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**MACEDONIA PARLIAMENTARY
ELECTIONS 2002
ELECTION WATCH REPORT
Volume One, August 15, 2002**

On September 15, voters throughout Macedonia will cast their ballots to elect Members of Parliament. This is the first in a series of reports on the campaign in Macedonia as the country approaches these critical elections. This first volume provides background on the political situation and the pre-election environment. Subsequent issues will focus on the administration of the election process, the campaign activities of the main parties, Macedonian non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international community.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Macedonia has faced numerous external and internal challenges to its political and economic development since gaining independence in 1991, although it has largely managed to avoid the major violence that characterized other former Yugoslav states during the early- to mid-1990s. Many of the most significant challenges facing the country have presented themselves during the past four years; these include the crisis in Kosovo and its spillover effects in Macedonia in 1998-99, unexpected violence and irregularities during presidential elections in 1999 and local elections in September 2000, and the armed conflict between ethnic Albanians and Macedonian government forces throughout the spring and into the summer of 2001.

Ethnic Conflict

Demanding greater political and economic rights for ethnic Albanians, who comprise approximately 25-30 percent of the population, the National Liberation Army

(NLA) initiated a series of military attacks in the early Spring of 2001. The Macedonian government responded with efforts designed to drive them out. In an effort to quell the violence, the four largest political parties, including two ethnic Albanian parties, formed a Unity Government. Early in the summer, representatives of the EU, NATO, and the United States went to Macedonia to lend their mediating assistance. Although fighting and violence continued throughout the summer, NATO and the EU eventually brokered a peace agreement.

The Ohrid Agreement

On August 13, 2001, the Framework Agreement for Peace was signed in Ohrid, officially ending the conflict. This agreement set forth constitutional amendments intended to improve the status of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia in exchange for a cessation of hostilities.

Key Points of Framework Agreement

- An increase from 5 to 25 percent of ethnic Albanian representation in the police force
- Use of second language in official communications with government institutions for minorities constituting 20 percent of the population
- Use of the Albanian language in Parliament
- Equitable employment for minorities in state institutions
- Territorial integrity
- Devolution of power to local government
- In the constitutional preamble, the state is now described as made up of citizens of Macedonia, which includes the Macedonian people as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serbian people, the Romany people, the Bosniak people and others.

The Parliament, by and large, has been very reluctant to enact the terms of the Framework Agreement. Under great pressure from the international community and threats of renewed violence from the NLA, the parliament on November 15 passed the first package of constitutional amendments. Since that time, it has enacted the remainder of the agreement. However, the process has been characterized by political infighting, the marginalization of moderate voices within the political spectrum, and an almost total lack of communication between political leaders and citizens regarding the important changes being discussed.

Despite apprehension that the procrastination and political gamesmanship characterizing the process could lead to a return to violence, positive steps were taken to legislate the remaining aspects of the Framework Agreement, including the Law on Local Self Government, the Law on Amnesty, the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, and the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament.

Recent Elections

The two most recent nation-wide elections in Macedonia – presidential elections in 1999 and local elections in 2000 – have been marred by violence and fraud. Widespread and significant irregularities were witnessed and recorded during these elections, including ballot stuffing, proxy voting, intimidation, harassment, and violence.

September 15 Elections

There is much at stake in the upcoming elections. There is widespread frustration within the Macedonian electorate regarding the responsiveness of the current government to its economic and social needs. Ethnic tensions between the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian

communities persist, and much of the campaign rhetoric focuses on issues of either nationalism and the imperative of sustaining the Macedonian state (VMRO-DPMNE) or the need for full implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement (among the Albanian parties).

Nonetheless, if politically-motivated acts of violence and intimidation are to occur, it will likely be intra-ethnic rather than inter-ethnic, i.e., between the two main ethnic Macedonian parties and among the competing ethnic Albanian parties as parties vie for votes within their own ethnic group.

Perhaps most importantly, the elections are viewed by many Macedonians as critical for the continued existence of their state. Many others, however, have stated they will not vote on September 15 despite the significance of the election. Some are afraid to vote based on the violent experience of recent elections. Others have become cynical and believe that there is no real choice among the parties. This view is particularly true for many ethnic Macedonians who had hoped that VMRO-DPMNE would offer an alternative to the previous SDSM government. Amid the many allegations of scandal and corruption, however, they now believe there is no real difference between the ethnic Macedonian parties and, therefore, see no reason to vote. On the other hand, voter turnout among ethnic Albanians is expected to be high.

There is widespread concern that, if acts of violence, intimidation or fraud lead the electorate to feel that the election results are not legitimate, political instability and violence could ensue.

