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Analysis

The authorities in office are due to strengthen their power after the presidential and legislative elections in Macedonia

1.7 million Macedonians will be electing the President of the Republic on 13th April next. If in the first round none of the candidates wins more than 50% of the vote, a second round will take place two weeks later on 27th April. On the same day general elections will take place, which will be the third to be organised early since those on June 1st 2008. This election follows tension between the Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and its government partner the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI-BDI). The electoral campaign for the presidential election will begin on 24th March, and that for the general election on 6th April.

The incumbent government's power is due to grow

At the end of February outgoing head of State Gjorgji Ivanov (VMRO-DPMNE) said that he would be running again. He is said to have taken this decision after the publication of a petition signed by some public figures (doctors, athletes, artists) in support of his re-election. Gjorgji Ivanov was officially appointed as a candidate on March 1st. He announced that his campaign will be based on three principles: honesty, sincerity and values. The DUI-BDI, VMRO-DPMNE's government party which represents the country's Albanian speaking population (1/4 of Macedonians) asked the Prime Minister to appoint a candidate of consensus who it would support in the presidential election. Nikola Gruevski rejected what he defined as interference by the DUI-BDI in his party's business and said that the choice of candidate in the presidential election was an issue that was specific to his party. "We must defend our dignity and the will of the Albanian speakers," Bujar Osmani, the DUI-BDI's spokesperson as he added, "Gjorgji Ivanov has not responded the what the Albanians want."

The Albanian NGO "Wake Up" led by Artan Grubi has called to boycott the presidential election: "We are asking civil society, the Muslim community and the Albanian speaking media to commit to preventing the election of a President who the Albanians will not acknowledge." The decision to boycott the election is threatening the

turnout rate which according to the electoral law must absolutely be over 40% for the election to be declared valid.

Bujar Osmani has asked the Albanian speakers not to support any of the candidates and the VMRO-DPMNE to organise early general elections in order to bring the tension between the two parties to an end.

By announcing Gjorgji Ivanov as its candidate the VMRO-DPMNE was then forced to grant the DUI-BDI its wish and organise an early general election. A request which the party agreed with since all of the polls forecast an easy victory for it.

Many political analysts believe that the "dispute" between the two government parties was just a pretext to organise early elections in which the two parties have interests. According to the polls they should win most of the seats in the Sobranie – the only chamber in Parliament. Both government parties vaunt their firmness and their nationalism. "They want to improve their popularity within the population and divert attention from the country's socio-economic problems," maintains Zravko Saveski, a teacher at the FON University in Skopje.

"For the good of the State and national interests I accept the organisation of early elections," declared Nikola Gruevski on March 1st. The elections will take place on 27th April on the same day as a possible second round in the presidential election.

The Prime Minister maintains that the DUI-BDI has set its sights on one of the country's three key positions (Presidency, Prime Minister or leader of parliament) and that the VMRO-DPMNE absolutely needs to win the absolute majority (ie 62 seats) in the general elections in order to prevent the Albanian speaking party from imposing its conditions regarding participation in government. Nikola Gruevski has asked his supporters to mobilise "so that his party will not be subjected to any pressure or blackmail on the part of its Albanian partner." The DUI-BDI reminded its supporters that they had to fulfil their civic duty so that the party could be an influential player in parliament. It maintains it needs at least 25 seats in order to be able to influence decision-making. In Macedonia tradition has it that the government coalition includes a Macedonian party and an Albanian speaking party so that both of the country's two main ethnic groups are represented.

Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski highlights his economic results. Macedonia's economy grew by 2.8% in 2013, notably thanks to household consumption and exports. Unemployment which totalled 36% in 2006 the year in which Nikola Gruevski took office now lies at 28%. Inflation lies at 1.4%. According to analysts it is due to lie at 2.7% on average for the next four years. Nikola Gruevski emphasises his country's low public debt which lies at 35.5% of the GDP.

The government has raised salaries and pensions as well as social aid by 5%. Nikola Gruevski has promised that taxes will not increase in 2014 and that VAT would be reduced in several areas. Finally he is planning to grant aid to a total of one million euro to businesses which recruit new employees. In his opinion this measure would lead to the creation of 4000 new jobs.

Opposition lagging far behind

During a congress on 4th March the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) appointed Stevo Pendarovski, a professor of political science at the American University of Skopje as its presidential candidate. He chaired the Central Electoral Commission during the election of 14th and 28th April 2004 and was advisor for national security and foreign policy to two former Presidents of the Republic Boris Trajkovski (1999-2004) and Branko Crvenkovski (2004-2009). He wants to increase the power enjoyed by the head of State, accusing Gjorgji Ivanov of having undertaken his mandate under the government's supervision.

The leader of the main opposition party Zoran Zaev has also accused the outgoing President of being the Prime Minister's "yes-man" and not a President of

all Macedonians as he should have been. The Social Democratic Union has lost all of the elections organised in Macedonia since 2006 – 7 in all.

In spite of the poor result it is being credited with in the polls the left opposition which criticises the government for the delay that has occurred in undertaking reform supports the organisation of early general elections. The SDSM has drafted a new electoral programme promoting the "restoration" of the middle class, which has been suffered under the present government. It accuses the government of having made Macedonia dependent on loans, of having increased the gap between the rich and the poor and of not respecting the rule of law. Stevo Pendarovski maintains that there are political prisoners. He is also planning to develop the natural gas network and build three next stretches of motorway between Veles (centre), Prilep and Bitola, between Stip and Kocani, and between Strumica and the Bulgarian border.

