

**FREE ELECTIONS:
A NON-NEGOTIABLE
CONDITION**

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field report ■ analysis ■ project information

Project:

FREE ELECTIONS FOR FREE CITIZENS

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FREE ELECTIONS: A NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITION

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СИХИЛ

Агенција
за Изборно Надзоровство
и
Бирачки Центар

СЛОБОДНИ
ИЗБОРИ
ЗА
СЛОБОДНИ
ГРАЃАНСКИ

Проект за слободни избори

ВКЛУЧИ СЕ!
НАБЉУДУВАЈ!

ЦИВИЛ ти повикува сите граѓани и граѓани да се вклучат во набљудување на слободни, фер и транспарентни избори во Република Македонија.

до делување
иот сектор
Битола

LEAD-IN

FREE ELECTIONS. WE ACCEPT NO LESS THAN THAT!

By Xhabir DERALLA

Insisting on the expression “free elections”, the meaning of it, sets the diagnosis for the Republic of Macedonia already. Free elections is so obvious and normal for so many European societies, and such a troubling issue for this country, for too long. What is accepted as a value and a fact of life in normal societies, is still an unreachable goal for us, here.

Yet, that is a goal that our organization is striving to reach, in spite of pressure, obstructions, and unpredictable developments in the stormy political reality of the country. Our determination has also only been strengthened as we have found ourselves in a political environment increasingly hostile to civil society actors and to any who dare to challenge the current government's monopoly on power.

But what do free elections require? For free elections to take place, we need a free society, free citizens. Liberation of the society is a slow and complex process, and cannot be settled by political agreements between a few powerful individuals, irrespective of the number of people they represent.

Our standpoint is that we, as civil society, need to provide information, knowledge and safe space for every individual or a group of citizens to become part of the democratic processes. We need citizens free from fear. We need citizens who are free from unprincipled ties to shady and deceitful power structures. We need to actively help liberate those citizens who have become so entwined in the nets of political institutions built on a system of clientelism and loyalty tests. That is how the title of this project was created: Free Elections for Free Citizens.

For the past year, CIVIL – Center for Freedom has devoted its energies and focus as a national pro-democracy NGO operating in the Republic of Macedonia to a goal that has proven attainable by so many European societies, but which has persistently remained outside of our country's grasp: Free elections.

During this time, we have been heartened, and energized, as thousands of Macedonian citizens have taken to the streets, also demanding free elections, an idea whose time has come.

The Free Elections for Free Citizens project has taken a multi-faceted approach to the preparations for free elections in the Republic of Macedonia. At its heart is the recognition of the need for citizens to see institutions and political parties as part of a joint effort to create conditions to conduct elections in a democratic atmosphere with respect for human rights and freedoms, and provision of conditions that ensure elections that reflect the free will of voters, above all, as our project was conducted against a back-

drop of a massive government wiretapping scandal that revealed government spying on opposition. That our project took place against the backdrop of a wiretapping scandal that revealed a legacy of election rigging and punishment of opposition parties, perpetrated at the highest levels of government, served to highlight the importance of this goal, and the many obstacles that lay the way of reaching it.

The project, which began in June 2015 amid reports of government wire-tapping and election rigging, introduced unique approaches and methodologies that provided civic education on voting rights, and contributed to awareness-raising on electoral irregularities. It was conducted through daily dissemination of information and knowledge, based on long-term monitoring of human rights and political situation in an electoral context and in general.

Here we stand at an end of a project implementation, but at a beginning of a long-lasting process, full of variables and challenges. CIVIL has succeeded, through this project, to provide the basis for long-term monitoring and analysis of the political and societal processes related to the elections, voting rights in particular and human rights and freedoms in general. It is and will remain a resource for civic education, awareness-raising and empowerment of citizens to secure free elections.

Finally, here it is, a publication that brings a short selection of reports and analysis, resulting from one-year-long diligent work of a great many people who took part in the implementation of Free Elections for Free Citizens project. It is alive and will grow, as the work of CIVIL as a human rights organization continues, not only through projects, but as an organized group of activists, human rights defenders and experts, who continue collecting and publicizing cases of human rights violations, and demanding improvement of policies and practices at all levels and in all spheres of the society.

It's been an exciting year in which we combined a variety of interconnected and complementary methodologies and activities, in order to face challenges imposed by the complicated socio-political reality of Macedonia. Through this project, we contributed to changes in perception of various aspects of electoral processes and political culture, public awareness on elections and voting rights, and we formulated demands for changes of policies, legislation and practices to secure free elections.

The project consisted of several components, such as field-based research, which included surveys, focus groups, interviews - all distributed online to CIVIL's wide and growing audience; fieldwork across the whole country in nearly sixty municipalities; analysis and recommendations; public awareness campaigns; civic education and mobilization on electoral and political culture; voting rights education and advocacy; and formation and administration of five regional monitoring teams and a mobile monitoring and reporting teams for long-term monitoring. As always, we continued to monitor the situation of human rights and overall political environment, with emphasis on the electoral context of the processes. A lot has been done, and a lot needs to be done. However, we are proud of our achievements so far.

