of another country.

Commenting about the Law for the use of symbols which is under party negotiations, DUI stated that the party priority is to regulate the use of the symbols of the ethnic communities, instead of getting into a debate about the state symbols and how shall they look like. This statement is made after the statement that DUI shall offer new solutions for the state anthem and coat of arms, and even other DUI prominent members publicly supported the idea of change of the state flag. However, the party isolated itself from the last statement, by confirming that the party two years ago by declaration has accepted the Macedonian flag. Experts estimated that the idea for change of the existing state flag should not be treated as a part of the Framework Agreement, since such change is not anticipated in the document. In addition, EU and USA representatives in the country greeted and supported the draft law on the use of the symbols (flags) of ethnic communities.

Reforms on the Way

In the Ministry of Interiors structural reforms are taking place, which are leading to three directions. At first, there shall be the police top management, including the Minister, his cabinet and the people who deal with the development and strategy of the police; the second is dedicated to operative reforms where the division is to the state and public security; third reform is in the public security sector, where there will be three structures: central police service, border police and branch police services, distributed in eight regions throughout the country. According to the Minister of Interiors, in the first four months of this year, compared with 2004 crime level shows decrease, in some areas even to 40%. In Skopje crime decrease is 28%. Murder cases are decreased for 50% and they are not linked to organized crime activities.

The Ministry of Justice opened a public debate for constitutional changes in the judiciary system. Intention is to make specific constitutional and legal changes, in order to strengthen the independence of the judiciary system and prevent the inefficiency from which the system was suffering. In this domain, another law for speeding up judiciary procedures has been forwarded from the Government to the Assembly to be accepted. This law sets up special judicial executor's services for the civil and administrative cases. By this law judicial decisions shall become immediately executing, as well as other adjustments for a speeded up procedure. Together with these novelties, in preparation are constitutional amendments addressing the election of judges and the duration of their mandate. On this point there have been differences in opinion among the experts, the government and the President of the Republic. The President's position (coincides with the expert group position) is that there is no need to change the permanently elected

judges' mandate to a testing mandate, and to change the existing two-third majority support in the Assembly for a judge's election. Also, the President suggested that members of the Republic's Judiciary Council should be judges who will be directly elected by all judges. This opinion has been submitted to the Assembly as a comment on the Government's suggestions for constitutional amendments. Government opposed to some of these ideas, arguing that when judges get an indefinite mandate, their enthusiasm lasts shortly, and this is why initially a three or five year's test mandate is desirable, period in which judges should show their quality and knowledge. In addition, the Government suggests a new constitutional novelty regarding the systemic laws, for which adoption presently is requested a qualified majority (80 votes out of 120 Assembly seats), to be decreased to a simple majority votes support (61 votes). Opposition strongly opposed the idea, because it is expected that in the future any government on power shall be able to pass easily any law it wishes.

At the conference on the application of EU standards to the Macedonian judiciary system, courts' representatives complained on the bad economic position the courts presently are (low salaries, debts, no financial courts independence, large direct budget dependence). The Republic Judiciary Council complains on lacks criteria on which judges' election and dismiss shall be performed, stressing the necessity of a special law for this purpose.

The transfer of powers from national to local level shall occur this year in 11 vital spheres, including education, urbanism, health, social services, environment, economic development, communal services, culture, and sports. It is expected that about 26.000 persons employed in the ministries shall continue working under the local authorities¹. By the end of March passed the last ten of the package of 42 laws referring to the decentralization process. Currently, it is estimated that local communities are in big debts, have excessive number of employees and have no adequate working space. Most local authorities still declare unable to take over the fiscal decentralization duties. This is in compliance with the position of the International Crisis Group when said that Macedonia is not yet ready for the decentralization process. ICG thinks that very few politicians really understand the process and that the government lacks strategy for operationalization of the idea. Speaking about the political dimension of the process it is estimated that DUI holds a special responsibility towards the other ethnic groups (due to the boundaries setting and the referendum as a consequence), to prove that other ethnicities shall have the same rights and privileges as the ones Albanians request for themselves. In this respect, it is recommended for special local confidence building measures to be established.

