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FREE ELECTIONS: Lessons Learned

Reports, opinion, analysis and recommendations deriving from unique and wide-ranging methodologies of observation of human rights, political and elections processes in the Republic of Macedonia, and based on long-term monitoring of Local Elections in 2017.



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Publisher and Editor: Xhabir M. Deralla

Authors and Project Team: Heather Roberson, Biljana Jordanovska, Maja Ivanovska, Diana Tahiri, Emilija Baltovska, Monika Taleska, Sonja Eftovska, Saso Ordanoski, Goran Naumovski, Dehnan Muratov, Ermin Klimenta

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Contacts:

CIVIL, Maksim Gorky 31/1, 1000 Skopje, Republic of Macedonia

+389 2 520 91 76 | civil@civil.org.mk

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WELCOME NOTE

Dear Reader,

This publication brings reports, opinion, analysis and recommendations deriving from unique and wide-ranging methodologies of observation of human rights, political and elections processes in the Republic of Macedonia, and based on long-term monitoring of Local Elections in 2017.

We, at CIVIL, claim that this is one more must-read publication of CIVIL. This is a guideline to understanding of elections processes in the country, an overview of events that brought changes, not so positive, inspite of hopes, deep and comprehensive insights and analysis, and a valuable presentation of concrete steps that have to be taken.

However, the organizations media platform is even richer with data and up-to-date materials in video, photographic and textual formats, related to the elections processes and reforms of the electoral system in the country. We cordially invite the general audience and professionals interested in elections to regularly visit our well-developed media outlets in Macedonian, Albanian and English language. As for the authors in this publication. Although the articles in this publication are signed, most of the material here is a joint effort of the entire project team, all observers, and many citizens who contributed in various ways to our work.

We are available to provide more information and briefings on this topic. Please, feel free to use the fact that we are always open, easy to reach. We wish you a pleasant reading.

Sincerely yours,

The CIVILians



October 16, 2017, CIVIL Press Center

FOREWORD

When lessons are not learned

Xhabir DERALLA

Many expected that local elections in Macedonia (October, 2017) will mark an introduction to a different kind of processes, where voters will finally take their deserved place – to vote free of intimidation, free from the corruptive conduct of power centers, respected as individuals with free will... Many had high hopes that institutions would finally start doing their job, and leave abuse of public resources behind.

But, these hopes were vain. The latest elections processes, after the reforms from which many expected much more – there were new and ugly surprises.

True, some steps have been taken, some goals have been achieved, and some new practices have been noted, but still very far from enough for one to declare that serious changes have been made.

Local elections 2017 were extremely important to all political parties from both Macedonian and Albanian ethnic communities. The upcoming local elections were about to bring (and they did!) numerous challenges to the society and political processes in the country, which are fragile and uncertain.

All political parties have had a huge interest in gaining power at local level. Having domination at local level, has strengthened or alleviated political aspirations at national level, including demands for another early parliamentary elections. The local elections have strengthened or diminished leaderships of political parties, depending on the electoral success. SDSM has gained an enormous portion of power, yet far from the proportions of power VMRO-DPMNE led coalition held for 11 years. However, circumstances have changed and the power of the new reformist government of Zoran Zaev faces daily challenges.

Again, one of the main challenges to the local elections were inter-ethnic and inter-religious issues. The issue of refugees has an internal political dimension that is closely related to interethnic and interreligious relations in the country. VMRO-DPMNE has used the potential of the refugees issue for disruption, and has used it extensively. Nationalism, xenophobia and hate along religious and ethnic lines were used as a fierce and dirty campaigning tool. Fourteen local anti-refugees referendums were called in times when only thir-teen refugees were registered in the country. Despite that, SDSM has had tremendous election success, in the same proportions as the one of the local elections in 2013, when VMRO-DPMNE has gained an over-whelming portion of municipalities; elections that are disputed due to the massive abuse of power, structural violence and electoral fraud.

This all was accompanied with the aftermaths of the unparalleled violent event on April 27, when the op-position VMRO-DPMNE conducted an attack on the Parliament, when attackers made an attempt against the lives of several MPs and political leaders.

This is a time when nationalism is on the rise, following the questions related to the political demands of the Albanians for further improvements of the official use of their language.

Voters Register was not successfully revised, though slightly improved. Abuse of public administration and resources has been reduced, but not sufficiently. Civic spaces continued to shrink, which limits possibilities for citizen participation and civic engagement.

Those were the circumstances that followed the country in its quest for democracy, accompanying the preparations for local elections to be held in October, 2017.

The gap between what would be required to create a fair and inclusive process, and what has been actually given and achieved, is deep and wide. For such a process to take root requires proper use of investments of human and financial resources, of time, and a level of political and social engagement that have been provided to the institutions relevant to the elections process, but we have not yet seen such conduct.

It requires institutions making real achievements, to go beyond publicly declared commitments. We need to see institutions and leaders that use the legislation as passage towards excellence, and not as an excuse for inactivity and partial implementation of reforms.

The reforms process of the State Elections Commission (SEC) has succeeded in raising hopes of the citizens and of civil society organizations that work in the area of elections and voting rights. However, in reality, the electoral administration, headed by the SEC, was during this election often just one more institution that was both the cause and perpetrator of irregularities.

Despite the reforms that were part of the Agreement for overcoming the political crisis, concluded in 2015, the SEC did not manage to rise above the daily political needs of

the parties, whose loyal representatives are, actually, at the core of this institution. The international and domestic support of the reforms of SEC were enormous in terms of money, time and expertise.

Yet, instead of an institution that maximally secures the right to vote, the SEC became a generator of the violation of the right to vote. Even more, during the appeals procedures by individuals and political parties, in which institutions, starting with SEC, ending with the Administrative Court, altogether have played their infamous role in elections processes in 2016 and 2017, and failed to perform as “reformed” institutions.

Recently, due to the investigative activities of CIVIL and of others, including the US Ambassador, the public has learned about the corruptive practices and abuses within this institution, after which the members of the SEC resigned, leaving the institution headless and ostracized.

To put it simple and short, this institution (SEC), indeed, was probably the deepest disappointment for all, including whistleblowers who came from within the institution. CIVIL’s reports and analysis will show an unacceptably high number of irregularities caused or allowed, even facilitated, by the electoral administration: low level of training and knowledge, and a very problematic level of professional attitudes and commitment. SEC has shown that it is not immune to harsh political contamination and utter arrogance, as well as scandalous abuse of public funds on top.

Everything that could go wrong with the electoral administration, simply happened.

Some other habits are really hard to root out. Political parties just went on with their abusive practices in the field. Political corruption by political parties was evident on all sides of the po-litical landscape, including the new ruling coalition between SDSM and DUI.

VMRO-DPMNE (previously ruling party) has made numerous attempts to abuse its

power at local level, and has played the nationalism and xenophobia cards. Those attempts, regardless of how hard they were trying, were quite damaging, although unsuccessful in the end.

The general conclusion from the elections observation of the local elections in 2017, as it was already reported immediately after the process was concluded, is that they were free. The country has had free elections, for the first time in a very long period. But, it was a process that has been very, very far from perfect. To the contrary.

The observation has noted cases of violence, hate speech, political pressure and intimidation, though at a lesser extent in comparison to the recent elections.

Incidence of vote buying dropped, but was still there. Observers recorded a growing number of family and proxy voting cases.

Improvements, there were quite a few of them. Abuse of institutions was reduced, according to the field reports of CIVIL's observers, although lots of improvements are still needed.

The conduct of the police, which was a special focus of CIVIL's observation, has greatly improved already since the early parliamentary elections in 2016; there is a lot of room for improvements also there.

Abuse of social welfare institutions is practically gone. Employment agency and social welfare centers were not used as tools for political pressure and corruption during the local elections process in 2017, as it has been the case in the past.

Even though at this moment it seems as a distant and unachievable vision, we have to insist that the right to vote is at the basis of the election processes around the world and in our country.

The right to vote is a fundamental human right. The Universal Declaration of Human

Rights (1948) and the contemporary international legislation regulate this right as a fundamental right of every person on this planet. Every democratic country in the world has an obligation to establish a general and equal right to vote for all of its citizens.

We need to insist that elections are the main pillar and the highest values of democracy, whereas the state and the institutions in each country have an ultimate obligation to provide the right to vote to every citizen. The elected representatives in the parliament, appointees in the institutions and politicians in general are all obliged to serve the interests of the communities and individuals in the country. After all, that is also the main goal of the election processes in which the candidates, both independent and those of political parties, compete before the voters with their political programs and promises to improve the lives of people and to implement democratic standards, the rule of law and the respect for human rights and freedoms.

However, we have found out that, during field activities, the political parties and candidates are just as likely to try to win votes by promising jobs for loyal followers, and even immunity from official systems of accountability.

Citizen education about the right to vote is one of the obligations of the institutions, and especially of the media. Without free media, we cannot expect free elections! A trusted electoral administration and a reliable Voters Register is another precondition for legitimate and free election process. Liberation of citizens from fear and intimidation, decisive action against political corruption and abuse of public resources and of the administration, are all essentially important for free elections to take place in the country. Citizens must have the central and the most important position in the election processes. State and local institutions, the administration, civil society organizations, media, and particularly the political parties must be at service of voters, not vice versa (no way!). The legitimacy of the government draws from the degree of the legitimacy of the election processes. Elections, simply, must be free.



RECOMMENDATIONS

are

well-intended,

reasonable

and

constructive

criticisms



RECOMMENDATIONS

What needs to be done, needs to be done now

Recommendations
are
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constructive
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CIVIL has conducted elections observation on part of the territory of the Republic of Macedonia since 2008, and has observed the elections processes throughout the whole country since 2011. During that time, our observers have heard testimonies from thousands of citizens who have been prevented from realizing their full right to vote due to a wide range of problems, and have in many cases witnessed such problems firsthand. As part of our work, CIVIL staff also work with complainants to access proper government channels, first and foremost the State Election Commission (SEC) and Municipal Election Commissions (MECs), and tracks the progress of complaints in the system.

What follows here is a list of recommendations we believe will help the relevant institutions more comprehensively address the most persistent issues that have continually prevented voters from fully realizing their rights. These recommendations are complementary to those of the OSCE/ODIHR and the Priebe Report.

Most of these recommendations have already been presented to the public and to the institutions of the state in the past, but very little has been done in terms of implementation.

1. State Elections Commission

The State Elections Commission (SEC) of the Republic of Macedonia and all of its bodies must be reformed, decisively and uncompromisingly. The ultimate task of the SEC must be ensuring that the elections process is lawful and fair, and to protect the right to vote for each and every citizen of the country.

Before introducing the following reform measures, the conduct of the SEC in the period of 2015-2018 must be investigated and legal responsibility must be taken. In cases of obvious and proven abuse of public resources and corrupt or incompetent decision-making, the responsible parties need to be sanctioned. As new instances of corruption and dysfunction are uncovered, we will study them and develop further recommendations for needed reforms.

*

The SEC must become a body of qualified, independent experts with training in international standards of democracy and human rights – not a representative body of the largest political parties in the country.

The number of SEC members must be cut down to seven members. It has become ob-

vious that the solutions outlined in the Agreement to overcome political crisis (so-called Przhino process), are partial. Sustainable and quality solutions are needed in order to overcome long-standing general shortcomings of the system.

The legal department of the SEC must be further trained and professionalized. The same is recommended to all other departments of the SEC.

Legal measures to prevent and sanction political influence and interference must be introduced and consequently implemented. Impunity and political bargaining over the responsibility and accountability of the highest body of the SEC has to end, once and for all.

All departments and bodies of the SEC must be downsized and precise job descriptions, responsibilities and powers of those employed by the SEC need to be defined and publicly announced.

The Municipal Elections Commissions (MEC) should be enabled to function regardless of the financial state of the municipalities, and need to be financed by the state.

Members of the MECs should be independent, trained experts, not representatives of political parties or interests.

MECs cannot remain just another place for partisan employment. They must be enabled to increase their efficiency, accountability and transparency. At the same time, MECs need to be downsized to rational proportions.

Election Boards members have shown utter ignorance on many occasions, and have violated the Electoral Code and procedures on Elections Days. The SEC must introduce more efficient and thorough training of the Elections Boards in future, based on practice and findings from elections observations missions and complaints of citizens.

Accessibility of polling stations must become reality, not a declarative stand. More than

one third of the polling stations in the country are not accessible to persons with disabilities. The government and the SEC have to identify all polling stations with accessibility issues, and make them 100% accessible.

Electoral material (voting ballots, guidelines, etc.) has to be made understandable and accessible to all, including persons with visual impairments.

Gender balance needs to become a firm criteria. Wherever the number of members of some structure is odd, the proportion should be in favor of female members, starting with the composition of the members of the Commission.

2. Violation of the Election silence

A renewed commitment to respect the election silence period is needed by all parties.

In every election that CIVIL has monitored, we have noted flagrant violations of the legally mandated 24-hour period of election silence that is to precede Election Days. The local elections held on October 15 and 29 of 2017 were no exception. We have observed violations committed by all political parties and have exhorted all parties to respect the law and to cease electioneering during the mandated period. Given that citizens of Macedonia are well aware that this period of election silence is mandated by law, it only serves to deteriorate trust in the elections processes if restrictions on campaigning during this period are violated, often in full view of the public, by party activists.

We are particularly concerned that the area of social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, as well as many Internet websites with vague or no obvious ownership, are conducting even harsher campaign activities during the Election silence period.

Institutions must take decisive measures to prevent and sanction violation of the

Election silence. They also must create and conduct awareness-raising campaigns to explain that violations of this kind harm the legitimacy of the elections process, and diminish the credibility of political parties that are running such activities.

More mechanisms for citizens to report violations of the Election silence period should be opened by the State Elections Commission (SEC). Particularly if people can prove that these violations have taken place, either by proving photographic or video proof, their complaints should be taken seriously and merit a full response.

