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Current Events and Political Parties Development in the Republic of Macedonia

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1. Headlines

1.1. Corruption and Other Court Cases

Courts have been one of the areas that have been targeted for significant reform steps, formal aspects of the laws that refer to this area, as well as because they were criticized for the slowness, delays and inefficiency of criminal and corruption trials. Present corruption cases are mostly dealing with previous government (1998-2002) officials, where the accused are coming from the then VMRO-DPMNE party: former director of the Health Fund-Vojo Mihajlovski, former Minister of Defense Ljuben Paunovski, former Director of the National Electrical company Lambe Arnaudov, former director of the Customs Dragan Daravelski etc, all accused for abuse of their official position. General impression is that in all cases the accused are buying time and delaying the final verdict, which is possible due to the court's inefficiencies. At last, in March, the former director of the Health Fund Vojo Mihajlovski was convicted to four years imprisonment for abuse of its official duty and authorization. Other persons involved in this trial that was initiated four years ago (since Mihajlovski's imprisonment in 2002) got from three years to ten months imprisonment. Also, the court brought a decision by which property from legal and physical persons convicted is to be confiscated. This way, the Health Fund shall return about four million EUR. Today, VMRO-People's party position is that these processes are "set up" by the present government and that this is a political pursuit.

The case of Agim Krasniqi (the person who in the last two years proclaimed Kondovo a "free territory", threatening to "blow Skopje in the air", provoking a mini crisis- see previous Barometers) is processed through the courts, but it moves pretty slowly. His trial is postponed for the eleventh time in January. Occasionally, he appears in front of the court and sometimes claims to be ill, or sometimes the second person accused in the case is absent. As he could not be brought in front of the court, it was decided that the case shall proceed without his presence. However, due to these –obviously set up impediments- the case is dragged, while Krasniqi was found on the MP candidate list for DPA in the national elections in July, and won a seat, thus obtaining immunity.

1.2. Hague Tribunal Cases

The four cases from the 2001 conflict which currently are in The Hague (the case of NLA leadership, the Lipkovo damn closure, kidnapped and missing civilians, the molested "Mavrovo" construction workers- see previous Barometers), for which the Court showed no interest in pursuing, shall be returned this autumn in Macedonia. Most probably, priority shall have the cases of kidnapped persons. It is expected that the cases shall bring turbulence in the political life in Macedonia, as it is obvious that various factors differ in their views whether there should be further court processes in the country or not. In fact, various opinions exist about the authority of the domestic courts for these cases. Ethnic Albanian parties claim that domestic courts are not in charge, since there is general amnesty for the former NLA fighters, but Macedonian government claims that courts have the authority to bring back the cases and process them. Ali Ahmeti (DUI) stated that processing these four cases "shall not be in the interest of the security and stability of Macedonia" and that the party shall not support their return to the country. He believes

that these cases fall under the authority of The Hague Tribunal, referring to some ratified agreements, as there is general amnesty of all parties involved in the conflict. Still, unlike other countries of the region deriving from former Yugoslavia, Macedonia does not have a law for cooperation with the Tribunal.

The Minister of Justice Meri Mladenovska and the Public Prosecutor Aleksandar Prcevski, met with the main prosecutor of the Tribunal Carla Del Ponte and agreed that these cases shall be gradually transferred starting from September. It was said that the destiny of the four cases shall be determined by further talks with the representatives of the Macedonian public prosecution and the prosecutors of the Hague Tribunal. As some foreign diplomats expressed doubt about the capacity of the courts to deal with these cases before reforms are realized, the Minister commented that the case transfer shall be performed professionally and that even now courts have the capacity to impartially and competently decide on the matter.

Other than these cases, the Tribunal trial of Ljube Boskovski and Johan Tarculovski is still proceeding.

1.3. Events in Kondovo

During a regular police action for arresting criminals at large, in Kondovo village in March this year, one of them got killed while resisting arrest. It was known that these persons were part of Agim Krasniqi's group. The shot person was accused for using a bomb against policemen a couple of months ago, and wounding two of them. He did not show up in court as requested, as he would have been immediately arrested on basis of the two courts-police wanted circulars already activated for him. Six years ago he was convicted for heavy robberies, and during his first free weekend he escaped from serving his sentence.

As several times before, the arrest of criminals was abused for political purposes, as DPA for this event demanded responsibility (change) from the Minister of Interior, claiming that even criminals have the right for life (as the leader Arben Xhaferi stated). Prime Minister Buckovski's reaction was that the police action was led in accordance with the determined rules and that even though criminals have the right to live, they also do not have the right to threat other person's lives. He added that Kondovo inhabitants should be relieved form the persuasion that their village is a refuge place for any kind of groups or criminals. Also, he appreciated all the efforts DPA was doing for resolving the previous problem with the "fundamentalists" in the village, but he believes that this time DPA did not have the right information. The Ministry of Interior stressed that Kondovo people must understand that the goal of this action were criminal structures, which were to be arrested, since three of them were heavy criminals, against which were pressed charges. As two of them resisted arrest by using arms, the police shot down one and wounded another person.

1.4. Return to the Assembly

In February DPA returned to parliament, after the one year boycott. This parliamentary absence was said to be due to the party's dissatisfaction in local elections process and

outcome, including other reasons (see previous Barometers). Return was achieved after intensive lobbying by the international and foreign diplomats, but also party representatives felt that as national elections are approaching they should start the pre-electoral promotion.

1.5. Decentralization Process

Having in mind all the problems that occur along the decentralization path, it is clear that reforms are hard, complicated and contradictory. What's more, municipalities complain that they have reached complete bankruptcy, as they are not able to take over the transfer of duties, while there is no money for them to be realized. For example, in comparison with the previous year, education funding is decreased by 40%. The duties to mend the schools, to supply them with heating, fuel, to take care of the hygiene are transferred locally, but not the actual money. Also, transfer of authority is very slow for the sport centers, the fire brigades, the data from the Public Revenue Service on taxation and property, the Geodesy Office and the Ministry of Interiors authorizations, and other. Another problem is the surplus number of persons employed in the Ministry of Transport, as it did not make rationalization, so instead of the agreed 220 state employees, the number has remained 296, pushing them all to be employed in the municipalities. To solve the problem, mayors are suggesting to reach a common agreement between ZELS (Association of municipalities), the Government, the Ministry of Transport, the Employment agency, the Agency for state employees and the municipalities.

What's more, ZELS sent a letter to the Government indicating these problems and demanding immediate solution, as some communities are getting significantly more funding than others. Another demand is the government to give building and agricultural land to the local communities for a long-term lease, as every foreign investor would like to make sure that he is able to master the land where he could be located. Due to this demand, the government looks seriously upon the request of construction land in order to assist local development. It is believed that decentralization shall be successful if satisfied are the citizens, but most importantly if the local authorities deliver true service for the citizens, offering quick, good quality and cheap services through democratically elected organs and efficient administration. In spite of everything, is it estimated by all factors involved that the process is moving and difficulties cannot endanger its progress.

1.6. Developments in the Islamic Religious Community

After many perplexities (see previous Barometers) in February the new Skopje mufti was elected (or in fact re-confirmed), as again Tajedin Bislimi, the imam from Grushino village and a professor from the Theological Faculty was elected for the second time. The first time was not considered official and was heavily opposed by the former Skopje Mufti Zenun Berisha. Bislimi was elected by the regular requested majority¹, and his election took further confirmation by the Islamic Religious Community Assembly. After the temporary VD head of the IRC Bahri Aliu signed the murafele document, Bislimi officially took the position as the new Skopje mufti. He took his cabinet (previously mastered by his predecessor) and promised to review the whole documentation. IRC

¹ Out of 181 delegates, Bislimi was supported by 169 persons.

representatives hope that after this election, they can proceed in electing the new Reis-Ulema of the IRC, as a second step for finally resolving the "crisis" this community was in for quite some time. By Bislimi's victory is considered that won the moderate part of the Islamic community in Macedonia.

1.7. Macedonian Orthodox Church – Current Issues

In an effort to overcome the dispute between MOC and SOC, the Russian Patriarch Alexei offered a couple of terms for overcoming the dispute. As the Patriarch Alexei announced that the solution of the problem is in the eventual use of the terms "independent" or "self-managing church", which would help negotiations to get out of the cul-de-sac. He mentioned that there is no general Orthodox consensus on the procedure for obtaining autocephalous status for a church. As this procedure is not clearly defined, there are various approaches and interpretations for it. From his side, the Head of MOC Archbishop Stefan stated that MOC has no intentions to give up its ethnic characteristic or name, as all other churches have it as well, so in order to resolve the church status, MOC should be accepted by the other churches as equal.

As it was announced that the Government has in preparation a new (or revised) law on religious communities, there have been voices that criticized the rigid attitude of MOC towards non-registering other orthodox churches on the Macedonian territory. Publicly given, USA Ambassadors position on the matter for Church is that the principle to have a church and to be able to practice ones religion is a basic fundamental freedom. Therefore it is expected that Macedonia shall be more constructive in the new draft law on religious communities, hoping that new regulations shall be the most liberal, tolerant and without prejudices possible. Although the MOC and the Ministry of foreign affairs reacted, it is obvious that the State Department regards the existence of the Ohrid Archbishopry of Jovan as a fact.