One of the ministries which is by far most criticized (especially by the World Bank) for the lack of reforms is the Ministry of Health. The relevant Minister estimated the current situation in the domain as non-transparent and inefficient, while the money put in the system are spent without the expected outcome. For speedy reforms purpose and in order to gain time, instead of a strategy, the Ministry is preparing a "white" book for the health system. Currently, under negotiations with the World Bank and IMF are the three types of health packages that are planned to be offered by the Health Fund in the future.

¹ Starting from July 1st, local communities shall take care of 94 high schools, 343 elementary schools, etc.

The Government in April adopted the suggestion for revising the Action plan for EU partnership in 2005. Main goal is to establish a frame for priority measures in the direction of EU accession, as well as to coordinate and be consistent in reforms in various areas. This document is in coordination with the strategic priorities of the Government for 2005, but also a decision has been brought for determining the priorities for 2006. According to priorities' classification accent is given to: speeding up of the process of EU integration, integration of the country in NATO, judiciary system reforms, intensifying economic development, decrease of unemployment, struggle against organized crime and corruption, introducing necessary constitutional and other legal changes. All these priorities include strengthening of the rule of law, improving the process of public administration reform and business climate, boosting foreign investment, as well as local community development.

EU and NATO Integration Process

Answers to the questionnaire were officially delivered to the EU in February, after which a festivity followed in Brussels, organized by the Macedonian government. It is estimated that after receiving the answers, Macedonia shall obtain an avis in autumn this year, after which a suggestion for start of negotiations is to be awaited by the end of the year.

In April the Macedonian government got additional 181 question and subquestions to the questionnaire, due to be answered by May 10th this year. Out of all the questions obtained the Ministry of finance got questions regarding the economic criteria, the free flow of capital and services, including financial services as well. The chapters of taxation, financial control, budget and customs, economic and monetary union are considered as completely answered in the first phase. The Government sent back the answers mid-May, awaiting the date for the second round of talks.

In the frames of the Council of Europe, at the beginning of this year a report was submitted regarding the Republic of Macedonia. It was stated that Macedonia progressively is putting the fundamentals of a multiethnic society, but all ethnic groups must prove and make efforts in the direction of building a common state and avoid ethnic divisions and instability. It is estimated that the Ohrid Agreement is respected and that lately there were no serious armed incidents. However, remarks were given on the still existing level of corruption, in which are included all segment of economic and political life, and on the existence of organized crime.

Special EU envoy Michael Sahlin in front of the OSCE Council stressed the high level of copplementarity of the EU and OSCE agenda when Macedonia is in question. A good aspect is that gradually safety issues are getting out of the agenda, imposing priority to the further application of the rule of law principle. He also quoted the respectable International Committee on the Balkans, as far as this country is in question, since Macedonia was indicated as a positive example in the wider region. Sahlin's suggestions to the country were directed towards long-term challenges in the economic and institutional domain, especially the rule of law.

EU shall finance the opening of an office for cooperation between the government and the civic organizations in the country, based on a predetermined Strategy for cooperation (CARDS project), out of which 34.5 million EUR shall be spent. Prime Minister Buckovski took responsibility on the Government coordination for the negotiations with the World Bank and IMF, on the PSAL and the three year reform arrangement to be negotiated with these institutions.

As far as NATO further enlargement is concerned, at the beginning of the year signals have been very positive, especially for Macedonia. The main position that was unofficially given is that at the end of this year due to the uneven progress of the three countries that are in the same group (Croatia, Albania and Macedonia) regarding the reforms or other political issues, there might not be a next acceptance of countries in a group, as was the policy so far. In this respect it was stated that Macedonia has the highest probability to be invited to join NATO at the end of this year. Starting from 2006 Macedonia shall have only professional soldiers, while complete army professionalization shall finish by the end of 2007. Still, unfavorable impressions of the last local elections, distorted the good impression the country had up to that moment.

Economic Trends

Foreign debt of the country is raised to 1,96 billion USD, although Macedonia still remains in the group of countries having medium debt. Its total debt is about 40% of the GDP. Most of the debt (1,4) are debts of the public sector, the government and public companies. In the first quarter of 2005 Macedonia reached the debt level of 217 million USD.