3. Vote-buying

Vote-buying is prohibited by law, but we have found in every election including the October 2017 local elections that these prohibitions are not sufficient to prevent it from taking place. According to the Macedonia Criminal Code's Article 162, which covers bribery in elections, any promises of presents or other benefits in exchange for assurances of voting behavior are punishable by up to five years in prison. However, the criminal code also contains provisions that minimize cases of bribery, stating "if the gain is of a lesser value, the perpetrator shall be punished by a fine or prison sentence up to a year." We believe that such language undercuts the seriousness of the problem of bribery and should be changed.

We also find problematic the language in the criminal code that if a "legal entity" engages in bribery, the case will be settled with a fee. So, if a representative of an institution, civil society organization, company or political party is perpetrating the criminal act of vote-buying, the sanction is a fine (mulct). This paragraph of the law needs to be deleted or modified in order to pose a more serious threat for this type of a criminal offence.

In addition to a review of the Criminal Code and related regulations, we recommend that a public information campaign be undertaken on the subject of bribery and the

many forms it can take. It is possible that the majority of Macedonian citizens do not know that they can also be found guilty of committing bribery simply for asking for benefits in exchange for their vote. It is crucial that all be educated thoroughly on the subject and have access to mechanisms for reporting instances of bribery and vote-buying.

4. Abuse of children and minors for political campaigning

The abuse of children and minors are evidenced in all elections processes in the country, and is perpetrated by all political entities in the country. This has to stop.

During this and previous elections, our monitors witnessed and processed complaints regarding children used as props during political campaigns, and pressured by their own teachers to be present and participate at political rallies. During elections past, we have heard numerous complaints that children have been questioned about their parents' political allegiances and have been deployed to pressure their parents to vote a certain way.

Political parties and individuals who use children or minors for political party purposes, must face legal consequences for this kind of offence.

Schools and parents' councils should be enabled to act preventively against these practices. Any school teacher or administrative official found pressuring students to perform politically should be sanctioned harshly for this activity.

5. Voters education

The state and local authorities, led by the State Elections Commission, and in cooperation with relevant civil society organizations and media, need to work on voters educa-

tion in a sustainable and effective manner.

Family and proxy voting, political corruption, intimidation and pressure can be diminished if voters are aware of their rights and if they have basic information on reporting and complaints procedures.

Awareness-raising campaigns are often detached from the reality and the real needs of voters. Civic education and awareness-raising campaigns need to be conducted on a long-term basis, and to be realistic, understandable, measurable, responsive, and results-oriented. Civic education will increase fairness, reduce confusion, and reduce numerous complications that grow from lack of knowledge of procedures and standards. They do not necessarily need to be expensive (as they have been so far), but need to become part of the political culture of the society.

6. Electoral system reforms: one electoral district; open lists; diaspora; downsizing

Macedonia needs to become one electoral district. By merging all six electoral districts into one, the system will provide more opportunities to smaller political parties and various communities to compete for representation in the Parliament. This will contribute to overcoming the domination of only a few big political parties in the political landscape, and a situation in which smaller political parties have no other options but to enter coalitions where they only serve as a number, without opportunities to properly represent their constituencies. This will also ease the complications about the varying and disproportionate number of voters in the electoral districts, as it is currently the case.

We further advocate for open lists so that voters may exert greater control over who they elect to office. These solutions have been presented to the public for quite some time now, but have been ignored by the ruling parties. The electoral model of the Re-

public of Macedonia has been amended several times, but solutions that would lead to the representation of all communities and of smaller political parties have never been taken into consideration, such as the model under which the whole country is one electoral district.

At the same time, open candidate lists will ensure greater democracy within political parties, and more importantly, they will increase the accountability of MPs towards their constituents.

The voting of the diaspora must be redefined to ensure that the value of the vote of the diaspora is equal to that of the voters in the country. The most efficient way to achieve would be to convert Republic of Macedonia into one electoral district, in which the diaspora would also be voting.

The country is too small for its 120 members of the Parliament. CIVIL has long proposed downsizing of the parliament to 90 MPs.

We are proposing specific solutions with simple and clear measures that must be taken in order to eliminate the serious shortcomings of the electoral system. Certainly, we are aware that political will and virtue are required for their adoption and implementation.

Throughout the recent years CIVIL has publicly elaborated recommendations in the area of financing of political parties and elections campaigns, media, and civil society, as well as on revision of the Voters Register. The organization will continue with its efforts to offer quality solutions on challenging issues in the area of elections, in cooperation with the expert community and relevant institutions and organizations.

Financing election campaigns creates conditions for manipulations and abuse

Goran NAUMOVSKI

The euphoria that swamped the supporters of the ruling party and the deep depression, in which the sympathizers of the previous ruling structure plunged into, overshadowed the topic of financing the election campaigns and political parties at the local elections held on October 15 and 29, 2017.

There was insignificant interest on this topic even after the early parliamentary elections held on December 11, 2016 ended, both among the public and among the competent institutions, which perhaps can be justified with the concern about the tensions in regards to the formation of the new parliamentary majority that culminated with the attack on the parliamentary building on April 27, 2017.

The formation of the new coalition government was followed by “thorough” reform processes incorporated in the so-called 3-6-9 Plan, along with a flood of information about the initiated court trials and the activities of the Special Public Prosecutor’s Office, while a large part of the energy was focused also on the local elections and the race to gain a larger portion of the local government.

The voters, then and now, burdened with the law on the use of languages and the name dispute, as dominant topics, and many other “peripheral” topics, are practically not at all informed or interested in the huge amounts of money that their representatives are spending for their own promotion and dominance in representing themselves before them, during the election campaigns, which usually begin much earlier than the legally anticipated period.

The competent institutions, usually concerned with distribution of high bonuses among its highest representatives, rather than with the legal obligation, which comes down to a purely technical operation, publishing of submitted financial reports from political parties on the revenues and expenditures during the election campaigns, do practically nothing, even though the current legal solutions allow them to.

The amendments and additions made to the Electoral Code, which refer to the financing of the election campaigns of the political parties, made after the Przino Agreement, inevitably impose the question whether they are sufficient enough to prevent the long-term corruptive and criminal financing of the election campaigns.

Before these changes, the parties (coalitions) were legally obliged to submit the final financial report on the election campaign to the competent institutions no later than 15 days from the day of the ending of the campaign, with which the period for “making adjustments” was quite short.

With the changes in Article 85, paragraph 1 of the Electoral Code, the deadline for sub-

submitting the total financial report on the election campaign is 30 days from the day the special bank account designated for that purpose is closed.

By adding Paragraph 10 to Article 71 of the Electoral Code, which regulates the closing of the special bank account within 3 (three!) months from the day the final election results are published, the parties (coalitions) are actually given a period of 4 (four!) months to submit final financial reports for the financing of the election campaigns.

The Electoral Code precisely stipulates that each party that participates in elections has to open a separate bank account, from which the parties can finance their campaigns (membership fees and donations from natural and legal entities), and that they have a legal obligation to submit a report on the revenues and expenditures for the first 10 days and the second ten days of the campaign to the SEC (State Elections Commission), the SAO (State Audit Office), the SCPC (State Commission for Prevention of Corruption), along with a final report (within the legal deadline).

If the reports from the previous early parliamentary elections in 2016 and the local elections in 2017 are analyzed, serious contradictions can be concluded.

These reports show for some political parties, for example, much higher costs than funds paid as membership fees, and the same goes with funds received as donations, only to have in the period that follows until the final report, negative balances annulled from various sources of funds, most often revenues from the basic account.

Hence, political parties are given too much time to provide funds to cover the enormous costs they make during the election campaigns, a negative amount that in the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE for the early parliamentary elections in 2016 alone was a fantastic amount of MKD 99.081.027,00, or around EUR 1.611.000,00.

Financing from illegal funding sources, which are not shown in the legally prescribed financial reports, especially in the vote-buying cases, is a huge problem that still extends

to the extent that there are even groups of voters who regularly expect at every election process some kind of compensation for their vote.

Having in consideration the great importance of the laws that regulate the financing of the election campaigns of the political parties, CIVIL – Center for Freedom has many times pointed out to these weaknesses, which have also been confirmed with the audits on the regularity by the State Audit Office, for which the competent state institutions will have to embark on a more serious approach to making certain changes and additions to the same.

The deadlines in regards to the closing of the bank accounts designated for the financing of the election campaigns (Article 71, Paragraph 10) need to be harmonized with the deadline for submitting the total financial report (Article 85, Paragraph 1), namely, this deadline needs to be shortened, thereby reducing the possibility and the period for “make-ups” of the final report.

The period in which the collected membership fees and donations can be used for financing the election campaign of the political parties has to be precisely determined, in order to avoid the practice of covering costs that are higher than these sources, several months after the election campaign has ended. It is necessary to regulate the manner of covering the negative balances of the designated bank accounts that have been opened for financing of the campaign.

The legal solutions need to be in the direction of limiting the parties, so that they spend within the amount of the funds they have provided for that purpose, and nothing more.

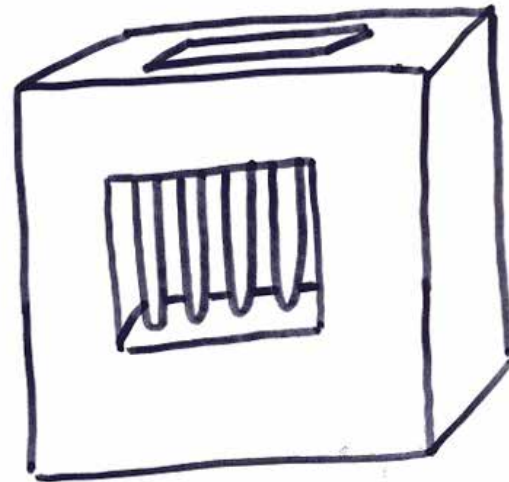
Article 84 of the Electoral Code, which has undergone changes following the Przino Agreement, now allows political parties to spend 110 denars, instead of 180, per registered voter in the electoral unit, which is not enough limitation because it still is a large sum of money.

To be precise, with 1.814.644 registered voters, according to the State Election Commission, at the last, local elections, the parties could legally spend 199.610.840,00 denars. Revisions to this article of the Electoral Code should also be considered.

The control and verification of the authenticity of the submitted reports by the political parties, especially in the area of incurred expenses, will greatly be simplified if a legal obligation is prescribed for submitting a report for the space used and the amount collected, for entities that work with advertising boards and billboards. The same obligation can also apply to the media and legal entities that publish materials for pre-election campaigns, as well as companies that rent space and equipment for outdoor advertising.

Nevertheless, the competent institutions, through their own initiative or a wider debate, should work on improving the laws that regulate the financing of the election campaigns of the political parties, which of course needs to be preceded by professionalization, but also strengthening of the capacities of the institutions responsible for controlling the regularity, reforms and efficient functioning of the legal state, as well as consistent respect for the laws. The way the system is set up now, gives huge opportunities for manipulation in the financing of the election campaigns.

After all, the experience of the last election process shows that the amount of funds spent on the campaign, regardless of whether being legitimate or not, is, however, not a decisive factor for winning power. On the contrary, it is the policies and the concern for the interests and rights of the citizens that have the concluding influence on the will of the voters.



Elections and human rights: Where do we go from here?

Heather ROBERSON

Introduction

The local elections held in October 2017 in the Republic of Macedonia have been taken as a very promising sign for those concerned with the status of human rights not only within this small country, but throughout the Balkans. In their conduct, they have been described as relatively free and peaceful, a marked improvement over elections of recent memory. In their results, they heavily favored the coalition led by the Social Democrats (SDSM), which has promised a slate of reforms aimed at restoring public trust and further integrating the country's ethnic

Albanian minority, also a marked improvement over the once-formidable Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (VMRO), which for a full decade sought to capture the full resources of the state, the media, and even civil society for its own use. That the usual election tactics deployed by VMRO – tactics of intimidation, misinformation, and its own special brand of extreme nationalism – did not work this time comes as extremely welcome news to any who have dared to dream of a democratic Macedonia, even as the noose of autocracy tightened, and who have dared to fight for that dream, often at great personal risk.

However, it is critical now that renewed hope not devolve into overconfidence and complacency. As CIVIL notes in its monitoring report, even this relatively peaceful and professional election was rife with irregularities. In the weeks leading up to the election, CIVIL monitors recorded incidences of voters pressured and intimidated into voting a certain way, at the risk of losing social benefits and even their jobs. On Elections Day, CIVIL monitors witnessed party activists engaged in vote-buying and harassment, and many instances of group and family voting as well. CIVIL heard reports of over a hundred citizens unable to vote as a result of irregularities with the Voters Register and of changes in polling locations of which voters were not notified. There were reports of violence, including an assault on one of CIVIL's own monitors. Such irregularities have reduced in number in comparison with recent elections. Still, it is a matter of concern that so many of these irregularities derived from the behavior of the State Elections Commission (SEC) and local elections boards, which remained slow and ineffective in responding to the complaints of voters, and insufficiently trained to discharge their duties.

Such problems must, of course, be viewed within the context of the past decade during which the ruling party VMRO engaged in an all-out assault on the country's democratic institutions, prompting international human rights groups to warn that the Republic of

Macedonia was quickly becoming a “captured state.” Indeed, in the years between 2006 and 2016, the VMRO leadership brought not only the government sector under its control, but also the media, education and even the civil society sector under its increasing control. It sought not only to control how the people of Macedonia were governed and their money spent, but also how they conceived themselves, and their country, and what they believed to be true. When rewriting the past and present didn't suffice, it launched a broad spying effort on journalists, civil society leaders, and even its own ministers, sewing paranoia, mistrust, and unrest.

Where do we go from here? How to move forward, now that the country has been granted a respite from de facto one-party reign? The first step is to recognize that, to the extent that positive changes will begin to take root, they will not be handed down from above. It will not be the long-stalled European integration process that will bring democracy and human rights to Macedonia. Nor will it be the new governing coalition, which has pledged to strengthen systems of accountability, but has thus far seen these systems turned almost exclusively on its political opponents. Nor can one say with complete confidence that positive change will come from Macedonian civil society, as this sector has also been polluted in recent years with nationalist organizations that would have the country cleansed rather than integrated. Perhaps it is best to say that change will come from all of these entities holding steadfast – and holding each other accountable – to the enormously complicated balancing act of promoting the norms of democracy, human rights, and tolerance above all else while also guarding against the perception (and in fact, the reality) that new laws and policies are being implanted without the consent, or even understanding, of those living in the country. It is almost impossible to get such a project “right,” but in making this effort, and with the willingness to face constant critique, we may see a new, more comprehensive human freedom take root in Macedonia, and indeed throughout the Balkans.

