

BAROMETER

Current Events and Political Parties
Development in the
Republic of Macedonia

Issue N.20
June 2009

Dr. Natasha Gaber-Damjanovska
Dr. Aneta Jovevska

In cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation
Regional Office Macedonia



C O N T E N T S

1. DEVELOPMENTS ON THE "NAME ISSUE"	6
1.1 Positions Remain Unchanged at the Beginning of the Year	6
1.2 PM Gruevski: There's a chance for Europe to be made complete unless there's a political will for it	8
1.3 FM Milososki sends letter to Greek counterpart, suggests establishing of good-neighborly relations	9
1.4 Athens Sees the name »Republic of Northern Macedonia« as a good proposal	10
1.5 Reactions to Ambassador Mallias' Statement	11
1.6 Greek Media and Other Comments	12
1.7 DUI's Ahmeti urges for quick solution of Macedonia-Greece dispute	12
1.8 German Social-Democrats ask Greek PASOK to alter its position on name issue	13
1.9 Athens and Sofia team up against Skopje	13
1.10 Macedonia to make utmost efforts for name talks progress	14
1.11 Strategy on name: talks only for change of FYROM, no constitution change and Macedonian identity confirmation	14
1.12 Gruevski: citizens will have the final word on name	16
1.13 FM Milososki: Athens to condemn individuals, groups that act violently towards democratic values	16
1.14 Gruevski: Macedonia wants name row settlement, national interests to be observed	17
1.15 UN mediator Nimetz fails to present new name proposal at Geneva meeting	18
1.16 Ivanov: Name solution must not violate citizens' honor and sentiment for self-determination	18
1.17 The UN Minority Report	19
1.18 Greece might block Croatia due to Macedonia	20
1.19 US Position on the "Name Issue"	21
1.20 Emotions to calm down, leave name issue to negotiators - U.S. ambassador	22
1.21 International Court of Justice sets time-limits for filing initial pleadings in Macedonia v Greece case	23
1.22 ICG: Macedonia name dispute threatens Balkan stability	24
2. LOCAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS	25
2.1 Speaker Veljanoski Signs Notices for Presidential and Local Elections	25
2.2. Selecting a Presidential Candidate for VMRO-DPMNE	26
2.3. Ljubomir Frckovski Becomes the SDSM Candidate for President	27
2.4. Fouere: Forthcoming Elections Crucial for Macedonia's European Future	27
2.5. Reeker: No Place for Violence at Forthcoming Elections	28
2.6. Responsibility for March Elections is Collective - French Ambassador	29
2.7. Leader's Meeting for Fair Elections	30

2.8. Minister Jankuloska: Mol has already kicked off election preparations	30
2.9. Macedonia is capable of holding free, fair and democratic elections - SEC chairman	31
2.10. Local and Presidential Rallies by Various Candidates.....	31
2.10.1 Highlights of SDSM campaign:	31
2.10.2 Highlights of VMRO-DPMNE campaign:.....	33
2.10.3 Highlights of LDP campaign:.....	34
2.10.4 Highlights of DPA campaign:	35
2.10.5 Highlights of DUI campaign:	35
2.10.6 Highlights of New Democracy campaign:	36
2.10.7 Highlights of Ljube Boskoski campaign:.....	37
2.11. Presidential Candidates' Joint Meeting.....	38
2.12. Boskoski, Ivanov, Selmani and Frckoski meet NGO officials	38
2.13. Election Data and Rules	39
2.14. Pre-Election Topics That Occupied the Public	40
2.15. EU Ambassador Fouere on Election Campaign	41
2.16. President Branko Crvenkovski's Statement at Sunday's polls	41
2.17. Election Day: Local Elections and Presidential Elections Round One	41
2.18. OSCE/ODIHR Preliminary Election Estimates.....	43
2.19. US Congratulates Macedonia on Peaceful Elections	43
2.20. Czech EU Presidency: Elections Held in Orderly, Peaceful Atmosphere.....	44
2.21. SEC Accepts Several VMRO-DPMNE, DUI Objections	44
2.22. Gruevski: Macedonia Demonstrated European Democratic Capacity	44
2.23. Foreign Media on Macedonia's Elections	45
2.24. PM Gruevski: Citizens Will Make Right Choice on April 5	46
2.25. Boskoski Says he is Relevant Factor at Political Scene	46
2.26. SDSM in Preparations for Second Round	47
2.27. OSCE - Mistakes From First Round Have to be Corrected in Runoff	47
2.28. Post-First Round Commentaries	47
2.29. Second Round Results.....	48
2.30. SEC Summarize: VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition wins most of mayoral and councillors posts at municipal elections	49
2.31. Russian President Medvedev Congratulates Ivanov on Election Victory	50
2.32. Rehn: Yesterday's Elections - Important Step Forward for Democracy in the Country	50
2.33. OSCE/ODIHR: Second Election Round in Macedonia Meets Most International Standards	51
2.34. Ivanov to assume presidential post on May 12.....	52
3. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESSES	52
3.1 Fouere: Brussels Recognizes Macedonia's Visa Liberalization Progress.....	53

3.2. Germany supports EU visa liberalization for Macedonia	53
3.3. European Parliament Adopts draft-resolution on Macedonia's progress (SUP)	54
3.4. Rehn: Macedonia May Get Free Visa Regime, Opening of EU Entry Talks by Yearend	55
3.5. PACE: Europe Should Help Macedonia	55
3.6. PACE President: Macedonia Deserves to join EU (SUP).....	56
3.7. Macedonia Progress Report Supported	57
3.8. Erik Meyer: EU should open talks with Macedonia irrespective of name issue.....	58
3.9. The European Union says Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey remain on track for eventual membership in the 27-nation bloc.....	59
3.10. EU Renaming of the Term »Macedonian«	60
3.11. PM Gruevski Expects Free Visa Regime for Macedonian Citizens by Yearend.....	60
3.12. BBC: Macedonia meets visa liberalization criteria	61
3.13. Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro may get EU visa-free travel within months	61
3.14. EU Foreign Ministers Discuss Visa Liberalization.....	62
3.15. ESI urges lifting of visas for Macedonia as soon as possible	62
4. NATO	63
4.1. State Activities Related to Participation in NATO Missions	63
4.2. PM Gruevski, FM Milososki to take part at 45. Munich Security Conference	64
4.3.NATO Accession Model Under Discussion	65
4.4. Robertson Commenting Macedonia's NATO Membership	65
4.5. Scheffer: NATO to Renew Membership Invitation for Macedonia	65
4.6. Milososki-Simmons: Macedonia Remains Qualified for NATO Membership, Name Issue Must be Resolved.....	66
5. ECONOMY	67
5.1. Predictions for the Macedonian Economy in 2009	67
5.2. USAID Competitiveness Project.....	68
5.3. Assisting Programs, Strategies, Promotions	68
5.4. EBRD forecasts 3% economic growth in Macedonia in 2009.....	69
5.5. New Government Investment Program	70
5.6. Government announces Euro 330 million package in wake of global crisis.....	70
5.7. Albania and Macedonia Economic Cooperation.....	71
5.8. Macedonians vs the Economic Crisis	71
5.9. Government to put state bonds up for sale.....	72
5.10. Debate on the Economic Crisis and its Consequences for Macedonia	72
5.11. 44% of Macedonians use Internet	73
5.12. Nearly 350,000 Jobless Persons in Macedonia.....	73

6. HEADLINES	74
6.1. PM Gruevski sends letters to incoming, outgoing US Presidents	74
6.2. Macedonia ranks 89th in World Globalization Index	74
6.3. Tupurkovski on Trial	75
6.4. Constitutional Court Decisions	75
6.5. President Ivanov Inaugurated	76
6.6. Parliamentary parties comment Ivanov's inauguration for Macedonia's President	78
6.7. UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom Visits Macedonia	78
6.8. Macedonian Parliament marks 60th CoE anniversary	79
6.9. Macedonia's Journalists Protests	79
6.10. Macedonia, Kosovo to Enhance Economic and Political Cooperation	80
6.11. Macedonia content with State Department's report	81
6.12. History of Macedonian People Promoted	81
6.13. Macedonia, Serbia enhance defense cooperation	82
6.14. Jacques Barrot Renames Macedonia into Northern Macedonia	82
7. POLICIES/EVENTS	83
7.1. Parliament endorses establishment of Lustration Commission	83
7.2. Parliament launches new website and e-Parliament	83
7.3. Local Government Ministry, UNDP to keep cooperating in concrete projects	84
7.4. Seminar on Technical regulative of new EU's Package	84
7.5. Mol Jankuloska meets EULEX chief Kermabon	84
7.6. Novelties in the Law on Health Insurance	85
7.7. PM Gruevski: Macedonia Determined to Tackle Corruption	85
8. PARTY DEVELOPMENTS	86
8.1. Branko Crvenkovski Wins Unanimous Support at SDSM Congress	86
8.2. PM Gruevski Says Informal Coalition of Several Opposition Parties Functioning Already	87
8.3. Ljube Boskovski Establishes a New Party	87
9. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS	87
9.1. International Republican Institute Poll: VMRO-DPMNE enjoys largest support	87
9.2. Over 70% of Macedonians expect benefits from EU membership - survey	88
9.3. Ivanov, Frckoski most likely to face election runoff - Rating Agency	89
10. FUTURE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS	90

1. DEVELOPMENTS ON THE “NAME ISSUE”

In the first half of 2009, there were no significant changes regarding the positions on the “name issue” by the two sides, Macedonia and Greece, as no substantial talks for resolution of the problem took place. However, during this period, political shifts and changes were expected primarily from the Macedonian side, as estimations were that the future president elected shall be from the VMRO-DPMNE party, as he would be one of the crucial factors that will shape jointly with the Government the future position of the country on this matter. Therefore, practically the process was waiting for the new policy factor to come in the picture after the April elections. At the same time, Greece had its upcoming June EU Parliament elections, in which was checked the position of the ruling party – New Democracy towards its main rival - PASOK. This interim period was not free from diplomatic “sparks” in various occasions coming from both sides, practically not helping in improving the positive climate for negotiations.

1.1 Positions Remain Unchanged at the Beginning of the Year

At the end of 2008, Bernard Kouchner, Foreign Minister of France then holder of the EU presidency, at a press conference in Brussels stated that all problems Macedonia was facing stemmed from the name row. “The problem of Macedonia, it's the name. Frankly, you can ask me about visas and about progress towards the EU, however as long as the name issue is not solved, you are knocking on the wrong door. This problem must be solved. After all these years of UN-mediated negotiations between Greece and Macedonia, the situation seems today very, very complicated for such a simple problem”, said Kouchner after the meeting of the EU Ministerial Council. PM Gruevski avoided giving a comment to the media about this statement.

In January, Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis has once again publicly stated that Greece will block Macedonia's NATO and EU integration, unless a solution to the name row is found. According to him, the solution should include a geographical determinant for general use. “If this practice resumes, Greece will also block funds for the projects on construction of pan-European corridor 10” said PM Karamanlis. “Macedonia is a broader geographical region and belongs to three countries - Greece, Bulgaria and FYROM. It should be made clear which part belongs to FYROM. Therefore, Greece urges a geographical determinant to be used before the name for making clear which is the country in question and the complex name to be used generally”...“Favorable relations as allies in NATO are not possible unless there's tense neighborly ties between Athens and Skopje...the government in Skopje will realize that neighborly relations are

crucial for both nations, leaving behind the rhetoric of nationalism and of provocation", stated Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis.

»Greece is committed to finding an all-win solution, but unfortunately the provocative attitude of Macedonia hinders creation of a climate of mutual confidence«, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis said in February during her visit in Serbia. According to Bakoyannis, such an attitude makes the chances for a timely UN-brokered solution to the name issue rather obscure. "I would like to stress once again that a mutually acceptable solution will bring benefit to FYROM (Macedonia) and will also strengthen regional stability in Southeastern Europe, and at the same time it will boost the country's EU prospects," Bakoyannis said.

Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki stated that Greece's position to block Republic of Macedonia's NATO integration is irrational, due to its fear that the country's name implies pretensions towards the northern Greek province Macedonia. "The name is not the goal of the problem imposed by Greece. Athens' hidden agenda is to undermine our national identity", he assessed, adding that "several proposals for settlement of the row were tabled in recent years, the ones most mentioned being 'Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)' and 'Republic of Northern Macedonia', but were refused by one or the other party". According to him, Macedonia has demonstrated readiness for compromise by changing its flag and Constitution, and it is up to Greece to make the next step. "Greece should make a move showing that it has nothing against stable and prosperous Macedonia, integrated in NATO and EU".. "We would accept a compromise name for bilateral use, a proposal that Athens refuses".

For the German newspaper "Die Tageszeitung" in February FM Antonio Milososki commented that »The name dispute is rooted in the Greek desire to protect its myth for a pure nation. It means: one country, one language, one nation, However, a small Macedonian-speaking minority lives in its northern part. This minority is not allowed to use its mother language or to foster its cultural identity. That is why Greece is attempting to contest the right of self-determination of a small country such as Macedonia«.

Asked about the chances of finding a compromise and what it would be like, he said it could be found only on bilateral basis. »The constitutional name of Macedonia is only disputed by Athens. We could be ready to allow Greece to use another name for our country. For instance, the Republic of Macedonia with Skopje in brackets. However, for this the Macedonian citizens will decide at a referendum«, stated the FM. According to him, the fact that 125 countries in the world have recognised Macedonia's constitutional name is a clear signal that the country has international support. »When it comes to the EU countries, for us it would be an immense support unless EU tells Athens: since you have a bilateral problem, it should be settled bilaterally and not to take the entire Union as a

hostage. Such an abuse of EU might damage its entire credibility», Milososki says.

Asked to comment the Balkan tour of his Greek counterpart Dora Bakoyannis in the capacity of OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, and her avoidance to visit Macedonia, Milososki said that Greek officials were welcomed in the country. »As OCSE Chair, Greece and its representatives, including the colleague, are welcomed in Macedonia. I hope they will manage to surmount their narrow-mindedness, which in a way is a product of this imposed dispute, and be our guests. We, in any case, are able to be good hosts« Milososki said.

Following a four-month break, Macedonian-Greek talks on overcoming differences over the use of Macedonia's constitutional name resumed in February. UN mediator Matthew Nimetz sat for the first time at the same table new Macedonian negotiator Zoran Jolevski and Adamantios Vassilakis of Greece. According to announcements from both countries, not intending to present a new proposal at this round of talks. The meeting focused on precisising positions of both parties, and reviewing of ideas and suggestions regarding the negotiating process. Both Macedonia and Greece remained on their official positions - double formula by the former, i.e. one name in bilateral communication with Athens and the constitutional name for all other countries, whereas the latter on one name with geographic determinant for general use.

1.2 PM Gruevski: There's a chance for Europe to be made complete unless there's a political will for it

In February Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski participated at the 45th Munich Security Conference, where in his speech urged forum's participants to demonstrate political will in an attempt to make the final step towards Balkans' integration to Europe and Euro-Atlantic structures. According to PM Gruevski, the security and stability of the Balkans lay clearly and undoubtedly in NATO and EU, that serve as driving force, while the Balkans are leaving behind their post-conflict stage on the road to sustainable development. »It is unfortunate«, he added, »that Macedonia despite meeting all the required conditions and criteria and gaining recognition from the Alliance considering our military, political and social reforms, the country's invitation for NATO membership was delayed for an unspecified period, while the reason for leaving more than two million people out of the sphere of freedom, security and democracy of NATO is our constitutional name. Greece's claim that the Republic of Macedonia represents a threat for its national sovereignty is not accurate«, he underlined, adding that Macedonia has changed the Constitution and national flag, while remaining devoted to finding a joint solution.

"If Europe's soul is tolerance, is Europe's diversity possible without freedom? How can it be explained to Macedonians that their accession to the European home - a home of various identities, will cost them their freedom of expressing

who they are? That it will cost them their identity", said PM Gruevski. He added that the consequences of Greece's objection of Macedonia are against the efforts made towards heightening the region's security and stability and hamper the effectiveness of NATO at a time when all of our collective endeavours should focus on combating terrorism proliferation of nuclear weapons.

1.3 FM Milososki sends letter to Greek counterpart, suggests establishing of good-neighborly relations

In March, Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki sent a letter to his Greek counterpart Dora Bakoyannis, calling for surpassing the stalemate in the relations between the two countries and building of good-neighborly, partnership ties. »Taking into consideration the recent misunderstandings over historic matters, presented publicly by senior Greek officials, and in favor of putting an end to the stalemate in the bilateral relations and reviving of the political dialogue, we believe that the two countries would like to express their obligation, responsibility for further development of the Greek-Macedonian relations in the spirit of good neighborliness and partnership. In this spirit of friendship, I would like to reaffirm the three Macedonian initiatives, presented to Greece at the official meeting under the UN aegis on the name issue, being held in Ohrid on January 21, 2008. These initiatives testify for our constant readiness for mutual engagement and cooperation in all spheres, significant for the relations of our countries, as well as for dedication to settling all opened issues in best possible manner«, Milososki says in his letter.

In line with the principles of the Interim Accord of 1995, Milososki once again advocates the two countries to sign a Declaration of friendship, good neighborliness and cooperation. »I am certain that this Declaration will not only contribute to the friendship of the peoples of both countries in favor of present, future generations, but also to the peace and development of the South East European (SEE) region and European continent. Taking into account the sensitivity Greece has been demonstrating about historic issues, I believe that one of the possible steps for building a confidence between the two countries and nations is a joint review of the historic events, Milososki says.

In this respect he suggests for the two countries to set up a Joint Committee for Education and History. »Taking educational and multi-perspective approach to the Balkan history may play a significant role in the reconciliation with the past by preventing utilization of historic events for stirring up future misunderstandings« Milososki says. He also suggests for the two countries to re-establish the practice of having regular consultations on various levels, as well as to sign bilateral agreements in all spheres of mutual interest.

Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyiannis responded to the letter of Macedonian counterpart Antonio Milososki, stating that the name row is the central issue, which settlement should be in the focus of both countries. Diplomatic sources say

that the Macedonian side seeks for possibilities through the letter to promote its ideas, agree on a friendship treaty with Athens, initiate the establishment of a joint commission and open the path for launching measures to build mutual trust. The same sources claim the ideas were previously reviewed and received positive assessment from UN mediator Matthew Nimetz.

1.4 Athens Sees the name »Republic of Northern Macedonia« as a good proposal

Athens sees the name "Republic of Northern Macedonia" as a good proposal tabled by UN mediator Matthew Nimetz, Greek Ambassador Alexandros Mallias said. He made the statement at the conference on U.S. policy on the Balkans "Completing America's Mission in the Balkans" staged by CSIS which was attended also by the Macedonian Ambassador to USA and the chief negotiator in the talks over the name issue, Zoran Jolevski. Mr. Mallias labeled the proposal as "sensible" adding that it was good enough for Greece to make a compromise. "I think the time is right to reach a solution on the basis of Nimetz's proposal. It is a sensible proposal. Greece, for the first time in its history, accepts the term 'Macedonia' to be included in the international name of the country. This is very important. People may not know this, but this is it," Ambassador Mallias said.

"Macedonia made a great and generous compromise in 1992, when it changed its Constitution and the national flag to meet the Greek demands. Shortly before the last year's NATO Summit, Macedonia demonstrated once again its readiness to accept another compromise, however, Nimetz's proposal was rejected by Greece. Official Athens is constantly pushing ahead with new demands and we fear that this practice would never end," Ambassador Jolevski said. He reiterated that "the dignity and identity of a nation cannot be subject of compromise." He underlined that although Macedonia is committed to finding a mutually acceptable solution on the name, the name issue must not be an obstacle for the country's efforts to secure integration in NATO and EU.

Janusz Bugajski of CSIS said that most Balkan countries are still out of the two support pillars of the West - NATO and EU. The potential instability scenarios impose the need for reconfiguration of the role by the US and EU, particularly in the regional security and economic development, he added.

In his address before the attendants of the conference, Daniel Serwer of the US Institute of Peace-Peace & Stability Operations, stressed that in a situation when US has to tackle issues of higher priority than the Balkans, EU should grant membership to the Balkan's countries as soon as possible. "We need a joint US-EU action and I call the Union to admit the Balkan's countries as soon as possible, once they meet the necessary requirements," Serwer said.

1.5 Reactions to Ambassador Mallias' Statement

The dispute with Greece involves not only the name, but also it aims to harm the national and language identity of the people of Macedonia, stated Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Milososki commenting a statement from Greek Ambassador to US Alexandros Mallias that the proposal "The Republic of Northern Macedonia" might lead to a name solution. »If those who believe that with easy and rash concessions with respect to the constitutional name of the Republic of Macedonia we will contribute to the strengthening of our national dignity, I deem they should question themselves, because pressures will not simply stop here. The ongoing dispute involves not only the name and the dispute has a concealed agenda, which gradually becomes more open, to harm the national and language identity of the Macedonian people. As politicians, journalists and citizens of Macedonia we have a sovereign right based on international norms and also an obligation to protect our national dignity«, assessed Milososki

»The time when other governments made decisions for the Republic of Macedonia had passed. Today Macedonia is an independent country and it is the sovereign right of the citizens of Macedonia to reach decisions about their country«. According to FM Milososki According »Comments by top officials of the Greek diplomacy on any proposals that are not concretized show that such proposals when concretized are solely in favour of the other side - they are unbalanced, unilateral and I think it fails to meet the goal of the process and that is through dialogue to reach a compromise solution« he added.

Referring to geographical determinants, he pointed out that until 1988 there was no area in Greece bearing the name Macedonia. - In 1988 under a decree by the Greek government, Northern Greece was renamed into Macedonia and Thrace, whereas couple of years later the same territory again under a decree was divided into east, central and west Macedonia, Milososki elaborated. »Greece uses the term Macedonia with sufficient geography and I believe that no additional geographical reference is needed to distinguish the Republic of Macedonia, which was established as a state and is in the same place since its establishment, wasn't moved neither to the north, south, west nor east. When our state was founded in 1945 in the former Yugoslav Federation, Greece had no objections regarding our constitutional name. In fact, there is correspondence where the then Liaison Office in Skopje used the constitutional name the Republic of Macedonia without a problem«, underlined FM Antonio Milososki speaking to reporters.

Any solution that may emerge from the name row negotiations will be a subject of a referendum, President-elect Gjorge Ivanov said, commenting the proposal 'The Republic of Northern Macedonia', pointed as acceptable by Greek Ambassador to US Alexandros Mallias. The proposal has been present for 15 years, being

favoured by Greece and part of the ideas of UN mediator Matthew Niemetz, Ivanov said.

1.6 Greek Media and Other Comments

Recent high-profile meetings of NATO, EU and G-20 showed Greece's endless loneliness when it comes to the naming of its northern neighbour, reads an analysis published Monday in one of Greece's newspapers, Eleftherotypia. Text with a headline "Turkey, Obama, Us and the Others", points out that countries are referring to Macedonia with its constitutional name, except Athens when in such cases names it Skopje or FYROM. »US President Barrack Obama at NATO's jubilee summit expressed his wish for the prompt accession of "Macedonia" to the Alliance. Also the foreign press, without having sense on the historical truth, reports ironically about an existing dispute between the Greeks and Macedonians. Unless a compromise on the name row is reached, the Skopjans will keep calling their country "Macedonia" as well as the other countries in the world that are used to calling it with the same name«, reads the analysis in Eleftherotypia.

"To Vima" refers to the recent statements by high-ranking U.S. and European officials that the name row should be settled as soon as possible, in order to open the way for Macedonia's NATO accession and determining a date for beginning of EU accession talks by the year-end.

Health Minister Dimitris Avramopoulos made a statement at the two-day conference entitled "Greece-Macedonia: The Causes of the Crisis and Greece's Position after the Bucharest Summit - Possible Solution, Prospects", organized by the ruling New Democracy party. Avramopoulos, a former Athens mayor and career diplomat, stressed that Greece in the beginning of the 1990s should have accepted the name "Slavo-macedonia" for the then newly-emerged state to its immediate north. "We have lost 10 years," the Greek Health Minister said at the conference. Moreover, he stressed that "in case of a referendum not a single Greek citizen would accept the name "Macedonia" as an international recognised name of the country.