While discussing the budget, the Minister of Finance Nikola Popovski stated that at the end of 2004 the ethnic composition of the persons working in the state administration and not belonging to the ethnic majority was the following: Albanians 13,8%, Serbs 1,7%, Turks 1,3%, Vlachs and Roma 0,5% each, Bosniacs 0,3% and others 1%. The Minister stated that regarding the fair representation when ethnic Albanians are in question the figures will improve in the first months of 2005, due to the new persons that are going to be taken to work in the state administration. However, the smaller by number ethnic groups constantly complain that they have been seriously underprivileged in the chances to find employment based on the principle of fair representation, when compared to the Albanian ethnic group.

“Macedonian Railways” are transformed, based on a law due to be adopted in May and under the surveillance of the World Bank. Reforms in this sector were rather painful, leaving many people unemployed.

The Law for Electronic Communications is on the procedure for adoption, thus imposing defined rules of the “game”, which should be respected by the parties interested to operate in the sector. Intention is to liberalize, and to ensure sound competition, to protect the citizens and to attract foreign investment.

The Government and the Trade Union have agreed to work jointly in formulating the new collective agreements of the social-economic sphere, regarding the public and private sector. The Macedonian Trade Union has opposed views to the IMF when worker's rights are in question. MTU does not hold responsible the "extensive" worker's rights for the low economic growth, while IMF believes that investments in the country shall grow if the rights diminish. Key point of argument is the Labor Law under preparation, for which talks have been unfruitful. IMF believed that by the new law illegal employment shall decrease, while worker's rights need to be better balanced, in order to ease the future employees. IMF position is that currently the firms are functioning according to the general collective agreements, although most of them are not even signatories. In this respect, flexible firing is recommended.

Serious public reactions provoked the government intention to privatize 51% of the National electrical company. Government's intention was to sell it to only one strategic investor without an initial price. Economists claimed that instead of state monopoly, Macedonia shall get a stronger private monopoly. Citizens fear of the raise of the price of electricity. Especially strong reactions were expressed regarding the privatization of hydro-power electrical plants. After strong reaction from the media, domestic experts, the World Bank, opposition parties and the wider public, the Government is reconsidering the idea.

At the end of last year the government of Macedonia, Bulgaria and Albania signed a common Declaration for support of the AMBO pipeline. This pipeline is to commence its building this spring, and shall be an alternative provider for the OKTA refinery in Skopje as well. Linked to this, countries through which passed corridor 8 (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania and Italy) in April signed a declaration for cooperation in the area of energy infrastructure. This Declaration represents an expression of political will of the four countries for constructing complete infrastructure for electrical power, gas and oil transfer. It is estimated that this project shall greatly contribute to the stability of the countries-signatories.

IMF had meetings with the Government in May, for the new three-year arrangement. It was expected that it shall be requested from the government to tighten further the budget expenditures (deficit). IMF representative denied the domestic experts accusations that the rigid economic policy dictated by IMF was putting breaks to the country's economic development. He stated that the slow revitalization of the Macedonian economy was due to the political instability, which was overcome by the Ohrid Agreement while the second reason was the lack of structural reforms.

Finally, at the end of May prime Minister Buckovski publicly presented the Government economic program, containing: measures for economic growth, reducing unemployment, reducing the deficit in the trade and payments balance, etc. It expected that by these measures there shall be 60.000 more employed this year, by improving the business climate foreign investments shall be improved, insurance sector shall be boosted, etc. This package of measures is expected to show a 4% growth by the end of this year.

Opposition and some experts heavily criticized the proposed program, stating that it is very declarative and that there are no adequate instruments legal or practical for its implementation.

Religious Communities' Current Issues

Series of events in the IRC are indicating that problems are not reaching its end. As previously announced (see previous Barometer), and although was subdued to a lot of pressure and threats for the action, the Head of the Islamic Religious Community, Reis Ul Ulema Emini released the Skopje Mufti from his duties. Skopje imams who practically requested his release and complained on the conduct of the Skopje Mufti Berisha, still insisted from Emini on the “urgent withdrawal of civilian persons brought by the Skopje Mufti from the Islamic Religious Community”. Followed elections for a new Mufti in which by obtaining large majority was elected Tajedin Bislimi professor at the Islamic Theological Faculty. However, the released Mufti denied the legitimacy of this act, suggesting that the election had irregularities and refusing to hand over his position to Mr.Bislimi. As the Rijaset of the IRC was supposed to meet and decide on accepting the new Mufti, media reported that about thirty armed persons were present at the place, in order to demonstrate force and put pressure upon the decision. The Rijaset also decided to urgently call the Assembly of IRC and verify the mandate of the newly elected mufti which did not occur. Finally, decision was not brought and the process was blocked largely because of the indecisiveness of Mr.Emini, who instead of making a final decision, waits for the termination of his mandate in June, thus further postponing and transferring the accumulated problems to the future IRC highest representative.