KEY PARTIES AND POLITICAL GROUPINGS

Coalition Together for Macedonia

The Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), which is the successor to the Communist Party and was in the governing coalition from 1994 to 1998, is poised to gain the largest number of votes in the upcoming election and to return to the government. According to recent polls, it is garnering far more support than any other party.

SDSM has entered into a coalition called “Coalition Together for Macedonia” with several small parties, including the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Labor-Farmer Party and parties representing Serbs, Vlachs, Bosniaks, Roma, Turks and the Green Party of Macedonia. Of these parties, LDP is the most noteworthy; it is a well-organized, up-and-coming “moderate” party whose leader is the very popular Mayor of Skopje (but not a candidate in these elections).

The coalition’s message is focused on offering a change from the past 4 years of political and social instability, economic downturn, and threat to national identity. A rally in Skopje on June 28 drew an estimated 50,000 supporters from across the country.

VMRO-DPMNE

The Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonia National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) has been the most dominant political party in Macedonia since 1998. VMRO-DPMNE, under the leadership of Prime Minister Georgievski, will be running in coalition with its traditional ally the Liberal Party (LP).

VMRO-DPMNE has not been doing well in the pre-election polls. The party’s campaign rhetoric is largely nationalistic. At an address at the end of June, Prime Minister

Georgievski referred to the “fight that VMRO-DPMNE led along with the Macedonian people” last year, adding that “the enemy we fought against will not renounce its idea for Great Albania.” The party’s campaign posters focus on military and nationalistic images from the conflict.

In an interesting twist that demonstrates the relatively weak position of VMRO-DPMNE, the party invited SDSM early in June to form a coalition with them in the heavily ethnic-Albanian sixth electoral district in order to maximize the ethnic Macedonian vote. SDSM rejected the offer, citing the fact that VMRO-DPMNE had sanctioned the entry of four former NLA commandos into the ranks of DPA.

DUI

The newest ethnic Albanian party on the scene has shaken up the ethnic Albanian political landscape and currently is gaining the most votes of the ethnic Albanian parties. After attempting to unite the ethnic Albanian parties through a Coordinative Council, which dissolved in April, former NLA leader Ali Ahmeti formed the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI). DUI’s moderate platform is centered on the implementation of the Framework Agreement and the integration of ethnic Albanians into Macedonian society.

DUI has fared better in the polls than any of the other ethnic Albanian parties. In the face of ongoing speculation regarding a coalition between DUI, PDP, and the National Democratic Party (NDP), DUI recently announced that it would not enter into any pre-election coalitions.

DUI faces certain hurdles, however. After an initial delay in being able to register as a political party, DUI’s application was granted by the local courts. Also, despite

the widespread amnesty given to ethnic Albanians who participated in the insurgency last year, charges against Ahmeti are still pending. As a result, despite his declared intentions of establishing the DUI headquarters in Skopje (as opposed to Tetovo, where the other ethnic Albanian parties have their headquarters), Ahmeti has not felt comfortable straying far from Tetovo for fear that he might be arrested.

Finally, Ahmeti is among the individuals on the U.S. Treasury Department's Specially Designated Nationals list (commonly referred to as the "terrorist list") and the current U.S. Government (USG) policy is that it will not have any direct contact with him or his party.

DPA

The ruling Democratic Party of the Albanians (DPA) is the largest ethnic Albanian party in Macedonia. Its standing in the polls has been very low, however, due to its presence in the current government, its perceived corruption, and the current popularity of DUI. Seeking to offset Ahmeti's popularity following the creation of DUI, DPA announced its appointment of 4 former NLA members to high-ranking positions within the party.

DPA, which was the first party to withdraw from the short-lived Albanian Coordinative Council, has also rejected the formation of any pre-election coalitions with other ethnic Albanian parties. In contrast to DPA's ratings, however, leader Arben Xhaferi continues to be one of the most popular ethnic Albanian politicians.

DPA was finally allowed to register as a political party at the end of July. It had failed in previous attempts due to the party's use of a double-headed eagle, which is the symbol of Albania, on its party flag.

Meanwhile, DPA President Arben Xhaferi has announced that DPA plans to be the radical alternative for ethnic Albanians in the election. Xhaferi held out on an agreement on the use of language in Macedonian passports, despite his party's membership in the ruling coalition government and their links with VMRO-DPMNE. Deputy Head of DPA Menduh Thaci has made public statements endorsing the achievements of the NLA and advocating for the creation of Greater Albania. This is viewed by some as an attempt to regain ground from last year's crisis when DPA originally opposed the NLA and called on the government to take severe action against them.

