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Election Analysis

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Zhidas Daskalovski*

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Context

In April 2014, Macedonia had both presidential and parliamentary elections. While the presidential elections were, indeed, scheduled for this time, the parliamentary elections were called early. The incumbent president, Gjorge Ivanov who is affiliated with the Internal Macedonian revolutionary organization – Democratic party for Macedonian national unity” (VMRO-DPMNE), became candidate on 1. March 2014; proclaiming that his campaign will be based on three principles: honesty, sincerity and values. Ivanov’s candidacy went against the demand of the ethnic Albanian, junior coalition partner, Democratic union for integration (DUI), who demanded from VMRO-DPMNE the appointment of a “joint consensual candidate.” In principle, the DUI demanded from the VMRO-DPMNE that an Albanian hold one of the three a key posts - president, prime minister or parliamentary speaker - something Gruevski’s party was not willing to agree upon. The parliament was dissolved on 5. March 2014 at the initiative of the DUI, but with the support of the VMRO-DPMNE. Thus, early parliamentary elections were scheduled together with the second round of the presidential election on 27. April 2014. The parliament is elected for a four-year term. Out of the 123 elected members, 120 are elected under a proportional representation system in 6 electoral districts. The remaining three are elected in a majoritarian system in three, out-of-country districts - Europe and Africa, North and South America, and Australia and Asia. No legal threshold is required for a party to enter the parliament. Votes are tabulated using the D’Hondt formula.¹ At least 30 percent of the candidates on each party list must be of different gender.

On 13. April 2014, Macedonia had its first round of the presidential elections. The candidates were Gjorgje Ivanov, supported by the conservative VMRO-DPMNE, faced three challengers: Stevo Pendarovski, a professor and former advisor of the late president Boris Trajkovski, and supported by the opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM); Iljaz Halimi, a former minister

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¹ Lijphart, Arend. 2003. Degrees of proportionality of proportional representation formulas, In *Electoral Laws and Their Political Consequences*, edited by Grofman, Bernard / Lijphart, Arend. New York: Algora Publishing, 170–179.

president and vice-president of the parliament and from the ethnic Albanian opposition party, DPA; and Zoran Popovski, a professor and former deputy minister of education from the newly founded GROM (Citizen Option for Macedonia). There were two other persons who attempted, but failed, to collect citizens' signatures to be approved as official presidential candidates: the independent professor Biljana Vankovska, as well as the president of the non-parliamentary party Dostoinstvo (Dignity), Stojance Angelov. As expected, DUI boycotted the presidential elections and actively campaigned to stop their kin from voting contributing to a lower turnout in the predominately ethnic Albanian areas. The decision of the electoral commission to use visible ink to mark voters added to the pressure on ethnic Albanian citizens in the first round, as their decision whether to vote or not was visible.

Electoral Campaign: Messages, Strategies and Battles

Overall, the turnout was 49%, less than in 2009, when the first round of presidential elections saw 57%; and much less than the last local elections last spring, when turnout was 67%. Since none of the candidates received the required majority of the total number of registered voters to be elected, a second round was announced between Ivanov, who received 51 per cent of cast votes, and Stevo Pendarovski, who received 37.51 per cent of cast votes. In terms of absolute votes in the first round, Ivanov received 449.068, Pendarovski 326.133, Halimi 38.966, Popovski 31.366, and 23.604 invalid votes. Since the country has a parliamentary political system, which only shifts towards a semi-presidential system when strong presidents are elected (Gligorov) or become strong in due time (Trajkovski towards the end of his mandate), the electoral campaign for the first round of the presidential elections was a prelude to the parliamentary election campaigns. Ivanov's campaign was, in fact, *de facto* synchronised with the overall VMRO-DPMNE campaign, while Pendarovski presented himself as more independent from the SDSM candidates. While the incumbent projected himself as part of a winning team, cooperating and aiding the good deeds of the government, the SDSM challenger attempted to portray himself as a man of the people, a consensual candidate. Much of the rhetoric of both the VMRO-DPMNE and Ivanov was about the number of projects implemented, investments made and forthcoming. Ivanov's main electoral message was "The state above all." Although, he also used a number of other, typically patriotic, and conservative slogans such as: "Gjorge Ivanov for president," "Holding resolutely to our roots," "Proudly and with dignity," "Determinedly and securely," and "Heritage and tradition." Presenting himself as a person close to the people, Ivanov let his campaign be initiated by a group of public figures and celebrities calling themselves "Team Macedonia."

