

**Analysis of the early parliamentary elections in Republic of
Macedonia: The accountability and responsibility of political parties
for their pre-electoral promises**



Content

Introduction	4
Methodology	5
Preparation For The Parliamentary Elections	6
The State Election Commission.....	6
Legislation	6
Discussions for change in the electoral system	8
Overview of the participants at early parliamentary elections 2016	10
Parties and Coalitions	10
Political Programs	11
Survey on public opinion of Roma for the early parliamentary elections in 2016	14
Media	17
Election Day analysis	19
Election conduct.....	20
Turnout	21
Post Election analysis	24
The position of Roma political parties	27
VMRO DPMNE unsuccessful attempt to form a government	28
President Ivanov invited political leaders for discussions	29
Interperations of the constitution.....	29
Negotiations between SDSM and DUI	30
Conclusion	32
Recommendations	34
Bibliography:	35
Annexes:	39

List of abbreviation:

AFET – European Parliament Foreign Affairs Committee

CoE – Council of Europe

DPA – Democratic Party of Albanians

DPS – Democratic Party of Serbs

DSR – Democratic Forces of Roma

DUI – Democratic Union for Integration

EC – Electoral Constituency

EU – European Union

LP – Liberal Party

MKD – Macedonian Denars

MP – Member of Parliament

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

ODIHR – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OSCE – Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

PCER – Party for Emancipation of Roma

PDP – Party for democratic prosperity

PIR – Party for Integration of Roma

ROM – Roma United from Macedonia

SDSM – Democratic Union for Integration

SEC – State Election Commission

SRM – Union of Roma from Macedonia

VMRO DPMNE – Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity

Introduction

The early parliamentary elections in the Republic of Macedonia has been triggered by the political crisis. The leader of the largest opposition party, Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) Zoran Zaev in February 2015 started publishing wiretapped conversations¹ from the last few years which apparently indicated the involvement of governmental officials and public servants in election fraud, corruption, abuse of power, and pressure on the media².

In several wiretapped conversations, it can be heard the inappropriate language used by the ministries' officials regarding Roma. In addition, from the wiretapped conversation it can be heard how Roma are used for electoral fraud. Through official statements, the political Party for Emancipation of Roma (PCER) and several non-governmental organization publicly condemned the Government officials³.

The process before the election itself was preceded by a dynamic period full of various events in political upheaval. However, the first step toward resolving the political crisis was taken on 2nd of June 2015, when the European Union, European Commission, and the US Embassy in Macedonia through mediation process initiated the four major political parties, VMRO DPMNE, SDSM, DUI, and DPA to sign the Przino Agreement⁴. The second step was taken on 15th of July 2015, when the mediators came up with the Protocols on Przino Agreement regarding the return of SDSM in the parliament and the preparations for the early election that were foreseen to happen on 24th of April 2016. However, the political crisis continued, and the parliamentary elections were postponed twice, once on 24th of April 2016 and later to 5th of June 2016 and the election happened on 11 of December 2016.

¹ In the public the wiretapped conversations are known as "bombs".

² Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Institute for Democracy - Societas Civilis. (2016). The Republic of Macedonia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections Handbook. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Xey6Yq>

³ More information on: Radof MOF, State institutions have racist attitudes towards Roma. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/jqydOw>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁴ European Union. (2015). Agreement between the four political parties 20 July 2016 Available at: <https://goo.gl/dGQBEB>

⁵ European Union. (2015). Statement by Commissioner Hahn and MEPs Vajgl, Howitt and Kukan: Agreement in Skopje to overcome political crisis. Available at: <https://goo.gl/yI3FRZ>

Methodology

Regarding the methodology for the analysis of the elections, Romalitico targeted primary and secondary sources. Primary target sources were mainly reports generated from the State Electoral Commission (SEC) and political parties while the target of the secondary sources were reports from the media, international and national organizations.

SEC during the elections provided information related to the parties, their campaigns and revenues with a follow up on their legality and lists. While after the elections, having in mind the close results and the pressure from the parties, SEC successfully conducted the whole process with the vote count and the distribution of seats. Political parties continuously reported for their campaign schedules, press releases and news related to the coalitions.

Although the media remained largely bipolar between the governing coalition and the opposition, this analysis is based on media that generated the most neutral reports for the electoral campaigns, election day and post electoral coalitions. In addition, OSCE and EU were key international factors in the process of ensuring fair and transparent elections. Their attention contributed for balanced and just conduct of the elections. Furthermore, national organizations such as CIVIL and MOST traditionally observed the elections and processes. They were also reporting for the pre-election, during the election day and post-election period.

These sources covered the developments from the outset to the end of the election process. In 2016, there were Roma observers on the elections. the platform “My vote my responsibility”. with 143 observers covering the whole territory of the Republic of Macedonia⁶. Apart from the observation, data related to Roma and the early parliamentary elections in 2016 were also generated by Romalitico prior and after the elections in infographics, tables and other comprehensive resources. Research and mobilization efforts have been presented to the Roma electorate by Roma NGOs for transparent and fair elections.

⁶ Konrad Adenauer. (2016). The Republic of Macedonia’s 2016 Parliamentary Elections Handbook. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Xey6Yq>

Preparation For The Parliamentary Elections

The State Election Commission

SEC on 18th of October has adopted the Timetable⁷ for performing election activities for the implementation of the early elections for Members of Parliament. According to the Timetable of the SEC for implementing of the early parliamentary elections 2016, the election campaign has run from 21th November to 9th December 2016, while December 10th was the day of the electoral silence.

Legislation

The latest changes in the Electoral Code were made in the 75th Parliamentary session. These changes were related to the following most important aspects of the electoral process:

1. The election system of six constituencies in the Republic of Macedonia remained unchanged. The change was the three constituencies (EC7, EC8, EC9) from the diaspora were merged into one (EC7) which covers all Macedonian citizens living in Europe, Asia, Africa, South America, and Australia. The MPs in EC 7 has to be elected according to the proportional model;
2. It prohibits the use of office space, equipment and official vehicles of public authorities for election campaign, except by special regulations;
3. As part of the changes to the Electoral Code there were signed an Code for Fair and Democratic Elections⁸ by the political parties participating in the elections after the announcement of the elections. The aim of the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections was the political parties promise that they will not put pressure on the employees in the public and state administration and other institutions financed from the State Budget;
4. The composition of the SEC was changed from 7 to 9 members and the election processes of selecting members was altered. This composition comprises of President, Vice President and 7 members. With the new changes, 3 members are proposed by the

⁷ SEC. (2016). Timetable. Available at: <https://goo.gl/W86rQv>

⁸ SEC. (2016). Code for Fair and Democratic Elections. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9FQm9G>

political parties in power, 2 by the governing party with the largest number of MPs and 1 by the second largest governing party. The opposition parties also propose 3 members, 2 by the opposition party with the largest number of MPs and 1 by the second largest opposition party. The three remaining member are elected by consensus to represent the expert community. The changes also introduced the position of Secretary General of the SEC, created to strengthen the administrative aspect of the organization. The Secretary General is not a member of the SEC and does not have the right to vote⁹.

5. Additional changes to the Electoral Code include provisions related to the voter lists; SEC was appointed as the only institution authorized to conduct and update the voting list. SEC provides electronic access to the voting list in accordance with the regulations and announces voting list on its website for citizens to check whether they are in the voting list. The SEC adopted Rule on the methodology for updating the voting list based on cross-checking of different databases and records, statistical analyses, unlimited spot checks and other appropriate recognized methods of verification. However, the first call for a public review of disputed voters from 40.000 only around 9.000 voters were registered to the voting list. In the list of disputed voters only in Suto Orizari, there were about 1.700 disputed voters that were not registered on the voting list. They needed to register by 11th November 2016 in order to have the right to vote. From the first call for public review of the disputed voters, it was estimated that there were around 7.000 disputed voters of Roma origin in the whole territory of Macedonia¹⁰.
6. Amendments to Election Code provided a greater percentage of representation of the underrepresented gender in the submitted lists of candidates and MPs from the current 33% it was increased to 40%. However, the Roma political parties in their submitted lists of candidates for MPs they did not nominate Roma women.
7. Regarding the media, the amendments to the Electoral Code for the first time, include electronic media (Internet portals), which as well as the broadcast and print media covered the election processes and they were obliged to work in accordance with the

⁹ Konrad Adenauer. (2016). The Republic of Macedonia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections Handbook. Available at: <https://goo.gl/68ml8n>

¹⁰ More information on: 24 Vakti, Possibility for "phantoms" to return to the Voters List. Available at: <https://goo.gl/VkaQsH> last accessed on 01.03.2017

Electoral Code. It also prohibits funding and donations from political parties by the media and persons associated with them, as well as banning political advertisements financed by the state budget. The amendments to the Electoral Code were aimed to provide equal and balanced access to political parties to the advertising space.