CIVIL's monitoring results: many improvements, but problems remain

According to international and local monitoring organizations that covered the October 2017 local elections in Republic of Macedonia, it appears that the enormous efforts undertaken by the international community and by organizations like CIVIL to reform the country's elections process are just beginning to pay off. The International Election Observation Mission launched by the OSCE/ODIHR reported that fundamental freedoms of voters were respected during the elections process, that candidates were able to campaign without restriction, and that the elections "contributed to strengthening confidence in the democratic process." The OSCE/ODIHR and other organizations even detected improvements in the transparency of the State Elections Commission (SEC) in the second round of voting, after complaints were levied during the first round. All in all, the election period was assessed as relatively peaceful and professional.

However, it is important to note that when we say "relatively peaceful and professional," this is meant in contrast to elections past, which featured extremely high levels of pressure and fraud. These include the parliamentary election held in December 2016, not even a year prior, in which thousands of citizens were denied the right to vote as a result of irregularities, incompetence, and corruption, while almost no voters were excluded from heightened pressure to vote a certain way. During that time, CIVIL monitors heard reports of government health service workers accompanying party members as they electioneered, portraying health services as emanating from the ruling party instead of from the government. CIVIL monitors heard reports of schoolchildren pressured by their teachers to question their own parents about their political leanings, and to report back the results.

Thus, it is important to say that while organizations have mainly pronounced the October 2017 local elections as free, there still exists plenty of room for improvement. In the pre-election period, CIVIL noted that over a hundred names of eligible voters were

missing from the voters register and, after following the proper channels of notifying the SEC of these missing names, were met with no response. During the pre-election period, CIVIL also noted that the training of elections officials could have been more robust – a critique that was echoed in the OSCE/ODIHR reporting. During the election silence period, CIVIL reported many violations, and provided video evidence of examples of inappropriate electioneering on its home page. Perhaps most troubling, it noted a trend of escalating rhetoric and propagandizing, including leaflets placed at voters' doors containing hate speech against political opponents. These, of course, accompanied a campaign of misinformation that sought to fan public fears of a secret deal with the Albanians, and which also drummed up fears of an influx of refugees in one contested municipality.

During the first and second round of voting, CIVIL processed hundreds of complaints, the lion-share reflecting unlawful and inappropriate actions of members of election boards. On the first day of voting, October 15, CIVIL monitors noted that voting was interrupted entirely at the polling location in the Skopje municipality of Aerodrom after ballot irregularities required police intervention, prompting several voters to give up and leave before voting. In the future, measures should be put in place to ensure that voting is able to continue even as irregularities undoubtedly arise. On the same day, voting at a polling location in the Municipality of Berovo in eastern Macedonia was delayed for a full half hour when it was found that a stack of ballots did not contain proper tracking numbers. In the future, independent monitors should examine ballots in advance to ensure that avoidable irregularities such as these do not interrupt voting, particularly at the beginning of the day. In the village of Creshevo, a party headquarters was located in the same building as a polling location (though with separate entrances) and party activists openly and inappropriately engaged with voters. There were also reports at several polling locations of members of the election board mobilizing voters for specific parties.

The elections were also, unfortunately, not free of violence. In fact, on the second day of voting, October 29, one of CIVIL's own monitors was threatened with violence in the municipality of Saraj by a member of the local elections board, forcing CIVIL to withdraw its observers on the day. Two days later, one of CIVIL's activists, who served as an observer during the election was physically attacked by the same official.

Such reports of irregularities and inappropriate actions on the part of elections officials are accompanied by reports of pressure by party members, vote-buying, violations of the secrecy of voting, and, as always, instances of family and group voting. While there appears to have been a reduction in threats against voter's jobs and access to social services as a result of their voting behavior, that is not to say this election was free from such trends. If anything, we fear that voters have become so accustomed to such threats and pressures, that they are not reporting them at all.

The way forward

It is without a doubt that even taking the aforementioned problems in mind, the conduct and results of this election are extremely heartening to anyone who has watched with concern the steady decline of Macedonian democracy over the past decade. It is heartening that the once-dominant political party VMRO, which not so long ago was able to command near complete control over the media, including the public broadcaster to which it paid millions to produce films on "Macedonian history," (which mostly denied or demonized the country's minority communities), still was unable to make its case effectively before a public once held so rapt by its tales.

In the end, VMRO was able to capture a mere 5 mayoral seats, down from the 56 seats it held before the elections. It is heartening that VMRO party leader Nikola Gruevski, whose stranglehold on power once invited comparisons to Hungary's Viktor Orban and

Turkey's Recep Tayyip Erdogan, was forced to step down from chairmanship of his party.

Still, it will take more than one election to undo more than a decade of institutional capture and many more decades than that of manipulation of the country's ethnic identity. In this way, the work ahead is twofold:

1) there is the need to infuse weakened and dependent state institutions with a new life and a new independence that has in fact never been seen in the past (as such weakness and dependence pre-dates VMRO's reign);

2) There is also, perhaps even more importantly, the need to address the legacy of the concretized ethnic Macedonian identity and conception of the state as something simple and pure when in reality the country is now, and has always been, a heavily multi-ethnic crossroads. Again, here we are not talking about restoration of the multi-ethnic identity to pre-VMRO levels, because VMRO did not in fact invent this concretized conception of the national identity and Macedonian state. It simply capitalized upon pre-existing legacy of nationalism while manufacturing new concerns and new injuries – wounds which only VMRO could be entrusted to heal – so that no one would notice or question its theft of the state.

To begin to restore Macedonia as a place where all of its citizens can thrive, and realize the full range of human rights, will take a renewed commitment from the international community, from local political parties, and from civil society to hold true to that very goal – the goal of human freedom – as primary, even before the goal of putting Macedonia onto the European path, or of strengthening European borders, or of “stability.” The goal now must be a country in which all can be thrive and be free, even if the European Union were to disappear tomorrow, and even if the new and promising ruling coalition were to collapse amid a flurry of scandals.

It is an extremely ambitious dream, yes, but after a decade of increasing autocratic rule, during which time a small group of people never gave up the fight, only to be joined by hundreds of thousands more in the darkest possible hour, it should be very clear that the Republic of Macedonia is a country that deserves no less.

Heather Roberson is a Human Rights and Balkans Specialist who holds an Undergraduate degree in Peace and Conflict Studies from University of California at Berkeley (2003) where she studied the implementation of the Ohrid Agreement; a Master's Degree in Human Rights from Columbia University (2013); and a Certificate of Advanced Study from the Harriman Institute at Columbia University (2013) where she wrote on the rise of Macedonian ethnic nationalism in the post-Ohrid era.



SHORT-TERM MONITORING ANALYSIS



REPUBLIKA E MAQEDONISE
KOMISIONI SHITETËROR I ZGJEDHJEVE
ZGJEDHJEVE LOKALE 2017

РЕПУБЛИКА МАКЕДОНИЈА
ДРЖАВНА ИЗБОРНА КОМИСИЈА

REPUBLIKA E MAQEDONISE
KOMISIONI SHITETËROR I ZGJEDHJEVE

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State Elections Commission

Election administration caused the highest number of irregularities

Biljana JORDANOVSKA and Emilija BALTOVSKA

CIVIL has prepared a report on election irregularities based on monitoring of the first round of voting, which took place on October 15, and submitted it to the State Election Commission on October 17, at 5:00 pm. It is just a report, and not a complaint, since civil society organizations are not authorized to submit complaints; only submitters of candidate lists and citizens can do so.

Nevertheless, CIVIL is submitting a report to the SEC within the legal deadline, in hopes that this institution will act according to its competencies and, based on our information, will take appropriate steps within the framework of the law. Such a thing did not happen at last year's elections.

CIVIL carried out a strict selection and verification of over 240 processed reports on election irregularities submitted to the organization's Coordination Body for Elections on the day of the election silence and on the day of the voting. The analytical team set apart a total of 199 reports in which there are testimonies regarding violation of the election silence, threats and pressures, unlawful conduct of an Election Board, problems with the Voters Register, family and group voting, violation of the secrecy of voting, overstepping power, vote-buying and violence.

Table 1

nr.	Classification of the event	n	%
1	Unlawful conduct of Election Board	56	28,14
2	Other	44	22,11
3	Problems with Voters Register	21	10,55
4	Family and group voting	19	9,55
5	Violation of secrecy of voting	18	9,05
6	Violation of election silence	17	8,53
7	Threats and pressures	7	3,52
8	Obstruction of the work of observers	4	2,01
9	Obstruction of voting	4	2,01
10	Vote-buying	4	2,01
11	Overstepping power	3	1,51
12	Violence	2	1,01
Total		199	100

n-number of reported cases

According to CIVIL's statistics, the greatest number of irregularities are registered in the category "Unlawful conduct of Election Board", that is, 28.14%. In six cases, accredited observers have been involved in some kind of election irregularity on election day, voters have been involved in 14.54% of the reports submitted on election irregularities, and two cases of violence have also been recorded.

The category "Other" in Table 2 consists of 44 cases of problems with the election material, including the number and quality of the ballots, the non-functioning of UV lamps, inaccessibility to polling stations, the poor set-up of voting booths for people with disabilities, and many other problems that are directly related with the poor performances of the election administration, as well as of the SEC and the Municipal Election Commissions (MECs).

On the other hand, as it was also stressed at CIVIL's press conferences during election day, and at the press conference immediately after election day, that a large part the Election Boards were forced to show quite a bit of creativity and much patience in order to implement the elections. Election Board members were observed cutting ballots with scissors when ballots arrived without proper perforation; and standing in front of ballot boxes explaining to voters where they should place their ballots, because the ballots were with similar colors and were not very clear. There were also many instances of non-working pens and UV lamps. They also had to count all the ballots and many other procedures.

After so many implemented election processes and even though it should be a routine preparation, this time the SEC prepared election material that was a serious challenge to everyone, but mostly for the voters and the election boards.

However, many Election Boards did not carry out their tasks according to the procedures and the law. More specifically, in CIVIL's system for entering reports from the

ground, in terms of the question “Who caused the irregularity?”, the election administration is most often the cause. As much as 121 reports indicate the election administration (from the SEC and up to the election boards) as responsible for the irregularities, or 60.80% of the reports submitted to the SEC.

Once again, as in previous election processes, our observers note that certain members or heads of Election Boards seriously violate the procedures and the Electoral Code. Some are noted propagating or cooperating with party headquarters in mobilizing voters. Also, in several cases, noted by CIVIL’s observers, they violated voting rights by marking voters inappropriately with spray, only to find out afterwards that they do not figure on the Voters Register at that polling station, leaving those voters unable to vote at the appropriate place.

Some members of the Election Boards make unacceptable mistakes also because of their lack of knowledge of the procedures. CIVIL also alerted before the elections that the SEC and the Municipal Election Commissions provide insufficient quality of training for the members of the election boards, as opposed to the long and expensive preparations of the educational material (video, manuals...).

In CIVIL’s pre-election report, among else, it also said that: “The Municipal Election Commissions who were supposed to train the members of the Election Boards, did not pay enough attention to the training. We think that thirty minutes are not enough, of which the first ten minutes are a brief presentation, followed by a video projection from which the members of the Election Boards come to knowledge, namely, instructions on what they are supposed to do on the day of the voting. This is not enough, and again we will come to a situation in which the members of the Election Boards will have to violate the procedures and the law even unintentionally, because they do not have enough information”.

In regards to the right to vote, this was violated at these elections as well in several hundred cases, when some citizens were unable to exercise their fundamental human right – the right to vote.

CIVIL's pre-election report warned that "We have 120 cases of 'missing' voters from the Voters Register. We see many indicative and symptomatic examples that the State Election Commission, that is, the administration is failing to meet the demands of the citizens".

Furthermore, CIVIL criticized the arrogance of the institutions with the conclusion:

"Since we have already seen an example, that is, a legal precedent, when in a time of an election process, contrary to the principles and standards, the law is changed, even the very structure of the State Election Commission is changed, then resources and time could have been found for solving the problem of the citizens who on election day will perhaps not be able to find themselves on the Voters Register. There is no need to go too far, it is enough to take a look at the Croatian experiences and to see that citizens can easily be ensured the right to vote. We anticipated that on election day we would have many such complaints when people will simply be powerless. It is a violation of human rights and violation of the law. Even one such case will be a serious violation of fundamental human rights."

Those anticipations have unfortunately come true.

Political party activists acted as if party action during election silence was not prohibited. They simply did not stop with the campaign and there are also cases of party pressures and threats, agitation, mobilization and transporting voters, along with vote-buying. We highlight the case where party activists were noticed putting up posters on one of the main streets in the Municipality of Butel.

Table 2

nr	Who caused the irregularity	n	%
1	Election administration	121	60,80
2	Parties	32	16,08
3	Voters	29	14,57
4	Other	9	4,52
5	Observers	6	3,02
6	Administration	2	1,01
	Total	199	100

n-number of reported cases

According to the previous experience in CIVIL's election monitoring, election irregularities were expected in Aerodrom, which after all came true. In the first report, CIVIL indicates 22 cases of election irregularities precisely in this municipality. These cases refer to unlawful conduct of the election administration, of the parties and party activists, family and proxy voting... In Kumanovo fourteen cases of election irregularities have been registered, most of which for unlawful conduct of Election Boards, family and group voting and problems with the Voters Register.

Table 3 shows the number of election irregularities by municipalities. CIVIL notes that this is data from 199 adopted reports from the ground. The remaining reports are archived, but not publicized, for they have failed to provide sufficient data to be taken into consideration.