The SDSM and Pendarovski both criticized the passivity, and alleged servility, of Ivanov to the ruling party leadership, and promised economic reforms that will end the misery of the Macedonian common people. Thus, the electoral slogan of the Pendarovski was "Macedonia deserves a president," presenting himself as a capable politician who would use his presidential powers to restrain the "authoritarian tendencies" of the government. In addition, somewhat confusingly for a very short electoral campaign, Pendarovski used an additional slogan that stated, "Stevo, my president;" an attempt to vie for the

youth and voters from the Albanian minority. To that aim, at the end of the campaign, Pendarovski visited, and gave a speech, in Kosovo. Whereas, SDSM accused the ruling party of authoritarian tendencies, VMRO-DPMNE noted that Pendarovski had not made clear his position on the Greek insistence that Macedonia change its name. Thus, indirectly accusing SDSM of being non-patriotic, and only being thirsty for power. Both parties presented, to the public, a number of corruption scandals by leading members of the opposite party. On the whole, SDSM used more negative political communication during their campaign than VMRO-DPMNE. Hoping to have discovered a game-changing scandal at the end of the campaign, SDSM presented audio recordings alleging that the prime minister received a bribe for the privatization of *Makedonska Banka*. In response to this accusation, the prime minister announced that he would file a defamation lawsuit against the SDSM leader.

At these elections, SDSM promoted a number of new candidates while its leaders, Zoran Zaev and Radmila Sekerinska, did not actually run, although being active in the campaigns. VMRO-DPMNE, on the other hand, presented a candidates list led by current and former ministers, other high ranking party members, and leaders of the smaller parties in the diverse, 24-party coalition. For a number of years now, VMRO-DPMNE has successfully used political marketing - the utilization and adaptation of marketing techniques and concepts by political parties - in its rule and electoral battles. The party is organized on the basis of the market-oriented party model,² mastering tools like market intelligence and segmentation, opposition research, e-marketing, market orientation and strategy, internal marketing, product redevelopment, branding, local political marketing, marketing in government to win and retaining power.

This year, as in previous elections, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM competed for votes mainly among ethnic Macedonians, while DUI and DPA competed for Albanian support. However, as in previous elections, both VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM led a coalition with parties representing various smaller ethnic groups such as Serbs, Turks, Roma, Bosniaks, and Vlachs. DPA and DUI on the other hand, competed independently. The two parties in the ruling coalition, VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, appealed to voters giving them the necessary mandates to strengthen their leverage, and to avoid having to make concessions to the other party. The prime minister repeatedly called on voters to give the party a clear majority, of at least 62 seats, to avoid any further pressure, influence or blackmail from the DUI in any future negotiations on forming the government. Meanwhile, the DUI asked its supporters for high turnout for the parliamentary elections, so the party could win a maximum number of seats, in order to improve their negotiating position. The DUI's stronghold is in the Kichevo area, where most of the former, leading "rebels turned DUI politicians" come from. In this municipality, the DPA hardly wins any votes at all. Meanwhile, the electoral race in Tetovo and Gostivar is highly contested, because a very strong party office in the Skopje municipality of Chair gives the

² Lees-Marshment, Jennifer. 2009. *Political marketing: Principles and applications*. New York, NY: Routledge.

DUI an advantage over its fiercest rival, the DPA. Moreover, a disagreement within the DPA, between the leader Menduh Tachi and the Struga branch leader Zijadin Sela, over candidate lists resulted in a branch's boycott of the early parliamentary elections in electoral district 5, and a weak party result there. Overall, in its electoral campaign, the DPA focused its energy on criticizing the leader of the DUI, Ali Ahmeti, and alleging corruption by DUI ministers and public office holders.

GROM, led by Stevche Jakimovski, the former high party dignitary of SDSM and the opposition Liberal Democratic Party, ran a neutral campaign, trying to position itself in the centre, aligning with neither the SDSM nor the VMRO-DPMNE. The stronghold of GROM is the Skopje municipality of Karposh, where the party leader won the mayoral race last year. Besides Karposh, which is in Electoral District 1, GROM stood a good chance of winning seats in a number of other electoral districts, including 2 and 4, where this party co-opted popular local political leaders (Viktor Cvetkovski and Pancho Minev). The Alliance for Positive Macedonia was another newly founded party, who was competing for the first time at the 2014 elections. Its leadership consists of one of the richest Macedonian businessmen, the manager of Mak-Steel, Mincho Jordanov; the former SDSM Prime Minister, Vladimir Buchkovski; and the Kapital media owner and businessman, Ljupcho Zikov. The party also had a neutral and positive campaign; even commending some of the governmental policies. It ran on an electoral program that focused on further economic reforms, and support of local businesses.