Another event has shaken the already perplexed relations between the Macedonian and the Serbian Orthodox Church (see previous Barometers). The public in Macedonia estimated the decision of the SOC to give the "tomos" to the Serbian exarch Jovan (thus recognizing him as a parallel church- as the Ohrid Archibishopry- in Macedonia) as scandalous. The MOC Cabinet stated that "such pressures and threats by the SOC, by which is made a spiritual terror over Macedonia, should be beard with dignity". By this move, the unregistered in Macedonia church of the exarch Jovan became practically part of the Pec Patriarchy, in fact obtaining a level less than the one the MOC got in 1958, when it got an autonomous status. Unofficially it is anticipated that the SOC brought this decision by resisting the pressure from the Greek Orthodox Church, and thus serving their interests indirectly. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Serbia and Montenegro stated that this decision "must not throw any shadow over the very good relations between the two states and peoples". Still, it is expected that many disputes shall occur, due to the conflict nature of Jovan, who undoubtedly shall try to put the decision that has been brought to work in practice.

The Russian Patriarch publicly disagreed with the decision taken by the Serbian Orthodox Church, stating that “a parallel eparchy signifies a deepening conflict”.

At the beginning of the summer is expected the Ministry of Justice to put in parliamentary procedure the new draft law for religious communities. It was said that the

draft took under consideration many similar laws in the region. One of the most important novelties is that registration of the religious communities shall be transferred from the Committee for Relations with Religious Communities to the courts. It is that courts that in the future shall have the duty to decide whether an applicant may obtain registration or whether an organization does not fulfill the preconditions as determined in the registration process.

VMRO-DPMNE New Platform and Party Rotations

Symbolically choosing February 7th - the “Maastricht Day” - as a day to promote the new party platform, as the most acute problem in Macedonian politics the party leader Nikola Gruevski stressed existing “party dualism and divisions”, (VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM from one side and DPA-DUI on the other) seeing this situation as a lack of true moral. Making a distinction between his party and the breakaway wing of the party (the present VMRO-People’s Party), he estimated that when conservative parties are not successful, it is not due to their system of values, but because their leaders abuse the values for their personal interests (indirectly referring to Mr.Georgievski and his supporters). He stressed that although VMRO-DPMNE had periods when it was not moving towards the best direction, presently it has finished its internal transition and is free to take all responsibilities. “Those who want to leave, may do so. But they should be aware that by doing that they shall uncover their real faces- those of transitional profiteers”- he added. Offering a new idea of the VMRO-DPMNE “modern politician”, Gruevski pointed out that mayor candidates who succeed to be elected shall annually declare their sources of income, improve local administration, publish reports of what they have accomplished and shall make their offices open for all citizens.

Still, the party continued going through major leadership changes. One day after local elations termination, the VMRO-DPMNE vice-president Ganka Samoilovska-Cvetanova submitted her resignation from the party leadership. She explained her move as a “difference in opinions towards the important strategic directions of the party activity”. In substance, differences between the leader Mr.Gruevski and Mrs. Samoilovska-Cvetanova have reached the point where they could no longer cooperate together, due to huge differences in practical policy-making in the party.

According to the party statute, the leader chooses the party leadership (vice-presidents and executive committee members), which are to be confirmed by the party Central Committee. As the leader choose Mrs. Samoilovska’s resignation, instead of her offer for differences’ overcoming, consequently the whole Central and Executive Committee have been dismissed. Mrs. Samoilovska's vacancy is expected to be filled by Mr.Trajko Slavevski, the Skopje council's list leader, but she remains the party's MP. At the end of May, Mr.Gruevski established the new party bodies and paralelly with the top party rotations, started a nationwide party membership checking, in order to distinct party members from VMRO-People’s party members. In spite of all the rotations, public estimations are that Gruevski is being late in the process of modernization of the party and of finding the right political strategy for some issue-based problems.

