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**MACEDONIA
PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS
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ELECTION WATCH REPORT
Volume Two, September 13, 2002**

On September 15, voters throughout Macedonia will cast their ballots to elect Members of Parliament. This is the second in a series of reports on the campaign in Macedonia as the country approaches these critical elections. This issue focuses on the administration of the election process, the campaign activities of the main parties, and the activities of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the international community.

OVERVIEW OF CAMPAIGN PERIOD

While the Macedonian election campaign has not been as violent as some had feared, it likewise has not been as peaceful and regular as others had hoped it would be. The level of tension peaked in the second week of the official campaign period and has since declined, but the continued frequency of isolated incidents of violence has created a low simmer of tension that could boil over on Election Day.

Pre-Campaign Period

Voter List Controversy. The only controversy during the campaign relating to election administration arose before the start of the official campaign period. The Minister of Justice announced that his signature stamp had been used fraudulently to add 3,500 ethnic Macedonians living in Albania to the voter list; the address of the Ministry of the Interior was given as their address. The Minister of Justice then alleged that the Ministry of the Interior had launched an investigation of him on an

unrelated issue following his announcement, although later reports stated that the investigation had been launched previously.

After a review of the voter list, the Ministry of Justice removed the 3,500 names in question and submitted the list to the State Election Commission (SEC) for final approval, thereby resolving the issue. It was not clear whether the Interior Ministry had attempted to commit election fraud or whether his action was a campaign tactic to attract the nationalist vote.

Shootings. As the campaign began, a number of shootings took place on the highway between Bitola and Tetovo in western Macedonia. These shootings were characterized in the news as criminal acts, but they led to the closing of the highway and led to some early concern about the tone of the campaign period.

Campaign Period

Week One: A Positive Start. A peaceful start to the campaign created hopes among the citizenry and the international community that the campaign might transpire in an organized and largely uneventful manner. Several parties agreed to coordinate the timing and location of their rallies in order to minimize clashes among party activists. There were no incidents of violence or intimidation that appeared to be political in nature. A veneer of calmness prevailed despite party leaders' provocative and nationalistic rhetoric, and both citizens and the international community were

hopeful that the campaign was off to a positive start.

Week Two: Tension Mounts. Unfortunately, a number of disturbing incidents took place the second week that dramatically raised tensions in the campaign.

- Two ethnic Macedonian policemen were shot fatally in Gostivar on August 26. A number of ethnic Albanians were detained and two were arrested amidst suspicions that the killings were orchestrated by one of the ruling parties.
- On August 27, the police erected a roadblock outside of Skopje, ostensibly to arrest Ali Ahmeti, leader of the ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), upon his entry into Skopje for a scheduled DUI rally that afternoon. (The international community, including the OSCE and NATO, has been outspoken in their statements that the authorities should not arrest Ahmeti during the campaign period and reached a “gentlemen’s agreement” with Interior Minister Boskovski to this effect.)¹

Meanwhile, a number of political activists erected a second roadblock that deterred DUI supporters from attending the rally, further escalating tensions. In an effort to diffuse the potential for violence, Ahmeti called off the rally.

¹ Nonetheless, the Interior Ministry has stated that a warrant for Ahmeti’s arrest has been issued and that it will arrest him when the conditions are appropriate. In the event that the authorities attempt to arrest Ahmeti, there is widespread concern that it would provoke a violent reaction from the ethnic Albanian community, including former National Liberation Army (NLA) members who remain armed. Although NATO has stated that the amnesty law reached following the conflict last year covers the charges against Ahmeti, domestic controversy prevails on this issue.

- On August 28, the Skopje offices of DUI and the ethnic Albanian National Democratic Party (NDP) were attacked, the former with a grenade and the latter by arson. No one was injured in these incidents.
- On August 29, a large cache of ammunition and grenades was reportedly discovered in Kosovo near the border with Macedonia, and the Macedonian police believed that it was intended for Macedonia.

These incidents changed the tone of the campaign for the worse and led to fears of a widespread escalation in violence. The government suggested that the incidents were the work of “Albanian terrorists” in the Albanian National Army (ANA), a shadowy group that claimed responsibility for some of the events. (The international community has not substantiated the threat posed by either the ANA or the equally mysterious Republican Army of Ilirida. In many corners, there was speculation that these incidents were fabricated by the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonia National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) to spark inter-ethnic tensions that they could use to their advantage in the campaign, and possibly in an effort to postpone or cancel the elections.

An NDI international pre-election delegation visited Macedonia during this week of the campaign and witnessed the dramatic change in the atmosphere. The NDI statement warned that the volatile and fragile political environment and recent events heightened tensions throughout the country and called into question how much freedom of movement and political activity there could be during this campaign.

Week Three: Crisis Averted, Problems Continue. The third week of the campaign began with a serious incident that continued the spiral of violence: on August 30, five Macedonians were kidnapped from a bus on the highway between Tetovo and Gostivar. Following intensive negotiations by the government involving the international community, they were released unharmed the following day, averting a sharp escalation in inter-ethnic tensions.

