

The Party led by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski is due to retain power in Macedonia

from **Corinne Deloy**

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D-7
1 days before
the poll

1, 828 380 Macedonians (of whom 7,258 live abroad) are being called to ballot on 5th June next to elect the 123 members of the Sobranija, the only chamber in Parliament (the assembly will comprise 3 additional MPs due to the vote of the electorate abroad).

The democratic nature of this election is the focus of the electoral campaign.

The Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) has dispatched a delegation of observers led by Julian Peel Yates. This includes 12 international experts who will be based in Skopje and 20 observers who will cover all of Macedonia. A delegation from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe also travelled there on 17th and 18th May. The latter insisted on the importance of the free, peaceful, democratic nature of the general elections and on the need for all political parties to acknowledge the election results. The Council of Europe spoke of the vital renewal of the electoral rolls which have been criticised since 1994. Indeed Macedonia has registered 1.8 million people on the electoral rolls for a total population of 2 million inhabitants, which implies an abnormally high number of voters.

"The electoral campaign will be dirty and full of negative energy," declared Klime Babunski, professor of communication at the Institute of Sociological, Political and Legal Research in Skopje. The leaders of 30 political parties have signed an electoral code of good conduct. On 8th May the TV channel A1, property of the media tycoon Velij Aramkovski, who is on trial for money laundering and tax evasion to a total of 4.1 million € and who has been in prison for the last five months, broadcast a documentary by Natasa Stojanovska and Saska Cvetkoska revealing the pressure made by the

authorities on certain civil servants in order that they provide names of voters who are prepared to give their votes to the party in office –the Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) in exchange for the upkeep of their jobs or a promise of employment for one of their family or friends. Employees had to provide the names of fifteen people and executives 30. The Macedonian Electoral Committee (DIK) led since 13th April last by Boris Kondarilo has said nothing for the time being about the scandal revealed by the TV channel. Similar pressure had already been denounced during the previous elections on 1st June 2008 and the presidential election on 22nd March and 5th April 2009.

The TV channel A1 has said that it supports the opposition parties in the election on 5th June: the Social Democratic Party, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), as well as those positioned on the right of the political scale, United for Macedonia (OM), the Revolutionary Organisation-People's Party (VMRO-NP) of former president of the Republic (1998-2002) Ljubco Georgievski, the Democratic Rightwing and Dignity as well as the Democratic Albanian Party (PDA-PDSh) of Menduh Thaci, National Democratic Renaissance (NDP-RDK), created at the end of March by Rufi Osmani, and New Democracy (DR) of Imer Selmani (ND-DR).

Velij Aramkovski's trial started on 23rd May in Skopje. It was immediately postponed until 13th June, after the election.

General elections in Macedonia 5th June 2011

Macedonians living abroad are being allowed to vote for the first time in these elections. The Sobranija will therefore soon have three more MPs (one representing the voters living in Europe and Africa, the second representing those living in America and the last representing those living in Asia and Oceania). Macedonians living in Europe were the greatest in number to enrol for the general elections on 5th June next (4,653). Any candidate living outside of Macedonia and who wanted to stand in the election had to collate the signature of at least one thousand voters.

The Electoral Campaign of the "Macedonian" Parties

The three main "Macedonian" parties – the Revolutionary Organisation-Democratic Party for National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE) led by outgoing Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) led by Branko Crvenkovski and the Liberal Democratic Party support entry into the EU and NATO, the end of the battle between Skopje and Athens and the development of relations with the Diaspora. Macedonia's membership of the EU is the number one priority of these three parties. The Liberal Democratic Party also says that if it wins the election Skopje will be ready to join the 27 in the last year of the next legislature, i.e. in 2014. According to Dimitar Mircev, former Ambassador for Macedonia in Slovenia (1993-1997) and political analyst the closeness of the political programmes explains the attacks and battles seen during the electoral campaign. "*The parties focus on what is happening to the others rather than offering real, precise projects,*" he said.