Table 3

Municipality	n	Municipality	n
Aerodrom	22	Lozovo	2
Berovo	2	Negotino	3
Bitola	4	Novo Selo	1
Butel	4	Ohrid	1
Valandovo	1	Petrovec	2
Veles	4	Prilep	7
Vrapciste	2	Probistip	1
Gazi Baba	13	Resen	7
Gjorce Petrov	4	Rostuse	2
Gostivar	5	Saraj	12
Demir Hisar	3	Sveti Nikole	2
Delcevo	1	Struga	1
Karpos	11	Tetovo	5
Kisela Voda	9	Centar	14
Kicevo	10	Cair	6
Kriva Palanka	3	Caska	3
Kumanovo	14	Stip	5
Lipkovo	4	Shuto Orizari	3
overall/special	6	Total	199

According to the methodology adopted by CIVIL, everything that is received as a report from the ground is processed and publicized through the CIVIL media platform and is available for the public, which means that CIVIL's reports are constantly updated with new data and give a detailed and comprehensive picture of the process.

Local elections reveal election administration's deficiency

Emilija BALTOVSKA and Biljana JORDANOVSKA

CIVIL has conducted a strict selection and verification of the monitoring reports, from the first and second round of local elections. The monitoring methodology involves a comprehensive analysis of reports submitted by observers over a longer period of time, during the pre-elections campaign, on the Election Day and in the post-election period. This report covers the Elections Days in the 1st and the 2nd round on October 15 and 29, 2017.

CIVIL's analytical team processed a total of 352 field reports in the 1st round and 179 reports in the 2nd round. Based on a total of 531 processed reports, in both rounds of elections, it can be concluded that the election administration remains to be the most frequent cause of the elections irregularities, whereas the most frequent irregularity is the unlawful conduct of the Election Boards at polling stations, with 28,25% of the total number of election irregularities. The results of the processed data are given in the tables below and show the type, classification of election irregularities (Table 1), the most frequent causes of election irregularities, who caused the irregularity (Table 2) and who caused an irregularity in the category "other" (Table 3).

Table 1. Classification of election irregularities

Classification of the event	1st round		2nd round		Rounds 1&2	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Unlawful conduct of Election Boards	102	28,98	48	26,82	150	28,25
Problems with the Voters Register	38	10,80	10	5,59	48	9,04
Violation of secrecy of voting	25	7,10	7	3,91	32	6,03
Vote-buying	11	3,13	2	1,12	13	2,45
Violation of Election silence	18	5,11	4	2,23	22	4,14
Abuse of children and minors	0	0	0	0	0	0
Threats and pressures	9	2,55	4	2,23	13	2,45
Abuse of public resources	1	0,28	0	0	1	0,19
Abuse of administration	2	0,57	0	0	2	0,38
Overstepping power	9	2,56	0	0	9	1,69
Obstruction of voting	11	3,13	0	0	11	2,07
Family and group voting	22	6,25	24	13,41	46	8,66
Obstruction of the work of observers	5	1,42	5	2,79	10	1,88
Violence	3	0,85	2	1,12	5	0,94
Other	50	14,20	42	23,46	92	17,33
Problems with election material	46	13,07	31	17,32	77	14,50
Total	352	100	179	100	531	100

Unlawful conduct of an Election Board includes several forms of inappropriate action, such as allowing voters to vote without checking whether they have previously used their voting right or not, violating the privacy of voters, conducting agitation at the polling station, etc. Family and group voting is once again treated as something normal, while reading out loud the names of voters was common in several polling stations, like in the previous election processes.

Polling stations 0510, 0415 in Gostivar, 2704 in Aerodrom, 1675/1 in Sveti Nikole are just some of the polling stations where, intentionally or not, voters were given more ballots than they should have been given. Even after the enormous amount of time and focus that has been given to election reforms in recent months, including the importance of independent observers, the election boards still did not overcome the practice of controlling and pressuring the observers, and obstructed CIVIL's observers on several occasions.

Unlike during the 1st election round, there was an increase of family and group voting in the second round. There was a decrease of reports on problems with the Voters Register, as well as of reports on violation of the secrecy of voting. In summarizing the election irregularities of both rounds, family and group voting and problems with the Voters Register have approximately the same share in the election irregularities with around 9% (Table 1).

This situation leads to the conclusion that voters themselves have a large share in causing the election irregularities, which is confirmed also by the results given in Table 2, where in the second place, immediately after the election administration, are the voters with 17,14% in the causes of election irregularities.

Table 2. Who caused the irregularity

	1st round	2nd round	Rounds 1&2			
Who caused the irregularity?	n	%	n	%	n	%
Election administration	223	63,35	113	63,13	336	63,28
Party/activists	44	12,5	19	10,61	63	11,86
Administration	3	0,85	1	0,56	4	0,75
Police	0	0	1	0,56	1	0,19
Security Agency	0	0	0	0	0	0
Voters	55	15,63	36	20,11	91	17,14
Observers	13	3,69	0	0	13	2,45
Other	14	3,98	9	5,03	23	4,33
Total	352	100	179	100	531	100

These data point out the serious need for election administration and voter education, in a proper extent and scope. More specifically, some of the irregularities in these categories result from the lack of proper knowledge, but the possibility of tendentious actions and manipulations in certain cases should, in no way, be neglected. In any case, the election administration and the voters viewed together are the causes of election irregularities in 80,42% of the cases (Table 2).

Our data also shows ten cases of obstruction of CIVIL observers as they discharged their duties. In some cases, this obstruction derived from a lack of knowledge; in others, it derived from a desire to cover up failure to follow procedures and act upon the law. The obstruction of the observers can be related to the unlawful conduct of the Election Boards at polling stations, including not allowing CIVIL's observers to be present inside the polling stations at certain points; demanding unnecessary documentation; and

even threatening them in an attempt to dislocate them from the polling stations. Certain members of the election boards, instead of carrying out the voting process, took on the role of observers, so they observed the observers themselves with rude remarks and forbidding them from noting irregularities in their notebooks, even preventing them from being present at the counting of votes.

At polling station 2447/1, a member of the Election Board directed extremely serious threats to CIVIL's monitoring team, which was assigned there and also at polling station 2447 in the village of Laskarci, Municipality of Saraj. The event took place a little after 11:00 am on October 29, in the second election round. The threats came from a person, member of an Election Board, who had been revolted by the presence of CIVIL's observers, that is, by CIVIL's reports from the first round of elections.

CIVIL withdrew its observers from the Municipality of Saraj, but on November 2, the same member of the Election Board physically attacked one of the observers who has been withdrawn by CIVIL's central office on the day of the voting. The case was reported to the police the same day, while CIVIL informed the public, the SEC, the ODIHR mission and the international community about this case. At the time of publication of this report, the state institutions had yet to respond.

At polling station 0683 in Kavadarci, CIVIL's observers were prevented from entering the polling station to observe, with the explanation that the authorization did not have the number of the polling station indicated on it. Following CIVIL's interventions and after indicating this irregularity to the State Election Commission and the Municipal Election Commission, the observer was allowed to continue observing the process.

The category "Other" within the categories in Classification of the event, includes all the irregularities that could not be included in any of the given categories or ones that are a combination of several categories of irregularities. It can be noted that election ir-

regularities caused by the election administration dominate here in both of the election rounds, such as ballots left behind the polling booth, two polling stations located in one room, inappropriate premises for the polling stations, being located near party headquarters, inaccessible polling stations for persons with disabilities, inappropriate set-up of voting booths, lack of booths for people with disabilities and several other, specific cases. Party activists are ranked second by the number of irregularities, with their various attempts to influence voters, and the third place is occupied by voters, who usually wanted to vote for someone else, or to exercise their voting right with an improper or invalid document (Table 3).

Table 3. Who caused an irregularity in the category “Other”

Who caused the irregularity?	1 st round		2 nd round		Rounds 1&2	
	n	%	N	%	n	%
Election administration	22	44	16	38,09	38	41,3
Parties/activists	10	20	9	21,43	19	20,65
Administration	0	0	0	0	0	0
Police	0	0	1	2,38	1	1,09
Security Agency	0	0	0	0	0	0
Voters	9	18	9	21,43	18	19,57
Observers	3	6	0	0	3	3,26
Specific cases (combinations)	6	12	7	16,67	13	14,13
Total	50	100	42	100	92	100

There were problems with the election material present in the first and in the second round of elections and they represent 14,5% of the total number of irregularities, that is, they are in the third place. The non-functioning of UV lamps, the poor quality of the

ballots, the lack of folders with ballots in Braille for the voting of the visually impaired persons, the poor marking or damage to the ballot boxes and many other shortcomings all made the voting even more difficult and were added to the leading irregularities in these elections, creating a clear picture that more attention needs to be given to the planning and organizing of the election process and to the improvement of all of its phases, by including all of its participants.

And just so they are not forgotten, party activists were considerably “active” at these elections as well, and according to reports account for 11,86% of the election irregularities in the first and second round together (Table 2). Cases have been noted of voters being brought to polling stations in Negotino, attempts for vote-buying in the Municipality of Karpos, Resen (Roma neighborhood), Shuto Orizari (primary school Ramiz-Hamid), Struga (village Livadia, village Vranishta, village Moroishta), Gostivar, political parties propagating in front of polling stations and on social networks, and many other forms of violation of the Electoral Code.

According to the statistics, these figures are devastating for the overall picture of the election process, which once again confirms CIVIL’s findings that, despite all the efforts made, the State Election Commission failed in the area of educating the election administration, in the preparation of the election material and in the selection of the locations of the polling stations.

Even though for the local elections these measures are primarily the responsibility of the Municipal Election Commissions, the State Election Commission as a competent institution does, however, have the responsibility for education and technical preparation, and not just for the financial support in the election process.

COMPLAINTS AND RERUNS

322 complaints, one rerun

Dehran MURATOV

There have been 219 complaints filed to the State Elections Commission after the first round of the local elections held on October 15, and 103 after the second round. All 322 complaints were rejected by the SEC. Political parties filed 27 appeals after the first round and 16 after the second round to the Administrative Court, which ruled positively on one single complaint by the political party of Besa. It was decided that there will be a rerun at the polling station nr. 2901 in the Municipality of Chair. The rerun took place on November 12, 2017. There was not much to report, the outcome was clear before the rerun took place.

DUI candidate Visar Ganiu has won majority of votes against his opponent Zeqiria Ibrahimimi of Besa for the third time, and has become the Mayor of the Municipality of Cair. Out of the 719 registered voters at polling station 2901, 272 voted in the school "Idnina", of which 169 voted for Ganiu, 98 for Ibrahimimi, while 5 ballots were invalid.

There was an overwhelming police presence in front of and in the neighborhoods around the polling station. Police officers told CIVIL's observers that should they notice party activists agitating or threatening citizens in terms of whom to vote for, that they have an order to immediately take them into custody.

There was information in some media that DUI activists had been standing in front of the entrances of the buildings and had been threatening and not allowing voters to go out and vote. CIVIL's observers did not come to relevant evidence for these allegations.

INVALID BALLOTS

INVALID BALLOTS ARE A WARNING TO POLITICIANS

Nearly 100.000 invalid ballots have been counted following the first round of local elections. Of these, 45.551 are for mayors and 51.681 for municipal councils. This is a dramatic rise in the number of invalid ballots.

In the first analysis of this incidence, a conclusion can be made that this is due to at least two reasons. The first reason is the problematic election material for which CIVIL was extensively reporting about during the election day.

The second, more important reason is the “protest voting”, that is, voters are deliberately invalidating the ballot. Voters in this way express their protest, or warning to the candidates running for office at the local level. If at one time voters often voted “against” and not “for” a given political party, now they are expressing distrust towards all the participants in the election race.

At last year’s early parliamentary elections there were 38.000 invalid ballots, a number for which CIVIL demanded special expertise, but was not accepted. This number is now a dramatic warning of the voters also to the local authorities. CIVIL is announcing that the analysis of this phenomenon will continue and that it will present new, more detailed analyses after the election process has completed.



LONG-TERM MONITORING ANALYSIS

A short selection of articles, published by the CIVIL Media platform



State Elections Commission

SEC adopts new rules of procedure. And, when is the implementation?

Biljana JORDANOVSKA

This article is a tiny illustration of only one of the many challenges that made the State Elections Commission a troubled institution with doubtful quality and impact.

Skopje, 07.07.2017. The new Rules of Procedure of the State Election Commission (SEC) and the Rulebook on the manner and procedure of handling complaints, after several months of evaluation of the election process that took place in December 2016, have appeared on the SEC website, replacing the old, outdated Provisional Rules of Procedure.

The Rules of Procedure determine the work of the SEC, its structure, transparency and respect of the Electoral Code and the manner in which the President, members, General Secretary and services are elected. It actually determines the principles that this institution has to respect and fully implement.

The evaluation for the drafting of the Rules of Procedure, according to information from the SEC, includes: the electoral activities from the early parliamentary elections in 2016; analysis of the recommendations of the Final Report of the OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission in 2016; and reports from workshops and roundtables organized by the SEC with representatives of civil society organizations and state institutions. Additional assistance was requested also from an international consultant of the Council of Europe's Venice Commission.

CIVIL – Center for Freedom in its reports and recommendations in regards to the elections last year, assessed the work of the SEC as non-transparent in terms of the citizens and organizations that monitored the election process. We recommended that the SEC and other competent institutions offer maximum openness and assistance to the citizens, in contrast to their conduct during the last elections when citizens had to fight for their own voting rights with little help from official structures.

Despite the numerous times CIVIL addressed the SEC and the public, during which the findings and analyses of the comprehensive monitoring of the pre-election, election and post-election period were presented in a completely open and direct manner, the institutions remained without a response. The members of the SEC had no response, and often, in crisis moments during the election process, they were not even physically present at work.

On the other hand, the final report of OSCE/ODIHR came out with expected results, namely, assessments that there is a need for improving the internal organization of the SEC, the efficiency and that there is a need for greater transparency in the process of carrying out the elections, as well as for all sessions to be public with the purpose of increasing trust among citizens. However, the new Rules of Procedure anticipate, according to Article 2, like in the Provisional, now invalid Rules of Procedure, for the work of the Commission to be fully transparent. The SEC can exclude the public only in rare cases, anticipated with the Electoral Code, but it is recommended for this institution not to use this right at all.