1.8. SDSM - 15 Years Celebration

SDSM (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia) celebrated its 15 years of founding, in which the leader and Prime Minister Buckovski stressed that the party should work hard and show that it has the knowledge, the team and the skills to pull Macedonia forward. "It was not easy from a state that was internationally isolated to become a state which is internationally respected, a state which sets an example for the region". In his speech, the Prime Minister promised another mandate to the current president of the republic Branko Crvenkovski. Transferring the greetings from the Socialist International, the leader of PASOK Jorgos Papandreu stressed that he comes as a neighbor and a friend of the country. "The only way that leads to peace and prosperity of the people in the future is the dialogue and mutual compromise for the name for everybody's benefit, by respecting the democratic principles and the principles of international law. I believe that in the frames of an EU perspective we can find a mutually acceptable solution (meaning the "name issue") which shall reflect the historic and geographic reality of the region" –he stressed.

2. Legal Reform process

2.1. Constitutional Court Decision

The decision of the Constitutional Court to repeal the Law on Members of the parliament (see previous Barometer) which enables them to have a beneficiary length of service (an MP could go to pension with 25 years of service and 55 years of age for men, and 52 for women with having at least two years spent in the Parliament), pensions with up to 80% of the MP salary and daily fees for the Assembly and Committees sessions, raged the MPs. Still, this law in the moment it was voted provoked very intense critiques from the public, so this outcome was highly predictable, as the law was producing inequality in enjoying labor rights among various categories of workforce. The first time the Law passed was voted by all parliamentary groups, but the President of the Republic Branko Crvenkovski refused to sign the decree. Then, MPs dissatisfaction was transferred to him, seeking “to abolish the President’s privileges, since as it is, he is not equal with other citizens”. As the Law was speedily passed for the second time and The President according to the Constitution had no right to deny his signature on the decree, many citizens and various other factors have initiated the issue in front of the Constitutional Court. As the decision was not favorable, MP’s characterized it as “political and pre-electoral populist decision”.

2.2. Criminal and Other Law Amendments under Discussion

In May, experts were disappointed by the latest interference of politics in the criminal prevention policy, claiming that they are tired of commenting the stupidities of the political elites, who are trying to push for solutions convenient to them, without any consultations with relevant experts. All experts criticized the attempt for change of a Criminal law provision, by which is reformulated article 353 regarding the official responsibility. Initiators were the MPs from VMRO-People’s Party, arguing that the existing formulation is too vague, wide, and general, thus opening opportunities for abuse, so all parties are trying to protect themselves from possible criminal indictments for official responsibility breach. Although the Ministry of Justice and the Government had negative opinion on the amendment submitted, the Parliament voted differently. By consequence, the President of the Republic Branko Crvenkovski after expert consultations, refused to sign the decree for this change.

Its first public presentation got the draft Law on conflict of interest. According to the Law’s substance, state officials should be careful regarding the valuable gifts they receive. They shall have the duty to refuse and to declare “improper” suggestions for donations. In the conflict of interest area are included persons close to the decision making officials. The State Committee against corruption shall have authorization to initiate procedure for replacement of the person that breaches this law.

In discussion are corrections of the Penal Law referring to the penalties for slander and offense, which are to be banned from the Law.

The Law on Courts was voted in May through acclamation, by obtaining 89 votes “for” (out of the total 120) and it got support from both position and opposition parties and from all ethnic groups. The greatest novelty in this law is the introduction of an Administrative court, a new Appellate court in Gostivar, as well as the specialization of the two largest courts in the country: Skopje 1 shall work on criminal and Skopje 2 on civil cases. By this law, is completed another European Commission recommendation.

2.3. Law for the Severed Workers

Severed workers organized protests and blockades in several cities throughout the country, putting pressure and lobbying to the Assembly to pass a previously prepared draft. General data show that due to reprogramming are employed about 6300 persons, but from all unemployed categories. Currently, total number of unemployed is 360.000, the number of severed workers who get certain sum of money is 9000, but about 5000 severed workers have 25 years of working experience and have unsolved status. The law was voted in parliament, but wasn't supported by the government, as it was opposed to the policy accepted with IMF. As a consequence, the President did not sign the decree for this law, thus returning it again to the assembly. By this, the government got a chance to fix its relations with IMF, but took obligation to search for a new legal model for taking care of this category. Tensions eased down after Prime Minister Buckovski promised that the government shall prepare a new law for taking care of these workers. Finally, the new draft offers social care to severed workers who have 25 years of working experience and social problems, up till the moment of their reemployment. There is no early retirement and it shall refer only to workers from FESAL 2 arrangement, plus 12 bankrupt firms, but not those individuals coming from private firms. Determining the exact number of beneficiaries is in charge the Ministry of labor and social care. Suggested amendments determine that the right for pension, social and medical care may be achieved by a 57 year old women or 59 year old man, regardless of the years of working experience. By this solution shall not be comprised 17.000 persons² (which were under the unsigned voted bill), but the real number shall be of 8000 persons who in fact fall under this category.

2.4. Law for Police

Due to other priority laws, as the term of this Government ended, the Law on Police was still not voted in the Assembly. As elections were set for July 5th, there wasn't enough time for this law to be passed as well. Simultaneously, rumors say that there have been some discussions between DUI and SDSM regarding part of the solutions present in this law, which were publicly denied by the coalition partners (see previous Barometers). EU High Commissioner for foreign policy and security Xavier Solana expressed dissatisfaction for this Law to be postponed for the next government, as it was seen as one of the pillars of settling relations and balances in the police organization in the country. Still, the SDSM parliamentary group was surprised for the rush, as the obligation according to the EU action partnership for this law to be introduced was set up until October 2006.

² The state is not financially able to support financially the retirement of 17.000 persons.

2.5. DUI demands NLA Fighter's Law

The period prior to elections for the ethnic Albanian parties was a period when they competed in proving who cares most for its pool of voters. Among other things, the five year period from the military conflict in 2001 DUI celebrated it together with the former NLA fighters, by the newly erected tomb-fortress near Selce village. On the occasion Ahmeti stated that “now emotions are rising up towards the direction the daily needs bring. These times are for different goals, those built through a University”. His uncle, Fazli Veliu later commented that “what happened in Macedonia in 2001 was a continuation of the Kosovo events. Our goal here was to locate ourselves on the political scene and to promote our requests for constitutional change and for change of the up to then ideas that were different than the current ones.” In this line of thinking, DUI requested a special Law for providing pensions for the former NLA fighters from Macedonia, as well as introducing a law on the official use of languages (these laws are not a Framework Agreement obligation). Prime Minister Buckovski stated that this is not the right moment for introducing such a law: “After the elections, for all those who have been subdued to damage in the 2001 conflict, not only the disabled but also for members of the narrower families of the killed should be found ways the state to help them for a certain period of time. We agreed with Mr. Ahmeti that now it is not the time for any new law which will equalize the defenders of the state and the former NLA fighters.”

2.6. DPA Legal Initiative

At the beginning of the year, DPA submitted to the assembly a new law suggesting the foreigners-applicants for Macedonian citizenship to be able to obtain the citizenship if they master the Macedonian or the language that is spoken by 20% of the country's inhabitants (meaning the Albanian language). The argument was that the Albanian language being the official language of the state, should have the same treatment as the Macedonian. The Government replied that the official use of the language spoken by 20% of the inhabitants is used while issuing official personal documents, in the organs of the state power and in the municipalities. At the same time, DPA's suggestion signifies change in the conditions of obtaining Macedonian citizenship which are provided for foreigners, and not for the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. Foreigners here enjoy rights and freedoms guaranteed by the state, under conditions determined by law and international treaties. That is why, change of the provisions set shall mean breach of the constitutional principle of equality, as citizenship does not signify ethnic background, but a relationship between the individual and Republic of Macedonia as a state.

2.7. Law for Public Gatherings

In response to the wild protests and street blockades against the privatization of part of the National Electrical Company the Assembly introduced a Law for regulating public gatherings and in which is determined in which locations gatherings are to be allowed. Opposition criticized this law, claiming that timing is wrong, as the law intends to forbid citizen's protests which are aimed to show the current dissatisfaction against the government policy in many areas, especially regarding privatization of the National Electric Company, protests of the tobacco producers and the severed workers, people who are requesting social care etc. As this draft was subdued by SDSM MPs, they

explained that this law is only trying to regulate the relation between the citizens' free right for protest and the constitutional provision that allows all citizens to freely move around in all country's territory, claiming that presently the second right has been violated, due to the continuous blockades for various reasons. These MPs criticized the blockades of international roads, and are of an opinion that protests must not be organized in front of schools, hospitals etc.

3. International / Regional Issues

3.1. EU and NATO Integration Processes

It is clear that candidate status is not sufficient for Macedonia to start membership negotiations, as for reaching the negotiations point there should be a satisfactory level of harmonization with the Copenhagen criteria-both political and economic. Brussels estimations are that Macedonia shall need at least two years until it starts to use the aid aimed for candidate status. Also, candidate status obtained by Macedonia in December last year does not automatically mean that the total sum for aid for the country is increased, but it means that a new phase of cooperation is starting, primarily putting emphasis on the more intense political dialogue and the economic relations.

In February, Macedonia accessed CEFTA (Agreement for Central Europe free trade). This agreement is expected to boost the free trade of the countries of Central Europe (including West Balkan), as the market in question is including about 20 million people, while agreements previously signed with Bulgaria, Croatia and Romania shall cease to be applied. If desired, here may join for example Ukraine, Moldavia or Byelorussia. Preconditions are for a country to be a member of WTO and to be an EU associate member (to have Stabilization and association agreement signed). Other than Croatia and Macedonia, these preconditions are fulfilled by Albania as well. The idea is stimulated by the European Union, as one of the new measures for integration of the region into EU by countries which are advised to form a common trade union. Goal is to establish better economic trend and stabilization in the region, as well as inclusion of parts of the Balkans that were rather isolated up to now, like Kosovo for example. There is hope that political effects shall be even bigger, as the region is expected to constantly cooperate, in order to allow the functioning of a multilateral agreement. Balkans may be widely seen as one zone, instead of a group of many states, so EU hopes that interest in this region shall be increased.

