

MACEDONIA: GEARING UP FOR
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

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MACEDONIA: GEARING UP FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

Executive Summary

On 31 October and 14 November 1999, Macedonian citizens will go to the polls to elect a successor to 82-year-old President Kiro Gligorov, who is stepping down after two terms in office.

All major political parties in Macedonia have a high stake in winning the presidential elections, the first test of political strength since the parliamentary elections of October 1998, which resulted in a change of government from the centre-left to the centre-right. The upcoming presidential elections will also determine whether Macedonia will continue with its model of political cohabitation, in place since autumn 1998, or whether one political camp will hold both the government and the presidency.

The presidential office in Macedonia carries political weight. Although the Macedonian constitution vests most executive political power in the government and prime minister, and legislative power lies mainly with the parliament, the president is more than just a figurehead. He represents the Republic, acts as commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces, and is chairman of the Security Council of the Republic of Macedonia. The president also has the right to veto legislation, though the parliament may override his veto by a majority vote of the full house. The president has specific powers with regards to foreign policy, and appoints candidates to several important state bodies, such as the Constitutional Court.

The president is elected by general, secret and direct elections for a five-year term. He can serve for two terms at the most. The president must be at least 40 years of age on the day of the election, he must be a Macedonian citizen, and he must have been resident in Macedonia for at least ten years within the last 15 years preceding the election, although time of residence in other republics in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia is also included in this time span.

Presidential candidates can be nominated either by 10,000 eligible voters or by 30 parliamentary deputies. To be elected president in the first round of voting, a candidate must receive a majority of the total number of registered voters. If no candidate is elected in the first round, the two best-placed candidates contest a second round of voting. In the second round, the candidate who receives a majority of votes cast is elected president, provided that more than half of the registered voters went to the polls.

Six candidates will contest the 1999 presidential elections, all of them backed by political parties. A number of independents who earlier declared their intention to run in the elections either failed to gather the necessary signatures or withdrew before submitting the necessary documentation to the State Electoral Commission.

Plans by the ruling coalition to field a common candidate fell apart, and all three coalition parties nominated their own candidates. The opposition also failed to agree on a joint candidate, as did the two major Albanian parties (one of which is in the government, the other in opposition).

The presidential candidates put forward by the ruling parties are:

- **Boris Trajkovski** of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE), currently deputy foreign minister;
- **Vasil Tupurkovski** leader of the Democratic Alternative (DA) and director of the Agency for Reconstruction and Development; and
- **Muharem Nexhipi** of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), currently Deputy Minister of Health.

The opposition is represented by:

- **Stojan Andov** of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), a veteran politician and former chairman of the Assembly (parliament);
- **Muhamed Halili** of the ethnic Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), a former government minister and currently Macedonia's ambassador to Denmark; and
- **Tito Petkovski** of the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), also a former chairman of the Assembly.

According to opinion polls published thus far, the number of undecided voters is fairly high, but few of the people polled have indicated they would not vote at all. The polls indicate that none of the ethnic Albanian candidates has a chance of getting through to the second round. Tupurkovski's chances also look very slim. The front-runners appear to be Trajkovski and Petkovski, with Andov close at their heels according to some polls. It is unclear who would have better chances in a second round, especially since most people polled indicated that their choice would be determined by the candidates' personality rather than party affiliation.

As the election campaign is heating up, serious cracks are beginning to show in the ruling coalition, in particular between VMRO–DPMNE and DA. The two parties disagreed on controversial changes to the State Electoral Commission and on the sale of the *OKTA* refinery to a Greek company. In both cases, the coalition was brought to the verge of break-up. Relations are likely to deteriorate further as the campaign enters its decisive phase. A fragmentation of the coalition following the elections can no longer be ruled out. If this happens, the DA will probably find itself out of the government. Early parliamentary elections, however, do not appear likely at this point, since a government supported by a majority in parliament will most likely be formed if the current coalition breaks up.

Relations between Macedonia and the international community, most notably the Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR) have taken a turn for the worse over the past months. Many Macedonians feel that the continued presence of KFOR troops in their country is having a negative impact on their quality of life. Several recent incidents have seriously damaged NATO's reputation. Most notably, on 28 August 1999, Radovan Stojkovski, LDP government

minister without portfolio, his wife, his daughter and his driver were killed in a head-on collision caused by a NATO vehicle. After the accident, a month-long row developed between the Macedonian government and KFOR in an effort to determine which side had the jurisdiction to try the Norwegian NATO officer responsible for the accident. Only after considerable diplomatic pressure did Macedonia agree to hand him over to the Norwegian authorities.

Relations between Macedonia and the international community have further been strained by the West's failure to deliver on the commitments of financial and other assistance made to Macedonia during the Kosovo crisis. This has generated strong anti-Western sentiment in Macedonia. The social and economic problems Macedonia is currently facing, greatly exacerbated by the burden shouldered during the Kosovo crisis, risk undermining the country's stability. The international community must strive to avoid this at all cost, as a destabilised Macedonia will inevitably have repercussions across the entire southern Balkan region.

Particular attention must be paid to Macedonia's delicate ethnic balance. While some inter-ethnic tension exists and Macedonia's various ethnic communities lead largely segregated, parallel lives, Macedonia is arguably the only multi-ethnic success story in the region, having so far avoided the deeply destructive experiences of most of its neighbours. It is of utmost importance that the international community support Macedonia to ensure that relations among the country's ethnic groups do not deteriorate as a result of economic and social problems, as a another ethnic conflict in the Balkans is unaffordable.

Skopje, 18 October 1999



MACEDONIA: GEARING UP FOR PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS

I. INTRODUCTION

In a few weeks, Macedonian citizens will go to the polls to elect a successor to 82-year-old President Kiro Gligorov, the country's head of state since January 1991, who is stepping down after two terms in office. The date of the elections has been set for 31 October 1999, with a run-off on 14 November if no candidate wins the required majority in the first round.

All major political parties in Macedonia have a high stake in winning the presidential elections, the first test of political strength since the parliamentary elections of October 1998, which resulted in a change of government from a centre-left coalition¹ to a centre-right one². The upcoming presidential elections will also determine whether Macedonia will continue with its model of political cohabitation, in place since autumn 1998, or whether one political camp will hold both the government and the presidency.