Nikola Gruevski deems the opposition's promises unreasonable. "You must be totally ignorant of the way investments are made or liar to promise investment of 3 billion euro," he stresses.

As for the Albanian speakers Iljaz Halimi will be running for the Albanian Democratic Party (PDA-PDSH) in the presidential election. He will be the only candidate of the country's biggest minority. "Things are clear: Gjorgji Ivanov is the election favourite. Our goal is to get to the second round," indicated the party's leader, Menduh Thaci. He has condemned the call for boycott by the DUI-DBI. Iljaz Halimi would like to stand as the candidate for all Albanians and wants to reassert that Macedonia is also a country for Albanians. Many of the latter deplore the fact that Albanian is still not considered an official language in regions where more than 20% of Albanian speakers live.

Finally Zoran Popovski will be running in the presidential election for the Citizens' Option for Macedonia (GROM), a party founded in 2013 by the Mayor of Karposh and former Deputy Chair of the SDSM, Stevce Jakimovski. He sits in the centre of the political scale.

The Macedonian Political System

The Presidential Office

The President of the Republic is elected for five years and his mandate is renewable once. His powers are relatively limited and the position is mainly an honorary one. The head of State is the commander of the armed forces and presides over the Republic's

Security Council comprising the Prime Minister, the leader of the *Sobranie*, ministers whose office is linked to the security, foreign relations, defence and three personalities appointed by the President himself. According to the electoral law the presidential election must be organised in the 60 days prior to the end

of the mandate. In order to be able to stand for the supreme office any candidate must be aged at least 40 and have the support of a minimum 10,000 voters or that of at least 30 MPs.

Turnout has to reach at least 40% for the election to be declared valid.

Reminder of the Presidential Election results - 22nd March & 5th April 2009

Turnout : 56.90% (1st round) and 42.61% (2nd round)

Candidates	No of votes won (1st round)	% of votes won (1st round)	No of votes won (2nd round)	% of votes won (2nd round)
Gjorgji Ivanov (Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for National Unity VMRO-DPMNE)	345 850	35,04	453 616	63,14
Ljubomir Frckoski (Social Democratic Union SDSM)	202 691	20,54	264 828	36,86
Imer Selmani (New Democracy)	147 547	14,95		
Ljube Boskoski (independent)	146 878	14,88		
Agron Buxhaku (Democratic Union for Integration, DUI-BDI)	73 629	7,46		
Nano Ruzin (Liberal Democratic Party)	40 042	4,06		
Mirushe Hoxha (Democratic Albanian Party, PDA-PDSh)	30 225	3,06		

Source : http://www.sec.mk/arhiva/2009_pretsedatelskiIlokalni/2009/fajlovi/rezultati/konecni/Izvestaj_do_SOBRANIETO_NA_RM_zapretsedatelskite_izbori_2009.pdf

The Legislative System

The Macedonian parliament is monocameral. The Sobranie has 120 members elected by proportional voting (according to the d'Hondt method) for a four year term in office. For the general elections the country is divided into six constituencies electing 20 MPs each. The electoral system guarantees the representation of the minorities (Albanian, Turkish, Serb, Roma etc ...) as well as that of women since the electoral lists have to include at least 30% of the opposite sex. Political parties, party coalitions and groups comprising at least 500 voters are allowed to run in the general elections.

The political parties represented in the present parliament are:

– a six party coalition led by the VMRO-DPMNE,

nationalist Christian Democratic, founded in 1990 by former Prime Minister (1998-2002) Ljubco Georgievski and led since 2005 by the outgoing head of government Nikola Gruevski, with 63 seats;

– a three party coalition led by the SDSM created in 1991 and led by the Mayor of Strumica (south), Zoran Zaev, with 27 seats;

– the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI-BDI), a party founded in 2001 and which succeeded the National Liberation Army (UCK) which officially disbanded in 1999. Member of the outgoing government coalition led by Alija Ahmeti, with 18 MPs;

– the Albanian Democratic Party (PDA-PDSh), created in 1997 by Arben Xhaferi, led by Menduh Thaci, with 11 seats;

– Democratic Revival (RDK), an Albanian speaking party founded in 2011 and led by Rufi Osmani, with 2 seats.

Reminder of the general election results on 5th June 2011 in Macedonia

Turnout: 63.48%

Political Parties	No of votes won	% of votes won	No of seats won
Coalition led by the Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)	438 138	38,98	56
Coalition led by the Social Democratic Union (SDSM)	368 496	32,78	42
Democratic Union for Integration (DUI-BDI)	115 092	10,24	15
Albanian Democratic Party (PDA-PDSH)	66 315	5,90	8
National Democratic Revival (RDK)	29 996	2,67	2
Others	106 027	9,42	0

Source : <http://217.16.84.11/Default.aspx>

The VMRO-DPMNE easily won in the recent local elections on 24th March and 7th April 2013. The party won 56 towns and 41.75% of the vote, whilst the SDSM won 4 with 26.64% of the vote. The DUI-BDI won 14 towns and 11.84% of the vote and the Albanian Democratic Party 2 with 7.02%.

According to a most recent poll undertaken in March by the Political Studies Institute in Skopje (IPIS) the outgoing President is due to win 29.3% of the vote

on 13th April, Stevo Pendarovski 19.4%; Iljaz Halimi 6.1% of the vote and Zoran Popovski, 1.5%.

The VMRO-DPMNE is due to win the general elections with 24.2% of the vote followed by the SDSM which is due to win 17.4% of the vote, the DUI-BDI 6.9%, the Albanian Democratic Party, 3.9% and National Democratic Revival 1.2%.

One third of those interviewed said they had not yet made up their minds.

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