1.7 DUI's Ahmeti urges for quick solution of Macedonia-Greece dispute

The head of DUI, Ali Ahmeti, warned the leader of its ruling coalition partner VMRO DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski, that any delay of entrance in NATO may cause insecurity among citizens. In a statement given to Alsat-M TV Station, Ahmeti stressed that the process of resolving the name dispute with Greece should speed up. "The name row with Greece has to be bridged as soon as possible because it caused delay in Macedonia's membership in NATO, which triggers insecurity among the citizens. Furthermore, it also caused foreign investors to look away from Macedonia," Ahmeti said.

1.8 German Social-Democrats ask Greek PASOK to alter its position on name issue

Walter Kolbow, coordinator of the Social Democratic parliamentary group and chairman of the German-Macedonian Association, told reporters in May that his party called on Greek PASOK (The Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and its leader George Papandreou to alter their position on the name issue. There has been no direct response from PASOK yet, but I believe that the first one will arrive after the elections in EU, Kolbow said after his meeting with Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski.

Kolbow extended his support of Macedonia in regard to the name row. »We have been on your side since 2004, when the German parliament voted in favor of Macedonia's right to take the name it wished for. Obviously, Greece as both NATO and EU member, is able to block Macedonia's accession. We don't approve it«, Kolbow said. He also expects lifting of the Schengen visa requirements for the citizens of Macedonia, commending the country's excellent results to that effect.

1.9 Athens and Sofia team up against Skopje

With the publication of a book featuring confidential documents from Bulgarian state archives, Greece and Bulgaria created a joint front in a bid to deny the Macedonian identity - state, nation, language, and name - which might additionally affect Macedonia's integration into the Euro-Atlantic community. Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis, who presented on Wednesday the book "The Macedonian issue and Bulgaria - Confidential documents /1950-1967", confirmed the ties and the apparent matching of positions of Greece and Bulgaria in denying Macedonia. The book is a joint publication of the Society for Macedonian Studies and the Bulgarian State Archives. During the presentation of the book, Bakoyannis noted that "the Bulgarian, same as many other previous historic documents show that the Macedonian issue is largely an ideological fabrication of the Cold War.

"The so-called Macedonian issue has become a tool to accomplish interests and goals that have nothing in common with the essence. It is a result of a long-standing competition in the Balkan. It's high time to leave it behind, it's time that stereotypes and rhetoric of an old era be left to the history, and seek stable and sustainable solutions of open issues such as this one," Bakoyannis said during the book promotion ceremony at the Athens-based War Museum. Most of her speech focused on the name differences, reaffirming the Greek position on the matter.

1.10 Macedonia to make utmost efforts for name talks progress

The Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki stated that Nimetz was expected on June 22 in Geneva to meet with countries' name negotiators Zoran Jolevski and Adamantios Vassilakis. »Macedonia's top officials are prepared at the forthcoming fresh round of talks to make utmost efforts in order to make a step forward in the dialogue led with Greece under the mediation of Ambassador Matthew Nimetz«, he stated.

»Mediator Nimetz should state his opinion and make an evaluation on the matter. We won't further comment the matter. However, we remain active in order to be able to better present our ideas, positions, concepts and viewpoints on a possible compromise that is not unilateral or a dictate - one side would be the winner and the other would be humiliated and defeated. For a long-term and successful finalisation of the issue, there must be a compromise, equality and preservation of the dignity and principles of the both sides involved in the issue«, stated Milososki.

According to him, the presence of Vice Prime Minister responsible for Ohrid Framework implementation, Abdulakim Ademi introduced a fresh quality to the treatment of this issue, serving as a representative of the coalition partner in the Government and Macedonian Albanians. »It demonstrated a huge accountability. We bear the responsibility together. The approach and solidarity of the Albanians in Macedonia is fair with regard to the issue. It is expected their commitment to give an additional quality to state's treatment of the issue, which at the same time is a message to those who are involved in the matter within UN«, FM Milososki stated.

1.11 Strategy on name: talks only for change of FYROM, no constitution change and Macedonian identity confirmation

»Talks should be only subjected to the name that will replace the provisional reference FYROM as foreseen in Resolution 817 of the UN's Security Council, unchanging the Constitution, confirmation and no troubling the Macedonian national and language identity, respect of the right to self-identification, building friendly and good-neighbouring relations with Greece«. These are main directions of the "Draft-State Strategy for Solving the Differences with Greece over the Name of Macedonia" prepared by MP of the Liberal Party Stojan Andov which was discussed at a plenary session in the Macedonian Parliament.

»In the name talks, the Republic of Macedonia should insist on its indisputable right to self-identification as prime manifestation of the right to self-determination. It should insist on stance of the UN's Security Council included in Resolution 817 in 1993, the agreed solution to be used as replacement of provisional name, that is for the needs of the UN«, reads the Draft Strategy. At the same time, the Constitution of Republic of Macedonia should not become again a matter of

amendments in context of the name issue, since it already got positive evaluation of the Arbitrary Commission.

»Troubling of the Macedonian language, the Macedonian peoples and its identity would represent an anti-European and anti-civilization act far outside the text of the Resolution 817 where the issue of the agreements is being defined. The Macedonian language is the fundament of the identity of the Macedonian nation. Any compromise over the name previously comprehends clear and unequivocal confirmation of the Macedonian language, the Macedonian peoples and its identity. Otherwise, negation of the identity of the Macedonian nation would lay behind the difference over the name«, reads the Draft-Strategy.

»Consequently, no representative of Republic of Macedonia has the right to negotiate a solution that will not contain clear and unequivocal confirmation of the Macedonian language, the Macedonian peoples and the identity. It should be drawn to the attention of Republic of Greece and the UN Special Envoy Matthew Nimetz that in the Opinion of the Arbitrary Commission, the Macedonian language is recognized as official language in Macedonia and that neither the report nor this part of it has not be disputed by any party in the European Community at the time«.

The document also reads that the Republic of Macedonia has a national interest of friendly and good neighborly relations with Republic of Greece, and this should accumulate with allied relations once Republic of Macedonia becomes a full-member of NATO and EU. The Parliament of the Republic of Macedonia should reaffirm its commitments for inter-parliamentary cooperation with Greece and that is why the Government of Republic of Macedonia should reaffirm the commitment for upgrading the diplomatic relations at ambassadorial level.

After a day-long consultations, the parliamentary parties failed to bring their stances into accord on the text. The need for reaching a common ground on the text of the document aroused after VMRO DPMNE put forward a number of amendments by the end of the last week. Although these amendments were accepted, the ones submitted by Nova Demokratija (ND) turned out to be the stumbling stone toward reaching an agreement. ND's amendments call for providing guarantees for multi-ethnic character of the state. According to the opposition, there is no need of additional guarantees for multi-ethnic character of the state in the talks with Greece over the name differences. They described ND's amendments as a tactical move of the ruling power.

"Although it was previously agreed that the strategy would pass without any amendments, SDSM accepted the ones tabled by VMRO DPMNE, aiming to protect the national interests. However, out of the blue, VMRO DPMNE's most coveted partner ND, tabled their own amendments today. This opens the dilemma whether this move is a part of a scenario aimed at protracting the dispute over the name," SDSM's representatives said.

Due to the situation, the initiator of the draft-state strategy, Stojan Andov notified Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski in written of his intentions to withdraw the draft-strategy due to lack of political will for reaching consensus. »As I watched the reactions, the lack of serious approach convinced me that at the moment there is no political will and things must be delayed for a while, when such a document will be understood and used«, stated Andov in the Parliament. He failed to state any details on why a consensus wasn't reached. »I have made maximum efforts. I have showed flexibility to accept certain suggestions. However, there is no willingness for moving forward«, he estimated.

1.12 Gruevski: citizens will have the final word on name

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in June reiterated the position that the citizens will have the final word on the name of the country as a compromise for resolving long-standing dispute with Greece. Regarding the frequent use of term "Northern Macedonia" as proposal for surpassing the name dispute, Gruevski said that talks for finding solution to this problem are underway. »However, as we have already said the citizens at the end will have the final word on what is called the future of their state and on passing crucial decisions for the Republic of Macedonia, he said.

Northern Macedonia as proposal for the name of the state is acceptable for the Archimandrite Nikodim Carknjas, who also attended the sanctification ceremony. Northern Macedonia is acceptable change of the name of the country. No catastrophe will happen if Macedonia accepts this proposal if it would resolve the long-standing dispute with southern neighbour. But Macedonian people should decide about this, Carknjas said Saturday in Bitola.

PM Gruevski also called on party leaders to unite over state and national interests. »A period filled with speculation, misinformation and various scenarios will follow. I urge vigilance and commitment to state and national interests, stressed Gruevski at Wednesday's ceremony on the occasion of marking the 19th anniversary of the establishment of VMRO-DMPNE.

1.13 FM Milososki: Athens to condemn individuals, groups that act violently towards democratic values

The political party of the Macedonians living in Greece, "Rainbow", promoted in Athens this evening the recently published Contemporary Greek-Macedonian Dictionary. Rainbow announced that the Professor Victor Friedman will be the main promoter of the dictionary. The Macedonian party in Greece said that they sent invitations to all local media to cover the event, adding however that they do not expect any of them to show up, given the previous practice of the Greek media to ignore all events staged by Rainbow.

Dozens of activists of the Greek right wings fascist movement Hrisi Avgi (Golden Dawn) provoked heavy incident during the promotion of the Greek - Macedonian dictionary organized by the political party of the Macedonian minority in Greece Rainbow. Thirty minutes after the beginning of the promotion of the dictionary the group of masked persons with emblems of Hrisi Avgi entered the Pres Center of the foreign correspondents in Athens, located nearby the Greek Ministry of Foreign Affairs and verbally attacked the promoters. They damaged the equipment of the present cameraman's and destroyed the promotional materials of the Rainbow party. No one was injured after the head of the attackers asked the group not to start fight but to pressure the participants to leave the event. The group which is considered to be extreme wing of the National Orthodox political movement/party LAOS lead by the fascist Jorgos Karadzaferis, have left the site after the information that the police is approaching the international press centre in Athens. The members of Rainbow continued the promotion but left the site after coming of the Police and after they got an information that another group of Greek right wings activist are preparing attacks against them. The promotion of the Greek Macedonian dictionary with 15,000 words prepared by the Macedonian author Vasko Karadza is part of the campaign for the Election for Europarliament.

Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki condemned Thursday the incident when a group of hooligans interrupted yesterday's promotion of a Greek-Macedonian dictionary in Athens, expecting Greek authorities to investigate the case and punish the perpetrators. "For a country that currently holds the OSCE chairmanship, an organization based on human rights and freedoms, it is inappropriate to allow violation of basic human rights and freedoms in the center of its capital", stated Milososki at the sidelines of the SEECP foreign ministers' meeting. He added, "The least that Athens could do is to seriously investigate the case and condemn individuals and groups that act violently towards the basic democratic values in an EU member-state".

1.14 Gruevski: Macedonia wants name row settlement, national interests to be observed

Macedonia is ready to resume talks with Greece for a compromise in the name dispute. If a compromise is reached, it will be put for referendum, at which the people will say the final word, stressed Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in Sunday's address at the ceremony marking the 18th anniversary of the VMRO-DPMNE Youth Union. "Republic of Macedonia is doing everything in its power in this regard, in order to find a solution that will not harm the state and national interests", said Gruevski.

Greece holds to its position that a solution to the dispute with its northern neighbour is 'erga omnes' - namely a complex name with geographic determinant that would be used worldwide, Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis says in an interview with the Athens daily 'Adesmeftos Typos'. Greece, armed with optimism

and determination, is expecting the next round of negotiations with Skopje by the end of June, Bakoyannis says.

The leader of main opposition PASOK, George Papandreou, also heralded his position on the matter at the party's rally for the European Parliament elections. He ruled out the 'double formula' for settling the dispute. »Greece wishes for FYROM to join the European Union and the road to that objective could be opened by mutually acceptable solution, which would also mean restoring of the bilateral relations«, Papandreou said.

1.15 UN mediator Nimetz fails to present new name proposal at Geneva meeting

UN mediator in Macedonia-Greece name talks, Matthew Nimetz at Monday's round of talks with countries' representatives Zoran Jolevski and Adamantios Vassilakis failed to present a fresh name proposal. Instead, areas that hampered the process aimed at solving the issue have been identified at the Geneva meeting. After the talks, Niemitz stated both sides were prepared to negotiate. »However, we haven't made progress. But I didn't expect it«, he said. Giving no details about today's talks, he said: »This is rather unusual dispute. The history has registered only few examples of such dispute. Both parties 'are deeply entrenched in their positions'. However, I believe that 'the positions may be altered«.

Mediator Matthew Nimetz announced his visit to Skopje on July 6 and two days later to Athens. These meetings are expected to focus on a name proposal, possible range for its use and mechanisms that would lead to formal closure of the issue in the United Nations, in case a final solution is reached. The Geneva round of talks took place few days before the OSCE Ministerial Meeting on Corfu, scheduled for June 27, which will be also attended by Macedonian, Greek Foreign Ministers Antonio Milososki and Dora Bakoyannis.

1.16 Ivanov: Name solution must not violate citizens' honor and sentiment for self-determination

»If a solution to the name dispute with Greece was so simple, we would have found it by now, says Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov in an interview with Germany's Der Spiegel online edition. The solution must not violate the honour and sentiment of one's self-determination. Over 120 countries have recognised the name Macedonia. Greece wants us to give up our name and to be called northern, upper or Slavic Macedonians. In Macedonia there are ongoing debates with all political parties on the possibility of a referendum, because the citizens would have to agree with the decision, notes Ivanov answering a question how long the dispute could last and whether there is a name acceptable for Macedonia.

When asked whether he is optimistic on prompt solution to the differences with Greece over the name, Ivanov says that "it takes two to tango". »It is not Macedonia, but Greece seeking confirmation for its authenticity in ancient times. We have invested a great amount of resources to meet the NATO standards, the required reforms have been implemented, foreign investments are expected. And then in April 2008 came a surprise from Bucharest that triggered frustration and dissatisfaction in Macedonia«, Ivanov tells Der Spiegel.

In the interview, the Macedonian President expresses his hopes that the European Union enlargement towards the Balkans will bring permanent peace in the region. - However, the process of setting new enlargement conditions must stop, he adds. President Ivanov states that after talking with European Union foreign policy chief Javier Solana he is optimistic that Macedonia in 2009 will get a date for launch of EU membership negotiations, adding that most Macedonians are determined to join NATO and EU.

1.17 The UN Minority Report

Gay McDougall, UN independent expert on minority issues, in her report urged Greece to focus on protecting the rights to self-identification and freedom of expression of the minorities. McDougall released a report after paying a visit to Greece on September 8-16, 2008. The principal recommendation included in the report reads that "Greece should withdraw from the dispute over whether there is a Macedonian or a Turkish minority on its territory and focus on protecting the rights to self-identification, freedom of expression and freedom of association of those communities." The report, conveyed by the party of Macedonians in Greece "Rainbow", adds that the rights of these communities to minority protections must be honored in accordance with the Declaration on Minorities and the core international human rights treaties. "Greece is required to comply fully with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights," McDougall underlines in his report.

Greece claims it respects the rights of minorities, thus rejecting an UN report that urged the country not to debate on the existence of Macedonian or Turkish minority but to protect them. "Our positions are crystal clear and founded on absolute respect for human rights, a principle that applies to minorities and constitutes an accomplishment of the modern Greek Republic," Greek Foreign Ministry spokesman Koumoutsakos said in a statement regarding the Report of the Independent UN Expert on Minority Issues. »Greece is a democratic state that fully respects human rights and such reports are not changing the reality«, Greek Foreign Minister Dora Bakoyannis said referring to the UN report on minority issues. Bakoyannis has said that Greece works and will continue working to protect human rights, Greece's daily Kathimerini reported. Greece presented its positions in detail at the Human Rights Council in Geneva, regarding the Report of the Independent UN Expert on Minority Issues.

A special section in the report refers to the minorities in the Florina region. McDougall says the Greek government does not recognize the existence of a Macedonian ethnic minority living in that part of Greece, nor the existence of the Macedonian language. "Many consider this a modern day version of Tito's efforts to create a myth of a Macedonian nation giving support to his expansionist claims against that region of Greece. The response of earlier Greek governments was to suppress any use of the Macedonian language and cultural activities. In recent times the harsh tactics have ceased but those identifying as ethnic Macedonian still report discrimination and harassment. They consider it of crucial importance for their continued existence that their ethnic identity and distinctiveness is respected", reads the report.

McDougall notes that in the 1920s and 30s, laws required the replacement of non-Greek names of towns, villages, rivers and mountains with Greek names. The family names of the Macedonian-speaking population were also required to be changed to Greek names. Community representatives note that traditional names continue to be in common usage and call for reinstatement and the official usage of a dual nomenclature. Macedonian minority representatives claim denial of the right to freedom of association and political activity, and highlight discriminatory laws affecting thousands who fled Greece during the Civil War, who were stripped of their citizenship and property. A 1982 law stated that, "Free to return to Greece are all Greek by Genus who during the civil war of 1946-1949 and because of it have fled abroad as political refugees". This decision excludes those identifying as ethnic Macedonians and is therefore considered discriminatory. McDougall says in the report that she had met numerous individuals identifying as ethnic Macedonians, who are fluent in Macedonian language. It was acknowledged that the situation had improved from a previous era, however they described a "softer discrimination", manifested in general hostility and pressure on the part of authorities and the media.

1.18 Greece might block Croatia due to Macedonia

Greeks are annoyed because Croatia has recognised the Macedonian national minority and autocephalous Macedonian Orthodox Church, therefore it is more likely Athens to block the opening of a new chapter of Croatia's membership talks, Split-based newspaper "Slobodna Dalmacija" reports in January. The daily citing "unofficial, but confidential information", claims that Greece might block the start of the negotiations in terms of the chapter of judiciary, because the Macedonian minority is mentioned in it. "Slobodna Dalmacija" says that even though Foreign Ministry spokesman Mario Dragun said he had no information on any announcements about a blockade from Greece, talks are being held about the issue behind closed doors.

1.19 US Position on the “Name Issue”

As US Ambassador Philip Reeker stressed at a session of the Parliament's Committee on Foreign Policy in November last year, in regard to his country's approach to foreign affairs after the election of Barack Obama for a president, US will keep supporting Macedonia, however name dispute with Greece must be settled. “The United States' foreign policy will not be a subject of drastic changes, always considering the security and prosperity of its citizens, as well as the interests of its partners, which include Macedonia...The US will help Macedonia to boost its economy and support it on the road to its integration with the Euro-Atlantic institutions. However, the dispute with Greece over Macedonia's constitutional name remains open on this road, a matter that both countries should settle by a compromise. In this respect, Macedonia should realistically review all options and chose the most beneficial one for its prosperity” Reeker said. “It means you should not be emotionally connected to some previously defined concepts about what is a compromise, solution to this matter. You should focus on what is important for you, which enables you to retain, preserve the identity, which is a very complex matter. It is not something to be written in a UN document, but something that says who and what you are” Reeker added.

In an interview with "Voice of America", John Bolton, former U.S. ambassador to UN stated: ““The policy of the Obama administration towards the Balkans is still not entirely defined. The Balkans could again be an issue of high priority. The positive thing is that the region is free of violence and ethnic cleansing, but tensions are present, and it will remain a source of tensions until agreements accepted by all parties are reached”. According to him, the U.S. administration should use the NATO Summit in April to strengthen transatlantic ties, primarily with Balkan countries.

In April, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has reiterated that the United States support the efforts in finding a compromise settlement to the Athens-Skopje name row, media report. “Washington strongly supports efforts in finding a mutually acceptable solution”, she stressed at a hearing of the Congressional Committee on Foreign Affairs. She added, “USA understand Greece sensitivity”, announcing the dispute between the two Balkan neighbors “will be discussed with NATO and EU partners”. “We must encourage both sides to reach an acceptable solution”, underlined Clinton.

»Settlement of the name issue is not important just for Skopje, but also for Athens, which knows it would gain a lot with this. Regional economic development, strengthened political stability of their neighbor is important for Greece«, assessed U.S. ambassador to Greece, Daniel Speckhard in Washington-based "Woodrow Wilson" center, referring to U.S.-Greek relations in light of the new U.S. administration, reports Voice of America in Macedonian Language. Speckhard said that the real challenge is how to reach a solution,

adding it is a complex problem that both countries need to settle together with U.S. support.

"USA will support their efforts. Being friends of both countries, we will do everything we can when asked to, support the negotiations, but they should also do this through the UN process, so that our engagement is successful. Taking into consideration my diplomatic experience, I know that when the U.S. is increasingly engaged, we become a triangle in a way, whereas the bilateral engagement ends. Therefore, I believe that we will continue to support the process, but the two countries should be engaged through the UN to get the job done", stressed Speckhard. He expressed hope there would be progress in 2010, although reminding, "I said the same thing last year".

1.20 Emotions to calm down, leave name issue to negotiators - U.S. ambassador

U.S. ambassador to Macedonia Philip Reeker, who was among the guests at the first global conference of the United Macedonian Diaspora in Washington in June, sees a double constructive role of the Macedonian diaspora - to lobby for Macedonia, but also offer advice and experience to Macedonian authorities and citizens. "It is excellent to see UMD cooperate with other diaspora organizations in USA and other countries, to make their opinions and ideas known to the Congress and other places in the US, but also offer a kind of wisdom and experience to Macedonia", Reeker told Voice of America in Macedonian Language.

Pertaining to the name issue, Reeker referred to the stance of U.S. President Barack Obama voiced at the NATO Summit in Strasbourg, that the USA expect Macedonia to become full-fledged Alliance member. Regarding the claims on concern among the people that the name issue is already settled, in the context of the recent statement of European Commission Vice President Barrot, who named Republic of Macedonia as 'Northern Macedonia', Reeker recommended that emotions must calm down, allowing the negotiators to do their job. "I believe the best thing is to leave the process move forward, taking into consideration the country and region's best interest. This is what we are doing here", added the U.S. Ambassador.

On the referendum idea, Reeker said it is an issue decided by the Macedonian authorities and citizens, but pointed out the large percentage of NATO and EU approval in the country. "I believe these are amongst the highest positive ratings on both institutions in candidate-states and members. Therefore, the leadership has the responsibility to take up this initiative, consider the people's wishes and work hard on transforming them into a new reality. We believe this could be the best future for Macedonia", he underlined.

1.21 International Court of Justice sets time-limits for filing initial pleadings in Macedonia v Greece case

Macedonia instituted proceedings before the ICJ against Greece on November 17 due to violation of the 1995 Interim Accord, thus preventing the invitation for NATO accession at the Bucharest Summit (see previous Barometers). The ICJ is requested to order Greece to observe its obligations within the Accord, which is legally binding for both countries. In January, The Hague-based International Court of Justice has convened for the first official meeting between Macedonian and Greek representatives and co-representatives related to Skopje motion against Athens over the breaching of the bilateral Interim Accord of 1995. The meeting was chaired by ICJ President Rosalind Higgins, addressed procedural issues, and set the further course of the process, expected to last for at least three years. ICJ has fixed time-limits for filing of initial pleadings in the case concerning Application of the Interim Accord of 13 September 1995 (Macedonia v. Greece)

International law experts assess that the six-month deadline set by the Court makes it possible for more precise forecasts to be made as regards the length of the whole process. They note that this is a short deadline and that it can be treated as victory of Macedonia, seeing as it indicates that the case is clean and clear. According to the practice of the Court, the usual deadline for submitting the written memoranda is between nine and 12 months. "These deadlines confirm the thesis that this case is very simple, both from the aspect of the legal and the factual situation, as no maps or borders need to be defined. This is a legal dispute over breach of an article of an international agreement, for which written evidence exists and for which there is no need for witnesses, expert witnesses, or assessment of the situation in the field," Faculty of Law professor and international law expert Toni Deskoski explained.

The deadline could be extended if Macedonia assesses that it needs to respond to Greece's arguments, which have to be submitted by January year 2010. In such event, Macedonia would be given one to two months to respond to these arguments, and the same timeframe will be given to Greece to prepare a counter-response. Following the completion of the written part of the process, the oral hearing will start, that is, the two sides will face each other and will be cross-examined. Then the 17-member court will make the final decision.

Even though there is no mechanism with which a country would be forced to abide by the decision of the International Court of Justice, the UN Security Council serves as guarantee that the decision will be implemented. The Macedonian experts explained that if the Court rules in favor of Macedonia, it would be counterproductive for Greece not to observe this decision, as it would be exposed to strong international pressure. "Non-implementation of the Court's decision leads to atrophy of the UN system, which no one will allow," Deskoski

said. He stressed that Greece is a highly developed country within the frames of the UN that has observed all decisions of the Court so far.