This Free Elections for Free Citizens project will live on for many years to come, as it has set basis for our work in other projects in this sphere. Project outputs, including this publication, represent the uncompromising struggle of the civil society to promote sustainable solutions for overcoming corrupt practices and electoral frauds.

CIVIL has reached an overwhelming number of citizens through Free Elections for Free Citizens project. It exceeded the originally planned figures, and it became a beacon in the gloomy political situation in the Republic of Macedonia. Thousands of people read CIVIL's reports related to the work on this project, every day. The reach of social media profiles of the organization is well over 150,000 every week, with peaks of 500,000 views per week. My colleagues elaborate about this and other achievements in this publication.

As always, we rely on information, comments, suggestions and advice from our constituencies and general public. Indeed, many of the cases revealed by us in the past year come from concerned citizens. Stay in touch. Until we are able to say: Free citizens are voting at free elections in the Republic of Macedonia.

We accept no less than that.

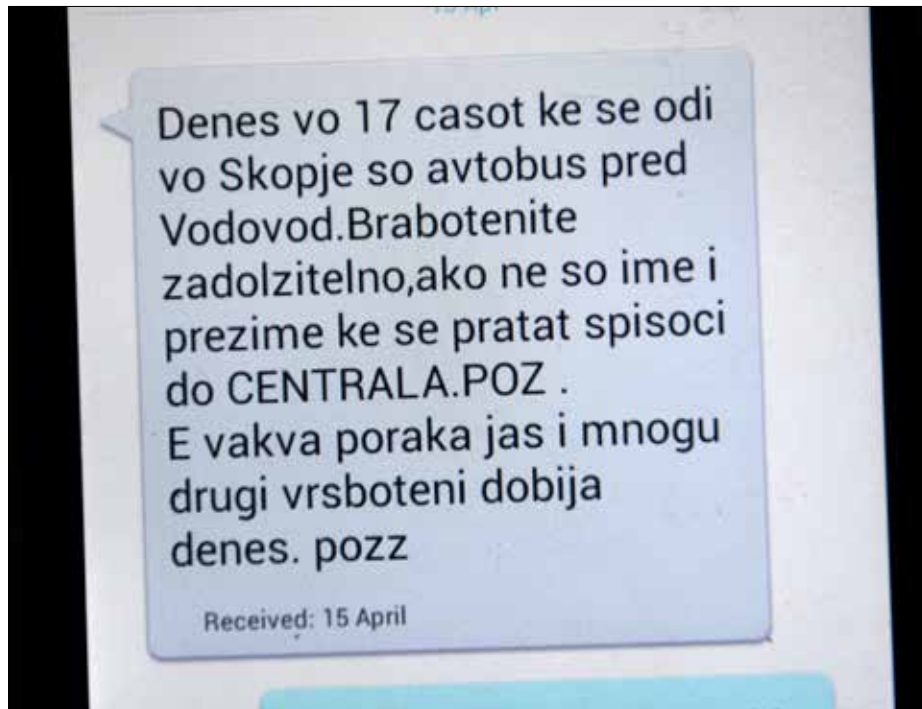
OBSERVATION AND INVESTIGATION FIELD REPORTS

JULY 1, 2015 - JUNE 30, 2016

Biljana JORDANOVSKA

In cooperation with monitoring teams and project staff of CIVIL

During the implementation of the Free Elections for Free Citizens project, which covered the period of July 1, 2015 – June 31, 2016, CIVIL – Center for Freedom received over 100 well-elaborated reports from its long-term observers, over 300 reports as the result of the research and investigation teams deployed for this project, and reports by citizens who contacted CIVIL using email, social networks, and the online application for reporting violations of voting rights and other abuses and irregularities through the website “Free Elections” (www.slobodniizbori.info). Additionally, over 600 citizens, in direct communication with CIVIL’s teams, have reported political pressure and discrimination based on political affiliation.



Mobilization message: "Today, at 17h, a bus will depart to Skopje. It is obligatory for the employed, otherwise lists with names will be sent to the HEADQUARTERS [of the party]", according to a insider.

CIVIL'S teams, including the journalist and research team of CIVIL Media, also made numerous site visits during the project period, investigating the situation and the specific cases reported to our teams, and also examined facts that were presented in the reports.

CIVIL reports on events that take place on the ground on a daily basis, and publishes stories on numerous cases of abuse of power, discrimination based on political affiliation, structural violence, political corruption, and many other categories of violations of human rights and freedoms in the electoral context and beyond.