This ICG report looks at the six presidential candidates and assesses their chances in the upcoming elections, while examining the constitutional role of the president and electoral procedures. It also makes a stab at predicting how the poll might affect the workings of the three-party ruling coalition. In a final chapter, the report portrays the increasingly strained relations between Macedonia and KFOR.

II. THE MACEDONIAN PRESIDENT

A. Rights and Duties of the President

Article 88 of the Macedonian constitution states that executive power is vested in the government of the Republic of Macedonia, while according to Article 61, legislative power lies mostly with the parliament, the *Sobranie* (Assembly). Nonetheless, the president is more than just a figurehead, and his office carries political weight. The

¹ This coalition was led by the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) and also comprised the ethnic Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) and the Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM). Until 1996, the Liberal Party, which later merged with the Democratic Party to form the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), was also represented in government.

² The current government is made up of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE), the Democratic Alternative (DA) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).

Macedonian system is essentially a parliamentary democracy with some elements of a presidential republic thrown in.

Article 79 of the Macedonian constitution states that the president represents the Republic and is commander-in-chief of the country's armed forces. He is also chairman of the Security Council of the Republic of Macedonia (Art. 86).³

The president has the right to veto legislation (Art. 75), although the parliament may override his veto by majority vote. The president can not veto laws that have been passed by a two-thirds majority of all parliamentary deputies.

According to Art. 84 of the constitution, the president's other powers include:

- Nominating the prime minister-designate to form the government;
- Appointing and dismissing ambassadors and other diplomatic representatives;
- Accepting credentials and letters of recall of foreign diplomatic representatives to Macedonia;
- Nominating two judges to the Constitutional Court;
- Nominating two members to the Judicial Council of the Republic;
- Nominating members for the Council for Inter-Ethnic Relations (which are then elected by the Assembly according to Art. 78);
- Appointing and dismissing other state and public office holders in accordance with the constitution and the law;
- Granting decorations and honours in accordance with the law;
- Granting pardons in accordance with the law.

The president must address the Assembly on issues within his competence at least once a year, and the Assembly can formally request the president's opinion on a certain subject (Art. 85).

Should the president of the republic be temporarily unable to perform his duties, the chairman of the Assembly takes over in the interim, during which he may continue to participate in parliament's work but may not vote. If the president of the republic dies, resigns, or is permanently incapacitated, the chairman of the Assembly stands in until a successor is elected.

The president can be impeached for violating the constitution. The relevant procedure must be initiated by a two-thirds-majority vote in the parliament. The Constitutional Court must then determine by a two-thirds majority whether the president violated the constitution. If the Constitutional Court decides that the president is found guilty, his mandate is terminated immediately (Art. 87).

B. How the President is Elected

The Macedonian constitution in Articles 80 and 81 contains very detailed provisions on the election of the country's president. The relevant procedures are regulated by a special *Law on the Election of the President of the Republic*.

³ The Security Council "considers issues related to the security and defence of the Republic and makes policy proposals to the Assembly and the Government" (Art. 86,3). It consists of the president, the chairman of the Assembly, the prime minister, the defence, foreign, and security (i.e. interior) ministers, and three members nominated by the president.

The president is elected by general, secret and direct elections for a five-year term. Presidential elections must take place within the last 60 days of the incumbent president's term in office. Should the incumbent's term be terminated early for whatever reason, new presidential elections must take place within 40 days from the day of termination.

The presidential office cannot be held for longer than two terms. The president must be at least 40 years of age on the day of the election, he must be a Macedonian citizen, and he must have been resident in Macedonia for at least ten years within the last 15 years preceding the election (Article 80,5). According to Article 132, periods of residence in other republics of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia are included in this time span, a transitional clause originally introduced to allow the incumbent at the time, Kiro Gligorov, to stay in office and seek re-election. Gligorov had spend most of his professional career in Belgrade and would have been unable to run if Art. 80,5 had been applied strictly. The clause retains its relevance in the 1999 elections since at least one candidate has spent extended periods of time outside Macedonia in the last 15 years.

Presidential candidates have to be nominated either by 10,000 eligible voters or by 30 parliamentary deputies. In the first case, voters must sign the candidate's list at local offices of the justice ministry. They can only sign one list. Duplicated signatures or those supplied by people not eligible to vote are struck off the lists. Parliamentary deputies may nominate only one candidate. All candidates must be certified by the State Electoral Commission.

To be elected president in the first round of voting, a candidate must receive a majority of the total number of registered voters. If no candidate wins the required majority in the first round, the two candidates with the most votes contest a second round, which must take place within 14 days of the first round.

In the second round, the candidate who receives a majority of votes cast is elected president, provided that more than half the registered voters went to the polls.

If no candidate wins the required majority in the second round (i.e. if voter turnout is below 50 percent, if both candidates receive the same number of votes, or if none of the two candidates wins a majority because of a high number of blank or invalid ballots), the whole electoral procedure must be repeated.

If there is only one candidate running for the presidency, he must receive a majority of all registered voters in the first round, otherwise the elections must be repeated.

III. THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES...

Six candidates will contest the 1999 presidential elections. Five of them were nominated by political parties. The sixth candidate, Stojan Andov of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), is in his own words running as a "citizens' candidate," but ultimately is also a party candidate, with the full backing of the LDP.

A number of independents who earlier declared their intention to run in the elections either failed to gather the necessary signatures or withdrew before submitting the necessary documentation to the State Electoral Commission. The most prominent

among them were theatre director Ljubisa Georgievski, who had been the VMRO–DPMNE candidate in the 1994 presidential elections, and George Atanasoski, a Macedonian-American businessman who already tried to run as an independent in 1994 but failed to provide the necessary signatures in time.

A. Parties Fail to Agree on Joint Candidates

Initially, the ruling coalition intended to contest the presidential elections with a joint candidate. It was generally assumed that Vasil Tupurkovski, chairman of the Democratic Alternative (DA), would be chosen for that purpose. But this option fell apart once the biggest coalition party, the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE), decided that as the country's strongest party they had to have their own candidate. The VMRO–DPMNE chose to field Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Trajkovski. Tupurkovski for his part decided to run despite having lost his senior coalition partner's support.