After postponing the elections that were scheduled on 5th of July, the four largest political parties on 20th July after the new round of negotiations agreed to sign an Annex of the Przino Agreement which, among the other things, envisioned additional changes in the Electoral Code. On July 28th the Law on Amending the Electoral Code was adopted¹¹. Amendments to this law mainly refer to the reforms in the media:

1. Formation of an ad hoc body within the Agency for Audio and Audiovisual Media Services, i.e. the formation of a five-member Interim Committee to monitor media coverage aimed at monitoring of media coverage during the campaign period. The mandate of this Commission lasted until the completion of the electoral process.
2. Appointment of a new editor of the news program on the Public Broadcasting Service. The editor was elected at the proposal of the opposition party with the largest number of MPs, and after consultation with both, the ruling political parties with the largest number of MPs and opposition political party with the second largest number of MPs.

Discussions for change in the electoral system

In the last few years, before every¹² election there had been discussion over changing the electoral system. Instead of having six constituencies some of the smaller political parties proposed to introduce single constituency unit with open lists. Unfortunately, the negotiations always ended without agreement. Over the past months again there was a public discussion whether there a need change of the electoral model. Also, the negotiation process of the Przino Agreement raised the same issue among the political parties. The smaller parties that were outside of the negotiation process suggested to keep the proportional system but instead of six

¹¹ Law on Amending the Electoral Code. (2016). Official Gazette of the Republic Macedonia, no. 142 of August 1. Available at: <https://goo.gl/IHnXjX>

¹² More information on: Vest, Trajanov proposes amendments to the electoral code and single constituency. Available at: <https://goo.gl/OpWmhy> last accessed on 01.03.2017

to have one constituency with open lists so they can run independently for the elections. The party from the opposition supported such change, while the ruling party proposed majority system with the bonus of 17 MPs for the winning party. Unfortunately, both sides could not agree on changing the electoral system, so the proportional model with six constituencies will remain. The only change was for the voting diaspora, which will now take place in one constituency rather than before in three.

Because of the inability to achieve a political agreement on a single constituency unit without a threshold, there is another chance for the smaller parties and that is changing the method for calculation of the seats. Unlike the Dhond't method which is currently applied, the Sainte-Lague method favors smaller parties and also motivates citizens to participate massively in the electoral process.

Since 1990ies the electoral model was changed three times. In 1990ies was used the majoritarian system which led to instability in the government formation. During the years 1996-1998, Macedonia also applied a mixed electoral system, according to which 85 parliamentary members were elected in constituencies under the majoritarian electoral system, and 35 members were elected from national proportional lists. From 2002 to date it is used the proportional model in 6 constituencies, with Dhond't method for calculation of the seats;

The Dhond't formula advantages parties or big coalitions (which might be two or three, depending on the country) and disadvantages smaller parties. The adverse outcomes on the smaller parties are reduced, however, if the electoral districts are big and offer more seats, thus increasing their chances to win seats in electoral districts. The downside of this method is that favors the bigger political parties, so the smaller political parties must make a coalition with the bigger parties if they want to get an MP, they cannot run independently.

Overview of the participants at early parliamentary elections 2016

In accordance with the Timetable for performing election activities for the implementation of the early parliamentary elections adopted by SEC, 13 political parties and coalitions submitted lists of candidates for parliamentary elections. After reviewing the applications, the SEC adopted a decision to accept 11 applications¹³. On the early parliamentary elections, 1,784,524 citizens had the opportunity to vote for 11 political entities, i.e. six political parties and five coalitions with 58 lists of candidates. In the seventh electoral constituency for the diaspora, a total of 20,573 citizens had right to vote.

Parties and Coalitions

According to the SEC there were eleven (11) political parties on the list including five (5) coalitions for the elections. In line with an enhanced quota for women's participation, 41% of candidates were women, although they topped only 4 of the 58 lists. On these elections, despite the already known candidate lists from the senior parties, new parties emerged to run on both Macedonian and Albanian blocs. In the Macedonian bloc, despite VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM with its coalitions, a new coalition called Coalition for Change and Justice led by already known Democratic Alliance together with FRODEM, MORO-RP and DEMOS, next was the coalition "VMRO for Macedonia" led by VMRO Narodna, Obedineti za Makedonija and Dostoinstvo, while the political party called the Levica and the Liberal Democratic Party participated as independent parties. In the Albanian bloc, despite the traditional DUI and DPA in these elections, the coalition "Alliance for the Albanians" emerged as an association of the newly formed Uniteti, DR-DPA and NDP. While Besa and PDP participated independently.

Roma political parties also participated on the early parliamentary elections. There were seven (7) Roma political parties from which six (6) political parties allied with the governing VMRO-DPMNE, while one (1) party joined forces with the SDSM. In addition, there was one candidate who enrolled in SDSM for the upcoming elections. Kurto Dudus, previously known for his candidacy for mayor of Suto Orizari, became a member of SDSM running on the second

¹³ SEC. (2016). Conclusion of confirmed lists of candidates to participate in the snap elections of Members of Parliament. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ao2BDX>

constituency. Similarly again, all of the Roma political parties were linked with Macedonian political parties, neglecting the opportunities to build post electoral coalitions or coalitions with Albanian political parties.

After eight (8) cycles of elections, Roma for the first time had the opportunity to put three candidates on the list as potential members of parliament. Out of all seven (7) Roma political parties, only SRM, PCER and Kurto Dudus were part of the lists. SRM again negotiated with VMRO - DPMNE for Amdi Bajram to take the 5th spot on the candidates' list in the constituency number 2. While competing in the same list with SDSM, Kurto Dudus took the 7th spot. Samka Ibraimoski from PCER after a turbulent negotiation with SDSM takes the 11th spot on the constituency number 5. The institute for research and policy analyses Romalitico analyzed the probability of electing Roma candidates from the lists based on the three (3) previous parliamentary elections. According to their statistics, Amdi Bajram had the highest chances to be elected for the next Parliament. Kurto Dudus had 71% of chances to win a parliamentary seat, while Samka Ibraimoski had the least of chances to become a member of the Parliament. The following infographic demonstrates the lists and probabilities based on the constituencies for the early parliamentary elections in 2016.

Political Programs

In regards to the political programs, Roma political parties have not published their programs online on their websites. According to Sumnal¹⁴, partially the PCER on their web page issued a recommendation for the next four years, the rest of the Roma political parties used their Facebook pages to share and promote their activities during the campaign. However, the coalitions in which the Roma political parties participated some of them had specific activities and measures that target the Roma community in Macedonia.

¹⁴ Sumnal. (2016). Analyses of the programs of the political parties and representation of the Roma and their issues. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zk50LV>

Program of the Coalition VMRO DPMNE	Program of the Coalition SDSM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ministry of Transport and Communications plan to allocate 10 million MKD for implementation of projects in the public infrastructure in areas inhabited by Roma. ● The project is "Inclusion of Roma children in pre-school education," this project aims to improve and to support the integration of Roma children by increasing the number Roma children in pre-school one year before they start primary school. ● The project "Legal assistance for the Roma community," the main goal of this project is to provide timely information, legal advice, and legal assistances to the Roma community. ● The government of VMRO DPMNE adopted an Action Plan for Roma in the higher education in order to increase the number of Roma in higher education, to increase the number of Roma students who graduate, to increase the number of Roma students in teacher training colleges and other colleges that produce teaching staff, as well as raising awareness among children and parents about the importance of graduation. ● Building a cultural center in Shuto Orizari. ● Building a swimming pool in Shuto Orizari, ● Building a sports hall in Shuto Orizari, ● Building a kinder garden in Shuto Orizari. ● Building 51 flats, ● Reconstruction and construction of roads, ● Construction of sewage, ● Reconstruction of schools, ● Building a basketball court in Shuto Orizari. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Reducing the rate of poverty in Macedonia by seven percentage points by 2020; ● Raising the minimum wage to 12,000 MKD for all sectors; ● Introducing a welfare pension for each person over 65 years of age for the past 20 years living on the territory of the Republic of Macedonia that does not fulfill the conditions for retirement. Such persons shall have the right to a state pension. The state social pension, initially, will be in the amount of 40% of the average of the older aged pensioners; ● Educational system that will ensure social integration in ethnic, regional, social and cultural terms, and encourages critical thinking and active citizenship; ● Free hospital treatment for all insured (Abolition of participation for hospital care); ● Abolition of the radio diffusion fee; ● Building a kindergarten in Shuto Orizari, ● Construction of sewerage in Shuto Orizari, ● Building a social flats in Shuto Orizari.