In spite of supporting the idea of enhancing regional cooperation, Macedonia fears of a new regional frame in the EU accession process, which would practically mean a step back in the country's accession. Macedonians view this possibility as a retrograde process for the country, as Macedonia is trying to break away from the regional progress inconsistencies. Seen from the other side the European Union should maintain its credibility towards the countries and endure in its promises.

Another big problem that Macedonian citizens are facing for years is the process of obtaining visas for the EU countries. Estimations are that 10 million EUR are spent for

visas, from them are demanded many documents which are never a guarantee that visa shall be obtained, while the process is characterized as “disgraceful”. Most visas are issued for Greece (in 2004- 114.00 visas and in 2005 - 90.000, then follows Germany- 15.834) The Commissar for Enlargement Mr. Olli Rehn stated that for alleviating the visa regime EU demands many obligations, but also it must deliver, and not only enhance expectations.

Foreign Minister Ilinka Mitreva addressed the foreign EU ministers to speed up relevant measures for liberalization of the visa regime from the countries of the region. She suggested for each country to have individual directions for the visa regime, through which shall be eased at first and then liberalized. She suggested facilitation of the visa regime for students and researchers, sportsmen, culture workers and truck drivers. It was asked more scholarships for the Balkan students, as well as a non-visa regime for the border area communication. Efforts are “to simplify the procedure and to be with more dignity for the person seeking for visa, to tend for multiple entries and to have longer term visas”. As visa liberalization demands introducing new passports, this shall be resolved in autumn, when the first new passports shall be issued. The other two conditions which are signing readmission agreements with all EU member-countries and integration border management, Macedonian authorities claim that are not a problem. Readmission agreements so far have been signed with nine countries, while with other six countries such agreements shall not be signed, as these countries feel that there is no need for that.

As from October 2006 the Macedonian army shall be completely professionalized, while the compulsory army service shall be abolished. This year’s April class of recruits shall be the last one. Instead, shall exist a voluntary three-month intensive training for persons of both genders up to the 26 years of age. These persons shall fill in the continuous exchange of professional soldiers. Macedonian Defense Minister Manasijevski stated that main goal of the transformation of the Macedonian Army is reaching a certain level of interoperability. As best prove is the country’s participation in the NATO missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The assistant to the NATO General Secretary estimated that Macedonia has achieved great advancement in realization of the goals set, and by that made another very significant step towards the final goal-NATO membership. On the occasion was said that in the Riga summit Macedonia shall be greeted for its progress, as well as Albania and Croatia. On the conference for transformation of the North-Atlantic Alliance in March, it was stated that “for Macedonia there is place in the transformed NATO”, adding that “it mostly depends on Macedonia whether it wants to become part of NATO, by fulfilling the set up standards”.

3.2. The Border Issue with Kosovo

The still pending issue of border demarcation along the Kosovo and Macedonia line produces restlessness especially from the Macedonian side. In spite of the encouraging confirmations coming from the international factors involved, occasional statements or

positions issues from various Albanian political circles brings suspicion and impatience among Macedonians, feeling that “it’s not over till is over”.

Fatmir Sejdiu, Ibrahim Rugova's elected successor stated that the border issue is the only open issue between Macedonia and Kosovo. His argument is that in 2001 the agreement has been signed by incompetent parties, as Serbia was not in a position to decide on the border issue, because since 1999 Kosovo became the interest of the international community. He was careful in not mixing the desires of Kosovars for independence with the ideas of Greater Albania which idea -he believes- derive from non-Albanians, stressing that the Balkans are tired from big ideas like greater Serbia, greater Macedonia, or greater Albania or Kosovo.

In spring, after the meeting of DPA representatives with the Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku, he stated that he is obliged to respect the resolution of the Kosovo parliament by which is rejected the agreement between Macedonia and Serbia and Montenegro regarding the border and that he shall not discuss the matter unless the other side explicitly insists. However the next day, due to reactions, the Cabinet spoke in a more careful language, stressing that it is very important to have good relations with Macedonia. Ceku said that demarcation may be opened in a more adequate moment, as Prishtina has other priority questions. Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski stated that the Kosovo government has no legitimacy, and obviously no will to be the main factor to perform the border demarcation. His position is that as Macedonia has an internationally valid agreement signed in Belgrade and submitted to the UN, the country has no interest to negotiate again with anyone, since the border is not administrative, but international. VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski commented that demarcation must be performed as soon as possible, as the opposite is used as an instrument for solving the final status of Kosovo.

In April the special US envoy for Kosovo Ambassador Franck Visner visited Macedonia. On this visit he agreed with the Macedonian President Branko Crvenkovski that the Macedonian border with Kosovo should be marked before the decision for its final status is to be brought and that “there is a valid international bilateral agreement” for this matter.

After some hesitations and unofficial signals, in May, the Kosovo Prime Minister Agim Ceku and the Macedonian Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski had a joint meeting, in the effort to harmonize the positions regarding the border issue. They both stated that it is a technical issue, and that shall not be a problem which shall influence good relations between Skopje and Prishtina. However, they evidently ignored the agreement with Serbia and Montenegro, referring to the former SFRJ administrative border. “After the talks with the Kosovo Prime Minister and yesterday’s declaration in the name of all political parties, it is clear that the border demarcation is not a political, but a technical question” – said Buckovski. “No Kosovo politician in any moment wanted to question the former administrative border, or if you want the state border between Macedonia and Kosovo” [...] ”the administrative border from former Yugoslavia shall be the border which will be marked when from the other side we shall have a partner with international

legitimacy to do it"- he added. He mentioned that domestic experts and cartographers from USA are already working on the technical details. Agim Ceku added that the position is very clear: "we start from the principle that there is no change of borders, which is the principle of the Contact group, which we entirely support". Buckovski repeated that "yesterday's declaration of the Kosovo authorities and to all political parties shows clearly expressed will for the non-change of borders to be the basic principle for demarcation".

A Macedonian expert, who was included in negotiations with Serbia and Montenegro for the border agreement, states that there is no actual territory around Debalde which is questionable and those reactions of villagers are unfounded. According to him, Macedonia has got an interstate agreement for the border and that all alternatives for demarcation that come out of this frame shall not benefit Macedonia and shall complicate the situation. This expert thinks that the term administrative border is hard to define, as it comprises not only borders that existed between the former Yugoslav republics, but also the municipal and village borders which sometimes were not even defined properly or were non-existing. According to him, the agreement signed with Serbia and Montenegro enables the Kosovars to work on their fields up to 15 kilometers in Macedonian territory, and this provision together with opening new border crossings and eight more border points for transit is a subject for which Prishtina did not wish to discuss so far. American experts, who analyzed the agreement with Serbia and Montenegro, determined that there were 360 changes of the new in comparison with the administrative border, but their final estimation was that these solutions were imposed by the logic of the terrain and the need to ease the access to their property by the local inhabitants.

Significant nervousness in Macedonia caused the comment of the Albanian minister of foreign affairs Besnik Mustafaj at a debate TV program at the ALSAT TV. Commenting the possible Kosovo independence he said that "if Kosovo breaks out (or divides –in another meaning of the word), we can no longer guarantee the non-changing of the borders, not only towards Albania but also towards the Albanian part of Macedonia". As a reaction, the Macedonian political leadership was mobilized, objecting the ambiguous statement of the Albanian Minister. The Macedonian Foreign Minister Mitreva communicated with her colleague and asked him how it is possible Albania to give guarantees for the borders of another country, reminding Mr. Mustafaj that Macedonia is a unitary state and that one cannot speak of Albanian or Macedonian parts. She also repeated that Macedonia absolutely respects and supports the positions of the international community, the EU, and the Contact group, whose position is that the next Kosovo status cannot be on basis of its division, that it cannot be talk about change of borders nor for Kosovo to join to territories of other states or parts of other countries to Kosovo. Albanian opposition in Tirana accused Mustafaj for his statement. The Socialist party called it irresponsible, "seriously damaging the country's image, bearing extreme nationalism and nurturing extremism". It also added that this statement shall seriously harm the positions of the Kosovo Albanians negotiating team in Vienna for the future Kosovo status.

3.3. The “Name Issue”

At the beginning of the year, there have been informal meetings by emissaries, exchange of opinions and diplomatic correspondence between Macedonia and Greece. Media were speculating that the two sides communicate in order to find a solution for the name issue and to finally close it. Officially, both sides state that their positions remain unchanged. Also, both sides have a “gentlemen’s” agreement not to open this issue during election years in both countries, which would mean that this year the issue will not show progress, as Macedonia had its elections in July, while Greece has upcoming local elections in October. The Greek side constantly reminds that final solution should be a "mutually accepted one". In the auspices of the "silent diplomacy" is passed the latest possibility from January 1st this year for seasonal workers for Macedonia to be able to legally reside and work in Greece. Also, a new Greek consulate is opened in Bitola.

The Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakogianni stated that the “name issue” is something for which the Greek foreign policy is subdued to critics, so she is not hiding that she would prefer to solve the issue on a mutually acceptable way, in a direction which would contribute to the regional stability, as Greece would like to see the country independent and stable. She also estimated the Macedonian foreign policy as “continuous complete refusal of any effort to find a commonly acceptable solution”, characterizing it as a mistaken policy, since “FYROM same as Athens has a duty to seek a commonly acceptable solution”. The Macedonian side is generally abstaining from any comment.