Thus the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), which had strongly supported the idea of a joint coalition candidate, was forced to look for an alternative. One obvious option would have been to field a joint candidate with the ethnic Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), currently in the opposition. But the PDP rushed ahead and nominated Abdurauf Prusi, chairman of the Islamic charity "El-Hilal," as the joint candidate without consulting the DPA beforehand. Angry, the DPA rejected this option. Prusi, for his part, made it clear that he would not run unless he had the support of both parties and of other ethnic-Albanian groups. Failing to solve their squabbles, the DPA and the PDP went their different ways. The DPA nominated Deputy Health Minister Muharem Nexhipi, while the PDP put forward Mohamed Halili, Macedonia's ambassador to Denmark and a former government minister.

Meanwhile, within the opposition Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), there were discussions whether the party should put forward its own candidate or support Stojan Andov, who had been the first presidential hopeful to announce his candidacy. At that time, the LDP was still represented in the government, although it never formally joined the three-party coalition. Reportedly, the SDSM demanded that in return for its support for Andov, the LDP would have to leave the government completely. Since the LDP initially refused to do so (although, interestingly enough, it did withdraw from the government in mid-September), accusing the Social Democrats of blackmail, the SDSM decided to nominate its own candidate. The party's choice fell on Tito Petkovski, a former speaker of the parliament and one of the party's top politicians.

B. The Six Presidential Hopefuls

Stojan Andov (LDP) is one of Macedonia's most senior politicians. Born in the town of Kavadarci on 30 November 1935, Andov studied economics in Skopje and Belgrade. During most of his professional career in Socialist Yugoslavia, he was active in Belgrade working in the federal government. He was among the most vocal proponents of economic liberalisation in the late sixties and early seventies and in 1971 became a federal government minister without portfolio. As such, he was in charge of economic co-operation with developing countries for seven years, and with the European Community and EFTA for another four years. After returning to Macedonia in the mid-eighties, Andov became deputy prime minister in the Macedonian government. In 1988, Andov was named Yugoslavia's ambassador to Iraq.

With the end of one-party rule in Socialist Yugoslavia, Andov allied with the then Yugoslav Prime Minister Ante Markovic and his Alliance of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia. Its Macedonian branch, the Alliance of Reformist Forces, won 18 out of 120 seats in the first multi-party parliamentary election in 1990. Andov was consequently elected chairman of the new parliament. After the disintegration of federal Yugoslavia, Andov's party renamed itself Liberal Party (LP). Before the 1994 parliamentary elections, the LP formed the "Alliance for Macedonia" with the SDSM, the Socialist Party, and several smaller groups. The "Alliance for Macedonia" scored a convincing victory in the 1994 elections, partly due to the decision of VMRO–DPMNE and the Democratic Party to boycott the second round due to alleged irregularities. The LP remained in the ruling coalition, and Andov himself retained the chairmanship of the parliament.

But in early 1996, the coalition between the LP and the SDSM fell apart. The main reason was disagreement over the government's privatisation policies, but personal quarrels also played a role. In particular, many Social Democrats were upset when Andov barely tried to hide his presidential ambitions while filling in for President Kiro Gligorov, who had been seriously injured in an assassination attempt in October 1995. After the "Alliance for Macedonia" fell apart, Andov resigned as president of the parliament.

In 1996, the Liberal Party and Petar Gosev's Democratic Party merged to form the Liberal Democratic Party. Gosev became party president (he was succeeded by Skopje Mayor Risto Penov in March 1999), while Andov became chairman of the LDP council. Prior to the 1998 parliamentary elections, the LDP failed to form a pre-election alliance with the VMRO–DPMNE after the two parties could not agree on a division of seats. Instead, the LDP formed a coalition with the small Democratic Party of Macedonia. The 1998 elections turned out disastrously for the Liberal Democrats, who managed to win just four seats in parliament.

Muhamed Halili (PDP) was born in the village of Dzepeviste near Tetovo on 21 February 1951. He graduated from the Faculty of Philology of Belgrade University. From 1972 to 1990, he taught French at a secondary school in Tetovo. Halili is one of the founders of the ethnic Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity. Elected to parliament in 1990, he led the PDP parliamentary group from 1992 to 1994. Minister without portfolio in 1995–1996, he was made Macedonia's ambassador to Denmark in April 1996, a post he still occupies.

Muharem Nexhipi (DPA), born in Bitola on 27 December 1954, holds a degree in dentistry from Zagreb university and has his own dentist practice. Nexhipi is a member of the Central Presidency of the Democratic Party of Albanians. When the DPA joined the government in November 1998, he was named deputy minister of health. In that position, he was also a member of the government council in charge of co-ordinating humanitarian aid during the Kosovo crisis.

Tito Petkovski (SDSM) is —like Andov— a former chairman of the Macedonian parliament. Petkovski was born on 23 January 1945 in the village of Psaca in north-eastern Macedonia. After studying law at Skopje University, he initially worked at the city court in Kriva Palanka. Later, he switched to the Skopje municipal administration, where he worked in the department of urban planning, housing, and communal policy.

Petkovski was active in the League of Communists of Macedonia (SKM), the republican branch of Socialist Yugoslavia's ruling party, which he joined in 1969. He

was a deputy first of the communal assembly of Skopje's Karpos city district and then of the Skopje Municipal Assembly. Petkovski also acted as deputy chairman of the Executive Council of the Skopje Municipal Council. Within the League of Communists, he rose to the position of Central Committee Secretary.

When Macedonia embarked on the road of multi-party democracy, Petkovski stayed with the reformist wing of the Communists, which later became the SDSM. Elected to parliament in all three multi-party elections since 1990, Petkovski was vice chairman of the Assembly from 1990 to 1996 before becoming Andov's successor as chairman of the Assembly in 1996. He lost this position in the 1998 parliamentary elections.