It can be concluded that the coalition led by VMRO DPMNE in their program mainly envisaged to continue with the projects that were implemented during their governance and promising to build several new objects in Shuto Orizari, while the coalition led by SDSM in their program have not foreseen specific projects through which will improve the situation except for building three objects in Shuto Orizari. On the one hand, VMRO DPMNE targeted policies and measures specifically for Roma, while on the other hand, SDSM mainstream policies and measures generally which indirectly Roma are the largest population to benefit from them. This situation proves that Roma political parties should develop their own political programs and advocate to be accepted in the coalitions. This will make the Roma political parties more democratic and the voters will have chance to hold the Roma political parties more accountable.

In theory, the ethnic formed parties may have different ideologies. In the interest of preserving the identity, values and tradition the Roma political parties would be classified as right-wing parties, but also, they can be left oriented if their interest is social security, equality and solidarity. Formally, it is difficult to determine the ideology of Roma political parties because their statutes are hardly accessible to the public. This causes a lack of information among the Roma electorate because it remains uncertain whether it supports an ideological option or leader (individual).

In a period of over 26 years, Roma political parties fail to impose as competing political parties in the Macedonian society. This is because these parties are solely concerned about the leaders' interests provided by the dependent members who want to solve their existential problems or needs. Roma political parties often work together with the parties in the government due to the possibility that members can obtain functions or other positions in the public administration. Bargaining with the leaders of Roma political parties have been an easy task for major parties and that can result with one or more than one Members of Parliament, one or no minister position or any deputy minister and several directors of administration offices and heads of departments

Survey on public opinion of Roma for the early parliamentary elections in 2016

Romalitico prior to the parliamentary elections conducted the second online survey on public opinion of Roma for the elections in 2016. This research had questions related to the parliamentary elections and confidence in the Roma political parties for this election cycle. The poll was done through an online survey using the services of SurveyMonkey from 23rd November to 4th December 2016 on a sample of 325 respondents¹⁵.

Romalitico firstly conducted a survey in 2014 to test public opinion of Roma in Macedonia for the Roma political parties and their previous actions. Traditionally, the organization continues with a survey for the elections in 2016, following the trends in the elections including the opinion of Roma political events such as elections. The primary objective of this survey is to see the opinion of the Roma middle class, because this group is driving the changes in society and they are less vulnerable to electoral manipulation. The initial assumption, based on previous studies this population has access to the Internet, the so-called Roma middle class. Romalitico with this research brought a new dimension to the political situation of the Roma electorate which is of common importance to the public and Roma political parties and other stakeholders. Analyzing this research also aimed to create a debate about the results.

Romalitico methodologically predicted a target population of 500 people with age over 18 years (due to the right to vote), users of social network Facebook. In the process of selecting a population, Romalitico chose their Facebook page that had 999 members and a resource of active Roma users who follow their work and the situation of Roma in Macedonia. Based on the population, the goal of Romalitico was to conduct a study on the basis of a random sample of 325 people living in Macedonia that support the work of Romalitico highlighting the gender equality in the sample. From the total of 500 members who speak and live in Macedonia and have the right to vote in the elections, the sample of this survey was 325 respondents. From the sample, 128 respondents answered the survey. The probability of accuracy was 95% and a margin of error of +/- 7%.

¹⁵ Romalitico. (2016). Survey on the public opinion of Roma for the early Parliamentary Elections 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/gF3g0z>

According to this survey most of the respondents were male Roma, but a large percentage of Roma women also participated in the process. The average age of the study was 30 years, indicating the potential associated with the Roma electorate. According to the results, most of the respondents are students or have completed higher education. Also this study shows that those polled were politically active, but they are not satisfied with the level of democracy in the country. Most of them trust the parliament as an institution, and the least trust is given to the judiciary. In addition, respondents demonstrated a low assessment of the Roma political parties regarding the principles of good governance. They were not satisfied with the responsibility and accountability of the parties. In the previous parliamentary elections in 2014, the majority of respondents voted, but a third of them did not vote. Regarding the power of their voice, respondents were undecided. In the same context, most of the respondents believe that their voice can even affect the government when a decision is made for Roma.

According to the results, one third of respondents are part of a political party, while the rest are not members of any of the parties. Another issue that was left uncertain was if Roma parties should participate independently in the elections. According to the responses, the difference in the affirmative and the negative answer was minor, there was also a small portion of respondents that did not know whether Roma parties should or should not participate independently in the elections. Considering the results of evaluation of Roma political parties, this time most of the respondents mostly valued PCER party. This party is part of the opposition bloc, but also it must be noted the small matter of their leadership, because SRM and with less intensity DSR are also highly valued parties. According to the results of the survey it can also be noted that Samka Ibraimoski enjoys the greatest trust of the respondents. After him followed Amdi Bajram from SRM and Kurto Dudus as part of the SDSM in these elections.

Employment is seen as the highest priority area in which Roma political parties need to streamline its operations, immediately followed by legislation and housing. The majority of respondents believe that Roma political parties do not differ from one another and all parties are the same. It was interesting to see a disconnect when it comes to whether the parties are the best way to represent Roma interests. It was also noted that the best way to represent Roma interests are not only the political parties. It was also noted that a growing number of Roma

parties reduces the impact on the government. The majority also disagreed with the statement that political parties have a clear vision and goals for improving the situation of Roma nor with the the statement that Roma political parties fulfilled their promises in terms of past elections. Important to note is that half of the total number of respondents believe that the political program/ plan impacts most on their choices while the manipulations are the biggest reason why Roma are not interested in exercising their right to vote. Lastly, according to the results, most respondents would not vote for any of the Roma parties. But despite this result, the majority said they would vote for SDSM as an option and PCER. The two opposition parties had the biggest popularity among the respondents on the survey. Right after them followed the SRM and DSR as the biggest favorites of the surveyed.

The results of this survey should be noted due to the range of the population, which was a sample of 325 respondents from which 128 responded. This sample reflects the situation in the country for Roma with a margin of error of +/- 7%. Also the comments from most of the respondents indicated that there is a need for such surveys to test public opinion of the Roma community and Roma political parties. In addition there they indicated that these survey should be used for the betterment of the Roma political parties for the interests of the Roma community in Macedonia. During the implementation of the survey the team of Romalítico encountered barriers such as: lack of responses by the respondents and this can be explained by the fact that this is the second time to conduct an online survey, distrust of anonymity for the poll is also a reason for limitation due to lack of data for definition of the general population and draw appropriate sample that would present the general opinion of the Roma middle class; Lastly, in some of the questions respondents suggested for larger extent of options from the listed, and the team immediately reacted to that.

Media

Various media which includes approximately over 130 broadcasters, operate in Macedonia. Media in the country are relatively divided along political and ethnic stands. Significant media reforms were anticipated in the Przino Agreement that would provide equal level playing field. The Electoral Code regulated the coverage of the elections in 2016. All of the media outlets were required to provide balanced coverage during the campaign period. The public broadcaster, Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) was obliged to allow access to free airtime, organize debates and provide parties with suggested shares of news coverage. Amendments in 2015 prohibited government-financed marketing and coverage of state officials favoring political parties during the elections.

The Interim Commission was delegated to control the media for more than three months prior to the elections. Nevertheless, some legal provisions were not fully coherent with other sections of the Electoral Code, which firmly controlled the coverage of the parties only during the official 20-day campaign, creating uncertainty about the mandate. This body had proposed 57 misdemeanor procedures, primarily in connection with unbalanced coverage, hidden campaigning by government officials, and paid political advertising. Before the election day, the court decided on two cases by rejecting them.¹⁶ Though required by law, the AVMS did not administered the election coverage in the electronic media, due to unclear rules. All electoral participants were able to access the media for campaigning, including through free airtime in public broadcast media and paid advertising. Some non-parliamentary parties complained about insufficient opportunities to present their messages in the media, including limitations on advertising in private media. Attempts to organize debates with all key parties were largely unsuccessful due to refusals of candidates to participate.

During the campaign period journalists noted self-censorship and lack of editorial independence of media due to the political or business interests of the owners. There were cases where journalists and news editors were intimidated and threatened by party representatives. OSCE also underlined the use of government-financed media campaigns (on hold during the electoral

¹⁶ OSCE/ODIHR. (2016). Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dKuA4g>

period) as a way to sustain and reward media that are close to the government party. According to the preliminary conclusions by OSCE/ODIHR, VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition and DUI used 20% of coverage each, while the opposition parties were allocated 42%. While non-parliamentary parties 11%. On MRT2, the reporting between governing and opposition parties was correspondingly unbiased, with more time dedicated to the ethnic Albanian parties. However, Sitel, Kanal 5 and Alfa failed to provide unbiased and impartial coverage in their news. Although they distributed equal portions of airtime mainly to the governing and opposition parties, the governing party was very confident while the opposition was often portrayed negative and destructive. All three channels were openly supporting the ruling party and focusing on VMRO-DPMNE campaign topics. Dubious information originating from Internet was occasionally presented as political news on these channels. Other privately owned channels such as Alsat-M, Telma and 24 Vesti, offered a more critical coverage of the main parties and political actors in their news programs, they also provided parties many opportunities to present their coalitions and political programs in debates or interviews. Monitored newspapers overall provided variety of views, while leaning towards ruling parties in the Macedonian and Albanian bloc.