PDP

The Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), also a member of the ruling government coalition, and former government coalition partner with SDSM, is struggling for its survival. This crisis is largely attributed to the emergence of DUI and a controversial leadership change within PDP that has resulted in the move of several PDP MPs to DUI. Despite the common view in Macedonia that PDP may be on its last legs, the new PDP leader Abdurahman Aliti and another PDP member recently traveled to the United States with SDSM, its traditional Macedonian political party ally; this trip suggests that SDSM believes in the continued viability of PDP and that another coalition between these parties after the election is still possible.

ELECTION FRAMEWORK AND ADMINISTRATION

Under the Framework Agreement, Parliament was required to enact all implementing legislation, including the Law on the Election of Members of Parliament and the Law on the Voters' List, by July 15; the parties internally shortened this timeframe to June 30. The Parliament was deadlocked in its debate over the election-related laws for over two weeks, and finally passed the laws on June 14.

On July 4, Speaker of the Parliament Stojan Andov called elections for September 15. It had long been expected that elections would take place on this date, but the Parliament waited until the last possible date to call them for the 15th under the law.

The political logjam continued, however, over the Law on Passports and the Rules of Procedure of the Parliament, and it looked like political disagreements centered largely on the issue of the use of the Albanian language in Macedonian passports and in Parliament could hold up the creation of the election administration and perhaps even lead one of the parties (DPA) to boycott the elections. Thanks to an agreement brokered by EU Special Envoy Alain Le Roy, the four main political parties reached an agreement on the Rules of Procedure and they were adopted on July 10; further, DPA agreed to wait until after the elections to resolve the issues regarding the Law on Passports.

The new election law contains a number of changes to the previous law. It establishes a proportional representation electoral system of six electoral districts with 20 parliamentary representatives each. Resolving a heated debate over the use of Albanian language on the ballots, the law states that the covers of the ballots will contain the Macedonian flag and the number

of the election unit; separate voting instruction pamphlets will be published in a second language where required by law.

The election administration will be composed of a State Election Commission (SEC), 6 Regional Election Commissions (RECs), 34 Municipal Election Commissions and 2,975 Election Boards. The SEC is composed of a President and 8 members, plus their deputies. The President of Macedonia appoints the President of the SEC and the President's deputy. The SEC appoints the presidents of the RECs and the MECs, as well as their deputies. In the SEC, the RECs and the MECs, half of the members must be judges of the Supreme Court, Courts of Appeals, and Primary Courts, respectively; the remaining members are appointed as representatives of the two main ruling and opposition parties.

On July 3, President Trajkovski named Director of the Human Rights Division of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mirjana Lazarevska-Trajkovska as the head of the SEC and Supreme Court justice Safet Avziu as her deputy. The SEC was constituted following the resolution of the dispute over the passport law and rules of procedure. It had its first session on July 12 and adopted a timetable for the elections on July 16. As dictated by the timetable, the members of the six RECs were appointed by July 26 and the members of the MECs by August 5.

August 5 was also the deadline for the submission of candidate lists by political parties and other voter groups. According to press reports, 153 candidate lists were submitted. Of those, 27 contained irregularities. The REC in Bitola rejected the candidate list submitted by DPA due to its late submission. The SEC is considering DPA's appeal of the decision.

Key Dates in Election Timetable	
Aug. 3	Deadline for voters to check voters' list
Aug. 5	Political parties must submit candidate lists
Aug. 9	RECs complete review candidate lists and determine the order of the lists on the ballots
Aug. 10	RECs inform the SEC of the ballot order
Aug. 14	Campaign officially begins
Aug. 16	SEC must present order of candidate lists in the media
Aug. 20	Voters' list presented to SEC for confirmation
Aug. 26	Election Boards are formed
Sept. 5	Domestic and international organizations interested in monitoring the elections must apply to the SEC for accreditation
Sept. 14	Campaign period ends
Sept. 14	Soldiers, prisoners and displaced persons vote
Sept. 15	Election Day ; polls open 7am-7pm
Sept. 16	Initial official election results released

ELECTION CAMPAIGN

Although the official campaign period has yet to begin, the campaign informally began in June. Polls were published reflecting the opinions of the voters, parties maneuvered and entered into coalitions, and politicians issued campaign rhetoric. Parties have begun to air paid ads on TV, publicize party platforms in the newspapers, and hold rallies. Now that the parties have published their official candidate lists, the campaign is expected to kick into high gear with the official start of the campaign on August 15.