Boris Trajkovski (VMRO-DPMNE), born in Strumica on 25 June 1956, is the only candidate nominated by parliamentary deputies. He holds a law degree from Skopje University. He rose to prominence only in the past year, virtually unknown to the wider Macedonian public at the time. However, he has a long party record. Having joined the VMRO-DPMNE in 1992, he was foreign policy advisor to party chairman Ljubco Georgievski and chairman of the party's foreign policy commission from 1992 to 1999. Thus, he was the party's logical choice for the post of deputy foreign minister after VMRO-DPMNE's election victory of 1998. During the Kosovo conflict, he headed the Macedonian government's committee in charge of co-ordinating humanitarian aid efforts and dealing with the refugee crisis. In this job, he was often very critical of the international community's handling of the crisis, which went down well with a large portion of the Macedonian public but did not necessarily endear him to his opposite numbers in the international community.

Unlike the vast majority of ethnic Macedonians, Trajkovski is not Orthodox but belongs to the country's small Methodist Church. This was seen as a possible drawback for his presidential ambitions and even for his chances of being nominated by the VMRO-DPMNE, a party whose more nationalist activists take the stand that ethnic Macedonian and the Orthodox Church go together. Nonetheless, Trajkovski easily won the party's nomination against Defence Minister Nikola Kljusev, since he had the support of Ljubco Georgievski and other leading party members. And the Macedonian Orthodox Church made it clear some time ago that it would not interfere in the presidential elections.

Vasil Tupurkovski (DA) was born in Skopje on 8 April 1951. He studied law at Skopje University and graduated in 1972. In 1973, he received a Master's degree from the University of Michigan, and in 1976, a doctoral degree from Skopje University, where he had started working as an assistant in 1974. In the 1980s, he headed the Union of Socialist Youth of Yugoslavia. During the last years of Socialist Yugoslavia, he was a member of the presidency of the League of Communists (the party's top political body), and also Macedonia's last member on the joint Yugoslav state presidency. In this position, he bolstered his image as an unconventional politician, coming to meetings wearing a sweater rather than a business suit. In June 1991, Tupurkovski was among the presidency members who voted against the intervention of the Yugoslav People's Army to prevent the break-up of Yugoslavia after Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence.

After the break-up of Yugoslavia, Tupurkovski briefly returned to Skopje, where he advocated that Macedonia become a multi-ethnic democracy for all its citizens, rather than the state of just one ethnic group. He then went to the United States to teach international law. At the same time, he worked as President Kiro Gligorov's special envoy to the U.S. He resigned from that position in May 1992, disagreeing with

Gligorov and others as to how Macedonia could strengthen its position internationally. In 1993, Tupurkovski returned to Macedonia and a professorship at Skopje University, but continued to spend extended periods of time in the United States, where his family still lives.

For years, Tupurkovski was rumoured to be ready to return to politics. Repeatedly, his name was put forward as a possible ambassador to the United Nations, foreign minister, or even successor to President Gligorov. The VMRO–DPMNE reportedly wanted to enlist him to run in the 1994 elections, but nothing came of it. In 1995, his name once again came up as a possible successor to Gligorov when the latter was almost killed in an assassination attempt in October 1995.

Tupurkovski returned to active politics when he formed the Democratic Alternative in March 1998. In the “Coalition for Change” with the VMRO–DPMNE, the DA emerged as the victor of the 1998 parliamentary elections. Following the elections, Tupurkovski became Director of the newly formed Agency for Reconstruction and Development, tasked with bringing in foreign investment. He is also the president of the Macedonian Olympic Committee.

IV. ...AND THEIR CHANCES

By the end of September, four major Macedonian print media had published opinion polls looking at the prospects of the six presidential hopefuls in the run-up to the elections. Unfortunately, the findings of these polls are so divergent that they cause a good deal of confusion and do not give a clear picture of the public's choice for president.

The first opinion poll was published in the pro-government daily *Nova Makedonija* on 23 September. The poll is based on a small sample of just 240 potential voters in seven cities. Men are strongly over-represented in the sample, as are ethnic Macedonians at the expense of national minorities, especially ethnic Albanians. Therefore, this poll should be treated with great caution.

The second opinion poll was published by *Utrinski Vesnik* on 24 September and conducted during the week of 13–19 September. It is based on a sample of 1,200 people. No details are given on the regional, ethnic, and age composition of the sample. This is the only poll that also looks at voting behaviour in a possible second round.

The third opinion poll appeared in the daily *Makedonija Denes* on 25 September. This poll is based on a sample of 520 from 15 towns and cities. Men and women are represented almost equally, but the paper gives no details on the ethnic background of the people polled. Although this poll is based on a bigger sample than the one in *Nova Makedonija*, it has the major shortcoming that it was conducted over a five-week period (1 August–4 September), when a clear picture of who would run in the elections had yet to emerge.

The fourth opinion poll also appeared on 25 September, in the bi-weekly magazine *Forum*. This poll is based on a sample of 1,000 respondents from nine cities and towns and the surrounding villages, who were interviewed between 10 and 14 September. The magazine gives no further details on the respondents' background

but stresses that place of residence, gender, age, and ethnic background were all criteria in selecting the respondents.

Clearly, these polls must be treated with a good deal of caution, not only because their findings differ so much but also because such surveys in the past have not always produced the most accurate results in Macedonia. Nonetheless, it is interesting to take a closer look at the results:

Candidate	Nova Makedonija	Makedonija Denes	Utrinski Vesnik	Forum
Stojan Andov (LDP)	4.0%	21.0%	6.6%	12.4%
Muhamed Halili (PDP)	2.5%	4.0%	7.6%	4.9%
Muharem Nexhipi (DPA)	8.5%	5.0% (others!)	9.2%	9.6%
Tito Petkovski (SDSM)	14.5%	14.0%	26.4%	19.3%
Boris Trajkovski (VMRO)	21.0%	9.0%	21.7%	18.2%
Vasil Tupurkovski (DA)	8.0%	9.0%	11.0%	7.5%
Don't know (yet)	33.5%	31.0%	13.8%	21.4%
None of the above	N/A	7.0%		6.7%
Will not vote	8.0%	N/A	3.8%	

Despite the widely differing results, some preliminary conclusions can be drawn from the polls. One trend is consistent: only a very small number of people said they were determined not to vote at all. *Utrinski Vesnik* puts their number at just 3.8 percent, *Nova Makedonija* at eight percent, and *Forum* at 7.9 percent, with an additional 9.5 percent who have yet not fully decided to vote. Of the remaining 82.6% who said they would vote, 6.7% will not vote for any of the actual candidates, that is they will either cast blank or spoiled ballots, or make a last minute decision to vote for one candidate as the “lesser evil”.