Roma political parties largely depended on the coalition partners. They faced hardships to campaign on mainstream media and they used very little of the Roma media in the country. During the campaigning period, there was an attempt from Telma to organize a debate with Amdi Bajram coalition partner from the governing party and Samka Ibraimoski, a member from PCER which is an opposition party. This attempt failed due to presence of only one of the leaders. Samka Ibraimoski participated on the program, while Amdi Bajram did not participate on the debate, canceling the invitation at the very last moment.¹⁷ Apart from this attempt, there was not any coverage of Roma leaders or parties on the mainstream media. However, a representative from Levica, Mariglen Demiri underlined the needs of Roma in two debates on TV Nova¹⁸ and 24 Vesti.¹⁹ He noted the marginalized position of Roma, Roma asylum returnees,

¹⁷ More information on: Top Tema, How to stop buying the votes Roma? Available at: (<https://youtu.be/W5UB4wlZh18>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

¹⁸ More information on: TV Nova, Macedonia: A Multiethnic society, Unitary state. Available at: (<https://youtu.be/VcFnqjA5p-Y>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

¹⁹ More information on: 24 Vesti, Otvoreno with Vlado Jovanovski, Petar Arsovski, Marin Babic, Mariglen Demiri, and Jasmina Dizdarevic. Available at: (<https://youtu.be/fNyAGRxWXts>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

Roma who were prohibited to leave the country from the Macedonian border and other social aspects related to Roma. In addition, Ljubco Georgievski in a debate²⁰ on the 24 Vesti channel discussed the position of Roma in the society. While deliberating the demographics of the country, he named Roma to be a crucial factor for the upcoming elections and the revision of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Other candidates from all of the parties mentioned Roma only in counting the nationalities living in Macedonia with no special attention towards the needs and interests of Roma in Macedonia.

Election Day analysis

After a series of negotiations including the Przino agreement and the reforms for qualifying conditions to implement the election, December 11th was decided to be the day for the parliamentary elections in 2016. These elections were originally planned for April 24th and later postponed for June 5th the same year²¹. These elections were essential for the country due to the political crisis alarmed by international organizations. According to the report by the European Commission issued for the political crisis on November 9th significantly underlined the misuse of the power, lack of democracy and rule of law in the institutions²². In addition, the European Council also warned about the situation highlighting the lack of freedom of expression, judicial independence and media manipulation²³. Thus, the only solution to avoid this political limbo were elections. When the early parliamentary elections were postponed twice, it was clear that the electoral code, electoral register for voters and a new state electoral commission were just the kickoff in order to establish transparent conditions for fair elections.

On December 11th many CSOs, both international and national, observed the elections for the regularity and transparency. Traditionally, MOST as a watchdog organization in times of elections observed these elections setting around 3.380 people covering all the constituencies in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia. In addition, CIVIL also deployed around 335 people

²⁰ More information on: Top Tema, Federalization of Macedonia - Electoral trick by Zaev or alibi for Gruevski. Available at: (<https://youtu.be/C-ss9TOFfD8o>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

²¹ European Commission. (2015). Statement by Commissioner Hahn and MEPs Vajgl, Howitt and Kukan: Agreement in Skopje to overcome political crisis. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ujynQR>

²² European Commission. (2016). Progress Report for Macedonia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/MbbZzR>

²³ More information on: Balkan Insight, Postponing Elections is Macedonia's Only Hope. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/wxUIE5>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

observing the elections on December 11th²⁴. Further to these organizations, Roma observers were also registered and organized by an initiative from the CSO platform “My vote my responsibility”. This platform engaged around 143 Roma observers covering the whole territory of the country²⁵. Having this said, Roma for the first time initiated an own initiative to observe the elections due to the fact that previous elections Roma were the first victims of voter manipulation, buying votes and other illegal methods for voter maximization for certain political parties.

Election conduct

In general, the election day progressed in an organized manner, without any major incidents. Although there were some procedural irregularities observed, predominantly in the process of vote count. Voters participated in great numbers and voting was mostly evaluated positively by observers. Watchdog organizations and observers highlighted a number of persons who were disallowed to vote after having been deleted from the voting list during the recent review of the voter register²⁶. Transparency of the electoral process benefited from the active presence of numerous citizen and party observers. The legal framework was largely encouraging for the conduct of democratic elections. In a positive note, the electoral legislation was significantly revised in 2015 as part of the Przino Agreement²⁷.

The amendments addressed many previous OSCE/ODIHR and CoE Venice Commission recommendations, particularly those related to the principle of equal suffrage for out-of-country voting, the composition and competences of the SEC, and measures for balanced media coverage during the campaign²⁸. These elections were also focused on the disintegration of the party and the state for financing the campaigns. Furthermore, voters had the opportunity send complaints

²⁴ OSCE/ODIHR. (2016). Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dKuA4g>

²⁵ More information on: Mojot Glas, Working plans. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/0MLJgW>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

²⁶ More information on: Deutsche Welle, Fateful elections in Macedonia. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/wvlRcJ>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

²⁷ European Commission. (2016). Progress Report for Macedonia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/MbbZzR>

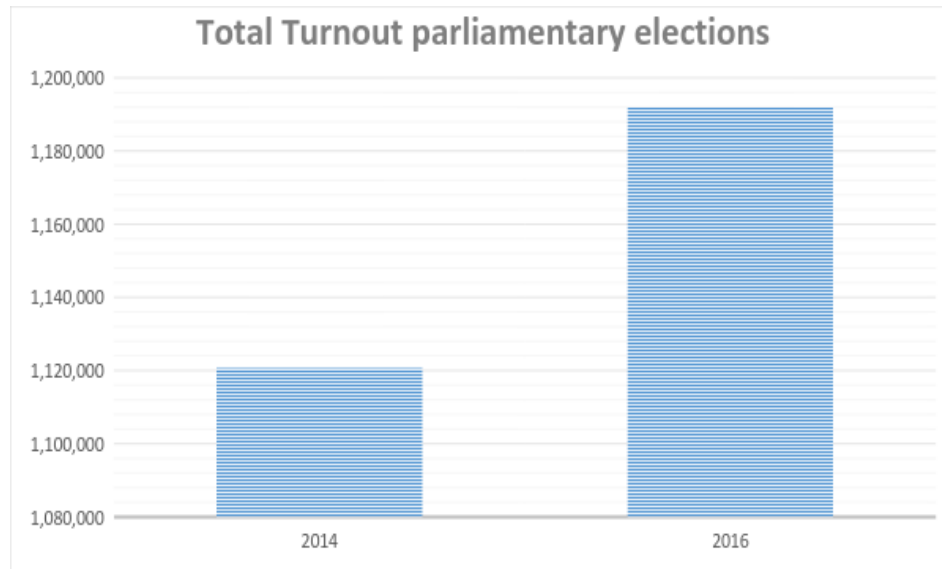
²⁸ OSCE/ODIHR. (2016). Joint Opinion on the Electoral Code as Amended on 9 November 2015. Available at: <https://goo.gl/fnkEa3>

during the electoral process, while the courts had to decide on electoral disputes²⁹.

Turnout

Positively, the SEC published preliminary results by polling station online throughout the night, with preliminary voter turnout at 67%. In comparison with the previous elections in 2014, these elections had a bigger turnout. In 2014 the total number of voters was 1.120.744, while in 2016 there were 1.191.852 total number of voters. The following table presents the total turnout in comparison between parliamentary elections in 2014 and 2016.