1.22 ICG: Macedonia name dispute threatens Balkan stability

»The dispute between Greece and Macedonia over the latter's name is putting an EU and NATO strategy to stabilise the Balkans "at risk"... "this is more than a bilateral dispute between Skopje and Athens. It risks derailing the main strategy of both NATO and the EU for stabilising Macedonia and the region, based on enlargement and integration," warned Donald Steinberg, the International Crisis Group (ICG) deputy president.

In a report entitled "Macedonia's Name: Breaking the Deadlock", the ICG estimated that there was "no imminent risk of a return to violence" between Macedonians and the country's ethnic Albanian minority, which had taken up arms in 2001 demanding more rights. But it added that the disagreement between Greece and Macedonia "puts at risk the progress achieved" since an internationally-brokered peace accord which gave the Albanians more civil and political rights.

Greece and Macedonia have been at loggerheads over the right to the name Macedonia - which is shared by a northern Greek province - since the former Yugoslav republic proclaimed independence in 1991¹. In April, Greece used its veto to block an invitation for Skopje to join NATO and has been threatening to prevent Macedonia's integration into the European Union. Brussels is yet to set a date for membership talks to begin for Macedonia, which was made an official EU candidate in December 2005. But the name dispute has been one of the main stumbling blocks on Macedonia's path towards EU integration. "By blocking NATO and EU integration, Greece appeared to contravene its undertaking in the 1995 Interim Accord between the two states not to let the name issue stand in the way of Macedonia's membership of international organisations," said Sabine Freizer, ICG's Europe Program director.

Both sides "must first rebuild trust" in order to solve this issue, the ICG said. "Skopje should avoid provocations and accept the UN mediator's latest proposal to rename the country as the 'Republic of North Macedonia'," it said. It called on Athens and Skopje to "examine the common history of the region in order to reach a basic understanding and avoid references in educational curriculums that offend the national sensibilities of either country". "Greece should accept the national identity and language of its northern neighbour as 'Macedonian' bearing in mind that this does not imply exclusivity and does not challenge the application

¹ Macedonia was recognised by the United Nations two years later under the name Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM). More than 120 nations, including Russia and the United States, have recognised the Balkan country under its constitutional name Republic of Macedonia. UN-led negotiations on the name dispute have so far come to nothing.

of the same adjective to the inhabitants of the Greek province of Macedonia," the ICG recommended.

"It is astonishing that the Greek government does not recognize an ethnic and national which clearly exists" assessed James Lyon of research organization Democratization Policy Council and former International Crisis Group (ICG) senior advisor on the Balkans, who spoke in January in Washington's "Woodrow Wilson" center regarding the Western Balkan challenges for the EU and the new U.S. administration, reports Voice of America.

Pertaining to the Macedonia-Greece name issue and the ICG call for its settlement, with Athens recognizing the Macedonian identity, Lyon stated that the Democratization Policy Council was shocked by the fact that Greece refuses to recognize it. Lyon expects that the administration of new U.S. President Barack Obama is more involved in the Balkans than before. "The attention on Balkan developments has reduced in recent years. The interest of the international community focuses on other hot spots worldwide. USA have given EU the role to resolve regional problems in the past eight years, but the Union still has problems in defining a single foreign policy, as was the case with Kosovo", states Lyon.

2. LOCAL AND PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

2.1 Speaker Veljanoski Signs Notices for Presidential and Local Elections

Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski, in accordance with his constitutional jurisdiction, on January 9th signed the notices for the forthcoming presidential and local elections in Macedonia, which officially are to be held on March 22. »These elections for the citizens of Macedonia are of utmost importance. Fair and democratic elections in line with the highest European standards are crucial for our future integration to the European Union« stated Veljanoski after signing the notices. After the adoption of Constitution's Amendment 31², the leaders of VMRO-DPMNE, DUI, SDSM, DPA and LDP in a telephone conversation with him endorsed the date March 22, "because it is acceptable both for the political parties and for the State Election Commission (SEC) as an electoral body in charge of carrying them out." The Parliament Speaker called on all political parties and independent candidates to advocate for organising democratic and fair elections and the state institutions to complete their obligations with responsibility, in order to demonstrate their historic responsibility not only towards their own voters, but also towards the citizens of Macedonia.

² In January, the Parliament adopted and proclaimed Friday Constitution's Amendment 31, which stipulates reduction of the census for President's election to 40% in the second round. A total of 86 MPs voted in favor of the amendment, thus meeting the condition of two-third majority. The constitutional changes were agreed at a meeting of leaders of four largest parliamentary parties.

2.2. Selecting a Presidential Candidate for VMRO-DPMNE

After rejecting the SDSM proposal of suggesting a joint presidential candidate (suggested was Srgjan Kerim, former Foreign Minister and a career diplomat), VMRO-DPMNE decided to select their presidential candidate on basis of filing candidatures to the party, setting a deadline on January 23. It was also decided that the party presidential candidate will be elected by delegates at a party convention, set to be held on January 25 in Skopje and to be attended by more than thousand delegates representing the entire VMRO-DPMNE structure, aiming to decide in the most democratic and relevant manner. The party received the first candidature for president of Macedonia from the professor of law Gjorge Ivanov (whose candidacy was earlier publicly backed up by academics and intellectuals as well), followed by Todor Petrov, president of the World Macedonian Congress.

At the beginning of the convention, VMRO-DPMNE leader and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski speaking before 1.143 delegates said that party and Government's priority is fair and democratic elections. "Macedonia, needs a president that will be stable, honest and sensible, a man who has succeeded on his own, without lies and intrigues" he added. According to Gruevski, the present President Crvenkovski during his mandate has failed to solve the key issues for Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia, he pointed out, faces many challenges, first and foremost in the field of foreign affairs, where the future president will be sharing responsibilities with the Government." Furthermore, Gruevski said that due to the embargo imposed by Greece regarding Macedonia's NATO and EU aspirations, the country is enduring great damages. "A solution must be found that will not cause any further damages. The pressure will increase. The ongoing row is in its most critical stage. The identity and nation that were built through many centuries and the country that we have created are bounding us to be more careful" - underlined Gruevski.

Followed the presentation of programs by Gjorge Ivanov and Todor Petrov. Finally, Gjorge Ivanov was elected as the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for the forthcoming presidential elections, gaining 1.016 delegate votes, whereas the second candidate Todor Petrov was supported by 91 delegates. After officially becoming VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate, Ivanov told the media his campaign will be exactly as his character - humble and honest. Addressing the party delegates, Ivanov expressed gratitude for their huge support. "VMRO-DPMNE has the strength to unite and to bring the people together. This Government, led by Nikola Gruevski, has managed to unite those around it and to create an ambient where each one of us is feeling as united Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, Vlach...It is a great honor to be a candidate of this party, but also a great responsibility" he said. Convinced in the power of the latest generation of politicians, who "change the ambient in Macedonia", he urged their ideas to be backed.

2.3. Ljubomir Frckovski Becomes the SDSM Candidate for President

SDSM party delegates at the end of January unanimously elected Ljubomir Frckovski, international law professor, former minister of interior and exterior, as a presidential candidate of the opposition. "We support a candidate who, considering his professional, academic carrier, will be a successful head of the state and present, promote Macedonia abroad, work in favor of the country's security, stability, interethnic relations and democracy", said acting party leader Zoran Zaev. He called on all political parties, in particular the opposition ones, to support this, as he put it, non-partisan candidate. The opposition New Social-Democrat Party (NSDP) also backed Frckovski's candidacy.

At the same time, ex-minister of interiors Ljube Boskoski announced his intents to run for president of the Republic of Macedonia at the coming elections, while LDP announced the candidate Nano Ruzin, a career diplomat and faculty professor. Considering the Albanian political camp, at first only the presidential candidature of New Democracy leader Imer Selmani was a certain candidate, as he easily managed to collect signatures from over 14.000 voters. Later in the race joined DUI with Agron Buxhaku for its candidate and Professor Mirushe Hoxha for DPA.

2.4. Fouere: Forthcoming Elections Crucial for Macedonia's European Future

"Several leaders' meetings will be necessary to secure fair and democratic elections and overcome the gap between the parties of ethnic Albanians", said acting SDSM president Zoran Zaev. According to him, this is due to the political positions presented by DUI and DPA leaders and their confrontations pertaining to the trials against party members on the incidents during the June 1 parliamentary elections. "If we want the elections to be properly held and verified by the international community, a lot of meetings lie ahead in order to iron out positions of Albanian parties", added Zaev.

After meeting the DPA leader Menduh Tact in Tetovo, Euro-Ambassador Erwan Fouere said that forthcoming elections are crucial for Macedonia's European future, adding that "All parties will bear responsibility for possible irregularities. However the main responsibility lies with the government's coalition that should set a solid example and implement the recommendations of the monitoring report on early parliamentary elections. From his side, Tachi said he and his party would urge zero tolerance for all violators of the election process, which is crucial for Macedonia.

"We managed to agree on two things - elections to be held on March 22 and DPA to be the first chair of the Lustration Commission", said DPA leader Menduh Thaci. DUI vice-president Xhevad Ademi assessed that significant progress has

been made at the meeting so that the upcoming presidential and local elections are peaceful. "Thus, we will overcome the problem from the last parliamentary elections, which resulted in damages for Macedonia", added Ademi.

On another occasion, Ambassador Fouere reconfirmed: »If Macedonia organizes peaceful, fair and democratic elections, it will make a giant step towards the EU membership and send a powerful message about the state capacity and the readiness of political party leadership to provide for a process, free of violence we have witnessed at previous elections. Naturally the country should also meet the eight benchmarks, set by the European Commission (EC), but definitely the fair, peaceful elections, complying to all international standards, will give powerful momentum to reforms and I hope will help EC to recommend a date for opening the (membership) talks in its forthcoming report«, he added.

He expressed satisfaction with the course of the election process thus far, being encouraged of the conduct of politicians at public debates. Asked if Greece may again block Macedonia, Fouere said that EC's evaluation was based on the overall reform process. However the Council of the EU makes the decision, and it has clearly said that name row settlement is fundamental for setting a date for opening of Macedonia's EU entry talks.

»Macedonia's EU-integration process is now related to the elections, namely the overall efforts of state institutions to organize fair, democratic process, to provide for it to be conducted in a peaceful atmosphere as it has been the case with the pre-election campaign thus far«, Vice-Premier for European Affairs Ivica Bocevski told reporters at sidelines of the Forum 'European Cultural Dialogue'. »It will alter the political image, environment of Macedonia's Euro-integration process. When we talk about the three Macedonia's priorities we mention the elections, visa liberalization and accreditation for IPA (EU Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance) funds. I do not mention the election process by chance, because it should eliminate the main obstacle that stands between Macedonia and setting of its date for opening the EU entry talks. Macedonia keeps working on meeting of all necessary criteria for the EU membership«, Bocevski said.

2.5. Reeker: No Place for Violence at Forthcoming Elections

US Ambassador Philip Reeker met in Tetovo with leaders and presidential candidates of DUI, DPA and New Democracy in order to convey a message from US President Barack Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton that March elections are crucial for the future of Macedonia. »It is the right of every citizen to expect free and fair elections and to have the chance to cast his/hers vote freely and to elect mayors and a president«, Reeker stated. DUI's Ali Ahmeti, DPA's Menduh Taci and New Democracy presidential hopeful Imer Selmani pledged to make utmost efforts in ensuring free, fair and democratic elections.

Following the meeting, Selmani and Ahmeti said they would advocate democratic elections at the campaign. »Let's do everything in our power in order to prevent incidents similar to those in 2008. Let our messages be positive and our competition to be based on messages and ideas. We must prevent all possible incidents from party followers beforehand and all candidates for the first time in independent Macedonia have to make an endeavour and send a message of unity at the elections«, said Selmani. Ali Ahmeti noted that his party would continue promoting fair and democratic elections.

In the course of his tour across Macedonian municipalities, US Ambassador to Macedonia Philip Reeker stated: »At these elections there is no place for threat, violence and fear; fear for one's job, for one's future or personal safety. The elections and ongoing campaign should be founded on the character of a certain candidate, but not on threats. Media on the other hand should ensure equal treatment towards all candidates and unbiased approach. I want to prompt the citizens of Cair to exercise democracy. I expect a massive turnout in order the citizens to elect their local leader and their president who will represent Macedonia aboard and will carry out his/hers constitutional duties as a supreme commander, stated Ambassador Reeker. In the past several weeks, he added, there are reports saying that civil servants have been put under pressure in terms of who to vote for. It is something that OSCE will be monitoring closely as well as the issues in connection to the electoral list that haven't been solved yet. - Currently, it is an additional responsibility of the authorities to clarify these claims, something which we will be also monitoring closely«.

2.6. Responsibility for March Elections is Collective - French Ambassador

Responsibility for the forthcoming presidential and local elections is collective and each individual should complete the given tasks in his/hers jurisdictions. Ongoing activities of the relevant institutions in election preparations is evident, says France's Ambassador in Macedonia Bernard Valero. »For me it is vital the country to be aware of the importance of the March elections and each and every person to have a collective responsibility, because it is the only way for the functioning of the democratic system to be demonstrated«, he stated. He believes Macedonia has collective responsibility and "it can be felt", because "everyone wants the elections irregularities that took place in June 2008 not to be repeated." Valero also deems that the authorities take adequate measures in an attempt to ensure fair elections.

»Upcoming elections in Macedonia will be a crucial test for evaluating the country's democratic capacity«, EU-enlargement commissioner Olli Rehn said at a press conference referring to the pace of EU-integration process in Western Balkans and Turkey.

2.7. Leader's Meeting for Fair Elections

I am encouraged that we have made sufficient preparations from a political and institutional aspect in order to hold fair and democratic elections, in which Macedonia and its citizens would come out as winners, regardless of ethnic, national or political background, said Prime Minister and VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski after the March 1st meeting with SDSM, DUI and DPA leaders, Zoran Zaev, Ali Ahmeti and Menduh Thaci respectively. He stressed that the upcoming elections are exceptionally significant for the country's EU and NATO integration, urging all political parties, their activists, state institutions and citizens to give their contribution in the process. SDSM and DUI leaders, Zaev and Ahmeti respectively, sent the same message after the meeting, whereas DPA leader Thaci left the meeting early in sign of "revolt from the postponement of trials of DUI activists indicted for electoral irregularities, whereas the trials of DPA members are swiftly processed, ending with judgments ranging from 2-4 years imprisonment". Gruevski denied Thaci's statements, saying that competent institutions would undertake the necessary measures if there are certain irregularities.

2.8. Minister Jankuloska: Mol has already kicked off election preparations

Preparations for the March elections are already under way and the Interior Ministry (Mol) is conducting all the necessary activities for introducing the police officers with their authorisations and responsibilities and the citizens with their role in the election process, stated Minister of Interior Affairs Gordana Jankulovska on Friday following the presentation of the project "Transparency and Accountability in Police Work", drafted in cooperation with the OSCE Spillover Mission to Skopje.

»Today's presentation of the project developed together with Mol will generate public understanding of the police activities, which is of significant importance especially prior to the forthcoming elections where the role of the police to secure the election process will be essential. I highlight the need that the police should be politically unbiased in this process and to do its duty in line with the law«, stated Ambassador Herrero."

At the sidelines of the European People's Party (EPP) meeting of Heads of State and Government in Brussels PM Nikola Gruevski said: »Considering the atmosphere thus far these elections should pass much better than the previous one. State institutions shall be on alert and do everything in their power to prevent all attempts for violation of the election process. Those who will try to disturb the peace will face serious consequences, as we are going to make their lives miserable if they make attempts to play with the country's future«.

2.9. Macedonia is capable of holding free, fair and democratic elections - SEC chairman

»I am convinced that Macedonia has the capacity to hold elections that all citizens and our friends worldwide want«, said State Election Commission (SEC) chairman Aleksandar Novakoski on occasion of Global Elections Day. According to him, Macedonia is aware that high and strict European standards have not been reached yet. "We know that a number of problems and obstacles have to be removed on this way, primarily the phenomenon of family and proxy voting, violence at certain polling stations, as well as other shortcomings. SEC is doing everything in its power to make Election Day a holiday of democracy. Still, we believe a big test is ahead of us", added Novakoski.

2.10. Local and Presidential Rallies by Various Candidates

2.10.1 Highlights of SDSM campaign:

SDSM officially started the campaign in Prilep, by promoting party presidential candidate Ljubomir Frckoski. Stressing that the accession to NATO is a national priority which would lead to resolution of all security issues, Frckoski criticised the government of taking Macedonia to isolation, failing to provide development or foreign investments. "An isolated Macedonia brings safety risks, which will immediately reflect at multiethnic level. We surpassed the main crises with difficult decisions and the Ohrid Framework Agreement and now in a time of peace we are backtracking," stated Frckoski, highlighting that Macedonia's non-accession to NATO, would increase the discontent among the ethnic Albanians. "Obviously, Gruevski has thoroughly studied Goebbels' doctrine, hoping that its implementation will help him rule for a longer period. He must face the fact that such methods have a limited timeframe," stated SDSM Acting President Zoran Zaev.

At the Veles rally, Frckoski accused the authorities of isolating the country, endangering its security and interethnic relations. "We do not have a problem if we clash with Greece and Bulgaria over our identity, we have a problem if we do not work with our friends throughout the globe. If we lose the positions, as is the case now in Washington and Brussels, we are in crisis", he added. Incumbent Veles mayor Ace Kocovski, who is a joint candidate of SDSM, NSDP and LDP, said it is an honor, but also great responsibility to be the mayor of Veles. Kocovski said the municipality has won a number of domestic and international recognitions, as well as projects and funds for investments in infrastructure and other projects in recent years, thus becoming a leader-municipality in the country's decentralization process.

At a rally in Skopje, Frckovski stated: »The Government offers complete isolation and therefore on election day we must awake Macedonia. We must fight for the honored Macedonia as it once was. As Macedonians, our identity is clear and the

international community has accepted us as such«. In response to calls from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE party on his solution to the name issue with Greece, he said he sees the way out in the guarantee of Macedonian identity, language and nationality. "The name for international use, which should serve as replacement to FYROM will be better than the one VMRO-DPMNE accepted at the Bucharest Summit, which is Republic of Macedonia (Skopje)", stressed Frckoski at a press conference. He added that the name issue should be resolved by this autumn, thus enabling Macedonia to join NATO. Frckoski also said he was ready to cooperate and support every authority, adding it is the obligation of the authority to take care of its citizens. "The concept of the ruling authorities is to destabilize the country. We have to prevent them. They offer unity, but around what? We will unite, but only for Macedonia's victory. We will not sell our identity", stressed Frckoski.

At the pre-election rally in Ohrid, acting SDSM leader Zoran Zaev told Ohrid citizens that they will decide whether to "return the country's lost international credibility or the country will continue to fall in the hopeless Balkan black hole". "It is nice to say what the people want to hear. However, one has to be realistic, flexible and pragmatic. A true patriot is the one who improves the economic situation of every Macedonian family, one who opens the road of the homeland towards a better future" he said.

At another SDSM party convention Zaev said: "It is time we put an end to the absolutism..this shameful isolation and adventurism must stop«. »We need a change of the policy which leads Macedonia towards isolation and misery, we need a policy which will bring the security issues on the agenda once again, a policy which nears Macedonia dangerously close to the edge of a new instability, and once again opens the question of whether Macedonia will succeed," stated Ljubomir Frckoski.

The candidate for Skopje mayor, nominated by NSDP and SDSM, Tito Petkovski presented at a press conference the project titled "Urban Development of Skopje". The projects envisages strategies that will solve the urban and environmental issues as well as fresh approaches in planning as a symbiosis of economy and environment. »Estates surrounding the capital must be treated as high-valued properties and used only for capital public facilities and infrastructure. Furthermore, the chaotic development of individual housing space must be stopped«, said Petkovski. He suggested a new general plan for the City of Skopje to be drafted in accordance with the territorial organisation and legal norms, as well as an urban plan of the Skopje valley and a Skopje center for conducting urban policy to be formed. »If I win the trust of Skopje citizens, I will develop the capital of Macedonia in line with the "green city" model«, Petkovski pledged.

2.10.2 Highlights of VMRO-DPMNE campaign:

VMRO-DPMNE traditionally kicked off its electoral race in Ohrid. There, Gjorge Ivanov stated that as a future president, he will work on strengthening the unity of all ethnic communities, honoring the needs of all citizens, promising to work in line with the principles of the rule of law and do his best for Macedonia to be a successful country of happy people, the cradle of freedom, democracy and friendship.

At the rally in Bitola, Gjorge Ivanov said that the city is a symbol of European Macedonia. "There is a synagogue, church and mosque at the same place. Bitola is the city of many heroes and renaissance men. This is the city of the Manaki brothers. Successful people live here", stated Ivanov. He referred to the President's competencies, saying that citizens must not burden themselves with politicians' problems. "We must establish open relations with all neighbors. Macedonia is strong when open. Macedonia is closed when entering into quarrels and disputes. We have problems with Greece, but relations of Macedonian and Greek citizens must not be cold", stressed Ivanov. In Veles, he said that his biggest pledge is to lift the visa regime towards Macedonia and to eradicate corruption and crime.

Addressing the residents of Makedonski Brod, Ivanov said that Macedonia had proved that only successful people, like the ministers of the current Government, were able to bring success. »I imagine Macedonia as a big, harmonious family, a family where we can achieve successes«, said Ivanov. In Kicevo, focusing on multi-ethnic relations in the country, Ivanov said they were successfully resolved within the coalition because "For Better Macedonia" was the biggest coalition made up of parties hailing from different ethnic communities.

At the rally in Krushevo, the presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov said: "Krusevo is a symbol of coexistence. Unity holds the town, but also Macedonia. As president, I will nurture good relations with neighbors and politics must not have an effect on this". He stressed that he would also promote the country's economic development. VMRO-DPMNE leader Gruevski stated that the president and mayors must primarily be honest people. "We need men who will work honestly, without abusing their office. Gjorge Ivanov is that man, with whom we will fight against the blackmails coming from our southern neighbor and find ways to overcome this problem, but not at the price of breaking Macedonia's dignity, state and national interests", added Gruevski.

VMRO-DPMNE and "For Better Macedonia" coalition held rally at Skopje's square presenting candidates for president and mayors of Skopje and its municipalities. The leader Nikola Gruevski recommended that government needs same partners at local level to easily surpass global economic crisis. »Mutual fight against economic crisis is needed that's why the government is important to have its ally at local authorities and because of this we must support candidates

of the coalition that have programme compatible with ours. At last year's elections we have programme that included concrete projects and showed that we can be successful politicians without lying the citizens. We are aware that many problems should be resolved and the government will continue resolving them with great commitment. It will depend from municipalities whether we will conduct more projects at local level« he said.

Candidate for president Gjorge Ivanov said that his vision is to see Macedonia strong and powerful, respected member of NATO and EU, country with happy and satisfied citizens: »We are accused for isolation, divisions and poverty. I am saying that Macedonia is not isolated, divided and is not poor. Macedonia is strong and respected outside because it is united inside. That's why I am happy that I will be president to all citizens«, Ivanov said.

Candidate for mayor of Skopje Koce Trajanovski said that the city needs experience and people that achieved something, like himself. He said that he has vision, plan and programme for Skopje made with citizens and with all 10 Skopje's municipalities for entire living in the city, education, sports and communal hygiene. If elected mayor he promised to make Skopje clean, to resolve the traffic chaos, new jobs through creating conditions for attraction of home and foreign investors, revitalisation of Skopje's Old Bazaar etc.

»There should be no more divisions; we are tired of divisions and labelling, we need a president who will unite us,« stated VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov at the party convention. "Our grandparents were divided into Serbs, Bulgarians and Greeks. Our fathers were divided into communists and VMRO supporters. Now we are being divided into Slavic and Ancient Macedonians. We have had enough divisions," stated Gjorge Ivanov. "We will let the opposition accuse, lie and manipulate since they are better at it. We will let them deal with accusations, degradations, lies and manipulations and we will deal with these things that we are good at," stated PM Nikola Gruevski.

2.10.3 Highlights of LDP campaign:

"Only united Macedonia can lead us to EU and NATO," stressed LDP presidential candidate Nano Ruzin at his party convention. "The name issue presented an obstacle for obtaining invitation in Bucharest, but it was unfortunate that the government and the President went there with divided stands, thereby destroying all chances for NATO. What is also unfortunate are the claims of the so-called 'unifiers', who created the thesis for divided Ancient and Slavic Macedonia by themselves. After two years, they now deny that and call upon unity. Do you really believe them? I do not believe them as well," stressed Ruzin.