Even if the number of abstentions in the actual vote is twice as high as the polls suggest, a relatively high turnout can be expected, at least in the first round. In the second round, participation will probably drop. For one, turnout among ethnic Albanian voters will most likely be lower if no Albanian candidate remains in the race, a scenario which can also apply to other voters whose preferred candidate does not make it to the second round.

The second common feature of three of the opinion polls is that they show a fairly high number of undecided voters. In three of the polls, the figures for that group vary from 21.4 to 33.5 percent. Even at the lower end of this range, this is the single biggest group in these three polls. The fact that a high number of people polled said that they would vote — but don't know who to vote for — makes the polls even more difficult to interpret. Only *Utrinski Vesnik* puts the number of undecided voters at a fairly low level, namely 13.8 percent.

The third conclusion to be drawn from the polls is that no candidate will be able to get a majority of all registered voters on 31 October. This means that a run-off on 14 November between the two best-placed candidates is inevitable.

Individual Candidates

Regarding the prospects of the individual candidates, several conclusions can be drawn from the polls, although it must again be stressed that public opinion might change in the run-up to the elections, and that the polls possibly do not correctly reflect the public's attitude in the first place.

The first conclusion is that neither of the ethnic Albanian candidates has a chance of getting through to the second round. A joint candidate supported by both major ethnic Albanian parties, DPA and PDP, would have stood a realistic chance of making it into the run-off, but by splitting the vote, neither should be able to muster enough support. Therefore, what is at stake for the ethnic Albanian parties in the upcoming elections is to determine which has more support among the ethnic Albanian electorate. This in itself is of interest to them since, in the 1998 elections, they had formed a pre-electoral alliance with a joint proportional list and joint candidates, so that it was impossible at the time to gauge whether ethnic Albanian voters preferred the DPA or the PDP.

Second, all four polls strongly indicate that Tupurkovski has very few chances of making it past the first stage of the presidential elections. None of the polls gives him more than 11 percent, and all have him in third or fourth place. Tupurkovski's campaign manifesto will probably meet with a good deal of scepticism, as most of what he promised before the 1998 parliamentary elections failed to materialise, first and foremost \$1,000 million in foreign aid and investment he had pledged to bring into the country. As a result of this and other blunders, his rating dropped considerably over the past year, and it is unlikely that lofty campaign promises will have a big effect on the electorate. But Tupurkovski is a canny and charismatic politician, and he is always good for a surprise.

The real difference between the three polls lies in their assessment of the chances of Trajkovski, Petkovski, and Andov. The *Nova Makedonija* and the *Utrinski Vesnik* polls see Andov as an absolute outsider. *Makedonija Denes*, on the other hand, sees him as the frontrunner, while *Forum* has him in third place, but with a realistic chance of gaining ground on the two best-placed candidates. As far as the Social Democrat candidate, Tito Petkovski, is concerned, all four polls agree that he will make it into the second round. *Forum* and *Utrinski Vesnik* even see him as the strongest candidate. According to the *Forum* poll, though, his advantage over Trajkovski is very small. With regards to Trajkovski, the picture is in some ways similar to Andov. Three polls predict that he will make it to the second round (*Nova Makedonija* has him down as the clear leader, *Forum* as a close second, and *Utrinski Vesnik* as a more distant second but with a significant lead over the third-placed Tupurkovski). *Makedonija Denes*, on the other hand, sees him trailing the other two by a relatively big margin.

At any rate, it seems that Trajkovski, Petkovski, and Andov are the only candidates with realistic chances of making it into the second round. Given the fact that the electorate of VMRO-DPMNE is generally very disciplined and quite numerous, it is very likely that Trajkovski will be one of the two candidates contesting the run-off.

It is much harder to predict who his opponent in the run-off will be. Petkovski can also count on a fairly disciplined party following, but at present it appears smaller than that of VMRO-DPMNE. The Social Democrats have still not recovered from their defeat in last year's parliamentary elections and Petkovski in this context is perceived by many as a man of the past, lacking vision and charisma. However, he is one of the few leading Social Democrats who has escaped any serious implication in scandals during his party's term in power.

Stojan Andov, finally, has a different problem altogether. He is generally well respected, and he appears to be the most statesmanlike of all the candidates. But his party is small, and it is doubtful whether it has the resources to successfully contest an election campaign against the country's two biggest power blocs. In addition, both Andov and his party are often perceived as being inconstant in their relations with the ruling parties and the opposition.

Since *Utrinski Vesnik* is the only newspaper so far to have published a poll for the second round, it is worth looking at the results. The polls assembled the six likely run-off combinations and asked people who they would vote for in each of those possible scenarios. Almost all combinations predict a tight outcome:

- If Boris Trajkovski and Stojan Andov face each other in the second round, the poll predicts a narrow victory for Trajkovski (34.9%–33.9%);
- If Trajkovski runs against Petkovski, he would lose by 34.6 to 38.2 percent;
- If it came to a showdown between the candidates of the ruling parties, Trajkovski would get 31.5 percent against Tupurkovski's 20.8 percent;
- With Petkovski and Tupurkovski in the second round, the poll predicts a very close race (37.0%–36.7%);
- With Andov and Tupurkovski in the second round, the result would be 35.7 to 34.2 percent in favour of the former;
- Finally, if the two opposition candidates Petkovski and Andov contest the run-off, Petkovski would win with 31.8 to 27.4 percent.

Not surprisingly, the number of undecided voters or abstentions would vary considerably from one scenario to the other, depending on the two candidates left in the race. Thus, it would be at its highest in the two scenarios that include only candidates of the ruling parties (Trajkovski vs. Tupurkovski) or only candidates of the opposition (Petkovski vs. Andov). If a candidate of the ruling coalition is pinned against one from the opposition, the number of people voting for neither would range from 11.1 to 14.8 percent. In the Andov-Petkovski scenario, this number would rise to 21.9 percent, and if Trajkovski and Tupurkovski were to contest the runoff, it would rise as high as 28.3 percent. At the same time, the number of undecided voters would vary between 13.2 and 19.4 percent, depending on the scenario.