Graphic 1. Total turnout in parliamentary elections 2014 and 2016

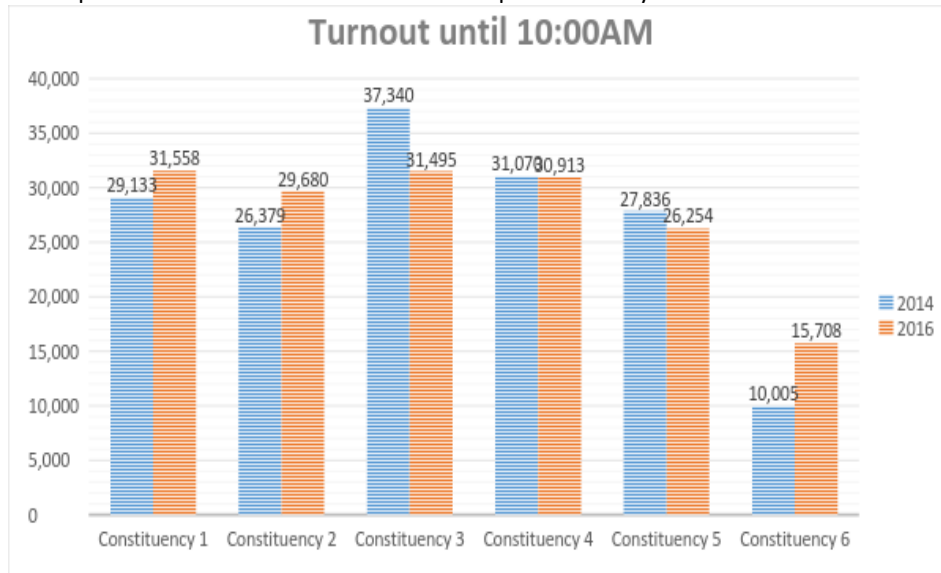


Source: SEC

When these two election cycles are compared in the aspect of turnout to 10:00 in the morning, we also observed that in constituency 1 the turnout was bigger in 2016 than the turnout in 2014 with a small difference, the constituency 2 was the same case where the turnout in 2016 was bigger in 2014. The third constituency was in the contrary bigger with the turnout in 2014 rather than the turnout in 2016. The fourth was nearly equal, while the turnout in the fifth was also bigger in 2014 than the turnout in 2016. Lastly a bigger trend was observed in the constituency 6 with a dramatic increase of around 5.000 voters in 2016 than the turnout in 2014. The following table demonstrates the figures of each constituency.

²⁹ Ibid.

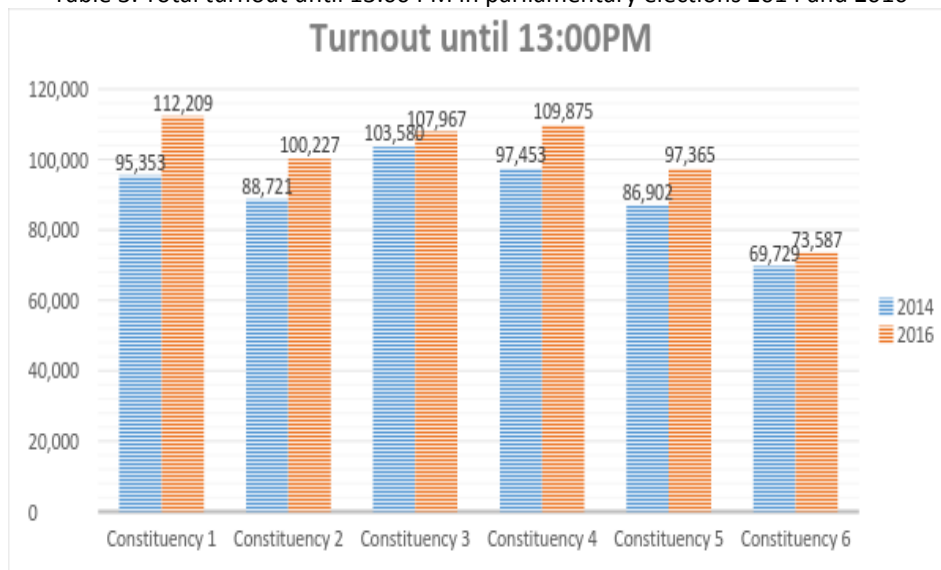
Graphic 2. Total turnout until 10:00 AM in parliamentary elections 2014 and 2016



Source: SEC

In comparison with 2014 and 2016 focused on the turnout until 13:00 PM, we observed a trending number of voters in 2016. In all of the constituencies there was a dramatic increase of voters. The average of the increase was approximately 10,000 voters. The biggest difference was recorded in the first constituency while the least was recorded in constituency 6. The following table shows the figures of each constituency.

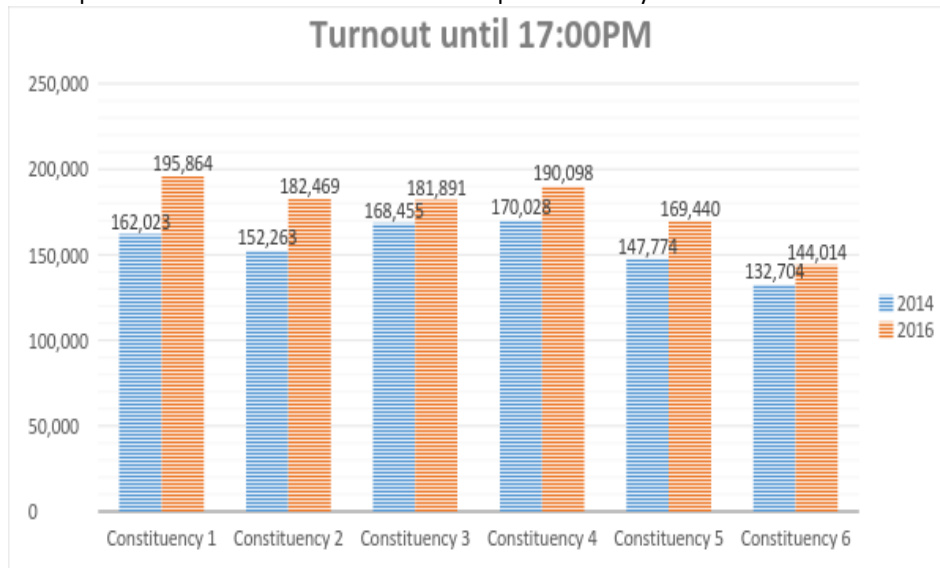
Table 3. Total turnout until 13:00 PM in parliamentary elections 2014 and 2016



Source: SEC

Another official reporting time slot for the turnout was 17:00 PM. When both of the years are compared by 17:00, it was observed another trending number of voters in 2016. In all of the constituencies there was a vivid increase of voters. The average of the increase was approximately 22.000 voters. The biggest difference was observed in constituency 1, while the least was observed in the sixth constituency. The following table shows the figures of each constituency.

Graphic 4. Total turnout until 17:00 PM in parliamentary elections 2014 and 2016



Source: SEC

The end of the election day was recorded accurately starting in 07:00 am to 19:00 pm in all of the electoral districts and posts. According to the figures on the tables, it can be seen that the elections in 2016 were more important for the voters than the elections in 2014. It was also commented by many scholars and organizations that these elections have been the most unexpected elections in terms of turnout and the results of the elections. According to Fakulteti and Romalitico, the youth had a major role in the participation. Fakulteti conducted a survey on youth in general and their participation was recorded with 1530 people. 39.2% of the people in age of 18 to 24 said that they would like to act in resolving the political crisis. While they also concluded that the youth was struck by the economic crisis in the country³⁰. Romalitico with the

³⁰ More information on: Fakulteti, The youth consider this election very important. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/buHBNM>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

political quiz and the public opinion poll for Roma youth confirmed the conclusions that Roma youth fear unemployment and they are eager to participate in the elections. 47% of the participants said that they are interested in politics and 66% of the participants reported that they have voted in the last elections³¹. This shows that the early parliamentary election in 2016 were a hot topic unexpected in terms of results and important for many societal groups especially the youth.

Post Election analysis

Several hours after closing the polling stations, both main political parties SDSM and VMRO DPMNE claimed election victory in Macedonia. VMRO DPMNE claimed a slight lead of 20.000 votes while SDSM claimed that they won two more seats than VMRO DPMNE. The different interpretations of the results caused a battle among both political parties. After the final results announced by the SEC, the results were as the followings: VMRO DPMNE 51 mandates and SDSM and the Coalition 49 mandates, DUI 10 mandates, Movement Besa 5 mandates, Alliance for the Albanians mandates 3 and DPA 2 mandates. In the Albanian bloc, the leader of DUI Ali Ahmeti expressed his disappointment from the results because although they are winners among the Albanian bloc, they lost 9 mandates in comparison with the previous parliamentary elections held in 2014. The leader of DPA, Menduh Thaci took full responsibility and he resigned from his position leader of DPA. The newly established party Besa expressed their satisfaction for the bad results of DUI. The Alliance for the Albanians also expressed their satisfaction for the bad results of DPA and blamed DUI for the loss of Albanian MPs. The other smaller parties who run for the elections in general expressed satisfaction for the high percentage of voting turnout and that majority of the citizens voted for change.