4. Economic and Social Trends

4.1. National Economy and its Problems

Other protests and blockades were organized by the tobacco producers for a higher buy-out tobacco price and the vine producers for the grapes already collected by the private winery owner Sveto Janevski, but which were not refunded yet. After several negotiations with the government, tobacco producers finally agreed on a raised price for the tobacco buy-out process and generally calmed down, although some tried to prolong the dissatisfaction atmosphere. As for the grapes buy-out, again the government intervened with a certain sum that covered the demands.

Another potential “fire” was eased down, as the government and SONK (Education Trade Union) agreed on the lowest salary raise of the employed in education, kindergartens, science and culture. The raise is agreed on 12%, which shall be completed gradually in the next months.

The Macedonian National Report on Competition concluded that in order to improve the domestic economic competition, macroeconomic stability does not suffice, as also structural reforms are needed as well. Although reforms have not been finalized yet, the macroeconomic environment quality got an improved index, while technology index drastically fell. Quality and efficiency of the public institutions are estimated to have

minimal improvement, which does not suffice to influence the economy. Out of 117 countries regarding competition Macedonia is on the 85th position.

4.2. Economic Trends

In 2005 the year closed with an average growth of 4%. Domestic experts believe that the only way to cope with the 37% unemployment Macedonia must have at least 6-7% of growth annually. In 2005, foreign investments were very low, amounting to 97,07 million USD. This figure presents a fall of 37,7% from the year before. Largest investors were the Italians (16,2 million USD), Russians (15,3 million USD), the Swiss (15,2 million USD), Austrians (13,3 millions USD) etc. Mostly investments were in mining, trade and banks. 2006 was also having very poor foreign investments performance (only 11 million USD for the first two months), not including the National Electrical company privatization, which shall significantly change the picture. In comparison with the year before, in 2006 there is a 32,7% fall. Bank loans interest has fallen by 4%, now varying from 8,5% to 13,5%. Macedonian average monthly salary is 220 EUR.

According to the new credit rating, Macedonia is doing pretty well, since the agency “Standard and Pures” confirmed the already obtained BB+ credit rating with a stable look for foreign currency and BBB- with a stable look for domestic currency. This rating is due to the improvement of the political stability, reforms continuity, economic growth, prudent fiscal policy and decrease of public debt. Unfavorable are the problems inside the workforce market and the corruption in the lower levels of institutions where business should be operationalized.

The Deputy General Director of IMF stated that “the economic effect of Macedonia is encouraging”. He estimated that in the country there is steady growth, low inflation, fall of the unemployment rate and significant improvements of the balance-of-payment. According to him, fiscal discipline, careful monetary policy and the structural reforms, together with the EU candidate status, should assist to increase trust and lower interest rates, which shall put Macedonia in a speeded up economic growth.

After the May control IMF mission, which coincided with the preelection period, IMF representatives reacted on some government promises which are going out of the projected budget structure for the current year. The appeal to the government is to be careful and not to use budget money for the campaign. In that sense IMF representatives thought that increase of tobacco subventions, by which the budget is burdened with new 13 million EUR, the increase of the salaries of the people working in the health domain by 10%, as well as giving benefits to the severed workers of 4.450 denars, shall have negative impact upon the obligations taken, according to the budget structure. Critiques were given to other parties as well, who in their programs suggest tax decrease (VMRO-DPMNE).

As registration system was one of the tasks determined by EU, from January 1st started the one-stop-shop registration system in Macedonia. Foreign firms wishing to register now may do so by a much shortened procedure, within five to seven days from application submission to registration. It is considered that this office together with

branch offices (starting from February, in total 30) throughout Macedonia shall improve the investment climate in the country, as it is lifting bureaucratic and long administrative barriers foreigners were facing while trying to invest in Macedonia. The Central Register shall take some authorities from the courts and the State Statistical Bureau and shall have a two-way communication with commercial banks and the Public Revenue Office. Registration form is to be taken from the web site, filled in and submitted to the local branch of this institution.

Prime Minister Buckovski in Kumanovo promoted the pilot project electronic cadastre, which shall in the future function according to modern EU practices. Efficient and quick procedures through transaction of the immobile property shall be first and foremost for the citizen's benefit.

4.3. Economy/Development Programs for Macedonia

The World Bank signed a 25 million USD loan with MEPSO (Macedonian electric transfer system operator) for development of the energy system of the country and for improvement of its functionality, security and supply. According to the WB, development of the energy sector in South-East Europe is a very significant issue in the moment, since there are indications that in the future there shall be problems due to the lack of energy, not only in Macedonia, but worldwide.

World Bank prepares a new four year support program for Macedonia for the period 2007-2010. Strategy is adjusted to the country's needs for the process of EU integration, as a candidate country and is a continuation of the three-year strategy finishing this year in which shall be spent all planned 165 million USD. Basic pillars of the new program shall be: restructuring of the agricultural sector and strengthening of its supporting institutions, environment protection, work with the local communities and the regions, (in order to be able to absorb the EU funds available) economic development, unemployment and poverty decrease. The Chief of WB mission, Mrs. Blumenkamp stressed that "it is a fact that the road ahead of Macedonia is more foreseeable compared to the other countries in the region".

Chief of World Bank mission Bruce Courtney stated that it is better that Macedonian economy is growing slowly but steadily, instead of having high growth rate which shall not be sustainable. "Four percent growth which has been achieved is not low and we should be satisfied, and it is sustainable"- he commented. He was also happy to see that the government endures on its reform course, regardless if this is an election year.

IPA funds (EU pre-accession funds) shall be opened for Macedonia starting from January 1st 2007. They are planned to refer to institution building, regional and border cooperation, rural development and agriculture, structural funds and human resources. It is up to the country to offer good quality projects in order to pull all the money available for it, as for next year are planned 42 million EUR.

AMBO pipeline project is proceeding very slowly, as some processes but also fundraising are dragged on. Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania have not yet finished the

engineer, geological and archeological research, while the Albanian government does not prefer 90% of the raw oil from AMBO is planned to arrive in Valona as the end destination port, idea which for the American investor is not acceptable. Still, Americans do not intend to pull out of this endeavor, as AMBO has not lost its significance, as the other three Balkan pipelines are in fact not competing with each other, as they are aimed for different markets. The pipeline is planned to be 914 kilometers long, to pass through Bulgaria, Macedonia and Albania and to be constructed in 3,5 years. Prime Minister Buckovski commented that Macedonia in the near future has chances to become geostrategic factor and leader of the region's integration in EU if one has in mind that through its territory shall pass strategic energetic and traffic projects which shall transit from the Caspian basin to West and South Europe.

4.4. National Electrical Company Privatization

During the first half of the year, the Government proceeded with privatization of the distribution part of the National Electrical Company. For gaining public support, the government issued flyers explaining what does the electro energetic system of Macedonia mean, why and what part of it is privatized, what will happen with the persons employed. It also explained how the price of electricity shall be formed, and why the new owner shall not be able to seek raise of the price of the electricity unjustifiably. It also stressed the improved quality of service that shall come out of it and the transparency of the whole process.

Still, protests for the privatization started and followed the whole process. The civic organization "Voice of the Light" continuously organized protests by blocking all major streets in the Skopje center, but also blocking roads throughout major cities in the country. Blockades made circulation very difficult and enraged many citizens, while on the other hand the organization stubbornly requested the privatization process to stop, refusing talks with the Minister of Economy and requesting to meet only with the Prime Minister, which talks would be exclusively in the direction of the Government stopping the privatization process. Arguments were that the electricity price shall be raised, and that hydro-power plants are to be sold in the process, which is unacceptable. On the other hand the Government justifies this move by a different reasoning, claiming that the price of electricity shall be raised unavoidably in the future, regardless who owns the company and that presently it is sold the power distribution net, which is to be modernized. "Voice of Light" activists were stubborn and continued to directly condition the Government and the Prime Minister. On the other hand, SDSM representatives claimed that this organization is discretely supported by VMRO-DPMNE (as some protested were identified as the party's activists) and that even protesters were paid to protest. Mr. Buckovski stated that "this is an introduction into political destabilization of the country, stimulated by the opposition".

However, domestic energy experts are reacting on the solutions that are to be adopted in the new draft law on energy. They mind that only one company shall be licensed in charge for managing, organization and distribution of electricity, as in this way there shall be no market liberalization, but only transferring the monopoly from state to private hands. Suggestions are to be licensed other companies as well, so competition shall be

secured³. They also complained about the high competitions of the Regulatory committee for energy, which shall have exclusive right to issue licenses and control the work of the company that works on electricity distribution. This way, fear is that the provider may show higher expenses, thus asking unfounded raise of electricity price. Major dispute is also where the money shall be invested after the privatization of the National Electrical Company distribution system. As things stand, this shall be the concern of the next government.

Finally, as chosen, based on the bidding procedures, the Austrian firm EVN became the new owner of ESM "Distribution". It is agreed that purchase contract is not to be publicly presented, but the document shall be offered to be looked at by persons in charge coming from state institutions. This was the final negotiated position, because EVN opposed the idea, as the firm felt that by publicly shown details of the contract may have negative effect on the firm's business strategy.

4.5. Health Sector Reforms

Although criticized for being particularly slow, health reforms are gradually taking place. Health service package, which is guaranteed on basis of the contributions obtained, is going to be shortened. Same goes with the medicaments list covered by the state. Up to now is introduced control on the work of health institutions and in the public acquisitions, while directors of health institutions are disciplined through expenditures reporting. Most importantly, a consensus has been reached regarding how health service is going to be covered by the budget. In the future shall be applied the institution "family doctor", who shall represent the primary health service level, and who will cover health needs of all members of the family. After dentistry and pharmacy, general practice offices shall be given under concession to the doctors they work in them. Doctors shall be paid by capitation, which means by number of insured who are in their files. Ordinations shall be hired by gynecologists and pediatricians. By this autumn it is planned for about 10.000 employed in the sector to get into the concession process. By renting the working premises doctors shall be transferred to a new way of payment, according to the number of insured persons (capitation), while for the patients there shall be no change on the service. Examination at their doctor shall be for free, while participation shall be paid for injection therapy. Other than general practitioners, offices shall be rented by gynecologists and pediatricians, who also will need a certain number of patients in order to survive in the economic sense. Privatization shall not be applied for: the emergency service, the domestic medical visit, patronage nurses, doctors working on prevention and those employed in the children's counseling services.