V. CONTROVERSIAL CHANGES TO THE STATE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

On 31 August 1999, the Macedonian parliament's "Commission for Elections and Appointments" recommended that parliament sack three members of the current State Electoral Commission (DIK), including the chairwoman, Liljana Ingilizova, on the grounds that they were too close to the previous SDSM-led government. They were also accused of violating laws and regulations during the 1998 parliamentary elections and of continuing to do so in the run-up to the 1999 presidential elections.

The opposition Social Democrats claimed that this campaign was politically motivated. They pointed out that the sackings would violate recent amendments to a law according to which the mandate of judges serving on the DIK is to last as long as the mandate of the DIK as a whole, namely until the year 2002.

Nevertheless, parliament voted on 2 September to fire two judges, Ingilizova and Dane Iliev. The third sacking proposed by VMRO–DPMNE was not carried out, probably because it would have removed the only ethnic Albanian judge serving on the DIK. Ingilizova was replaced as chairperson of the DIK by Pavel Manev, a retired judge.

VMRO-DPMNE's junior coalition partner, the DA, said it objected to the fact that Ingilizova was replaced by a retired rather than an active judge, thus for the first time openly going against VMRO-DPMNE. The parliamentary session ended in turmoil, as the presiding vice chairman, Tomislav Stojanovski of the VMRO–DPMNE, closed the session immediately after the vote and did not allow the legislators to discuss the matter or deal with any further points on the agenda.

The very next day, Savo Klimovski, chairman of the Assembly and member of the DA, said his party would take the whole matter to the Constitutional Court, on the grounds that it was illegal to replace Ingilizova with a retired judge and that the sackings did not get the required majority 61 votes in parliament (only 51 deputies had voted, of which 48 supported the VMRO–DPMNE proposal, while three DA deputies abstained).

Faced with a possible defeat in a proceeding before the Constitutional Court, VMRO–DPMNE spokesman Ljuben Paunovski stated on 6 September that the DIK vote should be repeated "in the name of inter-party confidence." Finally, on 14 September, parliament, this time with the necessary majority, sacked Ingilizova and Iliev for good, but replaced the former with her deputy, Josif Lukovski.

Thus the DA succeeded in ensuring that only active judges were placed on the DIK, while VMRO–DPMNE managed to have its way in sacking Ingilizova. The SDSM and PDP, who both voted against the changes to the DIK, ultimately accepted their defeat.

It must be noted that the DIK had indeed been the target of criticism during the 1998 parliamentary elections. The main charges levelled against the commission at the time were that it failed to keep the deadlines for announcing the election results, and that its information policy was abysmal. While those points are valid, it is clear that by replacing some members of the DIK in the run-up to the presidential elections, the parliamentary majority operated at the very limits of legality. If it appears to the public that the sackings were indeed politically motivated, confidence in the integrity of the election process could be undermined, which would be deeply regrettable.

VI. PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION DEEPENS RIFT WITHIN RULING COALITION...

Over the past months, it has become clear that not all is well within the ruling three-party coalition. The fact that all three ruling parties have fielded their own candidates for the presidential election hardly bodes well for the future viability of the grouping. Many observers think that once the presidential elections are over, the coalition's days will be, too.

Relations between the VMRO–DPMNE and the DA are particularly strained. The two parties have launched public attacks against each other, and on at least two

occasions over the past two months only high-level meetings could keep the coalition together.

The wrangling over the reshuffle of the State Electoral Commission was the first highly visible heads-on clash between the VMRO–DPMNE and the DA after a relatively quiet summer period, significant because it was the first time that the two parties voted differently in parliament. When Chairman of the Assembly Savo Klimovski of the DA threatened to go before the Constitutional Court to prevent the VMRO–DPMNE from getting its way over the sacking of the DIK members, the VMRO–DPMNE immediately launched a counter-attack. They suggested that Klimovski be dismissed for having “destroyed the dignity of the parliament”, but pointed out that this demand was aimed solely against Klimovski himself, and not against the DA.

At a high-level meeting on 9 September, the leaders of the two parties decided to put their differences aside, calling them “pre-election tensions.” VMRO–DPMNE agreed not to initiate proceedings to replace Klimovski, and withdrew some of their proposals for changes to the DIK. The DA, for its part, agreed not to support a censure vote against Culture Minister Dimitar Dimitrov and to abstain from the parliamentary vote on the controversial sale of the OKTA refinery to the Greek firm “Hellenic Petroleum.”

The OKTA issue

The sale of the OKTA refinery to “Hellenic Petroleum” was regarded as controversial because President Gligorov had initially vetoed it on the grounds that OKTA was far too strategic an enterprise to be sold to the Greeks. On the other hand, the Macedonian government was under great pressure from the IMF to sell OKTA by 30 September 1999 — or close it down altogether.

When the Macedonian parliament reviewed the OKTA deal mid-September, there were still differences between the parties as to how to proceed. On 17 September, Prime Minister **Ljubco** Georgievski (VMRO-DPMNE) strongly urged the parliament to ratify the sale, but after an eight-hour session and before a vote could be taken, Klimovski (DA) closed the session, arguing that the deputies were tired. Klimovski’s decision provoked outrage from the ranks of the VMRO–DPMNE deputies.

Again, leaders of the VMNRO-DPMNE and DA had to meet in a Skopje restaurant to iron out their differences. Reportedly, Georgievski threatened to end the coalition if the DA did not vote for the OKTA deal. There were also reports that the VMRO–DPMNE once more threatened to have Klimovski dismissed.

Finally on 23 September, the parliament overruled President Gligorov’s veto and ratified the OKTA deal. The DA, however, did not come out strongly in favour of the agreement - the VMNRO-DPMNE had decided to let the DA legislators vote according to their conscience in an effort to smooth ruffled feathers and save the coalition. Ultimately, only about half of the DA deputies voted in favour, but the bill was passed anyway with 71 votes, ten above the required majority.