Rumors of illegal and violent campaigning tactics have been circulating as well, and voter intimidation and fraud on Election Day

are considered the primary threats to the peacefulness and fairness of elections. In contrast to last year's conflict, analysts expect violence to be mainly within each ethnic group as ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian parties battle for votes in their own communities. Much of the violence that has taken place in the last few months has been attributed to the Lions, a special police force under the command of the Ministry of the Interior. There is concern that they will continue to play a provocative role during the campaign.

ELECTION-RELATED ACTIVITIES

Political Party Code of Conduct

Responding to concerns regarding violence, intimidation and fraud taking place during the campaign leading up to and on Election Day, NDI facilitated the negotiation and adoption of a Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections among the political parties. Following negotiations led by NDI Macedonia Country Director Sheila Fruman and former United Nations Assistant Secretary General Cedric Thornberry with the major parties, NDI invited all political parties in Macedonia to sign the code.

To date, 28 parties have signed the code, including VMRO-DPMNE, SDSM, PDP, DPA and DUI. NDI currently is engaged in a public awareness campaign designed to inform the public about the Code and the parties that signed it. Citizens Association MOST, a civic group to which NDI offers assistance, will monitor the parties' adherence to the code during the official campaign period.

Voters' List Campaign

Citizens Association MOST led a nationwide public awareness campaign to notify voters of the importance of checking to make sure that they are listed on the voters' list and that the information is

correct, encourage them to do so, and to assist voters with this process. Before launching this public awareness campaign, MOST had organized two events in which a group of individuals went to their local Ministry of Justice office and asked to check their information on the voters' list; in both instances, some of the voters were told they could not check their information despite the fact that it is the Ministry's obligation to allow citizens to do so at any time. The participants in the second organized event, which involved approximately 400 people across the country, found that the local offices of the Ministry of Justice were much more helpful.

The timeframe in which voters could check the voters' list and request revisions ended on August 3. In the past few weeks, the Ministry of Justice has conducted a voter education campaign with respect to the voters' list as well.

International Pre-Election Assessment Mission

From August 24-29, an NDI delegation of political and election experts will visit Macedonia to assess the political climate and election process in the run-up to the elections. The delegation will be led by Lord John Alderdice, Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly and key participant in the Irish Peace Process, and Karan English, former U.S. Congresswoman from Arizona, and will also include Cedric Thornberry, former United Nations Assistant Secretary General and expert on codes of conduct, and NDI staff. The delegation will meet with government authorities, the election administration, representatives of political parties, the media, Macedonian civic groups and the international community and then will issue a statement detailing its findings and recommendations.

Election Observation

NDI has partnered with Citizens Association MOST, an NGO that is organizing a domestic non-partisan monitoring effort to place volunteer citizen monitors at polling stations throughout the country. NDI is offering its assistance as MOST recruits, trains and deploys the monitors and reports on their findings.

OSCE/ODIHR will deploy approximately 800 election observers including several long and medium-term observers; this marks the largest election observation effort by the OSCE since Albanian elections in 1997. The European Commission will appoint 100 EU citizens to take part in the OSCE/ODIHR mission.

ABOUT NDI

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) is a nonprofit organization working to strengthen and expand democracy worldwide. Calling on a global network of volunteer experts, NDI provides practical assistance to civic and political leaders advancing democratic values, practices and institutions. NDI works with democrats in every region of the world to build political and civic organizations, safeguard elections, and promote citizen participation, openness and accountability in government.

NDI IN MACEDONIA

With funding from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), NDI has supported democratization efforts in Macedonia since 1993 in the areas of parliamentary development, non-partisan election monitoring, and political party building. The Institute is responding to these needs and challenges in both the short and long term.

In addition to helping create an environment that will deter fraud, intimidation and violence in both the campaign and on Election Day, NDI is directing its work in the pre-election period by working with political parties to increase the level of campaign skills required to participate in genuinely democratic elections. During June, NDI trained 650 local political organizers from 12 parties in campaign organization and voter contact. In July and August, NDI will be offering candidate training to the largest political parties and coalitions. NDI will also conduct a “train-the-trainers” program for party pollwatchers in August.

Following September 2002 parliamentary elections, the Institute will re-direct its activities to respond to the longer-term need for institutional development within the parliament and the political parties. With funding from the Belgian Government, NDI will also initiate a program designed to assist the parliament in its adoption of Albanian as a second official language.

For more information on NDI programs in Macedonia, please contact Sheila Fruman at NDI's Skopje office at +389 2 131 177 or Tara Gingerich or Kristen Wall at NDI's Washington office at 202-728-5500.