In June, VMRO-Real joined VMRO-DPMNE, a party from which broke away some years ago. Joining shall be completed, by deleting the VMRO-Real party from the courts register and by complete transfer of its members to VMRO-DPMNE. Same process is due for VMRO-DOM. Possible future coalition cooperation is announced with the present MP Marian Gjorcev who is the leader of the five independent MPs, who were deriving from VMRO-DPMNE. This group plans to found in June the Agricultural People's Party, and then arrange the future cooperation with VMRO-DPMNE. As the new VMRO-DPMNE vice-president is elected Trajko Slavevski, the list leader of the Skopje city Council.

Education Issues

After legalization of the other faculties, pending students who were studying medicine and stomatology at the Tetovo University, by decision of the Ministry of Education and Science were transferred to other faculties, in order to finish their education (see previous Barometer). About 200 students were transferred in Pristina University, 50 in Tirana and 50 in Skopje. Skopje Medical faculty formed special committees which task shall be the check of the so far knowledge of these students. Current law determines for these students either to start from the first year of studies or to seek estimation of their so far level of education, in order to continue the studies from a higher year.

Domestic and The Hague Tribunal Cases

The Council of the Court on War Crimes in Hague has accepted the Hague Prosecutor indictment for Ljube Boskovski, former Macedonian Minister of Interiors who during the 2001 conflict was in office. Accusation is for "serious breach of international humanitarian law" in the "Ljuboten" case, a second on a roll after his arrest by the Croat authorities regarding the case "Rastanski Lozja", lead in Macedonia, where seven economic immigrants were killed in the same period of time. In March, Mr. Boskovski from Croatia was extradited to The Hague for trial. Another person who was extradited from Macedonia for the same "Ljuboten" case is Johan Tarculovski, who is considered as the command executor. The Macedonian government showed intention to arrange for financial aid for the accused and their families.

For the "Rastanski Lozja" case there already has been a prosecution and a legal procedure lead by the Croat courts, due to the fact that Mr. Boskovski having a Croat passport as well, fled in Croatia after the indictment was raised in Macedonia. VMRO-DPMNE called the President of the Republic to sign an abolition act, which he refused, arguing that all things must be brought into court and legally proven through a court procedure. Other persons involved in this case are trialed in Macedonia. VMRO-People's party submitted an initiative for an amnesty law by which the accused for the case Rastanski Lozja shall be released. Unofficially, it is said that the government is thinking about this offer, since there are initiatives in equalizing these cases with the former NLA fighters. It is assumed that the government would like to unburden itself with the problems that it has with the former NLA fighters, for which sanctions may not apply presently, due to the resistance by their coalition partner DUI. Estimations are that after introducing such a

law, the authorities may be in a better position to resolve more efficiently problems like the one that arose in Kondovo (see previous Barometer).

In April, the Skopje Court of First Instance brought a decision in which the four accused (not including Mr. Boskovski, since for him is lead another trial) for the “Rastanski Lozja” case were proclaimed “not guilty”. Opposition praised the Court about this decision, while the position remained reserved, trying not to take a direct position, stating that the Court is independent in its work and decisions. By the end of May, the Public Prosecutor submitted an appeal to the court of higher instance, arguing that the court has neglected that most important material proves, that there have been procedural-legal mistakes, etc. If appeal is accepted, this trial shall continue to the court of higher instance in Macedonia.

There are other four cases performed by the then NLA which have been processed through the Hague Tribunal for which indications are that no indictment shall be raised. It is expected that these cases shall be transferred to domestic courts, but whether cases shall be processed in Macedonia and whether Macedonian courts shall declare themselves in charge for furthering the legal procedure, depends on the formulations which shall be used by the Tribunal while returning them. These are the cases concerning: torture of the “Mavrovo” workers, the NLA leadership, stopping the water supplies of the city of Kumanovo, and the disappearing of civilians in the Tetovo area. At least two of them according to Macedonian authorities can be treated as “crimes against humanity”. In the meantime, disappeared civilians have been proclaimed by the Macedonian courts dead, a decision which enables to be opened a legal procedure for persecution of the perpetrators. As the general public showed dissatisfaction of the “unequal approach to the conflict by The Hague”, regarding these four cases, Prime Minister Buckovski stated that “it shall be bad for all citizens of Macedonia, and for all future generations if a distorted picture for all that happened in 2001 is offered”. He showed dissatisfaction for the indictment solely of cases of individuals who were on the side of the regular police and army forces. Recommendation for The Tribunal to proceed on these four cases regarding NLA and raise an indictment came from Amnesty International. If The Tribunal acted differently, Amnesty International stated that “performance of justice shall be seriously under question”.