As currently are in preparation the new personal documents of the citizens, the idea of the Minister of Health is in the IDs chip to be included the health insurance. It is believed that this solution shall save the expenses of making another, special health card for every citizen.

³ Bulgaria is given as an example for this.

Pharmacies are sold, in a public stock market auction, as a combination of shares of the persons who worked there and private investors. Skopje pharmacies were sold for 13 million EUR, by a previously created domestic consortium, who intends to keep all the employees and the Macedonian brand. New owners got 75% from the capital, while the remaining 25% belong to the persons employed in the pharmacies.

5. Parliamentary Elections

5.1. Elections as a Party Catalyst

It may be noticed that the process of fragmentation of the Macedonian party system is very dynamic and not yet terminated. Although showing up of new actors in the political scene is usually frequent before elections, still impression is that this process is equally interesting before and after the elections. These regroupings and frequent transfers of MPs from one party to another determine very different Assembly composition at the beginning of its constitution up till the moment of starting the elections. Shifts of this kind may not be explained as ideological differences within the parties, or by conquering a new ideological area not yet covered in the left/right party scale. Instead, impression is that personal disagreements and rows between party colleagues are solved by this manner. Of course, this is due to the highly centralized party discipline, or the absence of readiness to democratize internal party relations. In total, about 80 political parties are currently registered at the courts. The previous list had 40 parties which are deleted, as they did not renew their registration.

As a result of these processes, other than the already known bigger players, the following “new” parties participated: DRUM (leader Goran Rafajlovski), Agricultural Party (leader- Marijan Gjorcev), VMRO-People’s Party (informal leader- Ljupco Georgievski), New Social-Democratic Party (leader- Tito Petkovski) and DOM (leader- Liljana Popovska). Excluded from the rule is the Party for Economic Renewal (PEO, leader Velija Ramkovski), which is not connected nor pulled out of the already established parties. The Party for European Future (leader Fijat Asanovski) is formed by Macedonians of Islamic religion, since according to its leader existing parties do not express their interest and needs. In the period of agreeing the preelection coalitions, although there were some negotiations with the bigger parties, still all these parties competed alone, leaving space for post-election coalitioning. Practically, all analysts due to the relatively bad party rating were focused on post-election coalitions as a necessary precondition for forming a relevant parliamentary majority which shall be able to elect the new government. In that sense, expected coalition was VMRO-DPMNE, DPA and VMRO-NP, as the block of right wing parties, while on the other side were mentioned SDSM, DUI and NSDP. Of course, as these combinations depended on the post-election maneuvering, it all stays in the grey area of probabilities.

5.2. SDSM and Coalition Partners

The Social-Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) ahead with Vlado Buckovski and its partners (Liberal-Democratic Party, Democratic Party of the Serbs, Democratic Party

of the Turks, Roma party, Bosniac party, VMRO-Macedonian) competed under the motto “Macedonia forward, not backward”. Rafet Muminovich, leader of the Democratic League of the Bosniacs, who was in coalition with SDSM in 2002, was dissatisfied with this election’s offer, so he joined Ali Ahmeti’s DUI, same as PDP.

As expected, the status of a party on power determined the election program concept. The accent is given for the results achieved, explained in “50 most important achievements”: USA recognized Macedonia under its constitutional name; established diplomatic relations with 114 countries under its constitutional name; efficient judiciary through constitutional reforms and series of laws in the area of the judicial system; high education with three state and four private universities; successfully terminated decentralization process; obtaining second pension pillar; doubled annual export, which in 2005 is over 2 billion USD, etc. The coalition “For Macedonia Together” plans to invest one billion Euros in projects for the needs of the country’s energy system, as well as in roads, which shall be realized from 2006 to 2010. Buckovski announced that the campaign lies on the three “E”- economy, education and EU-integration. SDSM in the future mandate promised to realize: commencing and successful termination of negotiations for EU membership; GDP growth of 5-6% annually; decrease of the taxes in addition to the salaries; stable, peaceful and safe Macedonia; additional 23 million EUR annually for agriculture; traveling to EU without visas; Macedonia to become a NATO member; efficient judiciary and procedural speed up of the trials; increase of the money for science and research to 1% of GDP; pensions growth for 10%; increase of salaries of the administration and security forces for 12%; introducing health electronic card for everyone.

Buckovski and Tupurkovski officially met and discussed about the possibility of bringing in the country the former DA business partners, announced a possible party cooperation after the elections, as DA hopes to win a seat or two, which might be proven decisive for the coalition formation. However, election results for DA were so devastating, that Mr. Tupurkovski after the elections publicly resigned from his political activities.

5.3. VMRO-DPMNE and Coalition Partners

VMRO-DPMNE promoted a program called “renaissance in 100 steps”, an ambitious and rich by content program, which points out the numerous priorities for which the party shall strive in the next four years period. “Unlikely the empty promises and the vague demagoguery phrases that they shall take us to Europe, our program contains concrete projects, figures, terms and steps and we know exactly what we should do and how to achieve results”- the leader Nikola Gruevski stated. He stressed that this program is determined by the need of a new Macedonian breakthrough, which means complete renewal of its internal vitality. For something like this VMRO-DPMNE and Macedonia have strength, to start with big steps ahead. This is how the party slogan was created: “Macedonia has strength”. In short- democratic, economically strong and socially just country, integrated in EU is the VMRO-DPMNE vision for the next four years. This goal they intend to achieve by economic turnaround, and unemployment decrease, GDP growth of 6 to 8% annually, competitiveness increase, attracting foreign investments, transparent rule and struggle against corruption. Polemics were caused by their idea to

introduce a unified flat tax rate, which shall depend on the salary level up to 2007 and shall be 12%, and by January 2008- 10%, as well as decrease of VAT for agricultural repro materials from 18% to 5%, non-taxation of the reinvested money. According to this party, Macedonia shall be the country with the lowest taxes regionally. At the same time public expenditure is to be decreased (up to 2% of GDP in 2010), achieving efficient state administration, its complete depolitization and professionalization. This party announced struggle against gray economy and draconic measures for all those working illegally. Two ministers without portefeuille shall be appointed to the new government to focus only on attracting foreign investment. The party promises a highway built from the Bulgarian to the Albanian border, better roads from Veles to Strumica and from Resen to Ohrid, as well as railway from Kumanovo to the border with Bulgaria, as well as electing a third mobile operator within 60 days of the new government.

This time, VMRO-DPMNE is in coalition with the Liberal Party (leader Stojan Andov), Socialist Party (leader- Ljubosav Ivanov – Zingo), Democratic Union (leader-Pavle Trajanov), Bosniac Democratic Party (leader Alija Shahich), while in the party melted the party of Boris Zmejkovski and Tomislav Stefkovski and their supporters. Dragisha Miletich (Democratic Party of Orthodox unity of Serbs and Macedonians) who was with Zmejkovski four years, now has his own party list bearing a changed name- Radical Party of the Serbs in Macedonia. In this party coalition joined three Roma parties as well, dissatisfied with the work of the so far government.

VMRO-DPMNE found it especially hard to compose the party lists, especially when in question the winning seats, since its coalition partners (with an accent to the Liberal party and the Socialist party), rich businessman and other interested parties were asking more than the party was ready to offer. Common language was not at all found with Marijan Gjorcev's Agricultural party and Liljana Popovska's DOM, who competed alone.

5.4. Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA)

This year, DPA's name of the campaign was "We trust". This party, even before election started, secured the support of Bali Kombtar from Albania. On the preelection convention at the end of May, Menduh Thaci announced the change of Albanian surnames which end up on "ski" or "ov", since according to him this was the result of the assimilation process and that tendency is still present. There, were presented the candidates and the party program. Thaci promised that the party shall bring laws regarding the killed NLA fighters and rehabilitate the war invalids. According to him, eliminating the 2001 crisis consequences has a substantial meaning for Macedonian stability. Again, iconography was like in previous elections, remained the same, using symbols that are not identified with the Macedonian state (only Albanian and party flags were in use)⁴, and only the Albanian national anthem was played. It was considered as a provocation the promotion of "trouble makers" linked to the past events (see previous Barometers), like Agim Krasniqi from Kondovo and Daut Rexhepi Leka. For Leka is issued a wanted circular for crimes against civilians, while for Krasniqi the legal trial for terrorism is still going on. Still, according to the election law these persons are not yet convicted, which enables

⁴ It may be noticed that were not respected the provisions of the law for use of flags.

them to run for candidates. DPA's program this time has a reform agenda, where the accent is put on economy and improvement of the living standard of citizens, but also contains solutions for complete implementation of the Framework Agreement. For this party, the issue of Albanian language use and the flag are still opened.