In the new Rules of Procedure, Article 2 is extended: “The Commission decides by public vote on all matters within its competence”. It is clear, the public is expected to have insight into the voting, the sessions that are being held and other activities of the SEC that are of high interest for the democratic character of the election processes.

In comparison, the new Rules of Procedure are improved. They are extended, more concrete and clearer, which shows that the SEC's competencies have been carefully determined. But the question is raised, after 10 years work with provisional rules of procedure, with an expired validity of one year – what were the obstacles for drafting a new one earlier? That is, whether the provisional rules of procedure of the SEC have been respected? And most importantly: How

much will the same composition of the SEC, which conducted the previous election process, implement the new and improved rules of procedure?

And finally, will anyone dare to refer to Article 9, paragraph 3 of the Rules of Procedure for dismissal of a member of the Commission for unethical and unprofessional performance of the function?!

In terms of the reforms, there is another distressing question: Which changes in the Electoral Code can lead to a complete reform of the SEC? Who holds the competencies?

Awaiting the local elections, which are to be held on October 15, the SEC also needs to solve the situation with the Voters Register, which is of greatest importance for creating minimum conditions for free elections. The Voters Register is in a chaotic situation, whereas the reports of the SEC in terms of the changes in the Voters Register are just empty statistics that do not give a clear insight for the citizens to be able to gain trust in that the institutions will enable them to exercise the voting right.

It remains for us to see how much of the Rules of Procedure will remain formal, and how much will be implemented. There are many questions, to which the answers in a normal democracy are within hands reach.

COMMENTS AND ANALYSIS

OBSERVER'S RAZOR BLADE

In this section, we bring a selection of comments and analysis of the CIVIL investigation and analytical team members who introduced a new way of observation of the election campaigning, close to the reality and to the general audience.

The team has produced reports, analysis and comments on daily basis, making the process transparent and meeting the public's great need for transparency.

MAYOR'S COFFEE – (NOT) ON THE TERRACE...DAY SEVEN

Dehran MURATOV

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 02.10.2017)

This year as well, men dominate as candidates for mayors (as until now). Whereas in regards to the few women who have decided to lead the struggle with the "males" ..., the citizens, instead of showing interest in the ideas and projects put forth by the female candidates, are instead focused on their pasts and their personal lives – how much one candidate has been "truthful", and what kind of hairstyle the other one has, whether the third one had her nails done, whether she has a husband or is single...

On the other hand, the male candidates for mayors do not miss the opportunity to praise their wives. It's as if though the citizens

should believe that they will not betray them in the promises, just as they are faithful to their wives.

After the campaign started, the candidate for mayor of Kisela Voda from VMRO-DPMNE, Johan Tarculovski, following several days of “speech abstinence”, decided to start talking. At the meeting with OSCE/ODIHR representatives, he said that he would not fulfill their wish to have his first coffee as a mayor with them, but that he would enjoy his first coffee with his wife Sonja.

Smart on his behalf. A true man would act in such a manner! However, knowing Sonja, how clumsily she moves, just so that she does not fall off the terrace again, it would be nice if they had their coffee somewhere indoors.

The leader of SDSM, Zoran Zaev, at the meeting in Kicevo predicted that Maksim Dimitrievski would become a mayor in the first round.

“Believe me, since my wife is also here, Zorica Zaev, and she also wants to be part of this victorious atmosphere. There is one sad news, but not for us, but rather for ‘Gruvskians’. VMRO-DPMNE is divided, already packing their suitcases, and in them are the new era and the new scheming”, said Zaev.

Several days ago in Dojran he “boasted” that it was right there that he had spent the most beautiful days with his first girlfriend. So it is normal now that his wife accompanies him across the cities, so that he doesn’t brag again that he also had a girlfriend in Kumanovo...jealous women, who can understand them. #Holdon Zaev!

The candidate for mayor of Skopje from SDSM, Petre Shilegov, at the market in Butel happened to run into the VMRO-DPMNE candidate for mayor of this municipality, Darko Kostovski. Shilegov in his style, advised his opponent that it would be better if he wins the elections.

“Respect, VMRO, let’s shake hands...The people are convinced that I will win and you know very well, your eyes speak”, said Shilegov to Kostovski.

On the social networks a photomontage with a poster of the Serbian Singer Aca Lukas ap-

peared, as part of the candidate lists of VMRO-DPMNE, with the motto – “Always work, always Macedonia”. In the context of the conversation between Shilegov and Kostovski, who will win and whose “eyes are speaking”, here is chorus line from Lukas: “Turn on the lights to look each other in the eyes, like in an old children’s game, who can do it longer, they say no one can stop destiny, what will they tell us, our eyes will tell us...”

This year as well, the “Ashure” manifestation was traditionally held in the settlement of Kanatlarci near Prilep. At the event that is characterized with a long tradition and history, the current Mayor Marjan Ristevski was also present, who is also a candidate for a new mandate from VMRO-DPMNE in the upcoming local elections.

VMRO-DPMNE candidates first started with advertisements and billboards in Albanian, and now go to Muslim holidays, such as “Ashure”, and it would be nothing strange if they also attended a circumcision during the election campaign. They have made a parody out of their Demo-Cristian party just to get votes.

The current mayor of Stip and candidate from VMRO-DPMNE for a second mandate, Ilcho Zahariev, said that during Gruevski’s rule several big projects had been built, which are presented in the “report” of 500 pages. He emphasized the several streets and highways that were constructed. VMRO-DPMNE have made the highways even and “precise” like an airport runway. Zahariev promised that he would also build an airport in Stip, all he needs is the trust from the citizens. And what would the airport be intended for, for import and export of migrants, or...!?

“DEMOCRACY” WITH VIOLENT ADDITIVES... DAY EIGHT!

Monika TALESKA

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 03.10.2017)

Last night, an attack on Mayor and current MP from the Union of Roma of Macedonia- Elvis Bajram and on Chief of Cabinet Adnan Memet. Several days ago, Alit Abazi, candidate list carrier from Kicevo, was injured in a shooting. These incidents from the past 8 days have put inererasable traces on the election campaign for a new local government that was supposed to be calm, fair and democratic. Moreover, before the start of the campaign, the political parties and mayor rivals shook hands and signed the Code for Fair and Democratic Elections.

The police have a crucial role in clearing the cases, which according to those who are familiar with the conditions have a different, but not a political background. But the fact is that the politicians are the target of attackers. And there is no excuse for violence.

SDSM, which is leading the coalition that is to bring life in Macedonia, last night in Veles announced the new sun, with a number of communal projects, economic and environmental ones as well.

VMRO-DPMNE, which is leading the coalition that is to bring a new era, after 12 years of ruining the entire system, last night from Kicevo promised new projects for development.

Leader Nikola Gruevski, who ruled with his cousins, godfathers, friends...and who is yet to be questioned by the prosecution for many crimes the SPO has charged him with, has now accused the new Government for “nepotism and tenders for personal wealth”.

At the local level, candidates for mayors who are bringing “life” and a “new era” are following each other to such an extent, that they have even started copying each other’s projects.

The citizens, on the other hand, are closely following all of them...And everyone comes to the media debates, except the candidates from VMRO-DPMNE. They have the courage to continue with populism in front of the people, but not in front of the cameras!

On the other hand, not even some spiritual “teachers” have remained immune to the election campaign. They have made remarks to SDSM that they are leading the campaign in the Municipality of Aracinovo with unconstitutional monolingual election posters (only in Albanian letters and messages), where they have chosen Milikije Halimi for the candidate for mayor.

The election campaign continues. From town to town, door to door, from one neighborhood to another, lighters, t-shirts, coffee, balloons, pens, bags are all given away, as a reinforcement to the election program. With a strong hand shake, everything is promised now...a “new era”, “new life”...everything, for Macedonia to be “eternal”!!!

LIFE IN AN ELECTION CONTEXT... DAY NINE

Diana TAHIRI

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 04.10.2017)

Life in Macedonia is becoming ever more interesting, as the days of the pre-election campaign for the local elections scheduled for October 15, 2017 pass by, in a rather bewildered, mystical and grotesquely stupid sense, with a daily dose of unrefined (not so) naïve humor.

The interesting thing is in the everyday non-sense that is made up by the participants in this campaign. To make up all sorts of nonsense – sounds meaningless, just like the campaign, meaningless, with tiny but unsuccessful attempts to present the candidates successfully, and with many “successful” “cultural arts programs” at the rallies.

For example, last night in the village of Batinci, SDSD started the rally with ultra-turbo folk music. As far as I know, there is no consuming alcohol there, otherwise the rally would have ended in the style of an extra cheerful wedding where everyone is invited, except for the bride and groom. I don't know whether they managed to present the program, the mood at the gathering did not seem like one for a political presentation, it looked more like a “Serbian market”, without Serbs.

Nothing new with VMRO-DPMNE, they are learning Albanian, collectively. Though it will be difficult to persuade the voters to learn it too.

The candidates of Besa, DUI and the Alliance for Albanians are caught up with the announced construction of the building on Bit-Pazar market, which is to start soon. They are all in favor of the construction, it's just that some want the construction to start now, before the elections, while others later, after the elections. No one is asking those selling on the Bit-Pazar market, they will be paying for space in the new market.

Bilall Kasami, aka Bili (as they fondly like to call him), adores to be photographed, and we have learned that his poses are inspired by the main character Polat Alemdar of the Turkish mega series "The Valley of the Wolves". It somewhat suits him, all he needs to do is to perfect a deadly stare and to kill off all of his opponents. On a picture.

"There (in Shutka, Guadalajara street), God forbid you should have anything to do with a woman, there the women are more dangerous than the men. They come out with sticks and axes to fight! – says Amdi Bajram, who obviously has traumas from violent women, because in the past he experienced this on his own skin. All right, it's not his first time, ever since we've known him, the parliament for him has been an arena for complaints about various types of violence that have been committed against him, including from women.

If you hadn't known, SDSM has their own candidate for mayor of the municipality of Aracinovo. More specifically, candidate – Milikije Halimi. The candidate is characterized by a pleasant appearance, and you think that finally Aracinovo, before the City of Skopje, has a chance of having a woman – dame for a mayor. That is until you hear her. Not that her "rich" vocabulary in English and Macedonian differs much from the vocabulary of an average person selling on a green market, but still you can understand her, if you repeat it to yourself a million times – she's okay, she has been chosen, "the bride" that was chosen by Prime Minister Zaev, and when Zaev chooses, it means that it is the best possible choice. For the Albanians. The ones that Zaev knows.

Somehow these elections and everything else revolve again around Zaev. He is wonderful, he manages to attend all rallies, yesterday he was in Cair, together with DUI's candidate for mayor of the Municipality of Cair. And with Bujar Osmani. A cheerful bunch, how should I call them, an association of mutual respect and support. And the thousands of voters of Aracinovo did not like this at all, who are largely responsible for the "victory" of SDSM at the parliamentary elections last year. They cursed his Ajvar (traditional dish made of red peppers and other vegetables) – "May Zaev's Ajvar spoil for Bayram". Not even the Albanian are what we thought they were.

And Koce is competing with Shilegov. Or, Shilegov with Koce. I just cannot conclude...

And, let me also not forget that in these elections candidates from four political parties from the Albanian bloc have been proposed for mayors of the Municipality of Cair. Ali Ahmeti is still calling on voters to join their votes and to all vote for the same, for DUI. How pitiful...But that is why SDSM will help him.

And finally, I'm not sure how this campaign and election spectacle is going to end, nor how the voters will decide. Whether to vote for themselves, or for candidates that will to some extent adhere to what they have promised, if the parties let them, or for friends and friends of friends, and in the end for us to sing along together:

Because politics go hand in hand with friendships.

We will read again tomorrow, with new views and events from our constant – life in an election context.

YOU ARE LYING GENTLEMEN! – DAY TEN

Maja IVANOVSKA

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 05.10.2017)

With all due respect to you, the great leaders of this pre-election campaign tragicomedy, yesterday, the tenth day, was however your complete failure.

Neither the 150.000 new jobs that Gruevski hinted from Bitola, in the midst of an election campaign for local elections (yes, I know, it's time someone whispered to him that this is a campaign for local elections and not for his personal promotion, and it's also time that someone told him that he is no longer a prime minister, but a leader of a party that is in a situation of complete reforming and that his days are numbered, both in the party and, at least I hope, also out in freedom...), nor Zaev's announcements from Butel about the new ways of managing Skopje, managed to reach the citizens in a way one little child did.

A child? Yes. A child! Do you remember? A small, living, honest creature, abused so many times by you, Gentlemen!

The video is older, published in 2014, but yesterday again was on the social networks, and it perfectly describes what you did to our children.

One little child has contested all your pre-election promises, all projects and visions for life in the new era for everyone! One little child, in just a few minutes tells you: You are lying Gentlemen!

That little child perfectly describes you, the great beasts that will bring milk and honey in this country. Take a look at it. That is you! You, who take children out of their school desks to hand out promotional materials for your party.

That is You, gentlemen, in the image of a little child. You, who leave students without teachers during classes, because their political activity is more important to You than the future of our country.

That is You, gentlemen, who leave the children without their parents.

That is You, gentlemen, who leave the children without their childhood! You contaminate them so much that you cannot even lie to them anymore!

That is You, gentlemen, who leave the children without dreams! Without hope! Without faith for a better tomorrow.

That is You, gentlemen, who cut their wings and pushed them in your uncompromising struggle for power. Let's be honest, you weren't fighting for something else!

That is You, gentlemen, who are promising kindergartens, schools, playgrounds, sports fields, you are promising everything, except – a future for these children! Maybe it is better this way. The promises will certainly remain unfulfilled, whereas the children will fight for their own future, as far away from home as possible...