The Republic of Macedonia has not adopted a law for cooperation with the Hague Tribunal, due to the political calculations regarding the timing for such an issue. The Assembly refused a draft version, suggested by VMRO-DPMNE, arguing that its text is already out of date and inapplicable.

Domestic Corruption Trials

After a longer period of case preparation and after the public critiques directed to the courts by the USA embassy for the cases delay, started one of the trials- the one against Vojo Mihajlovski, former Director of the Health Fund. He and his five collaborators were jointly accused for abuse of their official duties and authorization, while the total damage

to the Fund is estimated to exceed 240 million denars (or 394.000 EUR). Mr. Mihajlovski was appointed for the fund's director during the VMRO-DPMNE government, while investigations for this case commenced after the elections in 2002. Other trials for persons coming from the same party are the trial of the former general manager of the State Electrical Company Lambe Arnaudov and the completed trial of the former director of the media house "Nova Makedonija", Nikola Tasev, who was convicted to four years of imprisonment.

Another speedy case terminated for the former state secretary from the Ministry of Defense Ljubomir Popovski, who is a prominent SDSM member. He was accused for receiving bribery and was convicted to two and a half years of imprisonment.

At the Government's briefing it was said that during the first three months of this year 82 civil servants were caught to have received bribery. The police noted 70 criminal deeds "abuse of professional position and authorization", while the other cases referred to taking bribery.

The "Name" Issue

The unresolved "name" issue has been the topic of discussion during series of meetings in the first several months in 2005, between officials from Greece and Macedonia, mediated by the UN. However, talks have proven to be unfruitful. In his interview for a Greek daily newspaper, President Branko Crvenkoski stated that the New York process has helped in overcoming some prejudices or irrationalities that were present in the past. He commented the double-name formula suggestion the country offers as a convenient solution for a sovereign right of a country to determine on its own its constitutional name on one hand, and to consider the sensitivity of Greece on the other. That offered solution would mean that a common name for communication with Greece should be found, while all the other countries are to address the country by its constitutional name. As signs of good will towards Greece, the President mentioned the changes already introduced in the Macedonian Constitution, the change of the national flag and the readiness to discuss the matter.

Former President Gligorov publicly suggested transferring the "name issue" to the UN Security Council. The argument is that the Republic of Macedonia has established diplomatic relations with about 150 countries, out of which 105 have recognized the country under its constitutional name. Gligorov position is that it is time to estimate and elaborate the possibility to present an official document to the Security Council, containing all relevant arguments. At the same time suggestion is a draft-resolution to be submitted to the UN for the use of the country's constitutional name, calling upon the democratic right of the people to determine its country's name.

In April, assigned UN mediator Ambassador Niemitz "suggested some ideas" about the possible solution of the issue, one of which was "Republic of Macedonia-Skopje". As the Macedonian public and the Government reacted negatively to this suggestion (since it was not clear whether it was just an idea or a formal suggestion), the mediator remained

on his position that it is merely "an idea", as it is expected from him- to offer ideas which will bring a solution of the problem. The suggested idea included the Cyrillic (and not Latin) transcript of the name, which would have been a precedent in the UN, thus associating to a "non-existing name". The Macedonian President and Prime Minister repeated that two positions are not to be abandoned: first, the constitutional name as the only one under which Republic of Macedonia shall communicate in the UN and in the other parts of the world, and second, the most the country may demonstrate is the flexibility to accept conversations with dignity with its neighbor Greece in finding acceptable naming for Macedonia by Greece in the bilateral communication. Consequently, Macedonian officials remained in their position of the "use of double name" as described above.