5.5. Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)

DUI's leader is Ali Ahmeti and the election motto is "We have courage to change our history and reality". While promoting its election program, DUI states as basic the principles that promote freedom, equality and solidarity as political, human and moral values of a modern and democratic party. Still, impression is that the narrower, "ethnic" interest is still predominant into the party priorities. Enumerating the reasons why a voter should vote for DUI, it is mentioned: in the integration area DUI believes that it secured the status of a country-candidate for EU so it shall continue to work in that direction, including integration into NATO as well; free movement without visas in Europe; took the largest responsibility burden for the Framework Agreement implementation and changed the concept of the state and for that reason has the credibility to continue the reforms in the area of public administration, judiciary, civil society etc; supports an economic program which promotes equal opportunities for everyone (speeded up economic development, new employments, tax decrease); further strengthening of local power and stimulating the decentralization process; focusing on the Albanian national history (building a monument to Skender Beg, renovating Mother Tereza's house, renovating the memorial house of the Albanian alphabet in Bitola, building a museum for NLA, building memorial monuments dedicated to the freedom fighters, introducing institutionalized care for the fallen fighters and war invalids); other than founding a university on Albanian language, DUI binds itself to found adequate scientific institutions and to increase the quality of the university education.

Before the elections, constructive comments were given on other matters, as for example on Arben Xhaferi's statement for "uniting all Albanian territories". Ali Ahmeti counter-stated that "he is upsetting citizens and international centers of decision-making, while these words are empty. Lets not start making grater Albania and finish who-knows-where, on a zero level. Let's make grater Europe, let's eliminate borders".

5.6. VMRO-People's Party

This party's formal leader is Vesna Janevska and the shadow leader is Ljupco Georgievski, the former Prime Minister from 1998-2002. Party motto is "We were and we shall be" and "Future instead of Destiny". These slogans are a metaphor of the rule of Ljupco Georgievski as opposed to Branko Crvenkovski. This party reminded the voters comparatively: "when did you live better? During Buckovski's or all SDSM governments' time or those four years during Ljupco Georgievski government?" Pre-electoral promises are the following: in three months shall be solved the problem of farmers, as this party shall dedicate not today's 8 million EUR, but 40 million EUR from the budget; in three months shall solve the problem of severed workers with a law for pension or permanent remuneration for those who have over 25 years of service; social aid liberalization; stimulating the construction economic branch; health and education reforms; unemployment decrease from 38% to 20%.

As the media and opposition parties, mainly VMRO-DPMNE, during the last year were constantly pushing for early elections, Gruevski's opponent, the informal leader of VMRO-People's Party Ljupco Georgievski viewed it differently. In his interview⁵ he addressed his eternal rival, the present President of the Republic Branko Crvenkovski. He considered unacceptable Crvenkovski's position to tend to promote a "clean" attitude regarding responsibilities that lie to the present ruling coalition, while "Buckovski is to blame for everything". Georgievski believed that the problem SDSM has today is owed to Crvenkovski and not to Buckovski, as Crvenkovski escaped responsibility by becoming President of the Republic from Prime-minister and now he wants to control the government. Non-supportive for early elections, Georgievski said that there are still many citizens in Macedonia who wait for SDSM to do something for Macedonia, and he wants them to be disappointed to prove that they are not right. That is why, SDSM should be left to finish its mandate undisturbed, in order to be seen that they are unable to rule the country properly.

5.7. New Social-Democratic Party

As mentioned, (see previous Barometers) leader of this party is Tito Petkovski, who broke away from SDSM, thus forming a new party with smaller part of the mother-party branches and a number of politically up to then undecided people. Ideologically, the party is positioned on the left. According to this party, Macedonia is in a new historic moment, when should decide whether it should catch the rhythm of times or to stay in its no way out situation. According to this party, reform processes have been postponed and economic indicators are disastrous: high unemployment rate, poverty, high percent of social beneficiaries, insufficient foreign investment etc. All this describes the environment and the hard conditions in which are taking place these elections. In this sense, NSDP's project is based in the principles of high moral values and new patriotism. This party strives for respect of human rights and insisting on social justice, responsibility and solidarity. This project identifies itself with contemporary social democracy, supporting mild interventionism of the state and struggles for social equality of the middle and lower layers of society. Political and social priorities of this party shall be: biological survival of the inhabitants; balance between the capital and labor; balance between economic efficiency and social justice, their interaction and combination; rule of law and struggle against crime, corruption, tax evasion, non-payment of bills etc; health and social security of the unemployed, severed workers and pensioners; less working hours; education and preventing young professionals leaving the country. This party decided to compete on its own and afterwards desires coalition with parties that have good program orientation, in best country's interest.

5.8. DOM (Democratic Renewal of Macedonia)

DOM is a newly formed party whose leader is Mrs. Liljana Popovska, a former member of the Liberal-Democratic Party. DOM is promoted as civic party positioned in the political center. Ideals for which this party strives are "economically strong, rich, democratically developed Macedonia". The party believes that building serious state

⁵ Focus, January 2006

institutions demands cadre reconstruction of the political leadership, as Macedonia has capable people and solutions for the accumulated problems. Program priorities are: rule of law with laws that are valid equally for all citizens; economic development for overcoming unemployment and poverty together with intensive GDP growth; stimulative business climate, with a special accent on tourism and agriculture; social policy in accordance with contemporary EU standards; nurturing of culture as a universal bridge for understanding and for bringing people closer to each other; education reform according to the Bologna declaration and the EU credit transfer system; health system by which shall be secured quality health protection for all citizens and in which shall be a balance between the private and the public sector; promoting cooperation and links worldwide; friendship with all neighbors; strengthening ties with the Macedonian diaspora; speeded up EU and NATO integration; active foreign policy as equal collocutor and partner regionally and in the international community. One of the basic principles of DOM is gender equality. Also, the party is active against domestic violence and human trafficking. At the same time, in its interest is eliminating professional discrimination against women.

5.9. Party for Economic Renewal

Another new party in the political scene, trying to win the voter's attention is the Party for Democratic Renewal, whose leader is Velija Ramkovski, owner of the private A1 TV. Focusing its efforts on agriculture and the problems of people living in the village, PER protested in support for the demands of the tobacco producers, for the buy-out tobacco price, as producers were complaining that offered prices were too low and quality estimation was not adequate to the factual condition of the good purchased. This party claims that looking at the yearly budget, 58% of the produced GDP is managed by the state administration, while 42% are all the other purposes for which the rest of the money are spent. Ramkovski complained that in the agriculture domain 1/3 of the land is not worked on; 20% of the watering system is not functioning; the use of fertilizers is four times diminished; agriculture goods production is twice diminished; the number of sheep is diminished five times; areas under vines are halved down, same as under tobacco. In spite of the big efforts of Ramkovski to make a difference, he was said to be misusing his TV station for self-promotion, as much as for extreme and low populism. Remarks were proven to be true, as finally he did not succeed to win seats at all.

5.10. Election Campaign Violent Start

First basic characteristic of the campaign is its extremely early start, through the opposition pressure to have early elections. VMRO-DPMNE together with other 22 parties signed a common Declaration in January, demanding early elections, lead freely and fairly. Early elections are justified with the need for speedy and in-depth reforms in the social and economic sector. The coalition seeks cessation of selling state property and massive employment in public and state administration. As VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski stated, Macedonia needs political elites that shall speed up the Euro-Atlantic integration process, which shall realize the reforms and pull the country out of crisis. Early campaign was helped by media as well who before hand started showing election slogans and advertisements of parties, while the Radiobroadcast Council did not react for these breaches of the rules. The fact that legally "what is not strictly forbidden is

allowed” was enough to have parties campaigning before the actual term. The Prime Minister was maneuvering about the date for conducting elections, thus additionally heating the intra-party arguments. Finally, it was decided that after constituting the SEC (State Electoral Committee), the government decided elections to be held on July 5th as the most adequate term for elections.

Second, as Macedonia was many times warned that its future EU and NATO integration shall depend on its capability to conduct, democratic, free and fair election, it was obvious that political parties ought to “behave”. Unfortunately, violent incidents occurred from the very beginning of the official campaign, especially between the two rivals from the Albanian political block. US Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic, EU Ambassador Erwan Fouere and OSCE mission head Carlos Pais appealed for campaign violence to cease. As at first those appeals did not bear any results, ambassadors were forced to invite DUI and DPA leaders and use more direct language, to oblige them to use their credibility as politicians to control the events, thus ceasing the violence. Publicly, US ambassador stated that if the violence does not abate, there will be consequences for Macedonia’s Euro-Atlantic bid. “In spite of the difficult start there is still enough time left for things to improve in the process. We came to the scene of the incident to declare our disappointment with the impossibility or lack of willingness in the ranks of the political parties regarding the termination of incidents. The parties that have failed to stop these incidents are behaving carelessly towards the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. They put in jeopardy the future of the state”, Mrs. Milovanovic said. The Ministry of Interior pressed charges in 12 cases, seven for criminal acts and five for violations and called on the parties not to try to present themselves as victims. Fortunately, after these explicit threats, the last ten days of the campaign terminated peacefully.

All in all, election campaign was finishing with many emotions, increased adrenalin, high expectations and prognosis whether the defeated shall admit the victory of the victor. Ljupco Georgievski said that “we are devoted for a European Macedonia, but Brussels in the next four years should not expect miracles. The votes for VMRO-DPMNE are going in vain, as he shall not be able to form a stable government”. Buckovski said that all they did in the last four years was for European Macedonia- “we should go on together for realizing this project”. Nikola Gruevski said that the option which shall focus on the economy and to opening new jobs shall win. Election campaign of DUI and DPA was colored by the world prognosis of the Kosovo independence. Both parties were attacking each other, while the main point was who of the two was the most sincere towards the Albanian community. Ali Ahmeti reminded the Albanians that he enabled the legalization of the Tetovo University, the free use of the Albanian flag and the building of the monument of Skender Beg. Menduh Thaci from DPA accused DUI that is risking the future of Kosovo- “Albanians in Macedonia have good perspective, but they need political leadership that shall know how to channel their political energy”.