More inter-coalition haggling

While these disputes among the VMRO–DPMNE and the DA were taking place, some people within the VMRO–DPMNE tried to tighten the screws on Tupurkovski in a different way. Since he had spent the period from 1987 to 1993 outside Macedonia, first in Belgrade and then abroad as Gligorov’s special envoy, the

VMRO–DPMNE representative on the DIK questioned whether Tupurkovski was actually eligible to run for the presidency.

Obviously, this was just a trick to get him to agree to the OKTA deal and the proposed changes to the State Electoral Commission. After all, it must have been clear to the VMRO–DPMNE that according to Art. 132 of the Constitution (cf. page 7), Tupurkovski was qualified to run for president. In the end, high-ranking VMRO–DPMNE representatives said that they did not agree with their DIK member, and once the OKTA deal was passed, the issue of Tupurkovski's stay outside Macedonia was quietly dropped. The DIK registered him as a candidate on 26 September.

There have also been a number of occasions when members of the VMRO–DPMNE and the DA have made contradictory statements on various issues. For example, Tupurkovski promised state subsidies to grape farmers to help them collect this year's harvest and sell it off at a good price, only to be contradicted immediately by Agriculture Minister Marjan Gorcev. Furthermore, during the first days of his election campaign, Tupurkovski launched a series of strong attacks against the VMRO–DPMNE, saying that some of its members were undermining his efforts to bring in foreign investment. He even threatened to provide proof to substantiate his allegations, in which case relations between his party and the VMRO–DPMNE will probably hit rock bottom.

All evidence points to the fact that the current coalition is becoming increasingly untenable, a situation which will only be exacerbated through the tensions of the presidential election campaign. Patience seems to be wearing thin on all sides as the number of contentious issues increases. Should this continue, the DA may well find itself sidelined if Tupurkovski's bid for the presidency fails. Since the other two parties in the ruling coalition hold 60 out of 120 seats in the parliament, there is a very real possibility that the DA may be squeezed out of government. Some predict the DA will fall apart altogether if that happens.

If the current coalition breaks up, the most likely scenario is that the VMRO–DPMNE and the DPA will continue to rule, with the support of deputies from other parties, including disaffected members of the DA. Early parliamentary elections do not seem to be a realistic option in the short term.

VII. ...AS RELATIONS BETWEEN MACEDONIA AND KFOR ALSO UNDERGO CRISIS

Relations between Macedonia and the international community, most notably the Kosovo Protection Force (KFOR) have taken a turn for the worse over the past months.

Macedonia managed to deal with the influx of hundreds of thousands of refugees from Kosovo relatively well, largely thanks to the assistance provided by international agencies and non-governmental organisations. Once the military conflict between NATO and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia ended in June 1999, most ethnic Albanian refugees quickly started returning to their homes. The majority of refugee camps on Macedonian territory have now been closed down, but some still harbour a small number of ethnic Albanians who have yet to return to Kosovo, or are accommodating new refugees arriving from Kosovo, mostly Roma, fearing retribution from Kosovar Albanians.

Macedonia has received far less international financial assistance to deal with the economic and social consequences of the refugee crisis than it initially expected. Only some \$60 million of \$252 million pledged to the country at a donors' conference in Paris in early May have so far arrived in Skopje. Half that money came from the IMF alone, with Western governments together accounting for the other half. Many Macedonians, regardless of their political orientation, feel that their country, a convenient launching pad for KFOR's entry into Kosovo, bore a heavy burden during the refugee crisis and deserves more now than the West turning a blind eye to its problems.

This situation is regrettable because it generates strong anti-Western sentiment among large parts of the Macedonian population. There is a danger that populist politicians may try to exploit this mood. Foreign aid is desperately needed to keep Macedonia stable. Particular attention must be paid to Macedonia's delicate ethnic balance. While some inter-ethnic tension exists and Macedonia's various ethnic communities lead largely segregated, parallel lives, Macedonia is arguably the only multi-ethnic success story in the region, having so far avoided the deeply destructive experiences of most of its neighbours.

Macedonia's stability is of paramount importance to the region and, by extension, to the international community, which cannot afford another crisis in the Balkans. As most of Macedonia's neighbours stand to become involved if the country faces serious destabilisation, a major crisis in Macedonia is bound to have repercussions in the entire Balkans.

The international community must, therefore, deliver on its pledges of financial assistance to Macedonia as soon as possible. Aiding Macedonia in tackling the consequences of the Kosovo crisis is not just a matter of honesty or gratefulness, but lies squarely in the self-interest of the West. The international community should do everything in its power to keep Macedonia stable and firmly rooted in the Western camp.

Many Macedonians also feel that the continued presence of KFOR troops in their country has a negative impact on their quality of life. They complain about frequent traffic jams, especially on the main route from Skopje to the Kosovo border. There, KFOR convoys and long lines of trucks bringing humanitarian aid and other goods to Kosovo create an almost permanent congestion on the road. Locals also complain about frequent violations of traffic rules by KFOR personnel, arrogant or insensitive behaviour, and other nuisances. Even the local media found it worth pointing out repeatedly that Macedonia, after all, was not under NATO occupation, and that the military "guests" should not test the limits of their hosts' patience.

Several recent incidents have had a particularly bad effect on NATO's reputation and, by extension, that of the international community in general. It is quite clear that it will take major efforts on the part of the West to repair this damage.

In the most tragic incident, Radovan Stojkovski, LDP Minister without Portfolio, his wife and his daughter, were killed in a head-on collision with a NATO vehicle on 28 August 1999. Stojkovski's driver died on 9 September as a result of his injuries. The accident was caused by a Norwegian KFOR officer driving down a four-lane highway in the wrong direction, which provoked public outrage. Macedonian authorities and NATO subsequently got into a series of arguments over the course of legal action to take.

First, still at the scene of the accident, Macedonian police and NATO had a scuffle in front of TV cameras as NATO officers tried to evacuate from the scene the two Norwegian officers travelling in the NATO vehicle that had caused the crash. (NATO later said they had not been aware of the severity of the accident, because the bodies of the casualties had already been removed from the scene.)