As a response to the results SDSM and Besa filed 14 complaints in front of SEC for violations of the voting procedure and for the procedure of summarizing and determining the results³². Besa filed 8 complaints and SDSM and the coalition 6 complaints. Although, SEC was bound by Law to

³¹ Romalitico. (2016). Survey on the public opinion of Roma for the early Parliamentary Elections 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/gF3g0z>

³² SEC. (2016). Decision on objections to early elections for members in Parliament. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Aoa9LT>

decide within 48 hours for the submitted complaints, they held sessions for three days. While the SEC was deciding upon the complaints thousands of supporters of the main ruling party VMRO DPMNE were protesting in front of the SEC. After reviewing the complaints, the SEC decided positively only for one complaint submitted by Besa and rejected all the others submitted by SDSM and the coalition. SDSM and the coalition were not satisfied with this decision and they decided to submit a complaint in front of the Administrative Court in Skopje, which has a mandate to decide upon such cases. VMRO DPMNE was not either satisfied with the decision of the SEC for sustaining the complaint submitted by Besa, they decided to submit a complaint in front of the Administrative Court. The Administrative Court sustained the complaint filed by VMRO DPMNE and also sustained one complaint filed by SDSM and the coalition. As a result, the SEC decided to repeat the elections in EC 6 – Tearce.³³

Before the repetition the results were as the following: VMRO DPMNE 91 votes and SDSM and the coalition 87 votes. After the revote the results were as the following: SDSM and the coalition 245 votes and VMRO DPMNE 149 votes. However, these results did not contribute to any change in terms of the distribution of mandates.

The OSCE/ODIHR mission in their preliminary report for the election day concluded that the elections were performed peacefully without any major problems. However, on the elections day they also registered small incidents which were related to counting of votes. Additionally, they also noted that on the election day large number of people were removed from the voter's list therefore they could not exercise their right to vote. Group voting, intimidations and interfering were also registered on election day.³⁴

In relation to the work conducted by the SEC, there were critics for their work. Specifically, there were remarks on the level of transparency in terms of the announcement of decisions and biased actions of SEC members along party lines and interests when deciding upon the complaints submitted by the political parties. Another critiques to the work conducted by SEC was the

³³ SEC. (2016) Decision for repeating the voting at the polling station number 2011 – Tearce. Available at: <https://goo.gl/7c3JKi>

³⁴ Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Institute for Democracy - Societas Civilis. (2016). The Republic of Macedonia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections Handbook. Available at: <https://goo.gl/68ml8n>

determining the order of candidate lists. Explicitly, while determining the first position on the ballot, they assigned the four major political parties via random selections to draw lots. This type of action and procedure considered as discriminatory towards the other smaller parties who run for the elections.

After announcing the final results by the SEC the President of the Republic of Macedonia is obliged within 20 days to handle the mandate to the party who won majority mandates. The President Ivanov on January 9 gave the mandate to the leader of VMRO DPMNE Nikola Gruevski to form a government. Gruevski had 20 days to secure a majority in parliament if not he is obliged to return the mandate. However, in order VMRO-DPMNE to secure 61 mandates he needed 20 mandates or support from more than one Albanian political parties.

In the meantime, Albanian parties from Macedonian held a joint meeting in Tirana to discuss a common platform that will serve for their future participation in the new government. Specifically, they set seven conditions in the platform that they put to the main Macedonian parties as a condition for joining a new coalition government. One of the conditions is defining the Macedonian and Albanian languages as official languages in the country.

Albanian Platform³⁵
The constitution of Macedonia should define the Macedonian language and the Albanian language as official languages throughout the Republic of Macedonia,
Adoption of a resolution in parliament that condemns the genocide against Albanians in Macedonia during the 1912 – 1956 period
Economic and social development parity through the equal progress of all of Macedonia's regions
Creation of a new ministry that will supervise "respect for the rights of communities and economic and social equality in regions that have not been favored [previously]
Investigative commissions and independent international bodies involved in important court cases in which ethnic Albanians are involved.

³⁵ More information on: Balkan Insight, Albanian parties set terms for Macedonia's next Government. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/9DR2CW>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

A solution to the vexed issue of Macedonia's state name, involvement of Albanians in a working group between Macedonia and Bulgaria, as a means of improving Macedonia's relationships with its neighbors

Speeding up the processes for EU and NATO membership

The position of Roma political parties

All of the Roma political parties in coalition with VMRO DPMNE stated openly that they are against the Albanian platform and their demands. The Roma leader of the political party for Integration of Roma, Berat Bajram criticized the Albanian platform stating that it is actually blackmailing the majority population in the country that without them cannot be assembled a government. He also stated that as Roma and as a political party are against bilingualism in the country which will lead to binational state. If the country becomes binational state then smaller communities including the Roma will lose their rights guaranteed under the Constitution.³⁶ In addition, DSR leader, Shaban Saliu also openly dismissed the relevance of the platform and their demands with an additional request demanding official usage of Romanes as official language in the territory of the Republic of Macedonia³⁷. Party officials from SRM and ROM parties also stated that they are against the Albanian platform and their demands³⁸. This made almost all of the parties openly declaring against the Albanian platform and parties.

The leader of the Democratic Party of Serbs, Ivan Stoilkovikj, is also against the Albanian platform, stating that the platform is discriminatory towards the other groups who live in Macedonia. He also stated that in Macedonia all other constituent people have the right to decide on questions that are important for the country.³⁹

³⁶ More information on: Republika, Berat: The Platform of the Albanian parties is blackmailing the majority population in Macedonia. Available at: (<http://republika.mk/715802>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

³⁷ More information on: Faktor, Roma in Macedonia have asked their language to become official. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/a07pAO>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

³⁸ More information on: Sitel, Its not only the Serbs but also the Roma, Turks and Bosniaks are against SDSM. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/4sMCJ3>) Last accessed on: 01.03.2017

³⁹ More information on: MKD, By accepting the platform of Albanians, Macedonia will become a binational state. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/W4Pvy4>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

VMRO DPMNE unsuccessful attempt to form a government

The former Prime Minister and VMRO DPMNE party leader missed the deadline to form a new government. He failed to secure support from his former coalitional partner DUI. The Albanian party DUI after few days of intense discussions in the party could not reach a decision on any of the five options which they were considering. The five options discussed in DUI were: joining a VMRO DPMNE coalition government, joining SDSM, staying in the opposition, forming a wide-ranging government alliance and new parliamentary elections. The decision to not enter into a coalition with VMRO DPMNE was announced few hours before the deadline expired. Immediately the next day on a press conference the leader of VMRO DPMNE announced that fresh elections were the best option to end the political crisis.

In a debate broadcasted on TV21, Talat Xhaferi, one of the members of DUI, stated that coalition failed because VMRO DPMNE was not ready to extend the mandate of the Special Prosecution Office. Furthermore, he stated that all other key issues from the Albanian platform were accepted by VMRO DPMNE.⁴⁰ The leader of VMRO DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski rejected the statement given by Talat Xhaferi, and stated that the information spread in the public was not true. He stated that the only reason for why the coalition failed was the rejection of the introduction of bilingualism thought Macedonia.⁴¹

During the talks with DUI, VMRO-DPMNE have stated that they were against the introduction of bilingualism on the entire territory and have shown interest to discuss some ideas for promotion of the Law on use of languages in those municipalities where at least 20 percent of ethnic communities other than Macedonian live, an issue that showed many differences. It is obvious that without the votes of VMRO DPMNE they will be not able to change any laws including the Constitution of Macedonia. According to VMRO DPMNE, the Albanian platform attempted to introduce negotiations of a new Framework Agreement, and such a process can take the country in the wrong direction.

⁴⁰ More information on: MKD, Talat Xhaferi at Click Plus: Because of SPO we did not enter into a coalition with VMRO-DPMNE. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/jHnkcR>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁴¹ More information on: Independent, VMRO-DPMNE: We failed to Agree on Government with DUI due to Bilingualism Demand. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/mmEpp>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

President Ivanov invited political leaders for discussions

After the failure of VMRO DPMNE to form a government, President Ivanov invited the leaders of all political parties to inform them that the mandate for forming a new government will be entrusted to a party or coalition that will present a proof for enjoying a majority mandates in parliament. This requirement was heavily criticized by the political parties and experts on constitutional law stating that he imposes double standards and discrimination against the opposition. Experts also stated that “this is a political scandal that has thrown the country straight into the depths of the crisis”.⁴²

In his speech Ivanov did not set a deadline for party leaders, but said that if none of the political parties presents a proof for majority in parliament, the parliament would have to open the way for yet another early elections.