MORE VIOLENCE AND LOTS OF SWEET LIES... DAY ELEVEN

Xhabir DERALLA

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 06.10.2017)

The new life and new era have wrapped up the eleventh day of their clumsy dance on the dirty scene. Their pendants rattled on the belts of the big leaders and local sheriffs, fixed to the frames with red tones set by the PR masters. The eleventh day of the pre-election campaign (October 5) was marked by more violence, dirty tricks and many sweet lies uttered by party speakers. Why lies? Well even if I were to see what they are promising, I would be rubbing my eyes in disbelief!

This day, halfway through the election campaign and until the day of the voting, was marked by the death of one of the candidates for mayor of the Municipality of Kicevo, Alit Abazi, who was shot dead in daytime shooting on September 27. The investigation has still not announced the motives, even though the attacker did not hide after the shooting, but rather went to have coffee in a well-known locale. However, regardless of the motives, this is an event that was supposed to stir the public, and also the institutions. Instead, we have more attacks, including an attempt to spray the participants at VMRO-DPMNE's rally in the center of Skopje, which was also attended by the head of that party. Apart from the quick response of the police that prevented this attack, we did not see any specific reaction. However, VMRO-DPMNE rushed to deny and fiercely attack CIVIL, with a threat that it would discredit it before the "international donors", as they say in their angry announcement. We responded. With positive energy, with a tone of constructiveness that Gruevski said they would not practice.

SDSM is moving along with its political caravan, with mainly male speakers, who are talking about the liberation, about the crime of the previous rulers and about the beauties that the citizens will see with the new government. This time, in Tetovo, where a large number of Albanians voted for SDSM at the parliamentary elections and thus wrote a new page in the political history of Macedonia – for the first time, voters voted outside of their ethnic camp. The Albanians, disappointed and angry at DUI and Ali Ahmeti- long-time obedient partner in Gruevski's government, voted for SDSM.

But now it seems as if SDSM is paying off some kind of debt. Has the white-haired, silent political calculating person, who has survived many political and criminal affairs, made a bargain to have his voters returned, who he deservedly lost?

Zoran Zaev, Prime Minister and leader of SDSM, had a pleasant tour of Tetovo with mayor Teuta Arifi, an intellectual known for her independent views and frequent disagreements with the political chameleon Ahmeti. They visited the "Kiril Pejcinovic" high school and promised to build the central school building. Well, the long delayed construction operation, due to the ignoring of the previous prime minister, is now to be realized. Hmm...

At the same time, Minister Dragan Tevdovski was reviewing in Stip the open issues concerning the business in Stip, and how the budget rebalance anticipates a "serious amount of money budgeted for providing support to small and medium enterprises".

Correct me if I am wrong, but I am faced with the question as to whether this is a subtle, and perhaps not so subtle, pre-election marketing with a taste of abuse? I wrote this question to a member of CIVIL's Expert Board. She replied with a smiley and with the following words: "Well it definitely is interference of the government in the pre-election campaign of the ruling party. However, taking in consideration the intensity of the interference, the taste of the abuse is still mild, and not bitter".

Indeed, with everything that we saw in Gruvski's time, from Pustec, to beatings, imprisonment and serious abuses and crimes, this seems like nothing. But, it does not mean that it should go unnoticed and without criticism.

Gruevski's campaign is strongly spiced by the growing stream for reforms in the party that he is holding in his claws for over a decade. Party veterans came out with a public support for the Reformers and demanded a resignation from him. It's as if though the judicial system and party justice are in a race. Given the corruptness of the courts, which keep on complicating and obstructing the work of the heroic SPO, it seems that party justice will reach Gruevski before the law does.

Nevertheless, in this short and incomplete review of the 11th day of the pre-election campaign, there are more questions that remain unanswered than answered. There is the issue concerning the Voters Register and the functioning of the SEC on election day and immediately afterwards, during the difficult hours of counting votes as well as the procedures of complaints, possible election reruns and many other issues. Questions remain about the election pressures and corruptive actions of the parties. Question about how party soldiers behave on the ground, far from the eyes of the public and the media, who – uninvited – suffer from the “Sunflower Effect”...

In some other occasion, we will deal with the question as to how much the religious radicalism will replace the ethnic one and what can (could) better prevent the society and the state...

And of course, in anticipation of all the violent actions that we will keep silent about, because freedom has come, we can absorb a murder and some broken heads.

And, at the end...

What have the parties offered? A flavorless taste of uninventive campaigns and a totally unoriginal performance by those running for local seats...Millions of refugees about to flood Macedonia, national chauvinism, freedom, a new life, new era and promises from a little notebook of an average janitor. And many men on the scene, while women are clapping hands.

AFTER OCTOBER 29, WHAT IS CLEAR – WILL BECOME CLEARER!

Biljana JORDANOVSKA

(from the CIVIL-ians journal: 23.10.2017)

Certain in their victory, SDSM did not wait much to continue their campaign, from where they stopped. Normally, with a focus on 18 municipalities where, primarily, the opponents are candidates for mayors from VMRO-DPMNE. Not that the rest are not important, but if they conquer the main one, is it too much to expect that in the spirit of transparency and solidarity they will leave the rest to DUI, the Union of Roma of Macedonia and the independent candidate for mayor of Mogila, Stevo Pivkovski.

But that the elections were bright, crystal clear, they were not, however, it was clear as day who would have the crown.

VMRO-DPMNE with its last strength, on antidepressants, is trying to prove with charges, complaints, pleas, whining and maniacal behavior that the elections were a genuine crime of SDSM, together with the SEC, the international community, foreign services, Soros-oids and the citizens who voted contrary to their belief that VMRO-DPMNE is the best option for the upcoming era.

And while in the Albanian bloc they are denying each other, uniting and then dispersing, DUI is definitely promising that victory will be theirs on October 29 in all 8 municipalities where they have their own candidate for mayor. Their greatest opponent is Besa, but as being more experience they can just “slap them one” to get them in order.

However, neither SDSM is so naïve, hence they practically applied a central officialized support

and cooperation with VMRO-NP at the local level in Stip, as a sufficient difference for the victory of Blagoj Bocvarski.

And the very "smart" Ilco, who desperate to keep his comfortable chair, suddenly asphalted a street, one of the muddy ones. Fast enough to receive a criminal report, for such a nice and fine gesture.

SDSM with a liberal vocabulary, continued with the same phrases and winning manner to feed the souls of those who remain in the second round of elections, with centralized speeches adapted to the local problems.

All quiet on the west, east, north and south, is it about life, the citizens or just about figures and statistics?

The important thing is to win and to know who needs to win.

The ends justify the means?!

And in the meanwhile, just because there is not a second round of voting in your municipality it does not mean that you should not contribute to the campaign of one or the others, and if not elsewhere than certainly on Facebook you have friends from Kratovo, Staro Nagoricane, Cesinovo-Oblesevo, Probistip...

FIELD REPORTS SELECTION: 1ST ROUND, OCTOBER 15, 2017

VOTING IN AERODROM INTERRUPTED

Voting in the Municipality of Aerodrom at polling station 2686 has been interrupted by an intervention of the police.

A voter was given four ballots, and when he went to put them in the ballot boxes there were only three ballots. He was missing the ballot with the list of council members of Aerodrom.

Following a reaction of the Election Commission, the police interrupted the voting, whereas the voter remains at the polling station. The police are waiting for a search warrant.

CIVIL's monitoring team reports that because the voting has been interrupted, there is quite a crowd in front of the polling station and many voters have given up waiting. The interruption has been lasting half an hour already.

VOTING ON BALLOTS WITHOUT SERIAL NUMBERS IN BEROVO

At polling station 013, in the primary school "Cvetan Dimov", in the village of Ratevo in the Municipality of Berovo, voting was interrupted for half an hour, from 9:30 am until 10:00 am, because on the stack of ballots there were no numbers, reports CIVIL's observer.

Representatives from the Municipal Election Commission came to the polling station and allowed for the voting to continue, after the president of the Election Commission had put a piece of paper in the stack next to the ballot with numbers, and from which ballots the voting would continue without a number in the ballot. The stack was not replaced.

POLLING STATION AND LOCAL PARTY HQ LOCATED IN THE SAME VENUE

In the village of Creshevo, Municipality of Gazi Baba, polling station 2549 and the headquarters of one political party are located in the same building, but in separate entrances. Party activists loudly call out to voters to first enter the party headquarters before they enter to vote, and then to realize their right to vote.

POLITICAL PARTY STANDS WITH LISTS OF VOTERS

In the Municipality of Shuto Orizari there is a party stand on practically every street. CIVIL's observers managed to record and take photos of several stands at which party activists have lists of voters. Also on the social networks it can be noticed how voters of Shuto Orizari are posting photos on their profiles from the stands of the candidates for mayors.

MINORS WITH PARTY SYMBOLS ACCOMPANY PARENTS AT VOTING

Today, with party t-shirts and caps, the citizens of Shuto Orizari, in the primary school "Brakja Ramiz i Hamid" realized their voting right. In addition to the parents, their underage children also wore party symbols. (photographs provided by the observer)

VAN CARRIES VOTERS TO BITOLA'S NEIGHBORHOOD OF BAIR

CIVIL's monitoring team have provided photographic evidence of the neighborhood Bair in Bitola, where groups of voters are transported with a van several times during the day.

According to the observer on the ground, voters are taken to the school "Gjogji Sugarev". In addition to the white van, several automobiles are also used to transport voters.

VOTE-BUYING IN BITOLA

In the Bitola neighborhood of Bair, observers of “Go to vote” have registered vote-buying.

After one of the observers tried to record the moment when two voters were being given 1000 denars each, he was noticed and attacked by the bribers who wanted to take his phone.

The police intervened at the same moment, after which the observers as well as the voters were taken to the police station to make a statement.

During the incident, CIVIL’s observer was also verbally attacked, both by the offenders and by the observers of “Go to vote”, when he tried to find out what was happening and presented himself as an observer of CIVIL.

INCIDENT DURING THE VOTE COUNT IN KUMANOVO

At polling station 1017/1 in Kumanovo, observers from Besa were knocking on the door of the polling station after it was closed at 7:00 pm.

Activists of Besa were threatening and demanding to enter inside during the counting of votes. The Election Board let them inside after which the police intervened. At the moment, the vote counting is running normally.

SECRECY OF VOTING VIOLATED

The editorial office of CIVIL Media received a photo that confirms that is very easy for the secrecy of voting to be violated.

Despite the fact that many cases were reported to the police, this photo does however testify that not everywhere are the election boards alert enough to pay attention. The question is raised on whether such cases are deliberately allowed.

INCIDENT IN SVETI NIKOLE

According to a report from an observer of CIVIL – Center for Freedom, last night around 1:00 am after midnight, there had been a serious incident in Sveti Nikole. Allegedly, an employee of the MOI with initials O.C, provoked by the celebration of young supporters of SDSM, physically attacked the group of young people and fiercely beat several of them.

Among the young people who were injured is also a girl. Unofficially, we find out that the Internal Control of the MOI is working intensely on clarifying this unpleasant case.

COMPLIMENT FOR ATTEMPTED VOTE-BUYING

CIVIL's observer has noted several remarks during the day of the local elections in terms of the election process, that is, the course of the voting.

From the report of our observer, who was covering the Municipality of Butel, specifically the primary school "Petar Zdravkovski – Penko", several irregularities have been noted in relation to the voters and the election administration as well.

Around 9:00 am there was a physical confrontation between two people inside the school building. The police had intervened on time. What CIVIL stated before the elections were held, in relation to the Voters Register, was also confirmed on the day of the voting.

"In polling station 2912, Municipality of Butel, a citizen with the initials I.B.S was not able to find herself on the Voters Register, thus she was unable to exercise her democratic right, the right to vote" – stressed CIVIL's observer.

Furthermore, at around 3:00 pm, a voter, inside the same polling station, had been offering everyone present there 1000 denars each if they voted for SDSM. Only the president of the election board, S.G, had responded to his offer with the words – "you are very beautiful".

IRREGULARITIES INCITED BY PARTY REPRESENTATIVES AND ACTIVISTS

From the reports of CIVIL's monitoring team in regards to the irregularities in the election process, it is obvious that party representatives and their activists are active in encouraging election irregularities.

This category contributed in various ways towards the election irregularities, including: violation of election silence, vote-buying, threats and pressures, violation of secrecy of voting, obstruction of the work of observers and etc.

CIVIL received a dozen reports regarding violation of election silence, both on the social networks and on the ground.

In regards to the violation of the election silence on the social networks, we point out the case that was reported by an observer of ours concerning a list carrier in the Municipality of Butel, from the political party Alliance for Albanians, who on October 14 posted a photo on his Facebook profile calling for people to vote for number 9.

Furthermore, we received a report from a citizen that in the Municipality of Aerodrom, on Blvd. Avnoj, entrance 46, and probably in the surrounding buildings, they had received flyers from VMRO-DPMNE in their mailboxes in which it says "The new era begins, a new morning, new victories, sincerely and faithfully yours, Nikola Gruevski".

In addition, cases were reported to CIVIL related to vote-buying. CIVIL's observer reported about the case in the Municipality of Shuto Orizari, primary school "Brakja Ramiz I Hadid".

After two women had realized their right to vote, they were greeted by another person in the school yard, who gave them 500 denars each.

Election irregularities, incited by party activists, have also been noted in the category threats and pressures. An observer of CIVIL, who participated in the counting of votes in polling station 1017/1, in the Municipality of Kumanovo, reported that before the counting of votes had started, and after the doors of the polling station had closed, that two activists of the political party Besa had demanded, by knocking on the door and threatening, to participate in the

vote counting, after which the Election Board could no longer resist the pressure and let them inside.

Following this report, CIVIL reported the incident to the police, from where there was an urgent reaction and one observer removed from the polling station, whereas the situation was put under control.

At these elections as well, our observers noted violation to the secrecy of voting, which in several situations was prevented. Namely, in polling station 2447 in the Municipality of Saraj, an observer of DUI voted in place of another voter, who had complained that he has a visual impairment.

Near polling station 2653 in the Municipality of Karpos, three vehicles were noticed with Skopje license plates (which are thought to belong to activists of the political party GROM), carrying voters to the polling station.