At the rally in Kumanovo, Nano Ruzin said that a priority in his campaign is Macedonia's EU and NATO accession. "Macedonia cannot be divided anymore. If citizens want prosperous future, then we must stop with divisions. Therefore, I

chose slogan 'Macedonia United and Strong'", stated Ruzin. He reiterated the necessity of finding a compromise solution on the name dispute on a national level and afterwards with Greece. Ruzin also referred to the significance of Corridor 10, especially for Kumanovo, saying that the city could become the center of transit tourism.

Pertaining to overcoming of the current blockade and degrading position of Macedonian diplomacy, Ruzin announced the establishment of an inter-party forum, which would bear the historic responsibility on signing "a joint strategy for resolution of the name issue, agreed with the Government". "I will do everything to find a state compromise, followed by one within the UN. Our prior presidents and PMs have always feared on the consequences of compromises on their political future. We all favor against abandoning our constitutional name, but we, as politicians, must seek for an immediate solution", added Ruzin. The LDP presidential hopeful stressed he would promote professional diplomacy, more active relations between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the president, as well as closer ties with the diaspora.

2.10.4 Highlights of DPA campaign:

The opposition Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) kicked off in Gostivar its pre-election campaign under the slogan 'We go on in Albanian manner.' At the rally, the party presented its candidates for mayors, including the presidential hopeful Mirushe Xoxha, who said that a country could make no progress without a long-term strategy for both internal and foreign policy. "The institution president must respect the multiethnic character of the state," she stressed. "Working in favour of all citizens represents the goal which the president should accomplish. The future president should do much in the field of Euro-Integrations, which should be carried out in two phases, the first one being the country's accession to NATO and EU, and the second one improvement of the relations with the neighbouring countries," stressed Hoxha. DPA President Thaci stated Macedonia would either enter NATO or it would cease to exist.

At the DPA rally in the village of Batinci near Skopje Miruse Hoxha said: »The multi-ethnic society in Macedonia is not being reflected in the concept of the country. What happens is that every ethnic community or religion in the country continues to lead parallel lives. If multi-ethnicity is not stimulated, it will trigger problems«.

2.10.5 Highlights of DUI campaign:

DUI started the promotional campaign for the local and presidential elections in Struga. The party promoted its presidential candidate Agron Buxhaku as well as the candidates for the local elections. "DUI keeps its promises and as a result our party's slogan at these elections reads 'We keep our word'. »I will strive for liberalisation of the visa regime as quickly as possible, with the intention that the

citizens, especially the youth, can travel abroad and see Europe. Our goal is to resolve the current problems in the country. We will do everything for multiethnic Macedonia to enter NATO and EU," stated Buxhaku, adding that DUI would settle the problems with Greece for Macedonia, along with Kosovo and other states, to take its rightful place in Europe.

At the rally in Aracinovo, party leader Ali Ahmeti told the villagers that democracy in Macedonia arrived with DUI, whereas Aracinovo is significant for all Albanians. "Everything started from here. However, we must move forward in following Europe. Some have not realized yet that Albanians and Macedonia can prosper only together, because strength comes from unity", stressed Ahmeti.

2.10.6 Highlights of New Democracy campaign:

New Democracy started their campaign from Bitola under the motto 'New Democracy – New Spring'. Party leader and presidential candidate Imer Selmani presented his political platform with a highlighted European image, rarely witnessed in Bitola. "We expect success at the presidential elections, regardless of the fact that there are different views. Some people still refuse to believe that the president of Macedonia can come from an ethnic community other than the Macedonian, but I strongly believe that if it could have occurred in the USA, it can occur in Macedonia as well. Macedonia is not as divided as some people think it may be," stressed Selmani.

While presenting his program, New Democracy presidential candidate Imer Selmani said in Tearce and Jegunovce municipalities that Macedonia needs a president who would unite people, overcome the problem with Greece and promote good neighborly relations, NATO and Euro-integration. "There is no progress in Macedonia and the country is in permanent isolation, relations with neighbors have worsened, NATO and EU integration has been halted. New Democracy has a program for a better future. I will make Macedonia a country respected by all", he added. Selmani stressed that he runs for president because he believes in a fresh spring in Macedonia through good work.

Imer Selmani presented his election program in Strumica and said: "My vision for Macedonia is a vision I wish for my children. Economically advanced Macedonia, in which people respect diversities, being ethnic, cultural or religious. Let this be a benefit and model for many European countries", stated Selmani. He stressed that Macedonia has powerful friends worldwide, which must not be forgotten. "They will always support us with the same fervor. We should open up, communicate as much as possible, build an internal strategy of respect, with equal policy towards our neighbors and our integration path", underlined Selmani.

Selmani also presented his electoral program before the citizens of Prilep. He vowed to be a president of all citizens regardless of the language they speak,

their ethnic and religious affiliation. »We are all human and we want a better life - Prilep to be a city of happy families, the children to study and to find a job«, Selmani stated. He perceives Macedonia as an economically progressive country with well-developed infrastructure and stable co-existence amongst ethnic communities. »I see Macedonia as a country of two million inhabitants that can easily and quickly be integrated to NATO and EU. We should and we must find a way to unite our citizens«, he stressed.

2.10.7 Highlights of Ljube Boskoski campaign:

Under the slogan 'United for Macedonia', independent presidential candidate Ljube Boskoski promoted at a convention in Skopje his electoral program and web site. »I am the only VMRO candidate for Macedonia's president at these elections. My program is based on five priorities - Macedonia, its people, unity, prosperity and EU, NATO - integration, Boskoski said. He promised European standards for the private sector, better life for all citizens of Macedonia. »The name negotiations may be successful only if we are united and come forward with clear position on the matter, based on national consensus. I have a plan for bringing Macedonia to NATO, as well as solutions and negotiating experience«, Boskoski said. » I have come to unite, not divide, to resolve, not to delay the problems, to build, not to ruin. I have come to take you to brighter, more prosperous, safer future«, Boskoski said.

During the election campaign Ljube Boskoski also stated: »I have come back to merge the past, present and future. I have come to unite«. According to him, Macedonians regardless of their nationality, wake up with the hope of a better tomorrow. "This is a time of fresh political spring. As president, I will not forget about anyone and as supreme commander I will stand behind the rights of Macedonian Army members", he added. »I spent these past months in almost every city and village in Macedonia and I saw worried, apathetic faces of farmers, textile workers...I have solutions to the economic and social worries of the Macedonia citizens, I have a vision how to make Macedonia a member of NATO, how to create an effective army in line with international standards«, he said. He vowed to make Macedonia prosperous and respected country by joining forces with the people, where the young would built their future and where immigrants would return in order to "help their homeland in these historic moments".

»The name of my party VMRO includes name Macedonia. No VMRO member will ever make a compromise on the name of Macedonia. We can hold bilateral talks with Greece, because the name is not our problem, but one of our southern neighbor. However, we will never allow ourselves to lose the identity, lose our country, endanger our Constitution. I will establish diplomatic relations with Greece at a higher level, so that we resolve problems and join NATO, because this is the condition for our existence«, said independent presidential candidate Ljube Boskoski in Strumica.

2.11. Presidential Candidates' Joint Meeting

Presidential candidates reached Friday a gentleman's agreement on the campaign rhetoric at their joint breakfast in a Skopje restaurant. The breakfast initiated by LDP presidential candidate Nano Ruzin was attended by Gjorge Ivanov (VMRO-DPMNE), Ljubomir Frckoski (SDSM), Imer Selmani (New Democracy), independent candidate Ljube Boskoski, and Agron Buxhaku (DUI). DPA's Miruse Hoxha, who is the only female candidate in the running, cancelled her attendance without an explanation, but the candidates expressed their assurance on her attendance at the next meeting scheduled in Tetovo next Thursday.

According to Ruzin, although the meeting did not produce a written document, it is symbolic since it contributes to political culture in Macedonia, establishing a model of communication for future elections. "I believe that today we made an enormous step forward in Macedonia's political culture. We will resume this practice in Tetovo. It is not important who is the host, but to demonstrate that we have understanding on our multiethnic model", said Ruzin. All candidates stated that the joint breakfast was an excellent opportunity for exchange of opinions.

According to Imer Selmani, the campaign is held in a democratic atmosphere thus far, whereas the red line is respect of one's personal dignity and family integrity. "We exchanged certain opinions, concluding that the campaign start has exceeded our expectations. We are doing everything in our power to keep it that way. One of the seven candidates is the true president and the one who wins will buy dinner", stressed Selmani.

Agron Buxhaku said he favored positive campaigns, assessing today's meeting as a good step in sending a message to everyone that the level of political culture is upped, as well as a possibility for presidential candidates to get to know each other. Ljube Boskoski also promoted fair and peaceful elections, but expects heating up of the campaign as Election Day comes closer.

2.12 Boskoski, Ivanov, Selmani and Frckoski meet NGO officials

The presidential candidates held a meeting with representatives of the NGO sector, where they presented their positions and viewpoints in relation to the anti-discrimination law, which is up for a public debate. Independent candidate Ljube Boskoski, VMRO-DPMNE's Gjorge Ivanov, LDP's Nano Ruzin, ND's Imer Selmani and SDSM's Ljubomir Frckoski took part at the roundtable, which was attended by representatives of civil associations constituting the coalition "Macedonia Without Discrimination". DPA and DUI presidential hopefuls, Miruse Hoxha and Agron Buxhaku, failed to attend the event due to busy schedules.

The candidates said they would back the anti-discrimination law, only if its draft-text was to be subjected to several improvements, because it included

shortcomings. In general, they urged a body to be formed to monitor the law's implementation, whereas Frckoski considered that it must be independent with authorisations for conducting researches. If elected president, Boskoski vowed to settle the anti-discrimination issues. Ivanov said he managed the subject Civil Society to be included into the Faculty of Law curriculum, adding he would endorse the law. However, Nano Ruzin said he would not support the law, because of "its shortcomings which have been also detected by the Venice Commission".

2.13 Election Data and Rules

A newly constituted State Election Commission (SEC) has been set up in December 2008 and then it convened its first session. Its Chairman Aleksandar Novakovski called on political parties, relevant institutions to contribute to successful, fair elections: "These elections are crucial for Macedonia's EU membership and a country that aspires to join EU cannot allow any incidents at the forthcoming elections". SEC, in cooperation with the Council of Europe organized seminars on the election process, for preventing family voting and other irregularities.

As the law regulates, at least 10.000 voters or at least 30 MPs are able to propose a presidential candidate. The legal deadline for collection of 10.000 signatures of all potential presidential candidates expires by midnight February 15. The presidential elections are conducted during the final 60 days of the mandate of the current president. The President of Macedonia is elected for a five-year term and can only be elected for two terms. S/he must be a citizen of Macedonia, over 40 years old and to have lived in the country for at least 10 years in the previous 15 years. The new Macedonian president is elected by the absolute majority of registered voters at least. If this precondition is not met, a run-off will be scheduled 14 days later, including the two candidates who won most votes. Under the new constitutional changes, the required second round turnout for successful presidential elections has been lowered to 40%.

The elections for city council members and mayors are taking place every four years in all Macedonian municipalities. Registered political parties, coalitions as well as groups of voters have the right to submit lists of candidates for council members and mayors. At these elections citizens were able to choose from about 370 candidates for mayors and about 700 lists of candidates for municipal councillors in 84 municipalities and the City of Skopje. The candidate who wins majority of votes in the first round will be elected mayor, providing one-third of registered voters in the municipality go out at polls. If no candidate wins the required majority, a second round will be held, including the two candidates with most votes in the first round. The candidate winning more votes becomes mayor. The number of councillors differ depending on the number of citizens living in the municipality. Councillors are elected according to the proportional model of

closed lists, and the allocation of councillor seats is carried out in line with the D'Hondt Model.

The campaign of political parties and other participants at the fourth presidential and fifth local elections, scheduled for March 22 officially began Sunday midnight. Parties, coalitions and independent candidates promoted their programs in the set 20 days, elaborating why they need citizens' support. The campaign was set to last until March 20 at midnight, followed by election silence prior to Election Day.

A total of 1,792,082 voters were registered in the Voters' List, who can give their vote for one of the seven presidential candidates - Gjorge Ivanov (VMRO-DPMNE), Ljubomir Frckoski (SDSM), independent candidate Ljube Boskoski, Nano Ruzin (LDP), Agron Buxhaku (DUI), Miruse Hoxha (DPA) and Imer Selmani (New Democracy) as well as for city councillors and mayors.

Internally displaced persons (IDPs), detainees and inmates will cast their vote at the local and presidential elections on Saturday. A total of 529 IDPs have the right to vote, whereas their ballots will be counted on Election Day, said the State Elections Commission (SEC). Moreover, 1971 detainees and inmates will cast their ballot on Saturday, along with the sick people who submitted a request and received approval from the municipal election commissions. SEC has submitted the confidential material to all 84 municipal election commissions. SEC has accredited 6,981 domestic observers, most of whom from civic association MOST - 4,520. There are 524 accredited foreign monitors, most coming from OSCE/ODIHR 297. MOST Executive Director Darko Aleksov stated that the civic association would involve more than 3,500 observers during the elections, covering 65 percent of polling stations in the two election rounds. Polling stations will open Sunday at 07:00 and will close at 19:00 hrs.

2.14 Pre-Election Topics That Occupied the Public

The Broadcasting Council until February 9th has filed several motions for breaching of the media presentation ban before the start of the pre-election campaign.

The Anti-Corruption Commission on its behalf processed over 100 cases, related to notices for 860 new jobs. The deputy-coordinator of the opposition SDSM Marjanco Nikolov has been waiting a whole month for a reply by the Government on the question: How many newly employed persons are there (for limited or unlimited time) starting from August 2006, in all the ministries, agencies, regional offices and services for which in charge is the Government? And now much budget money have been spent so far for that purpose? This MP posed this question based on information that in the last three years the administration has been filled with persons in possession of party membership cards, not counting the Framework Agreement employments. »There are institutions in which have

been working two persons, and now there are twelve; there are places where people don't have a place to sit down» he says. And the main question is whether the state budget could be able to hold to the new employments, especially when in the state are felt the economic crisis consequences. What's more opposition accused the government that in the election period opens the construction of new numerous public buildings and other investments, which is contrary to the code of ethics in the preelection period. However, general impression including the media and the opposition is that the Anti-Corruption Commission does not perform its duties in a satisfactorily manner, as it treats very softly all the moves of the government.

2.15 EU Ambassador Fouere on Election Campaign

“All stakeholders in the elections should demonstrate strong political will through their conduct and create appropriate political climate for organising fair and democratic elections,” Ambassador Fouere recommended. He expressed content with the hitherto collective conduct of the candidates for mayors, since according to him, they observe the international standards for conducting the elections. “First I would like to send a clear message to the senior representatives of the government and the political parties to put paid to these acts of intimidation since they could destroy all efforts invested for holding good elections,” said Fouere.

2.16. President Branko Crvenkovski's Statement at Sunday's polls

After exercising his right to vote at Sunday's presidential and local elections, President Branko Crvenkovski expressed his hopes that Macedonia today would hold peaceful, democratic and flawless elections, without incidents and irregularities. »It is what we need for the democracy in Macedonia, for the credibility and legitimacy of our institutions. At the same time we are all aware that by holding peaceful elections we will meet the most serious pre-condition in the process of country's Euro-Atlantic integration«, said Crvenkovski.

He added that Macedonia in the past had organised peaceful and democratic elections, which in his opinion "demonstrated that in Macedonia there is institutional capacity and needed democratic potential for successful elections". »However, the existence of sincere and political will is necessary and I am convinced that such a will is going to be demonstrated today, stressed outgoing President Crvenkovski. He said he hoped that the future president of Macedonia in cooperation with the Government and other institutions would resume his/hers participation in the talks with Greece over the name dispute and that both sides with sincere efforts would find a fair and democratic solution acceptable for both Macedonia and Greece

2.17. Election Day: Local Elections and Presidential Elections Round One

The presidential and local elections in Macedonia have been carried out in a peaceful atmosphere. Turnout by 17.00 hrs was 48.73 percent, or 788,147 voters, and was higher compared to the general elections of last year, said Aleksandar Novakovski, president of the State Election Commission, at the press conference at 18.00 hrs.

Novakovski said the electoral commission from the municipality of Ilinden sent an announcement to the State Election Commission, contradicting the reports of certain media that police had to intervene at a local polling station. Because of the bad weather voting was hindered altogether in certain high mountainous regions. According to the official statistics, 12,556 voters could not vote for this reason. They will therefore exercise their right to vote in the second election round.

SEC chairman Aleksandar Novakovski informed at Monday's press conference that data from 2,823 out of 2,976 polling stations have been submitted. A total of 1,011,441 voters came out at polls, with a 56.44 percent turnout. According to SEC preliminary results, VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov won most votes at Sunday's elections - 343,374. SDSM candidate Ljubomir Frckoski won 200,316 votes, followed by Imer Selmani of New Democracy (146,795), independent candidate Ljube Boskoski (145,638), Agron Buxhaku of DUI (73,567), Nano Ruzin from LDP (39,645) and DPA's Miruse Hoxha (30,281). "Taking into consideration this data, Ivanov and Frckoski progress to the runoff, scheduled in a fortnight", added Novakovski. The SEC chairman also announced that mayors in 32 municipalities have been elected in the first round, whereas a second round will be held in 45.

Pertaining to the Skopje polls, VMRO-DPMNE mayor candidate Koce Trajanovski won most votes (98,144). He will face NSDP/SDSM hopeful Tito Petkovski, who gained 57,568 votes, in the second round. Moreover, the 134 polling stations, which did not open yesterday due to the poor weather conditions, Novakovski stressed they would not have an effect on the electoral results. DUI candidate Sefket Zekoli is third with 24,294 votes and New Democracy front-runner Argim Nagavci came fourth with 13,058 votes. The remaining candidates for mayors of Skopje won less than 10,000 votes. 451,691 voters cast their ballots for Skopje mayor in 495 polling stations. Their total turnover was 50,25%.

The list of councilors for the City of Skopje backed by the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition gained the most votes in Sunday's polls - 75,157. SDSM follows with 42,657 votes, then DUI with 24,261, New Democracy - 13,556, LDP - 12,359 and VMRO-NP - 11,400 votes.

Mayors in 32 municipalities have been elected in the first round of local elections out of which VMRO-DPMNE wins 23 mayoral seats, SDSM and DUI 4 each, and DPT one. Mayors in 45 municipalities will be elected in the second round

scheduled in a fortnight. VMRO-DPMNE coalition "For Better Macedonia" won in Skopje municipalities Aerodrom, Gjorce Petrov, Gazi Baba and Butel, as well as Bitola, Prilep, Kocani, Stip, Kavadarci, Sveti Nikole, Vinica, Novaci, Valandovo, Gradsko, Probistip, Kriva Palanka, Rankovce, Kratovo, Pehcevo, Vasilevo, Demir Kapija, Kicevo and Bosilovo. SDSM won mayoral seats in Kumanovo, Strumica, Vranestica and Debrca, DUI in Zajas, Oslomej, Debar and Saraj, whereas DPT in Centar Zupa.

2.18. OSCE/ODIHR Preliminary Election Estimates

The first round of Sunday's presidential and mayoral election in Macedonia met most international standards, stated the OSCE/ODIHR observer mission. »The first round, despite some issues of concern, represents an important step forward. We will be watching closely for continued progress in the second round," said Peter Eicher, head of the OSCE's election monitoring arm, the ODIHR. The elections were well administered and free of the violent incidents that clouded last year's parliamentary elections. Election day was peaceful and the voting process was generally well managed, although there were procedural irregularities and the counting process was assessed less positively, the OSCE/ODIHR report reads. »It is a pleasure for me to see that this country has made a number of steps along the democratic road that it returned to during the rerun of the elections last summer. Irregularities and a lack of trust remain - and these must be dealt with - but there is no doubt that you have made further progress in holding elections according to international commitments, said OSCE PA Vice President Pia Christmas-Moller, Special Co-ordinator appointed to lead the short-term OSCE observer mission.

2.19. US Congratulates Macedonia on Peaceful Elections

»The United States congratulate Macedonia and its citizens on the successful conduct of the first round of presidential and municipal elections. The citizens of Macedonia deserve praise for the high turnout, a public relations officer for the US State Department Bureau for European Affairs«, told the Voice of America - Macedonian language program.

The initial OSCE/ODIHR assessment that the first round of Sunday's presidential and mayoral election in Macedonia has met most international standards demonstrate the country' capacity to organize successful election process, which is vital for its further progress towards the Euro-Atlantic institutions, Marianne Tuscon said. The State Department also calls on the Government and other relevant institutions in Macedonia to address the rest of challenges notified in the initial ODIHR report, thus ensuring secure, free and just environment for the second round on April 5.

»The United States of America will cooperate with the new President of the Republic of Macedonia, who will be elected on 5 April«. The spokesman of the

State Department, Robert Wood, made this statement at a press conference in Washington, Makfax agency said. He reiterated the opinion of official Washington that the first round of presidential and local elections in Macedonia passed in full compliance with the international standards and without any problems or violence whatsoever.

2.20. Czech EU Presidency: Elections Held in Orderly, Peaceful Atmosphere

The Czech Presidency of the Council of the EU welcomed that the local and presidential elections in the Republic of Macedonia were held in an orderly and peaceful atmosphere and without any significant incidents. "The Presidency notes that the assessments of the international, as well as national observers and organisations, confirm that the elections met most of international standards and enabled the free expression of the will of the citizens", reads the press release. The Presidency expresses its belief that the remaining challenges will be addressed in the second round of the elections that is due to take place on April 5, which will also proceed in a positive and peaceful atmosphere.

2.21. SEC Accepts Several VMRO-DPMNE, DUI Objections

The State Election Commission (SEC) has accepted three objections submitted by VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition and one from DUI regarding voting, collection and determination of results at the March 22 local elections in Mavrovo-Rostuse, Studenici and Makedonski Brod. Moreover, SEC did not accept all other objections submitted by the Party of Turkish Movement in Macedonia, Group of voters, New Democracy, VMRO-DP and TMORO-VEP, Democratic Party of Albanians, Democratic Union for Integration, Party of United Democrats, Party for Democratic Prosperity, Roma Alliance of Macedonia, Democratic Party of Turks of Macedonia, VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition, Liberal Party of Macedonia and SDSM. According to Electoral Code provisions, applicants can submit an appeal against the SEC decisions to the Administrative Court within 48 hours.

2.22. Gruevski: Macedonia Demonstrated European Democratic Capacity

»Macedonia has shown it has the capacity and political will to organise peaceful, fair and democratic elections. Macedonia has experienced one of the most successful elections in terms of organisation in recent years, free of violence, where the citizens were allowed to freely express their will. The elections were won by the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the future that heralds progress has won, too«, Prime Minister and VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski stated late Sunday. »Macedonia has demonstrated democracy, thus enhancing its European and Euro-Atlantic process and has shown that it shares the same values with EU and NATO countries«, he added.

He congratulated, first and foremost, to the citizens for being "the most deserving factor in the elections" and also to the political parties, their leaders, extending

gratitude to media, the State Election Commission, electoral boards, police, international observers and all other factors for their contribution to the well-organised polls. Gruevski said he hoped the runoff would be organised with the same devotion and commitment, pledging the Government and state institutions to do everything in their power in 14 days' time to repeat Sunday's success, because "it is number one interest for Macedonia and its citizens."

Coalition's presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov won the most votes and enters the second round with a convincing lead, said Gruevski. He underlined that the citizens in the elections gave support to the political option that in the past two and a half years had introduced many changes and reforms in Macedonia.

2.23. Foreign Media on Macedonia's Elections

Foreign media paid attention Sunday in their articles on the fourth presidential and fifth municipal elections in Macedonia. Seven candidates have been running for a president, their reports say, noting that most probably none of them would be elected in the first round according to the pre-election polls. The reports also say that the pre-election campaign was focused on the economic crisis and Macedonia's chances to become the European Union, NATO member. They point out that the elections were being held under tight security measures for preventing a repetition of the violence that marred the parliamentary elections of last June, in which one person was killed and several others injured.