Later in May by request of the Macedonian government Ambassador Niemitz visited the country "to exchange opinions on the matter" and to be given an official government suggestion. On that occasion Macedonian authorities repeated the double name use as an official position of the state. Niemitz commented on some other possibilities, like the use of two names in the Macedonian constitution, using the example of Greece, since it is called both "Greece" and "Hellenic Republic", ideas that got no support by the Macedonian authorities.

Simultaneously, an amendment have been forwarded to the European Parliament, by the Danish MP Samuelsen in which it was requested by the EU Council to "see whether the moment has come to recognize FYROM under its constitutional name". EU parliamentarians respected their countries' directives and in their majority did not support this suggestion (139 were in favor, 398 against and 26 sustained). It is assumed that MPs did not support this amendment due to the bilateral nature of the problem.

DUI as a party declared that it accepts solely the constitutional name of the country. Opposed to this are the DPA leaders, and especially Arben Dhaferi. On the other hand, the VMRO-DPMNE leader publicly called for a referendum in which shall be reconfirmed the non-changeable character of the constitutional name of the country. This idea was criticized and abandoned by all other political parties.

The Kosovo Border Issue

Although Macedonian Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski visited Kosovo at the beginning of the year and had meetings with all relevant authorities, the Kosovo President Ibrahim Rugova refused to meet with him. Practically, his position on the border issue was the border of Kosovo with Macedonia to be established by an international agreement, by direct communication between Skopje and Pristina, while the frontier to be marked only after an agreement with the Kosovo institutions, UNMIC and KFOR. This position was confronted with the comment by the Macedonian President Mr.Crvenkovski who stated that the border is internationally verified already. All in all, Macedonian authorities do not wish to have this issue included into the negotiation agenda of the Kosovo final status, although such a tendency is felt from the other party. Still, Prime Minister Buckovski met with a delegation of the Albanians living in South Serbia, in order to meet

the population needs for opening new border crossings with Macedonia. To show signs of good will, at the end of February, the Macedonian government opened an economic bureau in Pristina. Previously, participation for the Macedonia-Kosovo border demarcation was asked from Albania as well, as symbolic demarcation was supposed to start from the common border among Macedonia, Albania and Kosovo. For this purpose was announced the formation of a special committee for demarcation, including representatives from UNMIC, Belgrade and Pristina as well. It was agreed that positions of Macedonia, Albania and Monte Negro shall be synchronized at a special meeting to be held next autumn.

The International Crisis Group addressing the Kosovo final status also tackles the issue of border demarcation with Macedonia, stating that “when the border shall be marked, Macedonian authorities shall be relaxed regarding what happens on the other side, because they will know that things shall be resolved in a peaceful way”.

Fact is that UNMIC has difficulties in arranging the border demarcation, due to “not being able to locate a partner to agree with” in the part of the Kosovar authorities. However, initially it was confirmed that demarcation needs to be done before final status negotiations commence. Through the course of the year, UNMIC statements on the issue have been shifting and changing, thus showing differences between the statements of the highest UNMIC representatives as opposed to others working in that organization. These variations were a big point of concern to Macedonian authorities, as the country’s interest is to proceed to higher goals, by finishing the border issue before the final Kosovo status is being resolved.

Another problem that arose was the announcement by the UNMIC authorities for introducing more severe border control of all persons entering the protectorate. UNMIC justified this measure with the need of having “diminishing the maneuvering space of the Balkan criminals”. Still, the type of formalities requested were understood by the Macedonian side, as imposing a visa regime. The President called upon the Government to act reciprocally. Also, together with this measure Kosovar authorities announced that soon a VAT rate shall be imposed on all products imported from Macedonia to Kosovo. Since this issue really is of a serious economic concern of Macedonia (as Macedonia’s export is the highest towards Kosovo), there were many reactions from the Government, experts and the businesses concerned.

In accordance to the planned takeover, Border Police in May took charge on the northern Macedonian border, towards Serbia and Kosovo. This northern line is the longest, it contains six border crossings including the Skopje Airport, and shall be guarded by 1000 border policemen. This is the third border that is gradually handed over from the Ministry of Defense to the authority of the Ministry of Interiors. In September is expected to be handed over the last remaining border towards Albania.

It is interesting to add that in June was officially registered the first party of the ethnic Macedonians living in Albania, named Macedonian Alliance for European Integration.