Interpretations of the constitution

After the decision of President Ivanov not to handle the mandate to the second party that won majority votes, there were different interpretations of the Constitutions. One group of experts are claiming that there is no provision in the Constitution where it is stated that the mandate shall be returned back to the President if the party fails to form a cabinet. They claim that the mandate is irreversible and whoever wins must form the government. Another part of experts say that these types of dilemmas would not have occurred if VMRO DPMNE before getting the mandate demonstrated that they have 61 mandates. In their opinion which is based on Article 90 of the Constitution claim that the right to form a government has the party who makes sure that it has 61 mandates and not the party who has the largest number of MPs.⁴³

Article 90 of the Constitution stipulates that: "The President of the Republic of Macedonia shall grant mandate within 20 days of the forming of the Parliament to a candidate of the party i.e. parties that have gained majority in the Parliament. The mandator shall present a program to the Parliament and propose a government form within 20 days as of the day the mandate was

⁴² More information on: Balkan Insight, Macedonia President Sets Terms for Giving PM's Mandate. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/KsQwqf>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁴³ More information on: Nova Makedonija, The Constitution does not stipulate returning of the mandate. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/8keRFS>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

granted to him/her".⁴⁴

Similar situation the country experienced in 1992 when President Kiro Gligorov granted the mandate initially to Petar Gosev, and then to Branko Crvenkovski although Ljubco Georgievski and VMRO DPMNE won the 1990 elections.⁴⁵

President Ivanov in his statement⁴⁶ said that he has heard various interpretations of the Constitution. He stated that The Constitution cannot be interpreted according to one's party wishes. The Article 90 of the Constitution is precise and not accidentally have the constitution maker foresaw an article in the Constitution, which means that the president has the freedom in action and estimates who to hand over the mandate to constitute the government and accordingly would abide by the oath, ie the maximum respect for the constitutional principles.⁴⁷ He claimed that by giving the mandate to Nikola Gruevski he has respected the Constitution and because Nikola Gruevski failed to form a cabinet now he will handle the mandate to the party coalition that will secure a majority in parliament, but this time he wants a proof of majority and then he will handle over the mandate.

Negotiations between SDSM and DUI

On February 8 DUI and SDSM officially started the consultations for a new parliamentary majority in parliament. The members of the presidency of both parties who started the negotiations did not reveal much details from the consultations. Both party said that final decision would be made at a leaders' level. Few days later the leader of DUI Ali Ahmeti said that he was expecting written offer from SDSM he stated *"We want materials on paper. Without that, there will be no signatures from DUI. First, we need to see what will be written on that sheet of paper, and then the organs of the party will reach a decision"*.⁴⁸ The next day SDSM announced that their political party will

⁴⁴ Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazzete of the Republic in Macedonia, nr.52/1991, Article 90.

⁴⁵ More information on: Independent, Different Interpretations of Constitution: Gjorge Ivanov to Decide on New Mandator. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/EK5Fjg>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁴⁶ More information on: Balkan Open Report. (2017). Macedonian President: Mandate to be Handed to Coalition that Would Secure Majority in Parliament. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/2FIVq6>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ More information on: Independent, Ahmeti Spoke: We Expect Written Offer from SDSM – then We Shall Decide. Accessible at: (<https://goo.gl/kniiZw>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

send written offer to DUI for starting the negotiations to form a cabinet.

After few days of intensive discussions, DUI decided to give the signatures to SDSM for getting the mandate to form a government. The two other Albanian political parties Besa and the Alliance for the Albanians gave their signatures to SDSM. With the support of the three Albanian political parties, SDSM fulfilled the condition for getting the mandate. The Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia requires majority of MPs for getting a mandate to form a government. DUI spokesman Bujar Osmani announced that SDSM accepted all requirements stipulated in the Albanian platform. Moreover, he also stated that the denar banknotes will be in Albanian language as well. In his statement he also said that Zaev accepted heavy fines unless the use of the Albanian language is respected, both for natural and legal entities. This information provoked the supporters of VMRO but also the smaller ethnic communities. In the meantime, the coalition agreement triggered street protests in several cities in which citizens marched and waved Macedonian flag.

The Romani leader of the Party for Integration of Roma accused the other ethnic communities in Macedonia for forcible assimilation of the Roma population in the country. He stated that any form of binational state and bilingualism for the Roma is unacceptable. Furthermore, he also claimed that this situation would put the Roma in unequal position especially the Romani children who will be required to learn three languages while the other children would have to learn two languages. He said that so far none of the Macedonian governments made some efforts to provide the Romani children to attend classes in their mother tongue as it is the case with the other ethnic minorities in Macedonia.⁴⁹

The Romani leader of the DSR, Shaban Saliu, demanded the Romani language to be declared as an official language in the Republic of Macedonia. He stated that if the Albanian language can be declared as official language, then the same should happen with the Romani language because the Roma people are the second largest minority in the country after the Albanians. Moreover, he said that the Roma community is surprised by the international community and from some embassies for supporting one ethnic group over another. According to him, Macedonia is a

⁴⁹ More information on: Sitel, Bajram Berat guest in the studio. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/5UpToC>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

country of Macedonians, Albanians, Roma and all ethnic minorities, and the unitary character should be respected in order to have justice.⁵⁰

On March 1, Macedonia's President has refused to give Social Democrat leader Zoran Zaev a mandate to form a government, despite his majority in parliament, claiming he had the potential to "destroy the country" by accepting the demands of the country's ethnic Albanian parties. He argued that wider official use of the Albanian language amounts to foreign interference in Macedonia's affairs. The constitution is not clear on what happens if the president refuses to give mandate to a party, nor does it give deadline for forming the government. With this decision Macedonia entered into a new political crises and into a possible inter-ethnic conflict.

Day after the decision of the Macedonian President Ivanov, the EU's foreign policy chief, Federica Mogherini, visited Macedonia and asked president, who is close to the VMRO DPMNE, to reverse his decision and urged political leaders to step back from a dispute that risked sparking conflict. Furthermore, the European Parliament announced that if the country does not get a government until 13 March 2017, they will postpone the plenary vote over the Macedonian resolution. On 28 February, 2017 AFET adopted a draft-resolution on the Commission Report on Macedonia with 54 votes 'for' and 8 'against'. The resolution reconfirms the eighth consecutive European Commission recommendation over the start of Macedonia's EU accession talks, conditional to the meeting of the Przino Agreement and the Urgent Reform Priorities.⁵¹

Conclusion

It can be concluded that the early parliamentary elections in Macedonia were held in a peaceful atmosphere without any major incidents. Since 2006 these elections were characterized with high percentage of voting turnout. However, during the political campaigns nationalistic rhetoric were used by both Macedonian and Albanian political parties. In these elections, again there were cases of voter fraud, intimidating, buying votes. especially in the communities populated by Roma. Furthermore, in this elections Transparency international noted that political parties

⁵⁰ More information on: Faktor, Roma in Macedonia have asked their language to become official. Available at: (<https://goo.gl/a07pAO>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

⁵¹ More information on: Independent, EP to Postpone Macedonia Resolution Vote if Government Not Elected Next Week Available at: (<https://goo.gl/yorVAG>) last accessed on 01.03.2017

made more expenditures than incomes. In this parliamentary election, only two Roma succeeded to win mandates in parliament. Both were elected in the second constituency, one is elected from the SRM party that is in coalition with VMRO-DPMNE and the other elected MP is from SDSM.

Regarding the media coverage, the available reports noted unbalanced media coverage. Some media provided unbalanced media coverage in favor of the ruling party VMRO DPMNE with a negative rhetoric for the opposition SDSM. As a response, the Agency for audio and audiovisual media services initiated infringement procedures against the broadcasters who provided unbalanced media coverage. The Roma political parties had limited access to media during the political campaigns.

Regarding the discussion of changing the electoral model it can be concluded that such change can only happen if there is enough political maturity and understanding of the democratic values among all parties who represent the citizens of Macedonia. The debate on changing the electoral system is necessary to continue, regardless of the outcome of the Agreement of Przino. It is time for the smaller parties, citizens, the media, and civil society organizations to put strong pressure on the dominant political parties to change the electoral system. Changing the electoral system would lead to greater democracy and more exceptional quality of the candidates who will represent the interests of the people. With the electoral model proposed in this report, Roma can be proportionally represented in Parliament.

Unfortunately, three months after the elections were held the country still does not have a government, the political crisis is even deeper than before the elections. There is a risk that the local elections will not be held on time because of this crisis. The Roma community as always is not being involved in international and domestic efforts for finding a way out of the political crises.