The civic group MOST, which has been monitoring the election campaign period and assessing the parties' compliance with the Code of Conduct for Free and Fair Elections, conducted a press conference, commending DUI, PDP, NDP, and DPA for signing a declaration on August 30 that condemned violence during the campaign period and called for fair and democratic elections. It also welcomed an agreement between the VMRO-DPMNE/Liberal Party (LP) coalition and the coalition "For Macedonia Together"² in Tetovo not to "over-poster," or put up posters over other parties' posters. However, MOST condemned a variety of campaign activities that violated the Code of Conduct, including:

- widespread over-postering;
- the burning of party flags, which are a popular campaign symbol in ethnic Albanian communities;
- campaign speeches containing violent and offensive rhetoric targeting political opponents;

- incidents of violence among party activists surrounding party rallies; and
- attacks on political party offices in Skopje, Negotino, Brvenica and Kumanovo.

The Macedonian Broadcasting Council, a government body, released a report analyzing the media coverage of the campaign. The Council noted a particularly high number of violations of laws that limit the amount of paid political advertising. The Council suggested that media outlets were violating the laws for economic reasons and also due to their relations with political entities.

Week Four: Parties Ready For the Polls Amidst Simmering Tension. The last week of the campaign, while relatively calmer, contained a number of troubling events. On September 12 an ethnic Macedonian police reservist in a village near Tetovo was fatally shot during an attack on the police station by ethnic Albanians.

Heightened tensions surrounded a number of political rallies in the past week. Roadblocks prevented many party supporters from attending the Together for Macedonia coalition rally in Prilep in southern Macedonia on September 8, and shots were fired at the end of the rally. The Democratic Alternative (DA) subsequently called off its Prilep rally scheduled for the next day.

The parties held their last rallies of the campaign on September 12 and 13. At the urging of the international community, DUI called off its final rally, which was scheduled to take place in Skopje on September 13.

² The coalition is composed of the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), and several smaller parties.

The government appeared to be leading an attack against independent journalists based on their writing, as charges were filed against one journalist and the Interior Ministry threatened others with arrest. The international community, including both NATO and Amnesty International, spoke out strongly against the inappropriateness of attacking independent media during a campaign period, the threat to freedom of expression, and the apparent attempt to chill any anti-government sentiment in the period leading up to the elections.

MOST commented on the recent events in its press conference on September 13: *“The political parties should respect the obligations they undertook with the Code for Free and Fair elections. The future of Macedonia depends on free and democratic elections, and the citizens have the right to vote in line with their choice or political determination. No one should be allowed to obstruct either the campaign or the elections. These events are violations of the Code, and their purpose is to intimidate citizens who voluntarily went out to listen to the party programs. The provocations and the criminal behavior of certain groups . . . cowardly jeopardize the security of the citizens in public rallies. We are witnessing day-to-day kidnappings in the crisis region. We are deeply sorry for the last night’s murder of a policeman in the Tetovo area and we hope that this kind of unwanted event will not prevent citizens from going out to vote.”*

Polling results by the Institute for Democracy, Civic Society and Solidarity based on a poll conducted September 1 through 6 indicated that, if the vote were held “today,” 36.7% of the population would vote for the “Together for Macedonia” coalition, 21.6% for VMRO-DPMNE and LP, 10.7% for DUI, 3.9% for DPA, 3.7% for

the Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM), and 2.7% for PDP. Almost 12% of the voters remain undecided or gave no response.

ELECTION ADMINISTRATION

The Macedonian electorate entered this campaign period with skepticism regarding the election administration that was based largely on the election administration from the last election, which was viewed as fractious and ineffective. Nonetheless, the President of the State Election Commission (SEC) has earned the respect and confidence of people across the country. NDI’s pre-election delegation encountered almost unanimous support for, and confidence in, the SEC President, as well as support for the productivity and transparency of the SEC generally.

The delegation encountered concerns about the work of the subordinate election administration bodies, however, including the training of officials and the lack of resources available to them. Particular concerns existed regarding:

- procedures governing the “special voting” by prisoners, Internally Displaced Persons and the military that will take place on September 14;
- the sufficiency of voter education efforts to alert citizens to changes in voting procedures and the election system; and
- the involvement of police forces, including reserve forces and “special forces,” on Election Day.

ELECTION DAY

When Macedonian voters go to the polls on Sunday, they will be taking part in a heavily observed process. MOST will deploy almost 3,000 domestic monitors at more

than half of the polling stations throughout the country and will deploy several mobile teams of monitors as well. A critical element of MOST's monitoring effort is the conduct of a Parallel Vote Tabulation (PVT). A PVT is a mechanism for projecting the results of an election based on a random statistical sample of polling station data.

The international monitoring effort for these elections is almost unparalleled in its scope, with the OSCE deploying approximately 800 monitors. A relatively small NATO force will be available to assist the monitors in a limited number of instances. NDI understands that parties will also deploy their observers to polling stations.

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.

In this election cycle, NDI has spearheaded a political party code of conduct, dispatched an international pre-election delegation, supported MOST in its domestic election monitoring initiatives, and provided a multiparty group of approximately 1,000 political party leaders and activists with training in campaign organization, candidate presentation, voter contact, and pollwatcher deployment, all required of parties to participate actively and responsibly in a fair and peaceful election process.

Following the elections, the Institute will redirect its USAID-funded activities to support democratic institution building over the long term, mainly in parliament and among political parties. With funding from

the Belgian Government, NDI will initiate a program designed to assist the parliament with its implementation of the Albanian language as an official language in parliament.

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.

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