Public Opinion Polls

Results that follow from the public opinion poll realized by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research at the beginning of February 2005, prior to the local elections campaign, on a nationwide representative sample of 1600 respondents.

Generally speaking, is Macedonia moving in the right or the wrong direction?

Right direction (38%) A- (55%) SDSM- (72%) DUI (61%) DPA (50%)

Wrong direction (39%) M- (48%) VMRO (75%) Narodna (80%)

Don't know (33%)

Speaking on personal terms, do you expect that the quality of life shall change after the decentralization process:

For the better 34% A-53%, SDSM 51%, DUI (62%) DPA (49%)

Shall stay the same 31% DPMNE (39%)

For the worse 19% DPMNE (33%) VMRO-People's Party (49%)

Don't know 16%

Which party list shall you vote for the community council?

SDSM 17.5%

VMRO-DPMNE 12%

LDP 0.80%

LP 0.70%

Third Way 0.80%

VMRO-People's Party 6%

DUI 10%

DPA 6%

PDP 3%

None 5.50%

Independent list 3%

Undecided 22.50%

Shall not vote 13%

To which party belongs the mayor you are going to vote?

SDSM 15%

VMRO-DPMNE 10.5%

LDP 3%

LP 0.70%

Third Way 0.50%

VMRO-People's Party 6%

DUI 10%

DPA 7%

PDP 2%

None 4%

Independent list 8%

Undecided 20%

Shall not vote 13%

Which is the decisive point when voting for a mayor?

His personal qualities 40%

The party he belongs to 13% A-21%

His program 39%

His ethnic affiliation 4%

Other 4%

What do you mostly expect from the future mayor?

Improved infrastructure 33%

Better public services functioning 19%

Stimulating development and investments 37%

More direct communication with the citizens 7%

Other 4%

What shall happen in various areas through the decentralization process?

Area	Shall improve	Shall worsen	Shall not change
Employment	43%	10%	47%
Public enterprises work	56%	6%	38%
Education	41%	10%	49%
Health	40%	14%	46%
Respect of legal urbanistic requirements	44%	14%	42%
Improved tax policy application	50%	10%	40%
Citizen's personal safety	44%	10%	46%
Interethnic relations	35%	14%	51%

Do you expect that these elections shall be fair and democratic?

Yes 48%

No 29%

Don't know 23%

Mark the performance of the Government lead by Vlado Buckovski from 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest)

1 – 27%

2 – 20%

3 – 23%

4 – 13%

5 – 7%

Don't know 10%

Which are the areas in which the Government has shown most success?

Foreign policy	34%
Economy	4% (A-10%)
Defense reforms	10%
Health	1%
Legal system reforms	4%
Social policy	1%
Education	4% (A-17%)
Has not shown success at all	40%
Don't know	2%

The January 2005 poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI), on a sample of 1108 respondents shows that 51% of the polled indicate unemployment as the highest priority problem in the country, while 25% indicate economic problems in general. Regarding the question whether the country is moving in the right or wrong direction, results are the following:

Wrong direction	46%
Right direction	18%
Neither right nor wrong	34%
Don't know	3%

There is a small decline in the “wrong” answers, since October last year, when 51% of the polled replied that Macedonia is moving towards the wrong direction.

About 94% of the polled think that foreign investments are the key element in securing economic growth in Macedonia, while regarding the future perspectives of the country in the economic domain, 36% think that conditions shall worsen, 31% think that they will improve, and 29% think that they shall stay the same. Every second respondent (52%) replied that the economic situation in his/her family has gone worse.

Almost nine out of ten respondents think that closer relations with EU and NATO are a very important issue for Macedonia. NATO membership is supported by 88% of the polled while EU membership by 97%.

The May 2005 poll conducted by the International Republican Institute (IRI), showed that if parliamentary elections were to be held now, the party rating is as follows: SDSM 18%, VMRO-DPMNE 16%, DUI 13%, DPA 4%, VMRO People's Party 4%, Third Way 1%, undecided 17% and shall not vote 19%. Still, citizens of Macedonia are getting more optimistic, since compared to the last poll, presently 23% of the polled think that the country is going to the right direction (5% more than in January). There is large dissatisfaction in regards to the so far process of decentralization (47%), although 62% of the polled are aware that this process is very important in order the country to obtain EU membership in the future.