The Financial Times says that these elections are probably Macedonia's last chance to show that it has not only capacity, but also a will for organizing elections in compliance with the international standards. Euronews implies that European representatives have warned Macedonia that disrespect of international electoral standards would seriously jeopardize the country's EU perspectives. Still, Euronews says that the elections would not make a big change, because "the presidential office in Macedonia is of ceremonial character". AFP cites the statement of Euro-Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn, who says these elections are "the moment of truth" for Macedonia, whereas BBC quotes Czech PM Mirek Topolánek, who recently paid a visit to Skopje as EU Chairman, comparing the elections with "a graduating exam that Macedonia has to pass". According to BBC, these elections are a crucial test for the country's democracy, as well as another criterion in the country's progress towards European Union membership, reminding that the process is followed by about 300 OSCE/ODIHR observers and several thousand domestic monitors.

Deutsche Welle states that the international community, USA and EU agree that the elections should be incident-free, reminding that OSCE has trained several hundreds of policemen in the past few weeks regarding their reaction on voting process violations. Citing western diplomats in Skopje, Reuters states that Macedonia does not have time to lose, whereas elections must be perfect. The Swedish radio comments that Macedonia's Euro-integration ambitions have been

shaken by the fact that both Germany and France recently announced that EU enlargement fatigue.

2.24. PM Gruevski: Citizens Will Make Right Choice on April 5

I hope that citizens will make the right choice on April 5, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski told reporters between the two rounds of presidential elections. »Citizens who voted for eliminated candidates are living creatures with own mind and now when their candidates are out of the game they will certainly know who deserves their votes and make no mistake in this respect. It is up to them to chose between a candidate, who has been known of his faux pass for the last 15 years and no one cannot understand him, and the one, who is honest, successful and respected professor with untainted past and willingness to help the citizens«, Gruevski said.

VMRO-DPMNE is working on better presentation of its presidential hopeful Gjorgi Ivanov to citizens, PM Gruevski told media. The aim is for citizens to hear his opinions, visions and get to know Ivanov better, as this is important for election of the head of state, he said, adding that VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate should be supported as he is the best one and offers very good solutions. Asked to comment the statement of opposition presidential hopeful Ljubomir Frckoski, who hopes to collect a large portion of votes of the other five 'pro-NATO' candidates, Gruevski said he was turning to the last resort for survival, being aware that he doesn't enjoy the support of citizens.

VMRO-DPMNE won convincingly at yesterday's presidential and local elections, said party official Ilija Dimovski. "Pertaining to the presidential race, we are marching towards certain victory. In regard to the local elections, no political party has registered such enormous victory in the last 20 years", stressed Dimovski. According to him, all assessments and analyses prior to the first election round have materialized. "We are aware that citizens continually give their support to us, which represents a great responsibility, but also undertaking a great burden to do everything we can and move processes in a positive direction", stated Dimovski. He added that VMRO-DPMNE has majority regarding councillor lists in 55 municipalities compared to SDSM, which won in 10.

2.25. Boskoski Says he is Relevant Factor at Political Scene

Independent presidential candidate Ljube Boskoski said at Monday's press conference that he is now a relevant factor at the political scene, taking into account the 155,000 votes gained at Sunday's elections. "Through a modest campaign, I demonstrated that nothing is the same in Macedonia as of today, whereas a third option has emerged. The myth that Macedonia is a bipolar state has been crushed", stated Boskoski. He announced that decisions on future steps would be taken following consultations with citizens and his election

headquarters. According to State Election Commission (SEC) official data from 94.86% of ballots, Boskoski won 145,638 votes at the presidential elections.

2.26. SDSM in Preparations for Second Round

The opposition SDSM won 300.000 votes at yesterday's elections, party leader Zoran Zaev said Monday at a press conference. »We have won in several cities, lead in many municipalities. We believe to improve the results during the 15-day campaign, Zaev said. He praised the citizens for their major contribution to Macedonia's democracy and congratulated to all winners in the first round. »The votes for our candidates is a sign that the citizens' trust in SDSM has been restored«, Zaev said. Presidential hopeful Ljubomir Frckoski said the party would try to reorganize the votes of other candidates for the run off. »We shall try to attract the votes of all other candidates, who promote swift accession to NATO, into one block that will stand against the governmental candidate, who is one and only that holds to the anti-NATO position. We believe this is the base to win in the second round on April 5«, Frckoski said.

2.27. OSCE - Mistakes From First Round Have to be Corrected in Runoff

In an interview with the Skopje's TV Station Alsat M, Head of OSCE Mission in Macedonia, Jose-Luis Herrero said: »The first election round passed in orderly manner, but there is still much to do to mend certain irregularities and make sure that the balloting process on 5 April is held in fair and democratic manner«; but still: "The remark number one refers to the intimidation, i.e. the climate of distrust among the voters that emerged in a relatively abstract form, however, I think that this the reason for20serious concern and something that calls for scrutiny," Herrero said. The international observers also noted inconsistencies in the ballot counting as well as buying votes and forcing citizens to give their vote for a certain candidate. Herrero made it clear that these remarks are exaggerated by no means, but refer to de facto anomalies that have to be addressed. According to him, an eventual failure in the presidential election runoff would trigger a process of political instability, which is something the international community does not want to see. "It would open a new period of political maneuvering, instability and insecurity; therefore, it would not be good news. Nonetheless, if the voter turnout threshold is not reached, it is still a part of the normal political life," the OSCE Ambassador said.

2.28. Post-First Round Commentaries

Although VMRO-DPMNE won convincingly in the first round, still figures showed that the trend differed from the expected three to one correlation VMRO-DPMNE : SDSM. SDSM practically stayed at the same level of support as the last parliamentary elections. VMRO-DPMNE will surely win much more mayoral seats after the second round, but still it will be very difficult such high rating to be maintained in the future. The next regular parliamentary elections are due for

2012, but there will be many challenges until then, while the entire responsibility shall be in this party's hands.

Analysts say that the largest problems in this context are the abuse of state resources and the agitation of the whole government and half of the parliament during the campaign, the expensive campaign, the direct support and even pictures taken of mayors together with their party leader etc. Impression is that voters in fact voted for the Prime Minister again, instead of the actual local candidates. In addition, a serious indication is the low turnout which signalizes the large apathy and disappointment of the citizens.

Looking at the votes the presidential candidates collected at the first round, it can be noted that Ljube Boskoski took a large portion of the VMRO-DPMNE votes, crossing the »critical« 100.000 votes, by which he opened the door for a future political career on his own, positioning himself in the right wing spectrum.

Results also show that DUI has not been getting the success expected, although won the mayor's office in Saraj and Cair (Skopje municipalities). This party lost the mayor positions in Tetovo (won by DPA) and Gostivar (won by the independent and popular candidate Rufe Osmani) and in the last moment managed to keep Struga and Lipkovo. At these elections, the major star was the former Saraj mayor and New Democracy candidate Imer Selmani, who also crossed the 100.000 votes line.

Largest surprise were the VMRO-DPMNE narrow victories in the second round of mayoral elections in Veles and Resen where opposition was leading at first. PM Gruevski was intensively running around the country and it seems that he managed to convince the voters that it is better to have the local power functioning in harmony with the central power.

2.29. Second Round Results

The confirmation that came from the SEC that the census of 40% turnout has been accomplished, was the most important information for the presidential election outcome. As it was clear that the VMRO-DPMNE candidate will gain more votes than his opponent, the issue was whether the census will be reached, having in mind that ethnic Albanians showed a very low turnout at the second round. Also, it was proven a good move that the Constitution has been changed from 50% turnout to 40%, since with this current result there might have been an election fiasco, resulting in repeated presidential elections. In the so far history of Macedonia, this is the lowest turnout registered. In the second round, Ivavov got about 100.000 votes less than Branko Crvenkovski in 2004.

Presidential Elections 2009 Second Round

Name	First Round	Second Round
Gjorge Ivanov	345.850	451.365
Ljubomir Frckovski	202.691	263.457
	Turnout 56,88%	Turnout 42,69%

At the second round of the previous presidential elections in 2004, the SDSM candidate Branko Crvenkovski got 550.000 votes, while his opponent Sasko Kedev 329.000.

Ivanov's first statement was that his three first priorities during his mandate will be EU, NATO and the problem with the name. However ethnic Albanian analysts say that Albanian voters did not support Ivanov due to his ideas for »antiquization« of the country, the state »monoreligion« approach, the state clericalization and the Euroatlantic blockade. It is believed that the boycott was directly a result of the Prime Minister's moves.

2.30. SEC Summarize: VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition wins most of mayoral and councillors posts at municipal elections

The coalition 'For Better Macedonia', led by ruling VMRO-DPMNE, has won most of the mayoral, councillors posts, namely 53, at recent municipal elections. The State Election Commission (SEC) says that opposition SDSM won six mayoral posts, while the parties of ethnic Albanians DUI and DPA would be at the helm of 12 and 1 municipality respectively. The Democratic Party of Turks in Macedonia, New Democracy, the coalition DUI-Movement for National Unity of Turks won per two mayoral posts. Two independent candidates have also win the mayoral race. The SDSM-LDP-NSDP coalition and the Union of Roma in Macedonia won per one mayoral post. The VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition has also won most of the councillors posts, namely 460, followed by SDSM - 282; DUI - 179; New Democracy - 61; DPA - 52; and VMRO-NP – 42.

The United States, Great Britain and France have welcomed the successful conduct of Sunday's polls, anticipating the country to resume the reforms needed for Euro and Euro-Atlantic integration. »The United States congratulate the people of Macedonia for the second round of the presidential and local elections. Citizens of Macedonia, alongside the country's authorities, deserve praise for the successful conduct of these elections, State Department Spokesman Andy Laine told Voice of America in Macedonian Language.

The U.S. administration once again confirmed the commitment on Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration. »We eagerly await to cooperate with newly-elected president Gjorge Ivanov, in order to help Macedonia achieve full Euro-Atlantic integration as soon as possible«, underlined Laine. The successful elections were also welcomed by Great Britain through its Minister for Europe Caroline Flint. London urges resumption of the reforms for Macedonia's EU membership.

French Ambassador to Macedonia, Bernard Valero said that the positive result of Sunday's elections demonstrates Macedonia's European commitment and its path towards the European Union.

Newly-elected President of Macedonia, Gjorge Ivanov, nominated by VMRO-DPMNE, met Tuesday with US Ambassador to Macedonia Philip Reeker. At the meeting Reeker congratulated Ivanov's victory at the presidential polls and at the same time commended the people of Macedonia for the peaceful and democratic elections, VMRO-DPMNE's Communications Center said in a press release. Showing gratitude for the congratulations, the President-elect said he was fully prepared to extend the cooperation with the United States and to strengthen it on country's road towards Euro-Atlantic integration.

2.31. Russian President Medvedev Congratulates Ivanov on Election Victory

Russian Federation President Dmitry Medvedev sent Monday a note of congratulations to VMRO-DPMNE presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov, who won at Sunday's second round of elections in Macedonia. The note, forwarded by the Russian Embassy to Skopje, reads: "Russian-Macedonian relations are characterized by mutual interest for active political dialogue, along with readiness to enhance commercial-economic cooperation. The spiritual and cultural-historic ties of our peoples gives an additional stimulus to consistent enhancement of bilateral relations. I am convinced that relations of friendship and cooperation will develop further in the interest of strengthening the stability and security of the European continent".

2.32 Rehn: Yesterday's Elections - Important Step Forward for Democracy in the Country

EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn welcomed Monday the overall satisfactory conduct of the presidential and municipal elections in Macedonia. The findings of the ODIHR observation mission that most international standards have been met represent an important step forward for democracy in the country, he said. »I congratulate the citizens of the country for this democratic achievement. The voters have shown their strong attachment to democratic values throughout the electoral process. Furthermore the state institutions have worked hard to ensure that these elections have been peaceful and orderly. The authorities should ensure continued commitment in following up the recommendations of ODIHR for further improvement to the electoral process in the future. In particular, any allegations of intimidation must be dealt through due judicial process, Rehn said.

»Now that the elections have been completed, it is time to step up reform efforts in order to meet the benchmarks which have been set. Important work remains in order to deliver results on judicial reform, the fight against corruption and

reform of the civil service. I look to all political leaders to ensure that a constructive political dialogue is maintained in order to support these reforms, the EU Enlargement Commissioner said. He believes that if the necessary efforts are made, the benchmarks could be fulfilled in time for this autumn's Progress Report.

»A recommendation on the start of accession negotiations will depend on the results achieved. Good neighbourly relations, including a resolution of the name issue, remain essential. Therefore I trust that with the fresh mandate for the leadership of the country, renewed efforts will be made in order to achieve good progress in this field, Rehn said.

2.33. OSCE/ODIHR: Second Election Round in Macedonia Meets Most International Standards

The second round of the presidential, municipal elections of April 5, 2009, met most OSCE and Council of Europe commitments and standards for democratic elections, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) said Monday at a press conference. However some of the issues identified during the first round, including credible reports of intimidation were of increased concern. We were pleased to see a peaceful environment and a well administered election day, although some aspects of the campaign period seriously detracted from the overall quality of the election process, said Peter Eicher, Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission.

Overall, OSCE/ODIHR and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) observers assessed the voting process positively in 97% of polling stations visited, without significant regional variations. The observers reported fewer procedural violations than in the first round and only isolated cases of serious violations. Family voting was observed in 13 percent of polling stations visited, still a high number but notably reduced from the first round. The Mission received an increasing number of troubling and credible reports of pressure on or intimidation of citizens between the two rounds of elections, which seriously detracted from the overall quality of the election process. Almost all of the allegations concerned actions by state officials and political party activists of the governing party. The 40% turnout requirement for the second round of the presidential election continues to create the possibility for failed elections in the future, OSCE/ODIHR says in its preliminary report.

In the campaign for the second round, most candidates and parties expressed their continued commitment to ensuring a calm and democratic election process. Political activity was generally low key, with relatively few public events. Freedom of expression and assembly were generally respected. Candidates appeared to use moderate language in their public statements. Nonetheless, the situation was tense in many municipalities with close mayoral races, the report reads.

Notifying positive aspects of the election process between the two rounds, the report gives credit to the State Election Commission (SEC), saying that it took steps to address some of the shortcomings observed during the first round, such as the adoption of short, practical guidelines for the work of Municipal Election Commissions and Election Boards, with a focus on preventing family voting and by conducting additional training SEC however did not handle complaints regarding the first voting round within legal deadlines, delaying the final results and complicating the preparations for the second one. Concerns also remains about the accuracy of the voter lists, particularly in regard to the large number of the citizens abroad, the report says. »The voting process was significantly improved from the parliamentary elections in 2008," PACE member Jorgen Poulsen said.

2.34. Ivanov to assume presidential post on May 12

Gjorge Ivanov will be inaugurated as new President of the Republic of Macedonia in the Parliament on May 12. Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski said Tuesday that the President has a 5-year mandate, and taking into consideration that incumbent President Branko Crvenkovski assumed the post on May 12, the inauguration session will be held on the day of the mandate's expiry. According to Veljanoski, the new President will no longer work in the Parliament, but in premises located near the presidential residence in Skopje. Thus, about 20 Parliament offices will be adapted for MPs and services, whereas the Speaker will be relocated to the presidential cabinet.

U.S. President Barack Obama has sent a letter of congratulations to Gjorge Ivanov on occasion of his presidential election. "I eagerly expect our joint cooperation in Macedonia's accession to NATO and continuation of the country's path towards European integration", says Obama in the letter, communicated by VMRO-DPMNE. "Your nation has demonstrated its sincere commitment and contribution to our mutual security, and the United States are grateful for your government's support in Iraq and Afghanistan", reads the letter of U.S. President Barack Obama to President-elect Gjorge Ivanov.

3. EUROPEAN INTEGRATION PROCESSES

Fact is that Macedonia is the most advanced in the process of visa liberalisation from the countries in the region and in view of time frame it should be finalised during Czech or Swedish EU Presidency. Government officials stated for MIA that during Czech EU Presidency an assessment of achievements in relation to visa liberalisation is expected to be given and decision to be passed during Swedish EU Presidency in the second half of 2009. November or December is the period when the European Parliament will debate on this issue. Once the

advisory opinion on visa liberalisation will be given, decision will soon become effectively applicable.

3.1 Fouere: Brussels Recognizes Macedonia's Visa Liberalization Progress

On December 2008, the European Commission presented a positive report including an assessment on the country's progress in the process of visa liberalization. EU Ambassador Erwan Fouere referred to the European Commission conclusions: "It is very important to emphasize certain things in order to clarify the situation. The European Commission presented a report including an assessment on the country's progress in the process of visa liberalization. The evaluation on the country's achievements is positive. Enormous efforts have been invested regarding the biometric passports, document security, integrated border management etc. The Commission also announced that expert committees would visit Macedonia in order to assess the situation, and if the Government can meet all reforms, then the Commission will be able to propose to the member-states the visa regime liberalization. "Macedonia is on the right path. The country is regional leader in meeting visa liberalization criteria", added Fouere.

A support for annulling Macedonia's visa regime was also provided by Tomáš Pojar, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Czech Republic, next EU presidency holder. The visa liberalization for Macedonia and for other Western Balkan countries, he said, will be one of the priorities towards which the Czech Republic will aim to during its EU presidency. The same line of support Macedonia got from Hungary, as it was estimated that both countries enjoy an exceptionally close bilateral political cooperation, without any open issues, whereas Budapest strongly supports Macedonia regarding its EU and NATO integration. Official visits in the Republic of Slovenia confirmed the same support coming from that country as well.

3.2. Germany supports EU visa liberalization for Macedonia

"Federal Republic of Germany is Macedonia's big friend and ally, willing to do everything to assist the country in its aspirations for full liberalization of the EU visa regime", German Interior Minister Wolfgang Schaeuble told in December 2008 to his Macedonian counterpart Gordana Jankuloska. From her side, Minister Jankuloska stressed at the meeting that the National Border Management Coordination Center has been set as an essential part in the meeting of visa liberalization criteria, with the basic objective of monitoring the situation at all border crossings, facilitation of swift information exchange among institutions competent for border management, as well as coordination of joint activities and operations. She added that the Border Police capacity is gradually increasing, including the adoption of the standard operative procedures for the border supervision in line with the Schengen border police handbook.

In the part of document protection, Jankuloska informed Schaeuble on the start of issuing new visa stickers containing integrated protective elements that meet European and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) standards, along with harmonization of the European Union visa regime and the possibility of entry in Macedonia with an ID. Mol Jankuloska also referred to the development of the National Intelligence Database, aimed at ensuring interoperability of databases in the fight against organized crime. This activity includes EU experts, which experiences are invaluable.

3.3. European Parliament Adopts draft-resolution on Macedonia's progress (SUP)

In January 2009 the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs adopted the draft-resolution on the progress of the Republic of Macedonia in 2008 with 64 votes "for" and 7 "against", said Vice Premier for European Affairs Ivica Bocevski, adding that seven amendments have been also adopted. "The European Parliament saluted the national and party unity in meeting EU membership criteria. It also perceived the consolidation of political dialogue in Macedonia and welcomed the progress in the vise liberalization process, as well as the progress made in implementing the Stabilization and Association Agreement, the Framework Agreement and the eight EU benchmarks", he stressed, regretting that the country after having obtained the candidate status three years ago still hasn't launched the accession talks and underlying that the situation is demotivating Macedonia.

»Next week the European Parliament will review the report on Macedonia and I am certain that most of the MEPs will support the launch of the country's EU entry talks«, report's author Erik Meijer said Friday at a press conference in Skopje. »Macedonia has been waiting long enough, since 2005, and now it is 2009. The (membership) negotiations should start soon, but it will take time for Macedonia to become part of the EU by 2017-18. All open issues should be resolved in the meantime, particularly the one with the neighbor Greece, as any EU member is entitled to veto the admission of a new country, which may be one of the problems for Macedonia's accession«, Meijer said.

Asked if the EU may mediate in the name row as it has offered its services to Slovenia-Croatia dispute, the EP Rapporteur for Macedonia said he did not expect Brussels engagement in this respect. »We are talking about a situation when one EU member sets a price for admission of its neighbor - this is the part where comparison may be made (with Slovenia-Croatia case) - but the name issue has been a long term subject of UN's, Matthew Nimetz's mediation, and I do not believe that the EU will takeover this role. The Nimitz-led process should be completed«, Meijer said. All members should approve an accession of a country to the EU, NATO. If any member has some reason to disapprove the admittance, the candidate stays out, which is the real problem you have at the moment, Meijer said.

Asked if the name may also be a problem for opening of Macedonia's EU membership negotiations, Meijer said that it would not be the case with the majority of MEPs. »But it is a problem for Greece, and maybe Cyprus. They will most probably set tough criteria, They have a right to impose veto to the start of negotiations, opening of new chapters in the course of the negotiating process and the final decision«, Meijer said.

3.4. Rehn: Macedonia May Get Free Visa Regime, Opening of EU Entry Talks by Yearend

Macedonia has real chances to get a date for opening the EU entry talks and free visa regime, as the country is a leader of the region in meeting the criteria to that effect, EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said in April after a meeting with Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki. He once again extended congratulations to Macedonia on the successful elections, pointing out that the long-expected compromise to the name dispute with Greece should be reached this year, especially after the fortifying of the Government's political mandate as a result of the latest elections.

The name row settlement will be beneficial for all, Rehn said, calling for resumption of negotiations under the UN mediation. Macedonia should also continue to work on meeting the benchmarks, in particular the combat against corruption, public administration and judiciary reforms, Rehn said. »Macedonia's successful elections have demonstrated its political capacity to resume the EU-integration process. The country's next step and priority is to acquire the European Commission (EC) recommendation for launching the EU accession talks and free visa regime, which will send a positive signal to all Western Balkan countries«, Milososki said.

»Brussels' highest grade for Macedonia's visa liberalization process is a valorization of the invested efforts and proof that the country has meet all necessary criteria for lifting the Schengen barrier, something the Government has been saying on numerous occasions; I am glad that Macedonian citizens will be able to visit European countries (Schengen zone members) without visas from January 1, 2010« Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said after his meeting with members of the coalition 'For Better Macedonia'.

3.5. PACE: Europe Should Help Macedonia

»Europe should help Macedonia in its progress, said participants in April's debate of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) regarding the monitoring for the presidential and local elections, reports Deutsche Welle-Macedonian Program. PACE adopted the Macedonia report and sent several recommendations, in which it advises that law changes, especially those pertaining to the elections, not to be made prior to the electoral process, whereas

this should be carried out in close cooperation with all political stakeholders and the civil society.

Andrej Zernovski was the only representative of the Macedonian delegation who addressed the debate, saying that the presidential and local elections, "have demonstrated the degree of democratic maturity of Macedonian society, as well as the institutions' capability to organize democratic elections". Zernovski believes that PACE should take this into consideration and close the process of post-monitoring dialogue with the Republic of Macedonia, meaning that the country has met Copenhagen criteria.

French Senator Jean-Claude Frecon, who expressed strong support to Macedonia on behalf of the entire French delegation, said that holding of democratic elections is good news. "Macedonia has sent us a message that it wants to integrate in the European family", stated Frecon and asked that the country is regarded with respect. According to him, Macedonia needs strong support, because if it remains on the sidelines of European organization, doubts and feeling of ethnic isolation would only enhance. "The more NATO and EU hesitate over Macedonia's integration, the more certain Albanophobic parties will ask for enlargement of the principle of two-third majority in the legislative field", warned Frecon.

He stressed it is necessary to stop all the frustrations by one section of the population, which is the mother of radicalization, concluding that the elections oblige Europe and Macedonia to make progress. PACE President Luis Maria de Puig voiced his satisfaction from the manner in which elections were held, sending a message that efforts on upgrading Macedonian democracy should resume.

3.6. PACE President: Macedonia Deserves to join EU (SUP)

Macedonia has started a process to join the European Union and like any other Southeast European state, it rightfully deserves its place not only in the Council of Europe or OSCE, but also in EU, noted Lluís Maria de Puig, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), in his address delivered in the Macedonian Parliament. »The road of EU accession is long and difficult and everyone needs to be on your side if you want progress. Your presence in the Council of Europe and your participation in the activities of our organisation is an additional advantage, said de Puig.

The PACE President in his speech stressed that Macedonia had made a significant breakthrough in implementing reforms, which was an additional reason to join the efforts in solving unsettled issues once and for all. » There is no doubt about the existence of a political will amongst the Macedonian authorities and Parliament to implement these reforms. I am deeply convinced that the

people of Macedonia have the full capacity to complete the required task, de Puig stated.