NATO then tried to fly the two officers to a field hospital in Kosovo for treatment, at which point Interior Minister Pavle Trajanov ordered Skopje airport closed and all flights suspended. While one of the two Norwegians was subsequently allowed to leave for Kosovo, the driver was transported to the Military Hospital in Skopje and put under police surveillance. A few days later, he was transferred to a Skopje prison.

NATO demanded that he be handed over immediately, stressing that he would face trial in Norway and arguing that this was the correct procedure under bilateral agreements between NATO and Macedonia. The Macedonian government did not think this was the correct procedure and refused to release the Norwegian officer into NATO custody, arguing that unless KFOR could prove the officer had been on duty while travelling, he would come under Macedonian jurisdiction and be tried in Macedonia. Only when all 19 NATO member states increased the pressure, giving assurances that the officer would be tried in Norway, did the Macedonian government agree on 23 September to hand him over to the Norwegian authorities.

This incident stoked the antagonism many Macedonians hold towards the Western alliance. In the days after Stojkovski's death, most newspapers carried extended stories of previous accidents involving NATO vehicles, in which Macedonians were severely injured or killed.

Another mysterious event took place just days after the Stojkovski accident. On 1 September, residents claimed they saw a KFOR helicopter dumping an unidentified load into Lake Lipkovo, a source of drinking water for the town of Kumanovo and its surroundings. A thorough search by divers sent by both KFOR and the Macedonian Interior Ministry failed to produce anything but huge amounts of garbage. Nonetheless, KFOR's information policy failed to convince the population that it was not using Macedonia as a garbage dump for potentially dangerous waste material. Finally, in late September, KFOR put in place a waste-disposal policy and began transporting toxic waste and other potentially harmful refuse to Germany for treatment, starting with a shipment of 75 tonnes. One source of friction between KFOR and Macedonia thus seems to have been neutralised, which may lead to better relations in the future.

With the results of the investigation of the Lake Lipkovo incident still pending, the Macedonian government seems to be increasingly unwilling to let KFOR go unchecked on Macedonian territory. The Interior Ministry issued a decree stating that KFOR planes and helicopters would in the future have to use air corridors specifically designated by the Macedonian government and could not fly over inhabited areas at night. The Ministry also demanded, in the light of Minister Stojkovski's death, that NATO announce any significant movements of its troops to the Macedonian authorities, but it is unlikely that KFOR will agree to this.

A fundamental improvement in relations between Macedonia and KFOR would require both sides to make serious efforts to reconcile their interests. Further conflicts would otherwise become inevitable, which could have serious

consequences, most notably a shift in Macedonian public opinion from pro- to anti-Western.

This would be a setback for the Western alliance, in whose interest it lies to have good relations with Macedonia because of the country's important strategic position and delicate ethnic balance. Macedonia's stability and inclusion—in whatever way—in the Western camp is a pre-requisite for the stability of the region as a whole.

VIII. CONCLUSION

Three weeks before the first round of the Macedonian presidential elections, it is almost impossible to predict which of the six candidates will proceed to the second round and who will ultimately become Macedonia's new head of state. There are strong indications that Deputy Foreign Minister Boris Trajkovski (VMRO–DPMNE) and Social Democrat candidate Tito Petkovski have the greatest chances of making it into the run-off. Veteran politician Stojan Andov of the LDP may however still be good for a surprise, and, if he manages to land in the second round, he has a realistic chance of emerging as the winner.

Meanwhile, serious divisions have surfaced in the three-party ruling coalition. Relations between the VMRO–DPMNE and the DA are particularly strained, which may result in the break-up of the current government. If this happens, the two remaining coalition partners will probably be able to get the parliamentary majority necessary to govern. The DA, however, would risk its very existence, especially if its leader Tupurkovski does not succeed in his bid for the presidency.

In addition to domestic political problems, the marked deterioration of relations between Macedonia and the West is a cause for worry. It appears that both sides are aware that it is in their vital interest to continue their co-operation and improve their ties. This is imperative for Macedonia's stability, which neither the international community nor Macedonia can afford to put at risk, not least because it is a pre-requisite for the stability of the region as a whole.

IX. RECOMMENDATIONS

- In the light of the tensions surrounding the State Electoral Commission in the run-up to this year's presidential elections, ICG recommends that in future elections major changes to the composition of the Electoral Commission should only be made with the consent of all political parties. Any changes to the Electoral Commission that could be perceived as driven by party politics risk undermining the public's trust in the electoral process and could therefore cast doubt over the very legitimacy of the elections;
- ICG urges the international community to live up to commitments made to Macedonia on financial and other assistance. This will avoid the spread of anti-Western sentiment among the Macedonian public and can foster stability in the country. Macedonia's stability is of utmost importance to the international community. A conflict-ridden Macedonia will inevitably destabilise the entire southern Balkan region;
- Particular attention must be paid to Macedonia's delicate ethnic balance. While some inter-ethnic tension exists and Macedonia's various ethnic communities

lead largely segregated, parallel lives, Macedonia is arguably the only multi-ethnic success story in the region, having so far avoided the deeply destructive experiences of most of its neighbours. The international community should support Macedonia to ensure that relations among the country's various ethnic groups do not deteriorate as a result of economic and social problems;

- The Macedonian government and KFOR must try to find a good footing for their relations, acceptable to both sides. KFOR must also work on its public information policy vis-à-vis the Macedonian people. The international community should pay attention not to turn an essentially pro-Western public into a sceptical one - accusing the West of disregarding their country as soon as it loses its strategic interest for the international community.

Annex A

LIST OF MAJOR PARTIES

VMRO–DPMNE

Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organisation–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity; biggest party in the current government, a three-party coalition comprising the VMRO-DPMNE, the DPA and the DA, which was formed after the parliamentary elections of October 1998.

SDSM

Social Democratic Union of Macedonia; biggest opposition party, in power until 1998.

DA

Democratic Alternative; formed in 1998, in government since 1998.

LDP

Liberal Democratic Party; small centrist party, briefly in the government in the summer of 1999, but never formally joined the three-party ruling coalition.

DPA

Democratic Party of Albanians; one of the two major ethnic Albanian parties, in government since 1998.

PDP

Party for Democratic Prosperity; the other major ethnic Albanian party, in government until 1998, since then in the opposition.