In the Municipality of Bitola, in front of the primary school "Gjorgji Sugarev", our observer was present during an obstruction that was made to the work of the observers, that is, during an attack on other observers from "Go to vote", who photographed a group of people who received a bribe for coordinating the voters. The bribers noticed that they were being photographed and headed towards them, while the observers ran to the police van. CIVIL's observer was also verbally attacked in the incident, both from the offenders and by the observers of "Go to vote", when he tried to find out what was happening and presented himself as an observer of CIVIL. The epilogue to this incident ended in a police station, where both the attackers and the observers were taken.

VOTERS IN VIOLATION

CIVIL's monitoring team noted irregularities on election day, caused by voters in several municipalities.

At polling station 2791 in Dracevo, Municipality of Kisela Voda, according to our observer, a father voted on behalf of his disabled child. The boy was physically impaired, was not contactable and did not see the lists for voting.

In the Municipality of Aerodrom, at polling station 2690, more elderly voters had given their ballots to the members of the Election Board, for them to put them in the ballot boxes. The members of the Election Board reacted immediately, pointing out to the voters where they need to put the ballots. Another citizen at the same polling station refused to fold the ballots.

CIVIL OBSERVER ATTACKED IN BROAD DAYLIGHT!

02.11.2017 A prominent member of DUI in the Municipality of Saraj, whose initials are S.M., has physically attacked an activist and member of CIVIL in broad daylight. The incident took place yesterday, November 1, near the roundabout in Gjorce Petrov, at 2:00 pm. CIVIL conducted serious checks of the area and verification of all data, requested a written statement from its observer, and secured the necessary documentation on the incident.

CIVIL concludes that the attacker is a member of the Election Board in the village of Laskarci, and the reason for the attack on our member is precisely because he was our observer, accredited by the State Election Commission and authorized by CIVIL, for observing the local elections at the polling station where the attacker was a member of the Election Board.

The attacker had been openly threatening CIVIL's observers even on the day of the voting, October 29, because of which they were withdrawn, while the relevant institutions were publically called upon to react. Namely, during the election day, October 29, at 1:30 pm, CIVIL called on the SEC and the MOI to take measures to protect the election process in the village of Laskarci. We have no feedback on whether that happened, though yesterday's attack shows us pretty

well how things are.

The attacker noticed our observer in Gjorce Petrov yesterday and fiercely attacked him with fists, after which our observer sustained injuries that were ascertained from a health institution. The case was reported to the police yesterday.

CIVIL informs the public that the attacker is an influential member of the ruling party DUI, who dared to attack our observer in broad daylight, simply because he was responsibly carrying out his task as an accredited observer of the State Election Commission and authorized member of CIVIL's monitoring team.

CIVIL strongly condemns this brutal act and categorically demands from the state institutions to protect our member and his family from further pressure and threats to their safety.

An attack on a member of CIVIL is an attack on the entire organization! At the same time, it is also an attack on the State Election Commission and represents a brutal attack on the entire election process and democracy in general.

FAMILY AND GROUP VOTING – A LASTING TRADITION

Biljana JORDANOVSKA

Voting for the entire family, especially on behalf of the wives, and not to mention the elderly citizens... Family and group voting is one common election irregularity that just cannot be eliminated.

From over 240 reports on election irregularities, CIVIL addressed 199 reports to the State Election Commission, out of which 19 refer to family and group voting, which is about 10% of all the reports on irregularities, processed until 12:00 noon on October 17. When we say reports, this means that

they have at least one case of family and group voting. On election day, October 15, CIVIL's observers had data that spoke about this issue.

In Probistip, polling station 1536 located in the school "Naum Naumovski – Borce", a married couple voted together behind the voting booth. The Election Board did not react. CIVIL's observer pointed out what was happening. The comments of the members of the Election Board were: "Be quiet, don't get yourself into more work".

At polling station 0749, in the primary school "Sande Sterjoski" in Kicevo, a grandson brought his grandmother to the voting, stood behind the voting booth with her and loudly instructed her who to vote for.

Saraj is a municipality in which, among the many election irregularities are also numerous cases of family and group voting.

In the village of Laskarci, Municipality of Saraj, in polling station 2447 and 2447/1 we have cases where a son votes for his mother, while the Voters Register is carried outside of the polling station for her to sign, where men vote for their wives, and a person with the initials B.A votes on behalf of his entire family..., while the Election Board is without any reaction.

At least in the Municipality of Prilep, polling station 1374/1, in the primary school "Rampo Levkata", the case was reported to the police. What happened?

Namely, a voter brought with him a larger group of voters, and while they were voting behind the booths, he went from one person to another telling them who to vote for. The members of the Election Board reacted, the voter ignored them and at the end the case ended up in the police.

Conclusion?

Family and group voting, add this to the serious violation of the secrecy of voting, on the one hand, and to the threats and pressures on the other hand, and to this, add the justification that is made at party headquarters about reliable voting, and you get a nicely framed picture of "traditional" voting that is carried out upon ones "own" will and belief.

THE ROMA ARE USED FOR A DIRTY CAMPAIGN!

Dehran MURATOV

“Flour”, “oil”, “500 Denars” ..., that is the first association one thinks of when the Roma are mentioned in relation to the election processes. Unfortunately, it can be concluded from the field work and from the reports of CIVIL – Center for Freedom that the Roma ethnic community is used as a cheap electorate.

Throughout Macedonia’s electoral history, the cheap vote of the Roma has been abused many times. Some political structures have even given and are giving the votes of the Romas for small sums of money, thus sealing the fate of the Roma community, which for years has not had its own voice in any sphere of social changes.

Group and family voting have become a trademark of the Roma ethnic community. However, in the past several election cycles, in addition to vote buying, other incidents taking place among the Roma during the election campaign have also become prevalent. The headlines from journalist archives and the reports of CIVIL’s observers testify to this situation: “SDSM is buying votes in Shutka with rotten meat” (2011), “VMRO-DPMNE is buying Roma votes with oil and a bag of flour” (2013), “Sekerinska attacked by Amdi Bajram” (2014), “Electoral vote buying with firewood” (2016), “Amdi caught handing out money” – (report by an observer of CIVIL), “On thin ice” – (testimony)...

In the past several days, several minor violations have occurred in Shutka since the campaign started. The most serious incident is the physical attack on Elvis Bajram, the mayor of the

Municipality of Shuto Orizari, and at the same time running for mayor of the municipality in the local elections. Bajram was attacked two days ago on “Guadalajara” street in Shuto Orizari, and injured while having meetings with the citizens. Adnan Memed, chief of mayor’s cabinet, was also with Bajram. Opponent Kurto Dudush claims that the group fighting had started after Elvis and his pals had attacked a woman who was opposing them while they were tearing down posters from SDSM’s headquarters in Shuto Orizari.

The MOI informs that several people who had participated in the fight have been identified and called in for a conversation, and that collecting evidence for further action is under way. They also add that every attempt to violate the democratic election process and endanger the safety of the citizens will be sanctioned accordingly.

The police need to quickly clear this case so that anger does not build up. If the competent authorities do not clarify the case, it is more than obvious that revenge on the attackers will follow after the elections.

Shuto Orizari and the remaining Roma neighborhoods in the country have been treated as ghettos until now, and practically no work has been carried out on educating the voters, no advisory materials have been given to them, and no explaining made on their rights and obligations.

What is most important following these incidents, is for the police to show that it really is not a party servant (as it was previously MVRO), but that it is there for all the citizens, and for it to be present in the municipality and all the other Roma-Turkish neighborhoods. Especially since in the past ten years, a private security agency maintained the “order” in Shuto Orizari, with the amen of Gordana Jankulovska and Saso Mijalkov.

This case should be solved and not be put “under the rug”, as was Amdi’s attack on Sekerinska on election day in 2014, and as there is still no report for Mayor Elvis, who attacked a citizen on the market in Shutka.

Ever since VMRO-DPMNE lost its power, and the SRM party started losing the support of the citizens, Amdi is no longer the absolute “ruler” and king of the Roma. Saso Ordanovski explains

his ruling quite well in his column –“Middle finger for Amdi”, where he reminds that: “The Roma are always with the government”, and Amdi is not with the government now ...

The question is why do the Roma always use a dirty campaign? Why is it that one of the smaller groups of citizens (according to the last population census, which has long been outdated) is filling the reports of observers and news headlines of the media with election violations, vote-buying and fights, when they do not have the power to impact the end results in terms of which of the bigger political parties will be in power, as there are seven official Roma political parties.

Nevertheless, the cheap Roma vote is very precious for the local elections. Experience and recent reports say that precisely the Roma votes decided who would be the winner in a given municipality. But their precious defining vote, cheaply bought until now, is forgotten immediately after the votes have been counted, up to the next elections! Will the Roma at these elections as well use a dirty campaign, and be dragged “Gypsy by gypsy by the ears and taken to the voting”! And will the Roma politicians and voters become aware of the significance of free, fair and democratic elections, without pressure, vote-buying and threats, because only in such way will we eradicate and listen and read about – “We ask the Roma not to do Gypsy stuff”!

VOTE-BUYING, HATE SPEECH AND BLACK CAMPAIGN HAVE MARKED THE ELECTION SILENCE

Excerpts from press conferences on October 15, 2017

CIVIL's monitoring team has noted over 20 reports of violations of the election silence. Many party activists used yesterday with their final efforts to provide sufficient voters for their candidates for mayors and list carriers.

On the other hand, it could be noted that the police were available and mobile enough to react timely to the reports of the citizens.

Our observers on the ground informed that the black campaign had not stopped not even for a moment.

Leaflets, flyers and brochures were distributed in front of the doors of citizens in Aerodrom, Novo Selo, Matejce, Otlja...party flags and open headquarters...putting up posters, all with hate speech against the opponent.

Neither threats nor verbal violence were missing.

A principle of a primary school threatened employees that he would expel them from work if they did not go to vote. The case has been reported to the police.

The Facebook profiles of party activists testify as to how proactive party activists were, but so do the night excursions for vote-buying.

Let us remind that there was such a case in Resen, for which CIVIL Media informed yesterday, concerning 4.500 Denars in a Roma neighborhood. The police reacted in time.

A similar case has been noted by an observer in Karpos last night, where party activists, with a list of people for whom they presumed would be politically neutral, had been determining how and with how much to bribe them in order for those people to vote for a certain candidate.

Many candidates used the silence of the others to call on the electorate and tell them who to vote for.

The message that reached a member of the coordinative body of CIVIL – Center for Freedom on who to vote for and on how to get acquainted with the party, testifies to the efforts for attaining a greater number number of people to whom the message on who to vote for reaches.

CIVIL will publish the uncensored audio recording of the telephone conversation and the party it concerns, today after 7:00 pm.

However, perhaps the biggest remark is in terms of the Electoral Boards in regards to the voting of the sick and frail, as well as those in prisons.

For example, in counting the ballots in one polling station, there were two ballots with the same serial number.

A voter, with a proper request to the State Election Commission for voting from home, and one that was accepted by them, did not have anyone come to his home until 7:00 pm for him to vote. After calling the SEC, he was promised that someone would come after 8:00 pm. Of course that did not happen.

According to CIVIL's sources, the Voters Register had been incomplete in the voting that took place in the prisons. More specifically, a large number of prisoners with valid identity cards were not able to realize their voting right because they were not on the Voters Register.

Election silence obviously does not mean a stop in the constructions works in several municipalities in Macedonia, if nothing else, municipalities can say they were providing access to the polling stations.

CIVIL announced new cases of election irregularities at the press conference held at 3:30 pm. However, the President of CIVIL shared the impression that this election process is running peacefully and in the sign of far more functional institutions and democratic atmosphere.

At the start of the press conference, CIVIL's team prepared two video recordings from citizen journalists, one from Shuto Orizari, and the other from Creshevo, Municipality of Gazi Baba.

There is obvious abuse of children and violation of the election silence in Shuto Orizari in the first video.

In the village of Creshevo, Municipality of Gazi Baba, polling station 2549 and the headquarters of one political party are located in the same building, but in separate entrances. Party activists loudly call out to voters to first enter the party headquarters before they enter to vote, and then to realize their right to vote.

"Election Boards today are often in a situation of being creative and thinking up ways how to overcome the problems with the election material" – stated Xhabir Deralla.

Below is selection of the report of CIVIL's observation:

Problematic election material

There is an increasing number of reports that speak of problems with the election material. In a dozen polling station, the stack of ballots is not perforated, thus the Election Boards have to cut them with scissors, which takes time and creates a crowd in front of the polling station.

Ballots are missing in the stack of ballots of several polling stations across the country.

In the village of Ratevo, at polling station 0013, in the primary school Cvetan Dimov, there are no serial numbers on some of the ballot.

Furthermore, in around thirty polling stations the pens either do not work or the ink is barely visible. This will cause a problem in the vote counting.

There is also an increasing number of reports that UV lamps are not working. There have been around fifty reports since early this morning that UV lamps not working in polling stations

throughout the entire country.

In polling station 1376 in Prilep, three uncircled ballots with a valid stamp were found behind the polling booth.

On a street in the Municipality of Aerodrom, CIVIL's observer found a security cord for the election material, which has been reported to the Municipal Election Commission and the MOI.

Family and group voting

Family and group voting is noted in the municipalities of Karpos, Aerodrom, Kisela Voda, Kicevo and Bitola. Unlawful action of representatives of one of the political parties has been registered at polling station 0654 in Demir Hisar. An observer of one party had went behind the polling booth together with the voter and voted instead of him. At the moment, they are waiting for the police to arrive, the voting has not been interrupted.

Photographing the ballot

There are 11 cases of violation of the secrecy of voting, in the municipalities of Center, Gostivar, Aerodrom, Negotino, Stip, Veles, Demir Hisar, Kumanovo and Tetovo.

In this category are also the cases of taking photos of the ballot. Hence, in polling station 2809 in the Municipality of Center, in the neighborhood Kapistec, a voter had taken photos of the ballot, but no one had reacted. The same thing was also noted in polling station 2267 in Stip, also without any reaction from the election administration.