Focusing on relations with neighbouring countries, he noted that willingness for improving relations was not enough, since the same extent of willingness must be shown by the other side. »Start a genuine and open dialogue with all of your neighbours in terms of issues facing various viewpoints. Listen to the others the same way you want to be heard. Avoid decisions that trigger tension. Try and put yourselves in the shoes of your neighbours to understand better their arguments, said de Puig. He added that his political experience had many times thus far manifested that patience and willingness for compromise paved the way towards solution. In his address de Puig said that after taking up his post he had decided to prioritise the Balkans. »Our goal, is to pay special attention to this region, to provide assistance for the establishment of a modern, pluralistic and multi-ethnic society resting on the principles of democracy, legal state and human rights« he said.

»Since declaring independence, the Republic of Macedonia has made a significant progress on the road to democracy. The Council of Europe admission in November 1995 was a recognition for the progress. As of that moment, Macedonia has been constantly making progress by strengthening the democratic institutions, hence confirming the basic principles of a legal state on the observance of human rights and the rights of national minorities, said de Puig. Speaking about Macedonia's difficult periods, he said that even the serious political crisis of 2001, caused by multi-ethnic conflicts with violence, had failed to disturb the dynamic of reforms.

»The progress you are making is recognised by the Council of Europe and by the EU. In December 2005 Macedonia was given the status of an EU candidate country. Today, the European Commission is reviewing the possibilities to open negotiations for Macedonia to be given EU membership. Visa liberalisation talks for Macedonian citizens is a concrete proof for the country's active engagement in the European integration process, he stressed. De Puig expressed hope that negotiations would be completed as soon as possible.

3.7. Macedonia Progress Report Supported

»Macedonia to obtain a date for beginning of EU accession talks by the year-end and full visa liberalization, recommends the European Parliament in the 2008 country progress report, which was adopted in March in Strasbourg. "Macedonia is taking steps to meet EU membership criteria. Progress has been made in the implementation of the Stabilization and Association Agreement and the Ohrid Framework Agreement, as well as in implementation of the European Commission's benchmarks. MEPs regret that Macedonia has not started negotiations three years after obtaining the candidate status, which has a demotivating effects for the country, increasing the risk for regional

destabilization. Therefore, the EU Council is urged to decide on a date for beginning of accession negotiations by the year-end", reads the EP resolution. The EP urges the European Commission to recommend to the EU Council visa liberalization for Macedonian citizens by the end of 2009, taking into account "the progress made by the country through introduction of the biometric passports, implementation of the integrated border management scheme, establishment of a national visa information system, fight against trafficking in human beings, illegal migration and corruption, as well as signing of the readmission agreement with EU".

MEPs do not directly urge Greece in using the veto as instrument to prevent Macedonia's NATO and EU integration, but adopted a more general provision, which recommends that bilateral problems do not prevent accession process of Balkan countries in European and Euro-Atlantic institutions. The resolution emphasizes the importance of candidate-countries to continue to foster good neighborly relations and seek to resolve outstanding issues with its neighbors, including a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue, on the basis of bilateral and multilateral commitments and obligations. The European Parliament supports the process under the auspices of UN mediator Matthew Nimetz, warning that unless agreement is reached quickly, this could result in a long delay in Macedonia's joining the EU. The European Parliament expects Macedonia and Greece to remain committed to negotiations, despite the legal proceedings instituted before the Hague-based International Court of Justice. The EP resolution welcomes the large political and social support in Macedonia regarding the country's EU accession, reaffirming that membership of Macedonia and other Western Balkan countries is essential for the stability, reconciliation and peaceful future of the region. MEPs commend the Government's efforts in the economic field, as well as measures undertaken for surpassing problems noted at last year's parliamentary elections, in line with ODIHR recommendations. Moreover, EP trusts that everything possible will be done to prevent any irregularities at the upcoming presidential and local elections. (Although the EP resolution is not obligatory, it can influence on the creation of Brussels' policy towards Macedonia)

3.8. Erik Meyer: EU should open talks with Macedonia irrespective of name issue

Greek foreign ministry sources have expressed their displeasure with the EU progress report on Macedonia, due to be approved at the European Parliament's plenary session, which pushes for the launch of EU accession talks with Skopje this year irrespective of whether name dispute with Greece is resolved or not. The report, written by Dutch MEP Erik Meyer and backed by an overwhelming majority of MEPs, proposes Macedonia's accession to the EU and NATO and calls on Greece to waive its right to veto Skopje, arguing that Macedonia's membership of both international alliances would boost stability in the Balkans. Furthermore, the report calls for EU accession talks with Macedonia begin this

year. Greek MEPs are reportedly seeking to push through amendments to the final text of the report but it is clear that the climate in the European Parliament is not supportive of Greece's stands.

Ioannis Varvitsiotis, the head of ruling New Democracy's MEPs, admitted that Greece was partly to blame for the development. "The Macedonia name issue is a series of missed opportunities," Varvitsiotis told Kathimerini. Stavros Lambrinidis, who leads main opposition PASOK's group of MEPs, said Greece should have taken the initiative and briefed other countries on its position. "In Greece we have been inactive in formulating foreign policy over the past few years, so many other member states are not aware of our positions or have only a sketchy idea," he said.

During his recent visit to Skopje, Meyer sounded optimistic in terms of European Parliament's backing of timely launch of Macedonia's EU entry talks. »Despite the EU foreign ministers' stands, who wanted to delay the start of talks with Macedonia - a candidate-country since 2005 - it seems there is a new momentum, as negotiations could start soon«, Dutch MEP said. Even if negotiations start this year, it will take time, probably by 2017/2018 for the country to join the bloc, meanwhile, all issues, particularly the one with neighbouring Greece, will have to be resolved," Meyer said. Meyer stressed the priority was to find a solution to the name dispute that allows Macedonia to join the EU. "I understand Greece's decision to veto but I don't like it".

3.9. The European Union says Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey remain on track for eventual membership in the 27-nation bloc

EU foreign ministers have reassured officials from the three countries that the door to the EU remains open despite a stalemate on entry talks with Croatia, and overall uncertainty about the bloc's expansion. Czech Foreign Minister Karel Schwarzenberg, whose country currently holds the EU Presidency, said at a press conference that his task at the forum was to explain "western European friends that the Balkans is part of Europe, whereas region's countries should join the EU as soon as possible".

»Macedonia makes good progress in the process of meeting visa liberalization criteria«, said EU Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn following Saturday's informal meeting of Union foreign ministers, MIA reports from Prague. He stressed that the first round of the local and presidential elections went well, expressing hope that the second round would be held in the same atmosphere. "Thus, Macedonia is successfully meeting the eight Union benchmarks", Rehn added. Pertaining to determination of a date for beginning of EU accession talks, the Enlargement Commission emphasized that a decision on the issue would be passed by the year-end.

3.10. EU Renaming of the Term »Macedonian«

The European Commission has decided to redefine the terms “Macedonian”, “Macedonians” and country code “MK” in its institutional style guide, Erik Meijer, European Parliament Rapporteur for Macedonia, suspects. According to information obtained by Eric Meijer, these terms now in common use are to be replaced with the designation “to be defined”, in order to satisfy Greece’s objections to the name “Macedonia”. The “altered” style guide is not yet available to the public.

Meijer was cited by the Macedonian national news agency, MIA, asking the EC whether it takes into account that this only complicates matters by taking the “name” row into new and “very sensitive” fields of national identity that will be “impossible to solve”. However, in an interview for local Alfa TV this afternoon Meijer said he got reassured by the EC that this means nothing in practice. “It means the situation will not change” and the terms will remain in use, he said.

In an EC response to Meijer, MIA reports, EC President Jose Manuel Barroso confirms it is true they used standard names until recently, but that, in the summer of 2008, a decision was taken to make this change. Thus, in the inter institutional style guide compiled by the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, these terms have been replaced with “to be defined”. The commission says all references are strictly in accordance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 817/93. Meijer also expresses concerns about the delaying of the date for opening EU accession talks for Macedonia, despite recent European Parliament recommendations assessing that Greek opposition could continue for years, MIA reported.

3.11. PM Gruevski Expects Free Visa Regime for Macedonian Citizens by Yearend

The visa liberalisation process was completed by the Government, while the European Commission (EC) recognised everything that had been done in the past three years with praise, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski noted in May. He said the visa abolition was in no way a compensation with the international community for the failure in obtaining NATO membership invitation.

Macedonia has met the five major prerequisites - opening of visa center last year; introduction of biometric passports, efficient combat against crime and corruption, integrated border management and signing of the readmission agreement - for launching of the visa liberalization talks, which officially kicked off in February 2008 by PM's meeting with EU Commissioner for Justice, Freedom and Security Franco Frattini. In the course of negotiations Macedonia has presented a report on its activities for meeting the benchmarks of visa liberalization road map - security of documents, border management - asylum, migration; public order and security; foreign relations and fundamental rights,

Gruevski said, pointing out that thus far two European Commission assessment missions have visited Macedonia to scan the country's achievements. In addition to the efforts for meeting all standards for free visa regime, the Government is doing everything in its power to seek support to that effect, Gruevski said, expressing belief that talks with many EU officials would lead to the desired result. In addition Switzerland, as part of Schengen zone will apply a possible decision of the European Commission (EC) on annulment of visa requirements for the citizens of Macedonia.

3.12. BBC: Macedonia meets visa liberalization criteria

»Macedonia has met criteria for annulment of Schengen visas for its citizens, whereas "certain difficulties" have emerged in the case with Serbia, BBC reports citing EU diplomatic sources. Anonymous European diplomats quoted by BBC said the European Commission report, which has already been handed over to the EU Presidency holder Czech Republic, concludes that Macedonia is the only country that has met all visa liberalization conditions.

Pertaining to other regional countries, Montenegro could also be part of the "white list", whereas Bosnia&Herzegovina and Albania do not meet criteria for visa-free regime just yet. According to the diplomats, the problem with Serbia emerged following the concern by a number of EU countries that Kosovo Albanians and citizens of Republika Srpska have the right of a Serbian passport, thus being able to enter freely in the Union. Serbia has been asked for an additional "technical explanation" on the manner of issuing, as well as the security of the country passport, says BBC

3.13. Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro may get EU visa-free travel within months

The citizens of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro could be allowed visa-free travel to the European Union as early as the end of this year, EU foreign ministers said on Monday (15 June), EUobserver reads. "The [EU foreign] ministers encouraged the European Commission to start dismantling the visa requirement for all countries that have met all benchmarks with a view of achieving a visa-free regime with them ideally by the end of this year," Czech foreign minister Jan Kohout, whose country presides over the EU until the end of this month, said at a press conference after the ministers' meeting in Luxembourg.

EU candidate Macedonia is said to be the most advanced and to have met all necessary conditions - including "document security, public order and security, external relations and fundamental rights" - for its citizens to be allowed to travel visa-free into the European Union. Montenegro and Serbia have met the majority of the conditions and are expected to make further progress on the remaining ones by the end of the year. After the commission makes its proposals, the

European Parliament is to be consulted and then EU member states are expected to give a final green light to visa liberalisation for the most advanced countries before the end of the year, EUobserver reads.

3.14. EU Foreign Ministers Discuss Visa Liberalization

EU foreign ministers in June discussed about the visa liberalisation of the Western Balkan countries that met the necessary requirements. The EU Council presented the report of the EC, which implies the progress made by each country. It is still uncertain how many Western Balkan countries will be included in the visa-free White Schengen List, but it is almost certain that it will be Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Macedonia reportedly received the highest marks in the EC's report and Skopje expects full abolishment of visa requirements for Macedonian citizens to happen early 2010. Although these three countries met the biggest number of requirements, also Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania will be mentioned in the statement by the EU foreign ministers.

European Union foreign ministers agreed and issued a recommendation for annulment of visas for travel in Union member-states for citizens of Macedonia and other Western Balkan countries that have met required criteria, said Czech Foreign Minister Jan Kohout. "The Council encourages the European Commission to present as soon as possible a legislative proposal amending Regulation 539/2001, as it applies to the Member States, in order to achieve a visa free regime ideally by the end of 2009 with those countries that will have met all the benchmarks", read the meeting conclusions. The Council restates its support for the dialogue on visa liberalisation with Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, based on the roadmaps containing clear and realistic benchmarks and on a country-by-country assessment. The Council recalls that the countries concerned should continue to focus on full implementation of these benchmarks.

3.15. ESI urges lifting of visas for Macedonia as soon as possible

The European Stability Initiative (ESI) urges the European Commission and EU member countries to lift the visa barrier for Republic of Macedonia as soon as possible i.e. from January 2010 at the latest. »The Commission assessments and expert reports leave no doubt that Macedonia has earned the right to visa-free travel as soon as possible, i.e. from January 2010 at the latest. Such a decision would send a powerful signal to the region that conditionality is taken seriously, and that reforms pay off, reads an ESI document titled "The Balkans and the Schengen White List – proposal for the way forward".

The prestigious think-tank considers that the EU institutions must make sure that a decision to amend Council Regulation 539/2001 is taken quickly despite the coming European Parliament elections. F Macedonians to travel visa-free as of

next January, the Commission must make the relevant legislative proposal within the next few weeks. The new European Parliament should then treat the dossier as a priority after the summer break, so that the Council can take the vote on it in the autumn.

4. NATO

4.1. State Activities Related to Participation in NATO Missions

In January The Assembly passed a decision on sending Macedonian Army (ARM) medical team to the peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan³, enacted a decision on sending ARM members for participation in the EU-led mission in Bosnia & Herzegovina-ALTHEA and ratified an agreement between the Macedonian Government and BiH Council of Ministers for cooperation in the fight against organized crime, drug trafficking, illegal migration and other crimes, as well as two accords on exchange and mutual protection of classified information between the governments of Macedonia, Croatia and Slovakia. Earlier, the Parliament adopted changes and supplements to the Amnesty Law.

At the end of 2008, US President George Bush send a letter to his Macedonian counterpart Branko Crvenkovski, extending gratitude for the participation of Macedonian soldiers in Iraq's mission from June 2003 to December 2008. He pointed out that Macedonia's readiness to support the establishing of a democratic government in Iraq in spite of all difficulties testifies for the spirit of the Macedonian people and their readiness to serve to the global freedom. "Our joint experience in Iraq reflects the strong partnership between our two countries, which I believe will keep developing. I am certain that our two countries will continue to cooperate in favor of the global security, peace and freedom and join their efforts for Macedonia to become a full-fledged NATO membership", the letter reads.

Defense and Foreign Minister Zoran Konjanovski and Antonio Milososki in February held series of meetings with NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Operations Lawrence Rossin, and held bilateral talks with Romanian, Swedish, Norwegian, Canadian Ambassadors to the Alliance, Sorin Dumitru Ducaru, Veronika Wand-Danielsson,

³ In January, a send-off ceremony of the contingent of the Army of the Republic of Macedonia (ARM) to ISAF peacekeeping mission in Afghanistan was held at "Jane Sandanski" military barracks in Stip. In the course of sixth rotation, ARM sends 150 members of the First Mechanised Infantry Brigade, three headquarters officers and three officers to conduct duties within the team for training and liaison for the needs of Afghan National Army (OMLT). Macedonian peacekeepers, under the command of British Army, will take part in providing security to the ISAF command in Kabul, patrolling streets and guarding military bases and facilities. "Scorpions" from First Mechanised Infantry Brigade started the mission in Afghanistan on June 2006 with one infantry mechanised detachment, whereat in the next two rotations their colleagues from second Mechanised Infantry Brigade successfully continued the mission.

Kim Traavik and Robert McRae respectively. »Meetings with the ambassadors are rather useful, as they offer an opportunity for reaffirming Macedonia's position (on NATO membership) and ongoing reforms of the Ministry of Defense (MoD) to that effect«, Konjanovski told reporters. Speaking about the reforms, Konjanovski mentioned the Alliance's Summit in Bucharest, which recognized Macedonia's success to do its homework. »However, the reform process is endless. We are moving forward - something that has been welcomed by our interlocutors today«, Konjanovski said.

4.2. PM Gruevski, FM Milososki to take part at 45. Munich Security Conference

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Foreign Affairs Minister Antonio Milososki participated at the 45th Munich Security Conference, held on February 6-8. Security risks and challenges in Europe, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and the future of NATO are the focal point of this year's conference, with a special emphasis towards deepening the Euro-Atlantic relations. This conference is the most prestigious annual security forum, where viewpoints and positions are shared on the main trends in creating global security policy. The event traditionally summons heads of state and government, foreign and defense ministers, members of parliament and other high-ranking representatives of international organisations, foundations and NGOs.

»Macedonia is a significant component of the security structure of Southeast Europe and its neighbors, which does not include Norway and Sweden, but Kosovo and Serbia - something that requires rational approach« was the message Macedonian FM Antonio Milososki conveyed to the participants in the 45th Munich Security Conference, which he believes is a good opportunity for presenting the country's positions and its foreign policy priorities, including Macedonia's aspirations for full-fledged NATO membership. »It cannot be allowed for NATO's reputation to be a long-term hostage of one irrational, bilateral problem and certain hidden agenda of one of its member countries, NATO members should give priority to long-term visions and strategy for a united, peaceful and stable Europe« Milososki added.

Saying that no meeting with his Greek colleague Dora Bakoyannis is expected, Milososki reaffirmed Macedonia's readiness to play an active role in the relations with Athens. »We are ready to invite our colleagues, Greek politicians to be our guests if there is a possibility and willingness. It also refers to our attendance of their events if invited. In any case we regret that since 2004, when Washington recognized Macedonia's constitutional name, the Greek Government has frozen under a decree all political contacts with Macedonia's officials at all levels. We cannot do anything about such decision. In the upcoming period, we hope for Greece to demonstrate its wisdom and re-establish the bilateral contacts, as a pragmatic approach to our relations as neighbours is more important than Greece's caprice«, Milososki said.

Minister of Foreign Affairs Antonio Milososki at the sidelines of the Conference held talks with US Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg where the United States support for Macedonia in its Euro-Atlantic integration was reaffirmed. At the meeting, FM Milososki briefed his interlocutor on the activities undertaken by Macedonia as well as on latest developments with respect to the lawsuit against Greece filed before the International Court of Justice for breaching the Interim Accord. He stressed that Macedonia remained engaged in the name row talks. Steinberg expressed his pledge for further strengthening and developing of the relations with the Republic of Macedonia. Both interlocutors also emphasised Macedonia's contribution to international peacekeeping missions and to the situation in the region.

4.3.NATO Accession Model Under Discussion

In March, Canadian Defense Minister Peter McCay has asked NATO to change the concept on accession of new members, because of recent problems the Alliance has experienced with Macedonia and Croatia. At a meeting with his US counterpart Robert Gates in Washington, McCay asked NATO to revise the article for consensus in order to avoid any possible failures due to bilateral issues, such as those between Greece and Macedonia and Slovenia and Croatia, which result in blocking the Alliance while admitting new members. McCay suggests the present system to be replaced with a new system where at least two countries must object the accession of a new member, which means Greece will no longer be able to prevent Macedonia from joining NATO.

4.4. Robertson Commenting Macedonia's NATO Membership

»It is a disgrace that Macedonia did not obtain a NATO membership invitation because of secret, indefensible and shocking obstruction by its neighbor-Alliance member«, said former NATO Secretary-General George Robertson at a gathering in Washington on the Alliance's 60th anniversary. Nevertheless, Robertson believes that Macedonia will, in time, become part of NATO. He also foresees the accession of Montenegro, Kosovo, Moldova, Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, even Sweden and Finland, without giving a precise timeframe, but added the process could be completed in 10-15 years. "NATO will not be able to say in the future there is no place for others. When states like Bosnia and Montenegro, even Serbia, say 'we are ready to harmonize our country and army, our way of life, our way of thinking and our values in order to be compatible with the wider alliance', we cannot say 'Sorry, we are full! Membership is complete!' Of course we won't and cannot do this", said the former NATO chief.

4.5. Scheffer: NATO to Renew Membership Invitation for Macedonia

NATO will renew its membership invitation for Macedonia once a mutually acceptable solution to the name row is found within the United Nations, Secretary

General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer said in April, after the second round of the country's presidential elections. Scheffer welcomed the conduct of presidential, local elections, which according to OSCE passed in orderly, peaceful manner and were well administrated. These elections show that Macedonia, as a country that works on its accession to NATO, has made real progress in meeting the high democratic standards of the Alliance, Scheffer said. He also expressed satisfaction with the announcement of newly elected president Ivanov about setting the name row settlement as his top priority.

Foreign ambassadors serving in Macedonia fully support the country on its road to NATO, but plea for prompt conclusion of open issues in order the integration process to be wrapped up, urged participants at the debate devoted to NATO and Macedonia and organised by the Ministry of Defense and Tetovo State University. US Ambassador Philip Reeker said the name issue should be solved, calling on the governments of Macedonia and Greece to intensify the negotiations for the well-being of both countries and region's stability.

In March, Turkey, Italy and Hungary reiterated Thursday their support of Macedonia's accession to NATO at meetings with Defense Minister Zoran Konjanovski. At the sidelines of enlarged Southeast European Defence Ministerial of the countries from the US-Adriatic Charter in Zagreb, Konjanovski held bilateral talks with his Turkish, Hungarian counterparts Vecdi Gonul and Imre Szekeres, as well as Italian Undersecretary for Defense Giuseppe Cossiga, MIA correspondent reported. »The message has been quite clear, namely (the officials) expect to see Macedonia within NATO as soon as possible«...« Macedonia was also given credit for its contribution to the Afghanistan mission« Konjanovski said after the meetings The Turkish, Hungarian and Italian officials reaffirmed Macedonia's success to meet the necessary standards for NATO membership, pointing out that the name row, imposed by Greece, presented a sole obstacle to that effect.

4.6. Milososki-Simmons: Macedonia Remains Qualified for NATO Membership, Name Issue Must be Resolved

Republic of Macedonia remains qualified for NATO membership and the only obstacle is the name row with Greece, agreed in April Foreign Minister Antonio Milososki and Deputy Assistant of NATO Secretary General for Security Cooperation and Partnership, Robert Simmons. "We have expressed readiness to resume dialogue with Greece under UN auspices. Macedonia is ready for a reasonable compromise with Greece, in order to overcome this irrational dispute, so that the region can jointly move forward towards increased cooperation and stability", said FM Milososki after the meeting, adding that following the presidential and local elections a signal has been sent to UN mediator Matthew Nimetz that he is welcome to Macedonia, which is also expected of Greece.

Simmons stressed that the position of NATO member-states regarding Macedonia's accession from the Bucharest Summit was reiterated at the recent Strasbourg Summit, according to which the country is qualified for membership, but the name issue must be settled first. "One of the crucial aspects regarding Macedonia's qualifications for NATO accession is the country's participation in peacekeeping missions, such as the one in Afghanistan", stated Simmons.

5. ECONOMY

5.1. Predictions for the Macedonian Economy in 2009

"If the global financial crisis lingers, Macedonia could expect an indirect effect on the trading balance and the investment dynamics", said Economy Minister Fatmir Besimi at the end of last year at a promotion of the National Internship and Job Placement Program. According to him, the financial sector is, for now, stable, whereas large companies have strategic plans for their future business operations. The Government remained on the position that the set of implemented economic measures enable the private sector to deal with all challenges. "The Government's economic program for improvement of the business climate, reduction of business costs, contributions, customs fees, increase of competitiveness at the labor market enable companies to cope with the challenges", added Besimi.

In December 2008, commenting the latest report issued by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), Minister of Finance Trajko Slaveski said that Macedonia's real situation was presented incorrectly. "It is quite known that if you take into consideration incorrect assumptions, then you reach incorrect conclusions and recommendations"... "I don't get it from where it was concluded that Macedonia has high foreign debt, since it was reduced to the lowest possible level in comparison with other neighboring countries. It is only 25,8% of the GDP", Slaveski told reporters in the Parliament.

He added that the recommendation and remark in terms of discouraging Macedonian investments in infrastructure were not clear, since IMF recommended increased fiscal spending as a countercyclical measure to tackle the crisis. "I don't know why a cure that is being recommended to other countries, cannot function in Macedonia", Slaveski stated.

He elaborated that the Government had decided to invest in infrastructure long before the world was gripped by the financial crisis. "The Government is aware of the coming challenges. The measures that are being taken aim to alleviate the consequences of the crisis. Every country, including Macedonia, is hit by the crisis. We think that Government's policies are developed adequately in order to address the challenges" he said.