Prior to Election Day, US Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic stated that “if anybody wins or wants to win by election manipulations, it is clear that we as US government cannot see them as the ones that have won without manipulations. I imagine that one of the

consequences for them is that they will soon realize that their possibilities for a career shall be interrupted". Addressing the public, the President of the Republic Branko Crvenkovski called for peaceful, proud and dignified voting, calling for high turnout. "In democracy, as in life, one cannot choose between imaginary or desired conditions and candidates, between dreams and wishes that cannot come true. One chooses between the realistically possible alternatives and the real political offer. Non-participation in the elections does not take off the responsibility from anyone, nor eases the consciousness". "The best that can happen to Macedonia is to have peaceful Election Day, massive turnout, the defeated to congratulate its opponent and the winner without triumphalism to accept the offered hand".

5.11. Election Codex in the Making

The process of drafting an election code was rather long, involving several working groups (expert and partisan) and several rounds of reading and negotiating, while OSCE and the election observation civic organization MOST were included as well. Follow the dilemmas pointed out by the parties participating in this process.

For the MPs most important is who will conduct elections, who will count the votes, what shall be the composition of the election bodies from the highest to the lowest and whether judges shall be removed from the process. Most of the Supreme Court judges stated that are against their further involvement into the election process. The main reasoning was that political parties put "labels" on them and they have hard time while processing the elections by the parties themselves.

Opposition leader Nikola Gruevski insisted that people working in the administration are party biased more than the judges. As position parties remained on their opinion for administrative workers to remain on the committees, Gruevski came out with a statement that "if is insisting the administration to remain in election organs, then the government is preparing a state forgery". To this statement joined many other opposition parties. Contrary to this, Prime minister Buckovski firmly believed that the state administration has capacity for regularly conducting the elections and that they are persons who can be trusted, while anybody who dares to put an ideological label to them (that they favor the now position parties) damages most of all the country in general. Government sources say that in the committees shall be sitting persons from education (mainly teachers), health workers, people who have respect in the area where they work. Also, there should be 30% women in the election committees.

After long party negotiations and maneuvering, final decision determines that in the election committees shall sit both persons employed in the state administration and persons appointed by the political parties (representing both position and opposition parties). This was a compromise, as a result of party negotiations where influence in SEC is kept by the parties as well. By the up till now legal version, SEC consisted of judges elected by suggestion of political parties, while the President was elected by suggestion of the President of the Republic.

The Helsinki committee suggested forming special voting places for separate men and women voting, in areas where the problem is traditional- women are traditionally absent from the process of voting. It is also requested precise rules for voting of the illiterate and the semi-literate in order to avoid abuse of their votes. Also special rules for the disabled are requested in order for them to fulfill their right to vote. The Committee appeals for the most possible election committees' departisation, by positioning lawyers as presidents of the election committees.

The Assembly on March 29 2006 voted the Electoral codex. Practically all election laws (for the Assembly, for local elections and for the President of the Republic) are codified together. Changes in regulations did not refer on the election model, but on the composition and the authorities of the election administration, securing the principle of subordination in the work of the election organs, securing compulsory representation of both genders in the composition of election organs at all levels, making the role of the police more precise, achieving transparency in the work of the election organs, improved regulation of the procedure on complaint, protection of the election right etc.

New legal provisions determine members of SEC to be elected based on public call. Still, VMRO-DPMNE was complaining that all the members are coming from SDSM, DUI, LDP and VMRO-People's party. Position's counter-argument was that it was VMRO-DPMNE who insisted on having a SEC composed by party persons, which now came back as a boomerang to those who preferred this solution. Finally, a concession has been made, which meant that the President of SEC was elected based on the proposition of the main opposition party, while his deputy was appointed by the position parties. In any case, the SEC President must not have a party background and it is necessary to be lawyer by training, with experience in this line of work. After some negotiations and several suggestions, finally for president of SEC was elected Jovan Josifovski, secretary of the Assembly committee for political system. The other six members were suggested by DUI (the Deputy minister of justice), the general secretary of the Assembly, the Deputy-minister for local self-government, a lawyer of private practice, a person appointed by DPA and a lawyer working in a private firm. The list obtained a 2/3 votes support by the Assembly. In spite of everything, European Commission was not very excited by the selection of the members of the SEC, as it felt that they had a party background. The Commission stressed that it will follow very closely the work of the members, to see whether they work according to EU standards.

During discussions on the Codex, opposition demanded for legal change in favor of voters who reside abroad for a longer period of time to be put in a special (annex) voter's list, so these names shall not be a manipulation instrument by the parties. These parties do not agree with the government suggestion for these names to be marked only with asterisk or to be placed in a special graph within the same voter's list. As this idea was not included in the Codex, VMRO-DPMNE announced that immediately after getting the power, they shall add these provisions in the Codex.

Some experts are suggesting that the Codex still did not achieve to address concerns regarding clear and distinct rules about the party financial spending and control over that

spending during the elections campaign, as well as how improved reporting needs to be done. Experience shows that illegal party financing is very difficult to be tracked down, especially during election campaigns. There should be precise information about where are money spent, where the money come from, who is the sponsor and whether the money are clean, all this controlled by an independent organ. Unfortunately, adequate details were not provided in the new Codex.

5.12. Election organization

On Election Day have the right to vote 1.742.316 citizens. It was determined that on a temporary work abroad are 59.650 citizens. SEC verified 135 party lists by 33 submitters (31 political parties and 2 groups of citizens), by which in the race participated 2700 candidates, or in average 22 candidates for one MP seat.

Members of Municipality Election Committees were randomly elected by computer from the list of people employed in the state administration. MEC have five members and five deputies, while the SEC guarantees for adequate representation of both genders and ethnic groups in election bodies. In the communities where live 20-50% of the citizens who belong to other ethnic groups than the major one, in the MEC are elected two members. In municipalities where they are 50-70% in MEC are elected three, while in places where they are over 70% are elected four members. If the municipality does not have enough persons to cover the ethnic and gender representation principle, persons from other municipalities shall be transferred to those MEC. The same principle applies for members of the election committees composed again by president and four members.

The Ministry of Justice sent letters to the larger parties in which asking for these parties to nominate one representative each to work jointly in the Committee for determining the updating procedure for the voter's list, and to clean it up from the persons who work and live abroad. Government sources state that this figure is about 70.000 persons, while opposition is claiming the figure amounts up to 150.000 persons. At the same time, the Ministry of Justice checked all the persons over 85 or 80 years of age, for updating the voter's list. In the future the same shall be done for persons over 75 years of age as well.

International community representatives were often giving reminding signals on the importance of regularity in the election process, as a precondition for furthering the process of integration of Macedonia to EU. US Ambassador Gillian Milovanovic stressed that free and fair elections are expected, which are crucial for EU and NATO integration of the country. She also encouraged participation in the regular political process, instead of boycotting it. Regarding the DPMNE mistrust towards state administration people in the election committees she commented that as there is no preferred international practice about the composition of the election committees, it is OK to have only people from the state administration in the election committees. Encouraging Macedonia to continue solving its problems alone, instead of having the international community do it, she stated that US are not paternalists to Macedonia, but partners.

5.13. Elections Outcome – Expectations

As elections were approaching, both biggest parties VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM were calculating on the probability of having close results. Therefore, VMRO-DPMNE's position was that only the party that will gain most MP seats shall have the legitimacy to compose a government, while SDSM stated that legitimate power shall be the one that shall be able to secure the 50%+1 or 61 seats support in the Assembly. Member of the DPMNE Executive committee Antonio Miloshoski stated that "every government lead or directed by a political party that obviously lost the elections (even if this is of a couple of seats less) shall be a provocation for the voters as carriers of the political legitimacy, thus this provocation may lead us to unnecessary risks and challenges". Obviously, he was aiming on the unofficial contacts among SDSM, VMRO-People's Party and the New Social-Democratic party, as well as the Albanian partner at that time. On the contrary, Buckovski stated that the key for forming the new government shall be the art of post-elections coalition combinations. "If there is no grand preelection coalition of the opposition parties of the Macedonian block, then post-election coalitions shall be the key for the one who is most skillful to make a government". SDSM analysis was that the only chance for Gruevski and Georgievski to come to power is Tito Petkovski, who serves as a bridge between them, like the Democratic Alternative and its role after the 1998 elections.

DPMNE expected and publicly announced that shall win the elections by gaining at least 45 MP seats, while SDSM shall gain 28 seats. This party announced that the defeated should not think of ways of how to defeat the legitimacy of the winner, through imposing coalitions. On the other hand Buckovski speaks of even results, 40 seats for SDSM, and a colorful coalition including various –even peculiar- combinations, and of course him becoming the Prime minister again. He believed that punishing votes took place in 1998 and 2002, but now it seems that this is not the case.

5.14. Election Day

OSCE preliminary elections estimation on July 5th was that they were generally well conducted and had isolated incidents. The ODIHR head of the monitoring mission Mrs. Glover stated that "although elections mainly fitted the standards for democratic elections, preelection incidents cast a shadow over the campaign". She added that "serious incidents during the campaign and on Election Day are a further reminder that perpetrators must be held responsible for their deeds, according to law". Mr. Chavushoglu estimated elections as regular, but adding that irregularities are noted, like buying votes, ballot box stuffing, intimidation, proxy voting, family voting, which incidents were particularly present in Bogovinje, Gostivar, Brvenica, Struga, Tearce, Zajas and Zelino. This situation in Western Macedonia was confirmed by the parties of the Albanian block, accusing each other for numerous abuses and irregularities. DPA announced that they shall not recognize election results in Kicevo and Zajas- "In the jungle of Zajas, Oslomej and Kicevo votes are usually manipulated. I call upon disappearance of the jungles and the monkeys leading those jungles"- Menduh Thaci said. Opposed to this, DUI replied that DPA activists lead by Daut Rexhepi-Leka, an MP candidate for district N.6, were stuffing ballot boxes or stole voting tickets in Odri, Prsovece, Tearce, Goren Celopek, Zelino, Svilare and Kondovo. According to DUI,

Leka's group was armed and under threat with guns stuffed ballot boxes. DUI announced that these identified persons shall be having criminal charges pressed against them.