Winners and Losers

At the parliamentary elections, the VMRO-DPMNE won 42.98% of the votes to claim victory ahead of the SDSM, with 25.34%, and DUI, with 13.71%. The 123 seats in the *Sobranie* were won by six political parties and coalitions, with VMRO-DPMNE winning 61 seats, SDSM winning 34 seats, DUI winning 19 seats, DPA winning 7 seats and GROM and NDP winning 1 seat each. At the presidential elections, Ivanov won with 534.910 votes, while Pendarovski received 398.077 votes. However, on Election Day, just as voting ended, the SDSM's leader, Zoran Zaev, announced that SDSM and its allies will "not recognize the election process, neither the presidential nor the parliamentary." Thus, accusing the VMRO-DPMNE of "abusing the entire state system to its own advantage." The ruling party immediately dismissed the opposition allegations as false and an "attempt to manipulate public opinion." Elected SDSM politicians resigned their parliamentary seats, while the party leadership is calling for a "caretaker" technical government to be established. Dissenters among the SDSM took their parliamentary mandates, while the ruling VMRO-DPMNE announced that it would discuss any issue with the opposition, except the formation of a "technical government."

Reporting on the elections, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) noted that the presidential election and early parliamentary elections were efficiently administered, occurring on election day. Although the OSCE stated that candidates were able to campaign without obstruction, and the freedoms of assembly and association were respected, it also noted how the campaign of the governing party did not adequately separate its party and

state activities. It also noted that voter intimidation allegations persisted throughout the campaign. While the State Election Committee, led by an opposition member, declared the elections “regular,” the OSCE reported that the “highly unbalanced media reporting was criticised as the majority of monitored media was largely biased in favour of the ruling party and its presidential candidate and mainly negative against the main opposition party.”³

Despite the complaints by the SDSM of electoral manipulation, it is clear that the trend is negative for the main opposition party, who, since 2002, has failed to break the 400.000 vote mark, a feat now regularly secured by the VMRO-DPMNE. More importantly, for Zoran Zaev, the SDSM’s parliamentary results this year were much weaker than in 2011, when the campaign was led by Branko Crvenkovski, the party leader and prime minister in the 1990s. On top of this, the SDSM presidential candidate, Pendarovski, also had an improved result compared to the 2009 elections. He managed to win over 100.000 votes more than the party. Among the ethnic Albanians, the DUI had a historically best result, over passing the DPA by almost 90.000 votes. While the government coalition, the VMRO-DPMNE and the DUI, was expected, it is not clear if the leaders of the SDSM and the DPA, Zaev and Shekerinska and Tachi, will remain party leaders following their parties poor performance. All of the small parties, except the newly founded GROM and the regional ethnic Albanian NDP, were losers in these elections, not being able to win any seats.

Appendix

Table 1. Parliamentary elections in Macedonia

Year	SDSM		VMRO-DPMNE	
	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent
1990	165 338	12	154 101	12
1994	291 695	29	141 490	14
1998	279 799	25	312 669	28
2002	497 342	42	299 179	25
2006	218 463	22	304 572	31
2008	233 284	23	481 501	47
2011	368 496	33	438 138	39
2014	283 955	25	481 289	43
	DUI		DPA	
	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent
1998	-	-	214 360	20
2002	145 607	12	64 025	5
2006	114 301	12	70 137	8
2008	126 522	12	81 557	8
2011	115 092	10	66 315	6
2014	153 646	14	66 393	6

Source: *State Electoral Commission*. (accessed: 11. November 2014).

³ OSCE Statement on Presidential and Early Parliamentary Elections, 27. April 2014.

Table 2. Presidential elections in Macedonia 2009-2014

Election rounds	SDSM		VMRO-DPMNE	
	Votes	Percent	Votes	Percent
1994 first	715 087	68	197 109	19
1999 first	343 606	33	219 098	21
1999 second	514 599	46	591 972	53
2004 first	385 347	41	309 132	33
2004 second	550 317	61	329 179	36
2009 first	202 691	20	345 850	34
2009 second	264 692	35	453 426	59
2014 first	326 133	38	449 068	52
2014 second	398 077	41	534 910	55

Source: *State Electoral Commission*. (accessed: 11. November 2014).

Table 3. Parliamentary elections in Macedonia 2014

Party	Votes	%	Seats	+/-
VMRO-DPMNE led coalition	481 615	43	61	+5
SDSM led coalition	283 955	25	34	-8
DUI	153 646	14	19	+4
DPA	66 393	6	7	-1
GROM	31 610	3	1	new
NDP	17 783	2	1	-1
VMRO Narodna	16 772	2	0	0
Alijansa za pozitivna Makedonija	10 566	1	0	new
Dostoinstvo	9 265	1	0	new
Other parties	11 485	1	0	0
Invalid / blank votes	37 550	3	-	-
Total	1 120 640	100	123	0
Registered voters/turnout	1 779 572	62.95	-	-

Source: *State Electoral Commission*. (accessed: 11. November 2014).

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