5.2. USAID Competitiveness Project

In February, the USAID Competitiveness project organized the Conference on Investment Strategy Development and Access to Finance. Leading Macedonian banks and leasing companies, (including Komercijalna Banka, Macedonian Bank for Support of Development and Hypo Alpe Adria), presented new financial products and services in corporate financing to more than 50 companies attending the Conference. "Today the global economy is increasingly competitive, and Macedonian companies need to invest in new technologies and improved business practices in order to stimulate companies' growth and ability to compete in the global market place. Having access to a wide range of financial products may make the difference between survival and failure for a company", said Michael Fritz, USAID Mission Director.

Additionally, the USAID Competitiveness Project introduced its newly created pool of pre-qualified financial facilitators to Macedonian companies that need assistance to access finance. The facilitators will assist companies in developing their investment strategies and building sound business plans to access locally available financial products and expand their business operations. The project is also looking to help Macedonian companies whose export growth is constrained by a lack of finance. This Conference is a part of the USAID Competitiveness Project's Financial Platform which helps companies successfully meet capital needs for business growth, and develop practical strategies to access a wide range of financial products and services, including commercial loans and equity finance.

5.3. Assisting Programs, Strategies, Promotions

A total of Euro 3,5 million from regional pre-accession funds for 2008 are provided for Macedonia in the frameworks of the Tempus programme's fourth phase. The call for proposals, which was announced Friday, entails mutual cooperation between the universities in Macedonia and regional cooperation with West Balkan higher education institutions. Minister of Education and Science Pero Stojanovski at the ceremony of call's launching said that Tempus programmes have stimulated the mobility amongst students and professors. Tempus programme coordinator Snezana Bilic-Sotiroska informed that thus far Euro 30,2 million were obtained through projects and individual mobility of professors for more than 130 project activities.

In February Deputy-Minister of Local Self-Government Faruk Feratoski presented the Draft-Strategy for Regional Development, emphasizing the necessity for coordination among competent ministries, central and local authorities. "The strategy's successful implementation depends on the involvement and engagement of numerous institutions at a central and local level. That is why all municipalities within country's planning regions were consulted during its

development, in order to detect their needs, thus determining the planning regions' development priorities", stated Deputy-Minister Feratoski. The document is structured in three sections - characteristics of the eight planning regions, development visions and priorities, as well as implementation. Following its approval by the National Council for Regional Development and the Government, the strategy will be submitted for Parliament's adoption.

Regarding the agricultural sector, at the international fair Green Week in Berlin, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Management Aco Spasenoski stated that "Macedonian products are a brand in terms of quality, safety and competitiveness. However, there's a lack of profitability, productivity and promotion on new markets". Macedonia, added Spasenoski, has begun to protect its domestic brands - Macedonian rakia, Berovo potato, ajvar.

5.4. EBRD forecasts 3% economic growth in Macedonia in 2009

The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) forecasts a three percent economic growth for Macedonia in 2009 in its revised report on the 2009 economic growth forecasts in 30 countries where the bank is active. The EBRD reduced its 2009 economic growth forecasts for 30 countries from Central Europe to Central Asia, reflecting the prospects of a deepening recession in the developed world, and faster-than-expected slowing in economic activity in this region in the final months of 2008.

South Eastern Europe, including Macedonia, was expected to show growth of 1.5 percent this year. "Positive growth in these countries reflects still strong domestic demand, and in some cases lower levels of financial integration, but the risk of an even sharper slowdown is high", according to Chief Economist Erik Berglof.

The EBRD is also lending €50 million to Macedonia to finance the improvement and upgrade of more than 400km of regional and local roads that form part of key regional network and provide connections to international road corridors. The investments will address an urgent need for road repairs, helping to improve transport links inside the country and support the development of areas to which there is currently limited access. "The improvement of these road links will contribute not only to the economic development of Macedonia and its important agricultural sector, but will improve links and trade with neighboring countries and the EU", reads EBRD press release.

Active in Macedonia since 1993, EBRD investments to-date amount to more than €460 million and the Bank has helped generate a further €496 million from its partners. The majority of investments are in sectors including power and energy, general industries, financial institutions and the private sector

5.5. New Government Investment Program

At the beginning of March, the Government has announced a new, 7-year investment program, focusing on large strategic infrastructure projects in the sectors of energy, transport, ecology, education and culture. The program's total value is Euro 8 billion, allocated from the Budget, indebtedness and largely from concessions. PM Nikola Gruevski said at a press conference that the funds would be invested in the construction of new mines, energy capacities, gasification, road infrastructure, environment and sporting facilities. "These are productive, investment and capital projects. The realization of these projects in crisis conditions would significantly improve the living quality, stimulate long-term development, and significantly raise the competitiveness of Macedonian economy. It is a strategic plan that is rather ambitious, and I would be satisfied if we manage to realize two-thirds, whereas more than this would be considered an exceptional success", stated PM Gruevski. PM Gruevski also stressed that 1,100 social apartments would be built by 2012.

The Government announced Euro 3,85 billion investments in the energy sector in period 2009-2016, Euro 250 million of which Budget funds, Euro 1 billion indebtedness and Euro 2,6 billion from concessions and private-public partnership. These funds would be invested in 30 strategic projects, such as mines, long-distance lines, renewable energy sources and studies for construction of a nuclear plant. Funds will also be invested in road infrastructure, aimed at reconstructing old local and regional roads, but also build new ones. The investment program also envisages construction of a new IT university in Ohrid, new student dormitory in Skopje municipality Aerodrom, as well as 93 new schools throughout Macedonia.

5.6. Government announces Euro 330 million package in wake of global crisis

The Macedonian Government passed in November 2008 a decision on a package of 10 preventive measures for assistance to Macedonian economy. The total support amounts to about Euro 330 million. It concerns four-year standstill and writing off liabilities of firms on the basis of contributions for mandatory health insurance, writing off interest rates on personal tax, profit tax, VAT, property taxes and pension insurance benefits under the condition that bonds fully pay the main debt, payment of tax debt in installments, gain taxation only if it is allocated in dividends, reduction of customs fees primarily for commodities, lower taxation of farmers are part of the Government measures for mitigation of consequences from the global financial crisis in Macedonia's real sector.

PM Gruevski said that the Government closely monitors developments, ready to undertake other measures if necessary. According to him, the banking sector cannot be hit by the financial crisis, but the real sector could suffer certain consequences because a number of Macedonian companies export their

products at the European and global markets, where certain countries have already entered into recession.

5.7. Albania and Macedonia Economic Cooperation

In March, Albania and Macedonia according to the economy ministers, decided to scrap customs tariffs to create a joint market. Members of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) along with other Balkan states, the two countries see the move as integrating their markets before a hoped-for EU entry and offsetting fierce competition during the global economic crisis. "We have agreed to fully liberalize trade between Macedonia and Albania. In other words Macedonia and Albania will have a joint economic market without customs," Macedonia's Economy Minister Fatmir Besimi told a joint trade forum.

Albania's overall trade exchange with Macedonia in 2008 stood at 105 million euros, with Albanian exports to Macedonia constituting 21 percent of the total of the CEFTA countries, up 47 percent compared to 2007. Imports from Macedonia have risen 33 percent, accounting for 26.7 percent of imports from CEFTA area, which uses lower tariffs to help develop trade between its members. "The figures show CEFTA's application has improved the growth of trade exchange between this group of countries, helping the integration of their economies," Albania's Economy Minister Genc Ruli said.

5.8. Macedonians vs the Economic Crisis

Vice Prime Minister Zoran Stavreski, commenting the latest data of the State Statistical Office on GDP's 2,1% growth in the final quarter of 2008 and its 5% growth in 2008, said that such economic result was quite solid amid the global economic crisis. »It is in fact higher than any other results that had been achieved by Macedonian governments in the past 17 years in favourable economic conditions«, Stavreski told reporters after a meeting of the Mixed Committee of Italian and Macedonian Entrepreneurs. The Vice PM said Macedonia was amongst the few countries in Europe to manage in achieving positive result in the final quarter of 2008.

According to the estimated data, growth rate of Macedonia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) for 2008 is 5%, the State Statistical Office said. The GDP growth rate for the fourth quarter of 2008 is 2.1 percent comparing to the same quarter of 2007. The largest upward trend in this quarter of 23.0% is realized in Sector F – Construction and in Sector H - Hotels and restaurants, 9.4%. Household final consumption, including non-profit institutions serving households in nominal terms increased by 17.8%, in the fourth quarter of 2008 in relation with the same period of 2007 and its share in GDP structure is at 85.0%. The share of gross capital formation in GDP structure in the fourth quarter of 2008 is 23 percent.

Due to the economic crisis, Macedonian citizens will mostly save on telephone bills, clothes and shoes, vacation and entertainment in the next six months, shows a survey of the Growth from Knowledge (GfK) Group. Twenty-six percent of respondents claimed they would save on telephone bills, 24 percent on buying clothes and shoes, vacations and tours outside of their place of residence (22%), entertainment (21%), nights out (16%), household appliances (15%), daily needs (11%) and personal needs (9%). Some said they would save on food products, use of credit cards, whereas the least (3%) claimed they would save on medical services and medicines. Moreover, results show that Macedonian citizens would save through reduction of gasoline expenses and use of cars (15%).

More than a quarter of Macedonian citizens buy domestic products more than before. The survey conducted by Growth from Knowledge (GfK) Skopje shows that Macedonian citizens are urged to buy domestic products resulting from the campaign that has been implemented throughout the years. The March poll results show 53 percent of citizens buy domestic products the same as before, 27 percent buy more, 10 percent less, whereas 9 percent did not give any assessment. Sixty-three percent of respondents agreed that purchasing of domestic products contributes to the general stability of Macedonian economy, opening of jobs and industrial strengthening. GfK concludes that awareness among citizens on buying Macedonian products is at a high level, especially among the youth, as well as the awareness regarding its effects on the development and stability of the country's economy.

5.9. Government to put state bonds up for sale

Macedonian government is set to launch a new auction of state bonds with 8.25% interest rate in a bid to collect extra 45 million euros from banks and citizens. Several daily newspapers spread the information, noting that similar auctions took place in the past few weeks. Experts said the government wants to cover the widening budget deficit shortfall, but anyway, the price is too high. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, on the other hand, claimed on Monday there is no budget gap. He reiterated that there is enough money for public sectors salaries and pensions. He added that bond-sale, initiated by Ministry of Finance, commenced during the tenure of the former finance minister Nikola Popovski upon a recommendation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The bond-sale measure has turned a regular practice, he added.

5.10. Debate on the Economic Crisis and its Consequences for Macedonia

"Market Economies under Pressure - Is There Light at the End of the Tunnel?" was the topic of Wednesday's debate of Government officials, representatives from banks, international institutions and companies, organized by foundation "Konrad Adenauer" and the European Business Association. According to organizers, the conference's goal is to gather relevant factors, who would give

proposals and solutions for the crisis, as well as discuss the perspectives of market economy and capitalist system.

Macedonian National Bank Governor Petar Gosev said the country's banking system has resisted the initial blow, remaining stable and secure, but the real sector has been hit strong, whereas the hard days lie ahead. "The negative feedback of the real economy and the financial sector could produce serious problems. Therefore, all institutions must be alert - banks, Central Bank, Government", stated Governor Gosev. He stressed that all policies should be aimed at preserving the fixed foreign exchange rate.

Finance Minister Trajko Slaveski said measures should be undertaken for improvement of the situation in the trade and payment balance, as well as defense of the foreign exchange rate. "The Government is committed towards preserving the economic stability in cooperation with the Central Bank", emphasized Slaveski, adding that more attention should be given to the process of deflation.

International Monetary Fund Resident Representative to Macedonia, Bert van Selm also delivered a recommendation for preservation of the fixed foreign exchange rate policy. He added that projections should be revised, expenditures should equal revenues, along with a macroeconomic policy eliminating the reduction of foreign exchange reserves. Conference participants said a 1-percent GDP growth is most realistic in Macedonia. Moreover, the Government was urged to present real projections and reduce budget spending.

5.11. 44% of Macedonians use Internet

Around 900.000 persons i.e. 44% of the population used Internet by end of last year in Macedonia, which is 125% more than 2006 when there were 400.000 Internet users, data of Internet World Stats website showed. In Slovenia 64% of the population use Internet, 46% in Greece and 44.2% in Croatia. Montenegrins use less Internet than Macedonians with 41.3%, 32.6% in Bulgaria, 32.4% in Serbia, 31.4% in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 16% in Albania. According to the website 1.6 billion people or 23.8% of the population in the world used global online networks by the end of 2008. This percent is 60.7 in the European Union and 48.5% in entire Europe.

5.12. Nearly 350,000 Jobless Persons in Macedonia

By the end of May, the number of unemployed persons in Macedonia amounted 349.063. The number of jobless fell by 816 from a month ago, when it stood at 349.879. Since the beginning of the year, the largest number of unemployed was registered in March - 351.278, whilst in February the number of jobless stood at 351.115. According to the Employment Agency, 278.139 persons willing to work were actively looking for a job in May, while 71.589 reported to the Agency only

to get free health insurance. The data of the State Statistical Office show that the number of working-age citizens in Macedonia stood at 919.424, among them 310.409 (33.8%) unemployed.

6. HEADLINES

6.1. PM Gruevski sends letters to incoming, outgoing US Presidents

In January, PM Nikola Gruevski sent letters Tuesday to incoming, outgoing US Presidents Barack Obama and George Bush respectively on the occasion of power transition. On behalf of the people of Macedonia, Gruevski extended gratitude to Bush on his contribution to the substantial development of the relations between the two countries: "We are particularly thankful for your constant support, encouragement and recognition of our chosen name - the Republic of Macedonia, as well as of the country's accession to NATO. We highly appreciate your recognition of our dignity. Your friendship for the people of Macedonia shows that the country may also count on you in the future".

Gruevski's letter to Obama refers to the significance Macedonia has been attaching to the political relations and strategic partnership with the US. "The Republic of Macedonia is grateful to the US, its support, encouragement and sincere friendship. We shall remain by your side to work on surpassing the difficulties in the region and worldwide, looking forward to great results that may be achieved when we set aside our differences and focus on matters that unite us. I am certain that the US will keep supporting our country - the Republic of Macedonia - to take as soon as possible the place it deserves within NATO" the Prime Minister says in his letter to the new US President.

6.2. Macedonia ranks 89th in World Globalization Index

In January this year, Macedonia is placed 89th at the list of KOF Index of Globalization 2009, calculated annually on a world level. The Zurich-based Economic Institute KOF measures the economic, social and political dimensions of globalization. This year's study encompassed 154 countries across the world. Macedonia is placed 89th with a globalization index of 60,08.

According to the KOF index of economic globalization, Macedonia is ranked 70th (index 63,84), in terms of the social globalization - 49th (74,03). The country has not been ranked in terms of the political globalization. Slovenia has the highest globalization index (ranked 20th) among the countries in the region, followed by Croatia (25th), Greece (32nd), Bulgaria (39th), BiH (43rd) and Albania (103rd).

6.3. Tupurkovski on Trial

The Skopje court Monday afternoon sentenced the former Macedonian Vice Premier and former leader of the Democratic Alternative party, Vasil Tupurkovski to three years in prison for embezzlement. In the infamous "Taiwan Loans" case, Tupurkovski and one other person were charged for the misuse of funds. The money in question were loans approved by Taiwanese Government back in 1999 when Tupurkovski was head of the state Agency for Development and Renewal, and in-charge for managing these funds.

The Criminal Court ruled that Tupurkovski and Jovan Andonov, his former aid in the agency, signed harmful loan contracts with several companies worth over 15 million Euros. Andonov received a two years' prison sentence, and the Court ordered Tupurkovski and Andonov to pay back approximately 2.5 million euros. During the whole process, Tupurkovski claimed his innocence, while his lawyer said he would appeal the verdict.

As head of the Democratic Alternative, Tupurkovski served in the 1999-2000 government led by Ljubco Georgievski's right from centre VMRO DPMNE party as Deputy Prime Minister, Minister for European Integration and National Coordinator for Foreign Aid. During that period Macedonia recognized Taiwan based on Tupurkovski's insistence, angering China over it. In return Taiwan promised a large investment plan in the country but only a small portion of the money arrived. In December 2000, Tupurkovski left the government complaining that his projects for Taiwanese investments were being undermined by VMRO DPMNE.

6.4. Constitutional Court Decisions

On initiative of LDP party a case has been put in front of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia. LDP argued that according to the Constitution the Republic of Macedonia is a secular state, thus religious instruction is not to be performed in state schools. In April, the Constitutional Court in majority ruled to abolish the disputed Article 26 of the Law on Primary Education, stating that this provision is unconstitutional, as it contradicts the division of the church and the state. The Constitutional Court also reaffirmed the right of religious communities in Macedonia to organize religious education and catechises classes, but in their own facilities and outside the system of obligatory elementary education. Religious education was first introduced into the elementary school curriculum in the academic year 2008/2009 through two facultative subjects – catechises classes and history of religions.

VMRO-DPMNE as a party and the government accused the Court of deliberating along ideological and political lines and condemned the ruling to terminate religious education. The party commented that the ruling will have negative effects on the fight against youth drug abuse. Followed series of protests and pressure

to the Constitutional Court, which were obviously supported by the ruling party. The Bitola Bishop Petar blamed the constitutional judges that did not allow the Government to lead demographic policy, accusing them as atheists.

Pertaining to the Constitutional Court decision to ban instruction of theology in elementary schools, ambassador Reeker said this court has a role in every democracy. "We have the Supreme Court in the United States, which passes judgments and plays a key role in the government's checks and balances. Sometimes decisions are difficult, but authorities and citizens should respect these institutions, whereas citizens should find ways to live their lives as they wish, in line with the Constitution", added Reeker.

Later in June, in an opened letter signed by five religious communities (Macedonian Orthodox Church, Islamic Religious Community, Catholic Church, Evangelical-Methodical Church and the Jewish Religious Community) publicized their demand to the Government to introduce constitutional changes that will allow introducing the religious instruction in public schools in the country.

The issue of religious instruction was not the sole one that brought sparks and discontent from the government side towards the Constitutional Court decisions. The Court also abolished the financial aid for a third born child which was based on territorial criteria (in municipalities where the birth rate is under the general average) considering it discriminatory; banned the so called »patriotic receipts« on which could be seen which of the goods bought have been of Macedonian origin of production; abolished the possibility of the state to perform external testing to the primary and secondary school pupils (instead should be performed by an independent, professional entity) etc. The abolishment of these government laws for which a long-term propaganda has been put in place initiated unpleasant reactions from the government side, casting a shadow upon the independence of the judicial system, posing the question how it can be provided for this country to function independently.

6.5. President Ivanov Inaugurated

»My political agenda is clear: Macedonia a member of NATO and EU, strong, respected and equal, while its citizens proud, rich and happy. In this regard, Macedonia continues to tread steadfast on the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, leading a responsible foreign and domestic policy, committed in implementing the highest standards. I want to clearly say: I am the President, one and equal for all citizens«. This is the message that newly-elected President Gjorge Ivanov sent to Macedonian citizens in his inaugural address.

"The presidential office is a duty before all, which does not know political, ethnic or religious affiliation, cultural or local differences", said Ivanov, adding he would invest his entire capacity and credibility for the well-being of the state and citizens. Referring to Macedonia's significance as the heart of the Balkans, he

stated, "this country is a chain link that unites worlds and should represent the most important European point that produces not only Balkan, but also European reconciliation of the East and the West, Christianity and Islam, diverse cultures that make the Balkans and Europe richer".

Ivanov stressed he would pay special attention to relations with Republic of Greece. "I will do everything in my power to develop bilateral relations in the spirit of good neighbors and mutual trust. We undoubtedly share common European values, dream the same European dream, understand the Balkans as the cradle of European culture", stated Ivanov, adding that issues which burden relations between the two neighboring states, especially culture and traditions, have the capacity to represent a bridge of cooperation and promoter of a fresh cycle of regional prosperity.

The President said he would resume efforts towards strengthening of mutual trust and friendship with allies USA, EU member-states, Turkey, but also Russia, China, India and many others. "As President of the Republic of Macedonia and its citizens, I am obliged to underscore: In spite of all efforts by our foreign policy, we must be aware that respect from abroad is best acquired at home. Therefore, we are obliged to resume reforms in building a modern, strong, healthy, competitive and prosperous society", added Ivanov. He said this society is based on functional market economy and democracy.

"We build the former through serious and strategic investments in education and science, development and application of modern technologies, competitive and entrepreneurship spirit of young generations. The latter is most essential for our prosperity. Democracy must be kept with vigilance. As President, I will promote development of democracy and support all initiatives that bring our country closer to its essence - interest of the Macedonian citizen", emphasized Ivanov.

He voiced commitment for observance of cultural, education, religious and other rights of Macedonian citizens. At the same time, through the rule of law and support to anti-corruption laws and policies, everyone must contribute to the strengthening of institutional capacity. Moreover, Ivanov stated that Macedonia is a model of an open and multicultural society, remaining faithful to its traditions and values shared by all Macedonian citizens - Macedonians, Albanians, Turks, Vlach, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks.

Ivanov voiced his willingness to cooperate with all institutions - Parliament, Government, municipalities - but also intellectuals, businessmen and primarily young people, so that the country responds appropriately to the greatness of the national challenge. "Over the past 18 years we coped with a number of challenges, and by overcoming each of them we have proved that we deserve our freedom. Republic of Macedonia has always followed the principle logic given by Beethoven: I do not know of other types of superiority besides kindness", underlined President Gjorge Ivanov in his inaugural speech.

6.6.Parliamentary parties comment Ivanov's inauguration for Macedonia's President

For ruling parties the first address of new President Gjorgi Ivanov is a speech for uniting of all citizens, while the opposition ones say it is empty and bears no political message. I hope that Ivanov is going to be a President of all citizens of Macedonia, regardless of their ethnic, cultural and other affiliation, said MP Safet Neziri, representative of the ruling coalition partner -Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). MP Silvana Boneva, coordinator of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE parliamentary group, said she was pleased that building of good interethnic, neighbourly relations would be among Ivanov's top priorities.

Opposition SDSM extended congratulations to Ivanov on the new post, but criticized his inauguration speech. »Ivanov's speech bears no political message, only aiming to court citizens. The speech lacked a strategy for resolving Macedonia's crucial problems, in particular the name issue and global financial crisis, said MP Cvetanka Ivanova, coordinator of the party's parliamentary group. The new President has sent a strong message by his speech, pointing out that the Krusevo Manifest, ASNOM Declaration, Framework Agreement and Constitution are the pillars of Macedonia's state system and its internal relations, New Democracy leader Imer Selmani said.

6.7. UN Rapporteur on Religious Freedom Visits Macedonia

Macedonian society is tolerant, respecting the religious diversity and freedom, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief, Asma Jahangir, said Wednesday at a press conference. Macedonia is multiethnic, multicultural and society that brings together many religions, the society that nourishes a high level of tolerance, Jahangir said. »The Government also shows respect for the freedom of religions and beliefs, but there are some areas of concern that need to be addressed, said the UN Rapporteur, who had meetings with representatives of the government, NGOs, religious communities during her three-day visit to the country.

»Some of my interlocutors have told me that the two largest religious communities in the country have a significant political influence and are even capable of breaching the constitutional concept of separating the state from the religion, she said. Commenting the recent Constitutional Court decision, the UN Special Rapporteur said it was by no means in collision with the freedom to receive religious instructions outside the primary schools.

»It is of vital importance to respect the independence of the judiciary and the ability of courts to make rulings on religious issues without fear or putting somebody in favorable position«, Jahangir said. »I don't see any major problems, but I can see signs of strained religious identities and polarization. If it's not

handled in time, it may be too late. When lack of religious tolerance goes out of hand, it can be very hard to amend it. On the other hand, people are happy for living together in a multicultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious society», added Jahangir.

She will present her report on Macedonia at the 13th session of the UN Human Rights Council in March 2010. The Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief is an independent expert appointed by the UN Human Rights Council. The mandate holder has been invited to identify existing and emerging obstacles to the enjoyment of the right to freedom of religion or belief and present recommendations on ways and means to overcome such obstacles. Asma Jahangir was appointed Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief in July 2004.