EU and USA Ambassadors gave positive estimation on the Election Day, commenting that in general these elections are better than the previous ones and that they signify significant step forward for the country in its EU-integration process. At the same time it was demanded the law to be applied for those who provoked irregularities. While forming the new government Brussels asked for a speeded up timing, while Washington was more reserved, making an appeal for a regular transit of power.

5.15. Voting results

The coalition of VMRO-DPMNE won on the fifth parliamentary elections in Macedonia. SDSM leader Vlado Buckovski admitted the defeat and congratulated his opponent. Main political parties expressed satisfaction of the election process, estimating them as fair and democratic. SDSM stated that these were the best elections ever- "By these elections Macedonia showed that it deserves to be an EU candidate and to start the negotiating process for EU membership. Citizens showed that our state knows how to organize fair and democratic elections". VMRO-DPMNE stated that "if we exclude a couple of isolated incidents, we are satisfied with the voter's turnout". Still, turnout was not so high, as it was estimated in about 56%. According to the votes counting, the SEC said that out of 1.741.449 voters, voted 975.132 (or 56,15%), valid votes were 937.249, and invalid 37.883. With the so far preliminary votes counting, the number of seats won by party is the following:

Party	Percent of votes won	Number of seats
VMRO-DPMNE	32,46%	44
SDSM	23,31%	32
DUI-PDP	12,23%	18
DPA	7,5%	11
VMRO-NP	6,11%	7
NSDP	6,09%	6
DOM	1,8%	1
PEI	1,22%	1

Viewed per regions, results are the following:

District N.1

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	48.287
SDSM "For Macedonia Together"	34.615
DUI-PDP	17.388
DPA	12.729
NSDP	12.477
VMRO-NP	7.361
DOM	6.780
Total	150.455

District N.2

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	39.517
SDSM "For Macedonia Together"	28.787
DUI-PDP	19.077
DPA	12.426
NSDP	11.048
VMRO-NP	9.148
DOM	3.458
Total	142.168

District N.3

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	70.032
SDSM "For Macedonia Together"	46.744
VMRO-NP	15.316
NSDP	12.294
ZNDP	4.442
SDPM	3.553
DOM	2.740
Total	168.042

District N.4

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	79.050
SDS "For Macedonia Together"	56.943
VMRO-NP	11.576
NSDP	7.625
Group of voters- Panco Minov	5.998
ZNDP	4.290
PEO	3.454
Total	177.725

District N.5

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	55.341
SDS "For Macedonia Together"	37.272
DUI-PDP	14.192
VMRO-NP	10.971
NSDP	9.091
DPA	8.253
PEI	6.504

Total	152.984
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District N.6

Party	Number of votes won
VMRO-DPMNE "For Better Macedonia"	10.922
SDS "For Macedonia Together"	13.369
DUI-PDP	60.942
DPA	36.069
NSDP	4.387
VMRO-NP	2.749
PEI	3.477
Total	138.102

According to the Macedonian constitution, the new Parliament should be formed in 20 days after Election Day. In that period of time the President of the previous Parliament has the obligation to call a constitutive session. If that is not done (as the up to now President is now the Macedonian Ambassador in USA) then MPs are initiating the session themselves 21 days after Election Day. After establishing the Parliament, the President of the Republic in 10 days time must offer the mandate for forming a government to the party (or parties) candidate who have majority in the Assembly. The mandator in 20 days time should submit to the Assembly a program and suggestion for the government's composition. The government is elected by obtaining an absolute majority vote. Following the dates, the new government should be elected somewhere between the 4th and the 9th of September.

Public Opinion Polls

According to Brima telephone poll, held in December 2005, about 60% of the polled think that "Macedonia is moving in the right direction", 27% think that it goes to the "wrong direction" and 13% "don't know". On the question "What influence upon your life shall have the EU candidacy status?" 22% believe that it shall have great influence, 42% somewhat positive influence, 23% no influence at all, and 2% somewhat negative influence. One third (34%) of the polled think that Macedonia shall become an EU member in the next five year, but another 1/3 (33%) think that this will happen in about ten years from now. Other 18% think that it shall become an EU member after over 10 years and 6% think that it will never happen. As main obstacles for entering EU are enumerated: unemployment (74%), bad economy (71%), crime and corruption (65%), non-functioning of the rule of law (39%), slow reforms (31%), politician's incapability (26%), absence of consensus among main political parties for important issues for the state (24%), interethnic relations (19%) and poorly organized elections (18%).

Another poll in December 2005 showed that over 70% of the citizens do not believe to journalists and their publishing houses, radio or TV stations. This was quite a shock for all journalists in the country, who lengthily commented the trend for days. "None believes when the lie and the truth get an equivalent mark"- they comment, complaining

on the low profile today's Macedonian journalism is showing. There is a trend of rapid fall of the copies daily newspapers sell or the popularity of certain TV or radio programs. Some complain that in the period around 2002 was a real chance for democratization to enter into the media space, but unfortunately that didn't occur. Journalists say that there is rough commercialization and constant fall of the moral principles and quality of journalism. "People are overdosed with politics" some public opinion experts say.

The telephone poll conducted by Brima Gallup in January, on a national representative sample of 660 respondents, showed some variations in party support, which was explained by the raised popularity of SDSM due to the achievement for Macedonia to get the EU candidate status. Party rating showed the following trend: SDSM 14,2%, VMRO_DPMNE 8,6%, DUI 8,1%, New Social-Democratic Party (Tito Petkovski) 6%, DPA 3,1%, DOM (Liljana Popovska) 2,4%, other 1%, don't know 25,6%, shall not vote 21,7%, refuse to answer 7,3%. Asked in which direction Macedonia is moving 60% stated that the country is moving to the right direction, 26,7% to the wrong direction, while 13,2% don't know.

In February 2006 IRI and Brima Gallup had a poll, on a representative sample of 1067 citizens. Party rating at that time was the following: VMRO-DPMNE 24%, DUI 22%, SDSM 20%, DPA 8% New social democratic party 8%, VMRO-People's party 5%, DOM 2%, LDP 1,6%. Nikola Gruevski has the highest rating among the Macedonian politicians (14,9%), after which are Tito Petkovski (12,6%), Ali Ahmeti (10%), Branko Crvenkovski (7,7%), Arben Xhaferi (5,4%), Liljana Popovska (2,5%), Ljupco Georgievski (2,1%) and Vlado Buckovski (1,9%).

Telephone poll performed in April, by the Institute for Democracy, on a sample of 1.100 respondents. More than 40% of the polled have negative opinion about the politicians in the country. Still the list of remaining percent of "trust" to politicians is the following: Tito Petkovski and Liljana Popovska 37,9% each, Nikola Gruevski 31%, Vlado Buckovski 24,5%, Ljupco Georgievski 11,5%. Asked differently, to whom they have the most trust, 57% answered "none", 32% Nikola Gruevski, Ali Ahmeti 17%, Tito Petkovski 14,9%, Arben Xhaferi 11,7%. The level of trust is under 10% for Vlado Buckovski, Liljana Popovska, Abduladi Vejseli etc. Party rating is as follows: VMRO-DPMNE 29%, SDSM 20,7%, DUI 16,1%, DPA 10,4%, NSDP 9,4%, DOM 5,9%, VMRO-People's party 3,3%, PDP 3,1%, LDP 0,8%, Agricultural party 0,6%, DRUM 0,4%, Party for Economic Renewal 0,2%.

Door to door poll in April 2006, on a representative sample of 1600, performed by "Ideja Plus". Obvious is the difference in results as compare with the previously mentioned poll. By this research party rating is: VMRO-DPMNE 25,3%, SDSM 23%, NSDP 11,2%.

What now?

Election results automatically erased the idea of having a wide catch-all coalition. Now, Nikola Gruevski has the hard task to balance between all the parties that are going to join the new government, as well as to satisfy the appetites of various small political parties,

tied with a pre-electoral agreement⁶. At the same time, as an opposition leader he has built up his personal rating, but did not succeed to build up a solid contemporary right-wing party, for a convincing and good political alternative, as often policy ideas were not clearly defined and consistent. He will have the hard task to prove that VMRO-DPMNE is really reformed, and that the future policy approach shall be the one that fits a modern right-wing party. In spite of the good will of the top party leadership, a possible problem will be to change the attitude, habits and political culture of this party's voters.

Future political events evolving may take the following course:

- almost certain smooth transfer of power from the up to now ruling parties to the election winners
- excessive difficulties in composing a viable coalition in longer terms, which shall unavoidably have an ideological mix as well (right-wing parties in coalition with a socialist one)
- difficulties in satisfying ambitious appetites of all future coalition partners and in achieving a consistent policy by all players involved
- decentralization process in spite of practical difficulties, shall continue its positive course
- possible transformation and change in SDSM, coupled with the analysis of the election unfavorable results
- peculiar cohabitation of the new government with the President of the Republic
- possible turbulences due to the use (abuse) of the ethnicity of some persons with criminal background, in order to avoid justice and rule of law to be applied, additionally complicated with party interference
- ethnic-political turbulences due to returning of the four Hague Tribunal cases
- imported turbulences due to the decision on the Kosovo final status

⁶ Too many small parties, representing very low number of voters and containing leaders with appetites for future positions in the executive.