Recommendations

- Immense electoral observation with mobile and static teams of Roma organizations. This enables CSOs and activists to take part in a transparent and fair conduct of the elections.
- Voting register should be strictly verified every mandate of presidential, parliamentary and local elections in order to tackle manipulations in the vote count.
- Media should enable equitable space for all of the parties with a focus on the minorities and their campaigns.
- Media bias should be regulated.
- SEC should remain depolarized and depoliticized body for a fair and transparent conduct of the elections.
- All of the parties should transparently show the revenue and expenditure costs prior and during the campaigning period.
- More severe legal measures for voter manipulation, vote buying, mobbing, forcing people for voting preferences and other illegal acts.
- Respecting power separation, disintegration of the party and the state.
- Cautious analysis on the complaints reported by citizens and parties.
- Roma parties should prepare and present their own programs apart from the mainstream coalition programs.
- Roma parties should assess the possibilities for post-electoral coalitions
- Roma parties should coordinate with each other for the Romani common interests despite their coalitions.
- Roma parties should entertain the motion for coalitions with Albanian parties in strategic constituencies.
- Roma CSOs should be vigilant in the processes in order to ensure a free, fair and transparent elections.

Bibliography:

- 24 Vakti. (2016). Possibility for “phantoms” to return to the Voters List. Available at: <https://goo.gl/VkaQsH>
- 24 Vest. (2016). 145 reports to the Ombudsman for early parliamentary elections. Available at: <https://goo.gl/LtIzAN>
- 24 Vesti. (2017). Otvoreno with Vlado Jovanovski, Petar Arsovski, Marin Babic, Mariglen Demiri, and Jasmina Dizdarevic. Available at: <https://youtu.be/fNyAGRxWXts>
- A1 On. (2016). Bags of money came in Bitola, 200 euros per vote. Available at: <https://goo.gl/1Eupto>
- A1 On. (2016). Interior: One arrested for handing out money and agitation of citizens. Available at: <https://goo.gl/iofVkN>
- A1 On. (2016). MOST: Agitation, unauthorized identification of voters photographing ballots. Available at: <https://goo.gl/S6811F>
- Albert Memeti & Nadire Redjepi. (2014). The discrepancy between the exercises of the political and financial power: Roma political parties in Macedonia. Romalitico. Available at: <https://goo.gl/G6XL3j>
- Balkan Insight. (2015). Postponing Elections is Macedonia’s Only Hope. Available at: <https://goo.gl/wxUIE5>
- Balkan Insight. (2017). Albanian parties set terms for Macedonia’s next Government. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9DR2CW>
- Balkan Insight. (2017). Macedonia President Sets Terms for Giving PM’s Mandate. Available at: <https://goo.gl/KsQwqf>
- Balkan Open Report. (2017). Macedonian President: Mandate to be Handed to Coalition that Would Secure Majority in Parliament. Available at: <https://goo.gl/2FIVq6>
- Civil. (2016). Amdi Bajram caught in the act?. Available at: <https://goo.gl/spZuAp>
- Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia, Official Gazzete of the Republic in Macedonia, nr.52/1991, Article 90.
- Deutsche Welle. (2016). Fateful elections in Macedonia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/wvlRcJ>
- European Commission. (2015). Statement by Commissioner Hahn and MEPs Vajgl, Howitt and Kukan: Agreement in Skopje to overcome political crisis. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ujynQR>
- European Commission. (2016). Progress Report for Macedonia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/MbbZzR>
- European Commission. (2016). Progress Report for Macedonia. Available at: <https://goo.gl/MbbZzR>
- European Union. (2015). Agreement between the four political parties 20 July 2016 Available at: <https://goo.gl/dGQBEH>

European Union. (2015). Statement by Commissioner Hahn and MEPs Vajgl, Howitt and Kukan: Agreement in Skopje to overcome political crisis. Available at: <https://goo.gl/yI3FRZ>

Faktor. (2017). Roma in Macedonia have asked their language to become official. Available at: <https://goo.gl/a07pAO>

Fakuleti. (2016). The youth consider this election very important and they will vote. Available at: <https://goo.gl/buHBNM>

Fokus. (2016). Black campaign in Madzari, chaos in the electoral commission in Kicevo. Available at: <https://goo.gl/GhY4Pt>

Fokus. (2016). Five people caught with a copy of the voters list and notebook identification numbers. Available at: <https://goo.gl/IX2iCp>

Fokus. (2016). In Tearce was given up to 100 euros per vote. Available at: <https://goo.gl/JKixES>

Fokus. (2016). Verified bribery of voters in Demir Hisar: Executives offered 1,000 MKD for vote. Available at: <https://goo.gl/hYwmH5>

Independent. (2016). Macedonia: With Revote at Polling Station on Sunday, Distribution of Mandates Depends on Vote Count. Available at: <https://goo.gl/qqV33J>

Independent. (2017). Ahmeti Spoke: We Expect Written Offer from SDSM – then We Shall Decide. Accessible at: <https://goo.gl/kniiZw>

Independent. (2017). Different Interpretations of Constitution: Gjorge Ivanov to Decide on New Mandator. Available at: <https://goo.gl/EK5Fjg>

Independent. (2017). EP to Postpone Macedonia Resolution Vote if Government Not Elected Next Week Available at: <https://goo.gl/yorVAG>

Independent. (2017). VMRO-DPMNE: We failed to Agree on Government with DUI due to Bilingualism Demand. Available at: <https://goo.gl/mmEpp>

Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, Institute for Democracy - Societas Civilis. (2016). The Republic of Macedonia's 2016 Parliamentary Elections Handbook. Available at: <https://goo.gl/68ml8n>

Law on Amending the Electoral Code. (2016). Official Gazette of the Republic Macedonia, no. 142 of August 1. Available at: <https://goo.gl/IHnXjX>

MKD. (2017). By accepting the platform of Albanians, Macedonia will become a binational state. Available at: <https://goo.gl/W4Pvy4>

MKD. (2017). Talat Xhaferi at Click Plus: Because of SPO we did not enter into a coalition with VMRO-DPMNE. Available at: <https://goo.gl/jHnkcR>

Mojot Glas. (2016). Working plans. Available at: <https://goo.gl/0MLJgW>

Nova Makedonija. (2017). The Constitution does not stipulate returning of the mandate. Available at: <https://goo.gl/8keRFS>

OSCE/ODIHR. (2016). Joint Opinion on the Electoral Code as Amended on 9 November 2015. Available at:

<https://goo.gl/fnkEa3>

OSCE/ODIHR. (2016). Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions. Available at: <https://goo.gl/dKuA4g>

Radof MOF. (2015). State institutions have racist attitudes towards Roma. Available at: <https://goo.gl/jqydOw>

Republika. (2017). Berat: The Platform of the Albanian parties is blackmailing the majority population in Macedonia. Available at: <http://republika.mk/715802>

Romalitico. (2016). Survey on the public opinion of Roma for the early Parliamentary Elections 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/gF3g0z>

Romalitico. (2016). Survey on the public opinion of Roma for the early Parliamentary Elections 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/gF3g0z>

SEC. (2016) Decision for repeating the voting at the polling station number 2011 – Tearce. Available at: <https://goo.gl/7c3JKi>

SEC. (2016). Code for Fair and Democratic Elections. Available at: <https://goo.gl/9FQm9G>

SEC. (2016). Conclusion of confirmed lists of candidates to participate in the snap elections of Members of Parliament. Available at: <https://goo.gl/ao2BDX>

SEC. (2016). Decision on objections to early elections for members in Parliament. Available at: <https://goo.gl/Aoa9LT>

SEC. (2016). Report on the executed early parliamentary elections held on 12.11.2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/NNnRxi>

SEC. (2016). Timetable. Available at: <https://goo.gl/W86rQv>

SEC. Results of the early Parliamentary Elections 2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/X3Xkbe>

Sitel. (2017). Bajram Berat guest in the studio. Available at: <https://goo.gl/5UpToC>

Sumnal. (2016). Analyses of the programs of the political parties and representation of the Roma and their issues. Available at: <https://goo.gl/zk50LV>

Top Tema. (2016). How to stop buying the votes Roma?. Available at: <https://youtu.be/W5UB4wlZh18>

Transparency International – Macedonia, Center for Economic Analyses. (2016). Monitoring of the spending from budgets and political parties in the campaign and electoral process 21.11 – 30.11.2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/PP6pky>

Transparency International – Macedonia, Center for Economic Analyses. (2016). Monitoring of the spending from budgets and political parties in the campaign and electoral process 01.12 – 09.12.2016. Available at: <https://goo.gl/cCucYf>

TV 21. (2016). Citizens in Shuto Orizari cannot find themselves on the voting lists. Available at: <https://goo.gl/rifr62>

TV Nova. (2016). Macedonia: A Multiethnic society, Unitary state. Available at: <https://youtu.be/VcFnqjA5p-Y>

Vest. (2015). Trajanov proposes amendments to the electoral code and single constituency. Available at: <https://goo.gl/OpWmhy>

Annexes:

Infographic - Results of the early parliamentary elections in 2016