6.8. Macedonian Parliament marks 60th CoE anniversary

In May, the Parliament of Macedonia at a formal session marked the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Council of Europe (CoE). It was created back in 1949 with the signing of the London Treaty by 10 European states. As of 1993, Macedonia is present in the Council of Europe at first having the status of special guest and in 1995 the country became a full-fledged member. Addressing the session, Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanoski said the idea about united Europe and the establishment of a representative body authorised to speak and act on behalf of Europe originated as early as in the 19th century. He noted that today in the Council of Europe, championing the basic principles of peace, democracy and human rights, 47 stars were shining and uniting over 800 million Europeans.

Successful legal projects realised with the assistance of CoE include the Ombudsman Law, changes to electoral legislation and the recent constitutional amendments. »Republic of Macedonia in the years since gaining independence and the transition period fosters a trend that identifies us as a democratic state observing human rights and freedoms and the rule of law. This fact is of fundamental importance for us taking into consideration that the Macedonian society is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-confessional, stressed Veljanoski. He added that the Republic of Macedonia had accepted the dialogue, being one of the basic principles on which the Council of Europe was founded, as a method for solving open issues, even the most absurd ones such as the one imposed by Greece referring to country's constitutional name.

6.9. Macedonia's Journalists Protests

Macedonia's journalists' association called its members to join a protest called "Five Minutes of Loud Silence" staged to highlight growing political interference in their work. The action, envisages a five-minute break of all news programs aired by electronic media across the country under the slogan "For journalists' dignity,

for a dignified profession". The journalists will protest against "pressures, political influences, (low) salaries", a statement released by the journalists' association says. Journalists and others employed in the media took part in a protest walk at Skopje's main square on May 3rd, World's Freedom of the Press Day.

Both the EU and Freedom House, a non profit organisation that monitors democracy and press freedom around the world, have expressed concern about political and business interference in the media. At the start of the year, the EU ambassador to the country, Erwan Fouere, publicly stated that the freedom of the press must be protected. Although the ruling VMRO DPMNE party has said its officials will stop filing court cases against journalists, the Association says its members continue to be put under pressure.

6.10. Macedonia, Kosovo to Enhance Economic and Political Cooperation

EU pledges normalization of the relations between Macedonia and Kosovo, EU Ambassador Erwan Fouere told reporters when asked whether Brussels was worried about the countries' relations after Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu cancelled his visit to Macedonia. EU champions the establishment of diplomatic relations with Kosovo that will encompass a variety of issues including the border demarcation. One must not forget that Macedonia at the moment is Kosovo's biggest trade partner. All measures to improve the ties and strengthen the corporations should be taken in the interests of the citizens of both countries, said Fouere following a promotion of the IPA Cross-border Cooperation Program between Macedonia and Albania.

Minister of Local Self-Government Musa Xhaferi, attending the promotion, stated Macedonia had good relations with Kosovo and the miscommunication between the cabinets of countries' presidents shouldn't hinder them. He noted the Government has never mulled an option to repeal the decision on the Kosovo independence recognition. »There's no such option. A vital argument that was also stated by EU Ambassador Fouere is that the demarcation of the northern border is coming to its end. I hope diplomatic relations will be established in due time, which will contribute to Macedonia's neighbourly relations - an important criterion for visa liberalisation and a date for EU entry talks, Xhaferi told the media.

Kosovo President Fatmir Sejdiu spokesman Xhavit Beqiri said Pristina and Skopje would soon establish diplomatic relations. "We will soon appoint ambassadors and establish bilateral relations", stated Beqiri. He stressed that the Kosovo President is interested in establishing diplomatic relations, denying that Sejdiu's absence from the inauguration of Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov and the cancellation of his visit to Macedonia had any effect on the establishment of diplomatic relations.

Macedonia-Kosovo economic cooperation is not sufficiently developed and there are numerous ways for its enhancement, concluded the two countries' businessmen. At a meeting of Macedonia and Kosovo chambers of commerce, businessmen urged for signing of an agreement on elimination of double taxation, enhancement of cross-border infrastructure, establishment of joint customs control and modern border crossings, which will facilitate bilateral cooperation of companies and citizens.

Businessmen agreed that improvement of bilateral commercial exchange requires establishment of a mixed committee, along with reassessment of the bilateral legislative framework, as well as more frequent business fora. "The business community urges for sooner construction of highway Pristina-Skopje, agreement on elimination of double taxation and investment protection, and joint border controls. The business community aspires for joint presentation of Macedonia, Kosovo, Albania and Montenegro before the European Union for use of infrastructure enhancement loans", said chairman of Macedonian Economic Chamber Branko Azeski. Kosovo colleague Besim Beqaj believes efforts should be invested in enhancement of bilateral economic cooperation.

6.11. Macedonia content with State Department's report

The inclusion of Macedonia in the list of countries that fully comply with the standards for fight against human trafficking represent a great recognition for the country, a Macedonian minister said. Interior Minister Gordana Jankulovska commented the State Department's latest report on human trafficking.

The report ranks Macedonia and Croatia as the only Balkan's countries in the first group, which comprises countries that have fully met the minimum standards envisaged in the US Trafficking Victims Protection Act. Nonetheless, the Report says that there are still women and children victims of trafficking in Macedonia and the authorities are recommended to continue with progress in curbing down of such cases. "The recommendations stated in the report on continuation of the progress in terms of victims' protection and adoption of new operational procedures for their recognition as well as keeping up of the non-selective, uncompromising fight, will become our tasks as early as of today," said minister Jankulovska.

6.12. History of Macedonian People Promoted

In June, a book titled "History of the Macedonian People", was published by the Institute for National History, was launched at one of the central events of this year's manifestation "Days of Goce Delcev-2009" in the town of Delcevo. Later, the Macedonian public estimated it as »controversial«. Book's promoter, Gjorgi Cakarjanevski PhD for MIA presented the latest researches and findings of the Institute for the period between 1988 and 2003. A group of authors in the latest

edition in Macedonian and English have included recent historic facts and interpretations on 340 pages in 18 chapters.

»The edition covers the most crucial events and persons from ancient times till the Bucharest NATO Summit, encompasses an etymological research on the name Macedonia, the differences between ancient Macedonians and the Hellenic people, Thracians, Illyrians...said Cakarjanevski. The book portrays events and people from ancient dynasties and rulers, military conflicts of Macedonia with the Roman Empire, the advent of Christianity, the evolution of Slavs, the work of Sts. Cyril and Methodius, the creation of the Macedonian medieval state and King Samuil, the Ottoman rule, various riots, the Ilinden uprising, the Balkan wars, the two world wars, Yugoslavia and its subsequent disintegration, the Macedonian independence, etc... Cakarjanevski and other scholars believe that this edition of the Institute for National History should put Macedonia on the scale where it rightfully belongs in the 21st century

6.13. Macedonia, Serbia enhance defense cooperation

Macedonian and Serbian Defense Ministers, Zoran Konjanovski and Dragan Sutanovac respectively, signed Wednesday an agreement for cooperation in the defense sector. Talks focused on cooperation in Euro-Atlantic processes, development of good neighborly relations, information exchange, open dialogue for strengthening of trust and bilateral cooperation. Ministers Konjanovski and Sutanovac also reviewed the possibility for military-economic cooperation in the field of military industry, but also military health. Moreover, they concluded that both countries have to be put on the white Schengen list as soon as possible, followed by becoming full-fledged EU members.

DM Konjanovski stressed Macedonia's support to Serbia's Euro-Atlantic processes, mainly through its own experiences, but also within the South Eastern Defense Ministerial (SEDM) process. "We see the region as a whole that needs to move towards Euro-Atlantic integration", said Konjanovski. According to Sutanovac, regardless of the administrative borders, security risks are common. Sutanovac also met with PM Gruevski and President Ivanov.

6.14. Jacques Barrot Renames Macedonia into Northern Macedonia

The Vice-President of the European Commission Jacques Barrot called Macedonia today "Northern Macedonia." After briefing the 27 EU foreign ministers at a regular session in Luxembourg on the progress of the countries from the Western Balkan's region in meeting of the conditions relating visa liberalization, Barrot singled out Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro as the countries which can expect lifting of the visa regime, Alsat-M TV Station said.

"What I can say is that today we are under impression that FYROM, i.e. Northern Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro made a really great effort. It's still uncertain,

but there is a possibility for us to suggest that these three countries achieve the liberalization by the end of this year, however this is simply a suggestion and I can not be absolutely sure in this stage. But, if the member-countries do agree on this, it can happen," Barrot said.

7. POLICIES/EVENTS

7.1. Parliament endorses establishment of Lustration Commission

The Macedonian Assembly with 87 votes in favor and none against in January adopted the decision on appointing president, deputy president and members of the Commission for Verification of Facts (Lustration Commission). In accordance with the decision, Agim Mehmeti - a journalist from Skopje - is appointed president of the Lustration Commission, while historian Gjorgji Malkovski is his deputy. The eleven-member Commission also includes historians, journalists, lawyers, special education teachers and civil servants. All candidates at the forthcoming elections in March are bound to file statements before the Lustration Commission that they didn't cooperate with secret services during the communist era. If an investigation determines that someone had cooperated or had been a member of the secret service, their names will be revealed and thus further banned from public functions. In the course of the Parliament debate, MPs expressed hope that the Commission would be able to adequately respond to its tasks and to resist any possible political pressures.

7.2. Parliament launches new website and e-Parliament

The system for electronic preparation and conduct of entire procedure in process of passing laws - e-Parliament has been launched in February in the Macedonian Parliament. »MPs with the new electronic system will be able to sign certain act whether they are on a business trip or are in the country linking with the citizens. In a similar way they will be also able to submit amendments«, said Parliament Speaker Trajko Veljanovski. He also said that the goal of introducing e-Parliament is increasing efficiency in entire process of passing laws and increase of transparency of the work of the parliament. The system enables monitoring the entire procedures included in the parliament's rulebook connecting the Parliament with the Government and the Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia. Also, new system will provide MPs faster access to information and larger efficiency of the Parliament thus reducing the expenses for distribution of materials.

7.3. Local Government Ministry, UNDP to keep cooperating in concrete projects

Further cooperation in concrete projects for building the capacity of local administration and implementing a policy for regional development were subjects of discussion in February at a meeting of Local Government Minister Musa Xhaferi and a UNDP delegation, led by UN Resident Coordinator and UNDP Resident Representative, Maria Luisa Silva Mejias and UNDP Europe and CIS Regional Bureau Deputy-Director Cihan Sultanoglu. »It is necessary to provide for institutional capacity building at local level via constant training that meets the existing and future challenges«, Xhaferi said, pointing out that this project may not be realized without solid expert support.

7.4. Seminar on Technical regulative of new EU's Package

The Ministry of Economy in cooperation with the Turkish Under-Secretariat for External Trade held on February 2-3 in Skopje a Seminar on 'Technical Regulative of New Europe's Package, New Approach Directives. The event brings together representatives of Macedonian, Turkish Chambers of Commerce, certain Macedonian scientific-research institutions and bodies for conformity, as well as, users of these directives. The purpose of this significant seminar, connected to the technical regulations that are applied in Europe, is to enable the institutions in charge of transposing and implementation of these regulations, as well as exchange experience in certain areas of the new approach that belongs to the industrial sector.

The new package of technical directives prescribes strict rules of the game for production of safe product by the producer and its representative in the country of import; with aim such product to be placed on the internal market. Macedonia has been actively working on the adjustment of the European technical directives in the national legislation, on implementation of equivalent system with EU member countries. The new package of directives was delivered in EU in 2006 and 2007, and the Ministry of Economy is in final phase of their transposing. It is about the directives: safety of machines, electro-magnetic compatibility, equipment under low voltage (microwaves, irons, boilers, refrigerators and others), children's toys and others.

7.5. Mol Jankuloska meets EULEX chief Kermabon

In January, Minister of Interior Gordana Jankuloska, Deputy-Minister Xhevat Buci and Public Safety Directorate head Ljupco Todorovski met Monday with EULEX mission delegation, led by chief Yves de Kermabon. Meeting participants assessed the cooperation between Macedonian and Kosovo authorities thus far, with EULEX expecting the police cooperation to be further enhanced. Jankuloska and Kermabon agreed that organized, cross-border crime does not recognize ethnic or political affiliation, whereas effective combat is possible only through

coordinated action. Pertaining to the border protection, Jankuloska and Kermabon stressed that both the Macedonian Mol and EULEX have a solid cooperation, including nine regional and over 200 local meetings with KFOR, UNMIK and KPS in 2008.

7.6. Novelties in the Law on Health Insurance

February changes in the Law on Health Insurance and Law on Contributions from Mandatory Social Insurance, shall provide tens thousands of citizens services within the basic health insurance package. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski said at Saturday's press conference that law amendments provide all Macedonian nationals with health insurance. "This is a category of citizens, mainly marginalized groups, who are not insured, but use healthcare protection through the national preventive programs of the Health Ministry or do not use them at all", stated Gruevski.

According to him, this category includes the unemployed, people who do not possess property, ones who are not registered in the Employment Agency, individuals who do not received financial assistance, persons over the age of 64 who do not receive pensions, people with specific contagious diseases but without health insurance, as well as other social cases. "Through this measure, all citizens will have the right to choose their own doctor, whereas the level of preventive health protection will be increased", emphasized PM Gruevski.

7.7. PM Gruevski: Macedonia Determined to Tackle Corruption

Corruption is not an innate and endemic phenomenon that is protected by people's stances and habits. It's a systematic phenomenon that should be tackled with joint forces in order to limit it to the slightest level, stated Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski in an address before participants at the 6th annual regional conference of Transparency International for Europe and Central Asia, which is being held on June 15-17 in Ohrid. »A wide front against corruption is essential, where contributions in the fight against this modern evil will be made with personal examples. It is a tough opponent, but it is not invincible. Success depends on political will, determination and commitment from state organs and courts, but also from the society and media by suggesting actions, organising public debates and contributing with researches regarding the matter, said Gruevski. The process of raising the public awareness has huge and most probably the key role, noted the Macedonian PM.

»One corrupted judge, politician, professor, customs official paints the same picture for his/her professions and casts a shadow of doubt on hundreds of other people who are professionals in their field of work, added Gruevski. He highlighted Macedonia's firm determination for reforms, positive changes in economic trends, international cooperation and strategic orientation towards Euro-Atlantic integration "which are our strong allies in the fight against

corruption in the same way as the successful outcome of that fight is a precondition to meet these goals".

»We have been encouraged by the fact that Macedonia has made a breakthrough while meeting conditions stemming from the European Commission benchmark on the fight against corruption. The Government continues its uncompromising combat against corruption, aiming to make Macedonia a partner in the international arena for fight against corruption. We are opened for cooperation, exchange of experiences, advices or criticism, because it is the only way to improve the fight against corruption, Gruevski said.

8. PARTY DEVELOPMENTS

8.1. Branko Crvenkovski Wins Unanimous Support at SDSM Congress

Branko Crvenkovski was unanimously elected as president of the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM) at the May party congress held in Skopje. Crvenkovski, the sole candidate for SDSM leader, was voted by 495 delegates out of 601. The delegates serve as the highest party organ. Crvenkovski, addressing the congress, admitted that SDSM was in a serious and lingering crisis, which resulted in low ratings and reputation, program disorientation and a number of organisational shortcomings.

»Our goal will be to strengthen the party in order to win the forthcoming parliamentary elections«, said Crvenkovski amongst other things. To accomplish that, he believes that the party needs deep reforms, including a new party programme with strict »house rules«. Some leading SDSM members, expecting Crvenkovski to unify the party's different fractions, were surprised to hear he »will not spend one second trying to pacify anyone«. He explained that the »SDSM is open to everyone, but can also exist without some«.

In June in Ohrid SDSM held its 10th Congress and elected new members of the party's main bodies. Over 80 percent of the 90-member Central SDSM Board is made up of new people bellow 38 years of age, party spokesman Emilijan Stankovic told reporters. Former acting party leader Zoran Zaev, Igor Ivanovski, Jani Makraduli, Ljubomir Janev, Andrej Petrov and Natasa Savova - close associate of party leader Branko Crvenkovski during his presidential mandate, are among the new Board members. The body also includes Ambassadors Aleksandar Tavcioski, Viktor Daimovski, Tihomir Ilievski, PhDs Renata Deskoska, Ljudmil Spasov, Ana Pavlovska - Daneva and Tatjana Prentovic, as well as representatives of other ethic communities. The party's Executive Board brings together Dane Talevski, Dragan Tevdovski, Natasa Savova, Viktor Dimovski, Igor Ivanovski, Emilijan Stankovic, Magdalena Nestorovska, Jovo Despotoski, Jani Makraduli, Renata Deskoska, Ljudmil Spasov, Peco

Stojanovski, Orce Jordanovski, Viktor Cvetkoski, Marija Kostova, Natasa Petrovska and Mitre Veljanovski.

The new party leading organs intend to come up with a new party program at the end of August. Intention is to offer a clear vision on what is the party position regarding the name issue and to reconfirm the »good old road« to EU and NATO integrations which the party thinks has been derogated by the ruling party. The party hopes that their program will meet the thoughts of the frustrated intellectuals and dissatisfied citizens who have discontent of the current political situation in the country.

8.2. PM Gruevski Says Informal Coalition of Several Opposition Parties Functioning Already

Informal coalition of opposition parties SDSM, VMRO-NP, United for Macedonia (OM) and DPA has been functioning already, Prime Minister and leader of ruling of VMRO-DPMNE Nikola Gruevski told reporters in June. The parties' leaders or their associates have been convening informal meetings and coordinate their activities, Gruevski said, pointing out that it was up to (SDSM leader Branko) Crvenkovski whether this coalition would become an official one. »Crvenkovski may set up a coalition with some but not all of these parties. They will work in this manner by the next elections, hoping that joining of their forces will render results. This is their democratic right«, Gruevski said.

8.3. Ljube Boskovski Establishes a New Party

Former Interior Minister and presidential candidate Ljube Boskovski after the presidential elections formally announced that shall create a new political party »United for Macedonia«. He cited speedy accession to the EU and NATO as party priorities and said it will promote real dialogue and tolerance. Boskovski left his former party VMRO-DPMNE after the UN tribunal at The Hague acquitted him of war crimes charges.

9. PUBLIC OPINION POLLS

9.1. International Republican Institute Poll: VMRO-DPMNE enjoys largest support

In January, two months prior to the local and presidential elections, VMRO-DPMNE enjoyed the largest support among political parties. The ruling party showed a 38% support while coalition partner from the Albanian bloc - DUI followed with 11%. Opposition party SDSM had 9%, New Democracy 3%, DPA-2, DOM and NSDP 1% each, 2% "other" parties, whereas 18% are still undecided. The rest of the respondents stated that they will not vote at all.

Current VMRO-DPMNE leader and Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski has the biggest rating among politicians with 31%, followed by DUI leader Ali Ahmeti-8% and the then President of the Republic Branko Crvenkovski-7%. Other politicians mentioned by the respondents in the poll were: Imer Selmani, Ljube Boskoski and Zoran Zaev with 3% each, and Srdjan Kerim, Arben Xhaferi and Kiro Gligorov with 2% each. According to the poll, a large majority of Macedonian citizens give their support to NATO and EU accession, i.e. 89% and 92% respectively.

9.2. Over 70% of Macedonians expect benefits from EU membership - survey

As many as 74% of the citizens in Macedonia expect benefits from EU membership, shows the January Standard Eurobarometer public opinion survey, which is conducted twice a year. Despite the decline of 8% compared to spring 2008, this is a far greater percentage than in the remaining two candidate countries, where the number of the respondents that expect benefits is lower than 50%. The number of respondents in the country with a positive image of the EU also recorded a decrease (from 67% to 60%). However, Macedonia remains at the top of the list of countries whose citizens have positive feelings towards the EU, the Office of the EU Mission to Skopje says in a press release on Friday.

An opinion poll carried out by agency "Rating" on February 6-8 showed that if presidential elections were to be held tomorrow, 27% of Macedonian citizens would vote for VMRO-DPMNE candidate Gjorge Ivanov. According to the poll, SDSM candidate Ljubomir Frckoski is second with 13 percent, followed by Ljube Boskoski-10% and Imer Selmani-9%, whereas 23% of citizens are still undecided. If the VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM candidates enter the second round, data show that 36% would go for Ivanov, while 21% for Frckoski. According to the agency's analysis, if Boskoski does not enter the second round, 46% of his votes would go to Ivanov, while 17% to Frckoski.

In the framework of the February 20-22 poll, which encompassed 1,093 respondents, 14.4 percent said they would not vote for any candidate, whereas 17.7 percent were undecided. Citizens have most confidence in PM Nikola Gruevski - 31.2 percent, followed by DUI leader Ali Ahmeti-8.8, President Branko Crvenkovski-8.3, ND leader Imer Selmani-4.9 percent, Ljube Boskoski-1.9 etc. When asked which party they would vote for at the next parliamentary elections, 29.9 percent of respondents said VMRO-DPMNE, followed by SDSM-13.01, DUI-9.4, New Democracy-4.9, DPA-2.1, LDP-1.2 etc

The March latest telephone poll of the Institute for Democracy shows that 25.5 of respondents would vote for VMRO-DPMNE candidate Gjorge Ivanov at the upcoming presidential elections, followed by SDSM candidate Ljubomir Frckoski with 12.1 percent. Imer Selmani of New Democracy was supported by 11.7

percent of respondents, independent candidate Ljube Boskoski-8.8 percent, Agron Buxhaku of DUI-4.8, Nano Ruzin of LDP-3.6, and Miruse Hoxha of DPA-1.5 percent.

An opinion poll conducted between March 7 and 9 by the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM) amongst 1.100 respondents showed that VMRO-DPMNE and New Democracy (ND) presidential hopefuls, Gjorge Ivanov and Imer Selmani respectively, still have the biggest chance of becoming Macedonia's next head of state. CRPM's two latest polls also show that the number of undecided voters is high and the number of those who will not cast their ballot is slightly on the rise.

Asked who would they vote for at the next presidential elections, 23,1% of the respondents said they were in favour of VMRO-DPMNE's Gjorge Ivanov, 13,3% would vote for ND candidate Imer Selmani, 9,7% for SDSM's Ljubomir Frckoski, 8,1% for DUI front-runner Agron Buxhaku, 6,3% for independent candidate Ljube Boskoski, 3,9% for LDP's Nano Ruzin and 1,9% for DPA's Miruse Hoxha. According to the poll, 23,9% of those interviewed do not know or refuse to vote at the elections, 5,9% will not vote for neither of the candidates and 3,9% will not cast a ballot.

9.3. Ivanov, Frckoski most likely to face election runoff - Rating Agency

VMRO-DPMNE candidate Gjorge Ivanov and SDSM/NSDP front-runner Ljubomir Frckoski are most likely to enter the second round of the 22 March presidential elections, shows a recent telephone survey conducted by Rating Agency between March 12-14 on the basis of a representative sample of 1.080 citizens. Asked who would they vote for, 29% of the respondents said they were in favour of Ivanov and 14% for Frckoski. Third on the list is Imer Selmani of New Democracy with 12%, followed by independent candidate Ljube Boskoski (8%), DUI's Agron Buxhaku (6%), LDP's Nano Ruzin (4%) and DPA's Miruse Hoxha with 3%. Asked to what extent the election campaign shapes voters' decisions, 71% responded it doesn't influence them at all since they have already decided who to vote for, 21% said it will influence a little bit and it will influence a lot to 8%. Out of those participating in the survey, 51% said they follow the campaign with huge interest, 38% from time to time and 11% do not follow it at all. Currently, 69% are motivated enough to cast a vote at the upcoming elections, 17% lack motivation and 14% are not motivated at all.

10. FUTURE POSSIBLE DEVELOPMENTS

Politically, the first half of 2009 will be remembered mostly for the presidential and local elections that have been held. These events practically »froze« any possible developments on the »name dispute«. Large interest and hope presents the possibility of abolishing the visa regime for Macedonian citizens, and eventually getting a date for starting the entry talks with EU. As a continuation of this year's events and situations, is expected:

1. "Name dispute" with Greece may get some dramatic turns and/or solutions (i.e. referendum) by the last quarter of 2009, but there is probability that a consensus may be achieved
2. There will be turbulent coalition relations DUI vs VMRO DPMNE (due to feeling that the government favors one ethnic, one cultural and one religious group)
3. Introduction of free visa regime in 2010 may occur
4. Possible polarizations among the ethnic Albanian political parties
5. Possible radicalization of some ethnic Albanian political factors
6. Economic crisis will hit harder by the second half of 2009 and may provoke big social tensions