Unlawful conduct of the Election Board

We have 39 cases of unlawful action of the Election Board and problems related to the procedures in the following municipalities: Prilep, Gazi Baba, Gjorce Petrov, Aerodrom, Karpos, Saraj, Lipkovo, Kumanovo, Petrovec, Butel, Center, Gostivar, Kisela Voda, Stip, Bitola and Vrapcista.

At polling station 2554/1 in Gjorce Petrov, a voter was given 6 instead of 4 ballots, after which the voter had filled all of them out. The voting had been interrupted at 7:35 am. The Election Board decided to circle each party logo on the ballot and to put them in the box, which will

probably mean that those ballots will be declared invalid. The same thing happened at polling station 2809, in the Municipality of Center, Kapistec neighborhood. A voter was given five ballots, which he filled out, after which he himself saw the mistake he made. The Election Board has called for the Municipal Election Commission, and assistance has also been requested from the State Election Commission.

At a polling station in Aerodrom, a citizen was first marked with spray, and after that determined that she was not on the Voters Register. She could no longer realize her right to vote.

Problems with the Voters Register

Unfortunately, we have to conclude that CIVIL's prediction have come true that on election day there would be cases in which citizens would not be able to exercise their fundamental human right to vote. Problems with the Voters Register usually mean cases where voters cannot realize their voting right, because they have been erased from the Voters Register. In this category we have ten reports from the municipalities Kisela Voda, Kriva Palanka, Gazi Baba, Kumanovo, Petrovec, Aerodrom and Gjorce Petrov.

ANALYSIS

Local elections that were much more than just local elections

Dr. Sasho ORDANOSKI

Dr. Sasho Ordanoski, one of the most prominent political analysts in the country, as part of CIVIL's Board of Experts, has written numerous analysis and columns for the media outlets of CIVIL Media platform. For this occasion, we have decided to publicize a selection of transcripts of Ordanoski's video analysis on the local elections process and the wider political and social context. Ordanoski's assessments proved to be precise and to the point. The presented transcripts provide a comprehensive analysis and chronological insight into the elections process, involving a variety of important aspects.

THESE ELECTIONS WILL SHOW THE FUTURE OF MACEDONIA

29.09.2017 (excerpts)

“These elections have a high political goal and will show the outlook for Macedonia. They will also determine whether there will be early parliamentary elections”, said political analyst Saso Ordanoski, at the conference “Free elections for a free society”.

“These elections will determine the fate of several party leaders. The elections will probably bring about the final political judgment for Nikola Gruevski [the leader of VMRO-DPMNE]. Likewise for Ali Ahmeti, because after the elections he will be deciding on what he will do in his political party. The elections will also be important for SDSM and Zoran Zaev, because they will be an assessment as to what the voters think about his policies. The elections will show the direction that the parties will further follow. If a certain form of defeat occurs, then not only will Gruevski leave the party, but there will also come a reform process, which the reform wing of VMRO-DPMNE has started. The same goes for SDSM”, said Ordanoski.

“The elections may perhaps be the most important, because they will show where Macedonia is on the road to EU and NATO”, concluded Ordanoski.

DEMOCRACY IS ALWAYS A LOCAL ISSUE

12.10.2017 (full transcript)

The pre-election campaign is coming to an end and now we can reflect upon the events of the past month. I think that the predictions did come true in that this pre-election campaign proceeded differently from an ordinary "local election. It appears that these local elections will mean more than just choosing a mayor and municipal councils, and that they will greatly determine the fate of entire party structures, and especially of their leaderships.

Therefore, you should not be surprised that the contents of this pre-election campaign resembled what one would expect from national, parliamentary elections much more than the local issues one hears on sidewalks and roundabouts. However, Macedonia is in such a situation, again historically, probably as the past 27 years, in which issues are being resolved in regards to the end of a major phase, a major phase in our democracy, when we are dealing with the remainders of an eleven-year regime. That is why I think that the stakes on the very day of the voting will be in the sense of a referendum. That means that the voting will be for or against two concepts that were also offered to us at the past parliamentary elections.

In that sense, it is disappointing to see that the campaign was not spared from filthiness. I think that this year, maybe for the first time, the use of hate speech, especially on the social media, went to a great extent. You can see it is no coincidence. You can see that the parties have completely understood the importance of the social media

and the occupation they are carrying out in an organized, and I would say, even in a well-paid manner. You can see that behind that traffic on the social networks are entire headquarters. You can see that they are the main producers of that hate speech, which most definitely cannot be good for these elections, or for the atmosphere that is further awaiting us. Macedonia is a divided society, and it is clear that we are coming out of a period of a strong and at times a filthy propaganda campaign that was carried out by the previous regime. Expectations and rational needs for settling scores with opponents, even for a revengeful line of action do exist, and have also transferred to the election campaign. I believe that all the parties participate equally in this, especially the two major Macedonian parties, both SDSM and VMRO, which are also the main sides of the conflict in these elections.

The elections will be, I hope, peaceful on the day of the voting, while the turnout of the voters will be very important. The degree of the turnout of voters will also directly affect who the winner will be.

It will be quite interesting to see if this trend that started at the last parliamentary elections will continue, of an ethnic Albanian support for the candidates of SDSM. If this trend does continue at these local elections, then we can say that we are entering a more stable phase of developing multi-ethnic options, party wise, which will not be tied solely to the ethnic background of the voters, but will be tied as a party offer to the entire electorate in the future.

We have seen VMRO's effort to correct, I would say, its totally wrong, not only politically, but also pragmatically incorrect approach, to go with irrational slandering and practically a campaign of hatred towards the Albanian part of the citizens in Macedonia.

They are trying to correct this, but I do not think that this will happen at these elections. Still, there is a highly expressed level of awareness among the voters in terms of who is doing things sincerely and who is not.

In that sense, I expect for there to be a twist in the results of the local elections, especially when taking into consideration the results of the previous local elections. However, we need to wait and see what the extent of this will be, in exactly which municipalities, so that afterwards we can deal with an analysis of the winners and of those defeated at these elections. I think that in some municipalities, and in a greater part of them, the issue of the mayors will be resolved in the first round of elections. I think that the grouping and consolidating of the electorates are such that they will immediately express a quantum of political intention as early as the first round. And this ultimately is not bad, because, if nothing else, we will be spared from additional two weeks of campaigns.

In other words, I think that these local elections will provide important foreshadowing for the political future that is awaiting Macedonia in 2018, where we are awaiting major reform type tasks. Where we are awaiting to see what the referendum voting for the policies will be, even though very briefly, for several months presented by SDSM in the position of being in power. After that we will see whether the results of these elections and the agenda that is to follow afterwards, and I especially mean the turmoil that already exists in several Albanian parties, and also in VMRO-DPMNE, will provide opportunities to assume whether we will have extraordinary parliamentary elections in the foreseeable future.

In any case, I wish for all the citizens to fulfill their civic obligation, and according to their conscience and political beliefs to go and vote on Sunday, because we must not forget that democracy is always a local matter. Even when you are voting for national issues, it is good for you to know that you have voted for someone at the local level, ultimately, that is where your life is. It is there that you do what you do every day, and what reflects the way your life is spent.

THE MOST IMPORTANT POLITICAL TREND IS THE NON-ETHNIC VOTING

15.10.2017 (excerpts)

“If we try to make a country in which everyone will have equal chances because they have been born as citizens of Macedonia, and not because they belong to a certain ethnicity, religion or any other affiliation, then that would be the perspective of the Macedonian state. We are moving in that direction with these results. We remain to see how the gap with Besa’s shortcoming will be filled. I think there will be a second round of voting in many places, which will be important”, said Ordanoski at the panel discussion at the CIVIL’s Press Center, two hours after polling stations were closed, at the end of the first round of the local elections in the country.

According to Ordanoski, it is possible that in the upcoming period there could be MPs of the VMRO-DPMNE coalition leaving, or joining other parties and coalitions, or declaring themselves independent, which will lead to a decline in the number of their MPs in Parliament.

“Generally, in politics, the one who wins in the first round will also continue to ‘trample’ in the second round. The trends I think are such that we will come to a situation of having a stable government at the central level, which will then have to decide whether there will be early parliamentary elections”, said Ordanoski, who at the beginning stressed that it is important that we saw a neutral but responsive state.

VMRO'S BOTS LOSE THE BATTLE ON FACEBOOK AND TWITTER

24.10.2017 (excerpts)

“It is interesting that VMRO-DPMNE has been losing the war on the Internet in the last several years. Despite the huge investments they made in this area, building an army of bots, relying on fake websites and fake profiles on Facebook and Twitter, in the end, however, to be they have been defeated in that realm”, says Ordanoski in the video-analysis publicized on CIVIL Media.

He considers that the social media have played a big role in the democratic changes in Macedonia, especially in circumstances where VMRO-DPMNE de facto controlled 90 percent of the traditional media.

“After shutting down most of the media and the change in the ‘editorial’ policy of key national television stations, primarily of TV Sitel and TV Kanal 5, who tried to return to somewhat more balanced frameworks, even though I believe they are one of the most scandalous television stations in terms of content and professional level, VMRO-DPMNE was been left without that support of the traditional media, and afterwards, it was also stranded in the social networks”, outlined Ordanoski.

Ordanoski stresses that social networks are necessary for the spreading of messages, but that they are also used for spreading hate speech, forgery, misinformation, and extremism...

“I think that the wave of election victory at these local elections was so strong for the

Social Democratic Union and for that big coalition that even if VMRO-DPMNE were better in the sphere of social networks, they would have still lost with a similar result”, added Ordanoski.

He is confident that a big part of the political struggle – that is, the democratic exchange of views, opinions, and debates – has moved to social media and the Internet, and all those who take this seriously will have benefit from doing so.

“I repeat once again, the social media are a ‘dangerous’ phenomenon, because there, all information and facts are suppressed, and they deal with fake news, with perceptions, with various distortions and much hatred that is spread, both individually in the form of slander and insult, and as hate speech towards entire communities, regardless of whether they are cultural, ethnic, sexual, linguistic... But this is the outcome, VMRO-DPMNE has lost the Internet war”, concluded Ordanoski.

END TO NATIONAL CHAUVINISM

29.10.2017 (full transcript)

Video analysis recorded at the CIVIL's Press Center, two hours after the second round of local elections was concluded:

Following the second round of local elections, it is important to outline several points.

First of all, the elections are being disputed by two sides, or two leaders, so to say. By Nikola Gruevski, in perhaps the longest post-election speech in the history of democratic Macedonia, and by Zijadin Sela, in probably the shortest election speech in the history of democratic Macedonia, and in principle they both do it with two same narrations. They both claim, with a slight difference in claims, that they have won in their ethnic communities and therefore do not accept defeat by all other citizens who have voted ethnically mixed.

It is a kind of symbolism, which has deteriorated in Macedonia with the parliamentary elections and I think that for both of the presidents of those parties, for Sela, who is an Albanian nationalist and also for Gruevski, who is a Macedonian nationalist, it actually says that they are politicians from a time that is gone in Macedonia, and they will probably never again be in a position to win elections with their nationalistic and chauvinistic platforms, as they have until now.

On the other hand, it is clear that VMRO-DPMNE, long before the second round of elections, had no intention of recognizing the elections. The entire pre-election campaign before the second round was actually a campaign that was followed by the written speech of the leader five minutes after the closing of the polling stations. A speech of

probably around thirty pages, from which it can clearly be seen that Gruevski, who was aiming not to recognize the elections, was not content with a victory in any municipality, because his thesis is that everything is arranged, everything is bribed, everything is a result of pressures. So according to him, the greater the defeat, the more this thesis is well-founded.

I think that in the case of Gruevski, we have a classic example of when a state frees itself of a dictator, then that dictator moves into his party, and after the state releases itself of him, then the party needs to find a way how to save itself from him. This will actually be the next topic, on how the relations will develop in VMRO-DPMNE. It is obvious that Gruevski has made in-depth analyses and has no intentions of leaving the leadership position in the party, and it is also obvious that it is difficult to expect a democratic resolution in DPMNE. The party will probably have a mix of some pressures, some despair and some resignations. However, this will be an internal story of DPMNE that is not pleasant for Macedonia, because Macedonia needs a functional opposition that admits when it is defeated, and especially when the defeat is as resounding as it has been in this election.

On the other hand, the story of the looser Sela is a story that in one part affects the Government of Macedonia. Sela is not in a position to be able to threaten. Sela is not even in a situation, I believe, to leave the government. He may even face a situation of having divisions in his own party. Therefore, I think that Sela will choose very carefully how he will construct his following steps. He is humiliated in Struga, in no small way. He is one nationalistic, chauvinistic leader who likes winning, especially among his own ethnic group. Now, as a result of that changed policy in Macedonia, he can no longer win, because now neither the Albanians, nor the Macedonians vote only for their ethnic leaders. And because I do not believe that Sela can transform himself into a citizen journalist, he will remain a provincial nationalist. I think that his career is more or less

over. This only thing that could rescue it would be dramatic changes or if Macedonia returns dramatically to the paths of nationalism to which it has been heading for years, because Sela comes from that period of the Macedonian nationalist policy.

Hence, I think that the Government will remain stable after these elections. The government will continue to function the way it has functioned until now, but will become even more stable, I believe, at least until the middle of next year. And then, depending on how the integration processes will be developing in the European Union, we will see whether there will be considerations for extraordinary elections in the foreseeable future.

At the end, I must warn of some indications, which are being told by all those who are losing, that the police participated in the rigging of the elections, in the vote-buying, in the pressures and so on. I have Minister Oliver Spasovski's statement that such things did not happen, but I would like to say that I am not completely sure that the Republic administration of the Ministry of Internal Affairs has strict control over what really was happening in Struga. Therefore, I will warn, because I consider that this police still functions quite locally, with their local party bandits and with its local party police contents. Do not forget, DUI is the continuity of Gruevski's regime. I would recommend to have and see with a more in-depth analysis where and how much the police exercised or possibly exceeded their legal authorities in terms of the elections. Even though I do not believe that anything of what the police could have perhaps done somewhere could contribute to a significant change in the outcome of the elections.

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