The main opposition party, the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) is running in coalition with 14 other parties under the banner "For our Future". Its candidate for head of government, former Prime Minister (May-June 2004 and November-December 2004), Radmila Sekerinska, is campaigning on an increase in investments in infrastructures and in agriculture as well as for social aid for the poorest. She says she will do everything necessary to solve the problem of the official name of Macedonia which has caused a problem between Skopje and Athens and is preventing Macedonia from joining NATO and from progressing on the path towards Eu-

ropean integration. Former President of the Republic (2004-2009), leader of the SDSM, Branko Crvenkovski advised outgoing Prime Minister, Nikola Gruevski to give up his post as head of government if his party won the general election. "*Do as I did, give up office. Free Macedonia of Nikola Gruevski and Branko Crvenkovski,*" he declared.

The VMRO-DPMNE has concluded an alliance with 23 other parties thereby forming the biggest coalition in the country's history. Its programme is entitled "Renaissance in 100 steps: development and progress". It includes exactly 1,185 projects for the continued reduction of taxes, a decrease in VAT on tourism from 18% to 5% and new subsidies. The VMRO-DPMNE has chosen to use new technologies and social networks in the electoral campaign. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski has 43 000 friends on Facebook (against 11, 000 for his main adversary Radmila Sekerinska). Analyst Vladimir Bozinovski of the Institute for Political Research in Skopje stresses that the presence of the party in office on the internet explains its lead in the polls. "*The novelty of this election lies in the use of Facebook, blogs and the political parties' internet site,*" he said.

The electoral campaign of the Albanian speaking parties

The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI-BDI) the VMRO-DPMNE's partner is being criticised by the other parties which represent the Albanian speaking minority for having forgotten its campaign promises. Moreover its leader Alija Ahmeti and some of his colleagues have been accused of being agents of the secret services of former Yugoslavia. The Macedonian legal authorities acquitted them of this deeming that it did not having enough evidence.

The tradition in Macedonia dictates that the Albanian speaking party which wins the greatest number of votes in the general elections enters government whichever party leads the government coalition. This explains why Alija Ahmeti is undertaking a campaign that states he was forced to govern with the VMRO-DPMNE, a union that he had not wanted.

The DUI-BDI has made the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement (a peace agreement signed by the main Macedonian parties on 13th August 2001 to put

an end to the fighting between the government forces in Skopje and the Albanian guerrilla, the National Liberation Army) the focus of its electoral programme. It insists on the fact that it will demand, before deciding to take part in the government, a signed agreement on the respect of its programme.

The strengthening of the rights of the Albanian speaking population, the appointment of a member of the Albanian minority to one of the country's key positions (President of the Republic, Prime Minister or leader of Parliament) and the introduction of Albanian as an official language across the entire Macedonian territory are the three main points in the programmes of the Albanian Democratic Party (PDA-PDSh), led by Menduh Thaci, and of New Democracy (DR), a newly created party by Imer Selmani. Albanian is only an official language in the towns where at least 20% of the population speaks Albanian; in addition to this the law makes a representation of the country's leading minority obligatory in the civil service only.

Menduh Thaci declared that he would never take part in a government led by Nikola Gruevski again. Imer Selmani has said that he would demand that his party's programme be included in the political agenda before thinking about joining the government. Finally the

leader of National Democratic Renaissance (RDK), Rufi Osmani declared that he would not govern with Branko Crvenkovski's Social Democratic Union.

According to Imer Ismaili, professor at the University of Tetovo, Nikola Gruevski government's lack of knowledge of the Albanian speakers' requirements over the last six years explains the present demands made by the Albanian speaking parties. "*His government has damaged Macedonia a great deal and has also spread mistrust between the country's two main ethnic groups,*" declared Imer Ismaili.

The Democratic Union for Integration and the Albanian Democratic Party signed an agreement to avoid hate speeches and provocation and also for the acknowledgement of the election results.

The election result will depend on the Social Democratic opposition's ability to motivate the electorate which has still not decided, i.e. around 35% just one week before the election. The VMRO-DPMNE, which won the presidential election on 22nd March and 5th April 2009 and the local election on the same date, is in a strong position. According to the polls the party of outgoing Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski is due to stay in office. The electoral campaign started on 15th May and will end on 4th June.

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