From the many years of observing the situation of human rights and freedoms in Republic of Macedonia, CIVIL has noted a constant rise in the number of abuses, pressure and discriminations based on political affiliation. The work of the long-term observers and CIVIL's project team in the Project "Free Elections for Free Citizens" was dynamic and difficult.

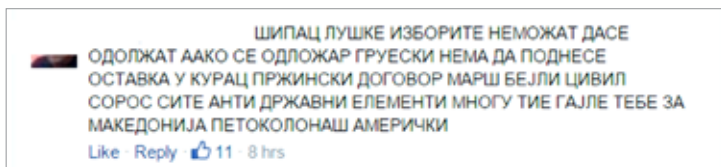
A large number of cases were revealed and published, but a far greater number of indications of serious abuses and violations of human rights and freedoms in the electoral context still remain. Structural violence and political discrimination are widely spread and embedded in every pore of society and institutions. Yet, the institutions for justice remain willfully ignorant of these conditions, and their actions constantly confirm the insidious trend of political interference in their operations, which prevents many citizens from having access to justice.

The main website of CIVIL (www.civil.org.mk) is an exceptionally rich resource that has published more than 800 texts on the subject of elections, in the period July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016 alone. A large part of these items are direct testimonies and documents on serious violations that our organization has noted.

We would like to direct the public to our online resources for information about the situation of voting rights and the numerous individual cases to which the reports of the long-term observers, the reports and the investigation of CIVIL's team all testify. All

contents that are published by CIVIL are free to download, use and publish, under the license Creative Commons 4.0, и and we encourage the media to continue using this resource.

When publishing, CIVIL pays attention to protecting the identity and the source of the reports. Upon the request of the sources, many reports from the ground cannot be published due to, as they have said, “fear of vengeance by the regime”. Nevertheless, it is worth mentioning that increasingly more people are becoming emboldened to speak out about what is happening to them, and wish to share their experiences on the immense problems related to the politicization of the institutions at the local and national level.



Facebook comment: “Shipac [pejorative for Albanian], elections cannot be postponed, and if they are postponed, Gruevski will not resign... [swearing] Przino agreement, Bailly, CIVIL, Soros, all anti-state elements, you don’t care about Macedonia, 5th Column of America.”

Moreover, it is especially encouraging and motivating that, in the course of the implementation of this project, trust in our organization has grown. This can be noticed through the openness of citizens to share information with CIVIL, even when they are ex-

tremely frightened of the consequences they could face as a result of such communication. There are precise data, recordings and other documentation that is collected, according to the project methodology and principles of the organization, for each of the hundreds of stories that have been registered by CIVIL’s observers.

The following text is a brief selection of reports and cases registered by CIVIL, within the past 12 months. It should be taken into consideration that often it is impossible to conduct a clear categorization of the cases, as they most often belong to more than one category, as one abuse usually leads to violations in other categories as well.

In several cases, we have refrained from disclosing details, in order to protect sources from retaliation.

FIERCE AND MASSIVE POLITICAL PRESSURE

The daily lives of many citizens of the Republic of Macedonia are filled with a large number of politically motivated pressure, threats and blackmail. Pressure, threats and blackmail that have been reported by observers and sources in the field range from subtle to harsh and direct ones. They are usually conducted by representatives of government institutions, including police officers and inspections officers, during working hours and after.

According to our findings, incidents of political pressure occur to people in virtually every sphere of life: in public places, in state institutions, at work in the public and private sector, in the education and health care sector, and even in everyday communication between people.

There is a pattern; first, sending out “friendly advices and suggestions”, through close friends and relatives of the “target” of the pressure, followed, if necessary, by warnings, threats and blackmail. And if all that does not achieve the desired effect, then more serious pressure follows, aimed at “disciplining” and “punishing” those who are not obedient.

The regular weekly reports of the long-term observers of CIVIL, almost without an exception, state cases of various forms of political pressure, threats, blackmail and discrimination, and quite often hate speech directed towards political opponents of the ruling party. This is especially emphasized in state institutions, both at the local and the national level. The threats are most often related to work dismissals, cuts in salaries, degradation and termination of internship contracts. In practice, these threats are often executed for minor “mistakes,” in order to intimidate other staff members.

CIVIL came across numerous testimonies on politically-motivated pressure, and even violence, in which the perpetrators are municipal officials and policemen.

Cutting social welfare, deleting people from unemployment records, cancelling or reducing subsidies for agricultural products and reducing salaries – are all just one part of the over 250 cases for which CIVIL has reported on in the 12-month period from July 2015 – June 2016.

Not even children and youth are spared from political pressure. Apart from the indoctrination that is performed every day on children and youth, it is also a tool for political pressure on parents. These cases are the most difficult to reveal. The sources fear for their children and are reluctant to speak on what is happening. Nevertheless, CIVIL's teams have come upon more than twenty cases in which teachers conduct subtle pressure on students who are children of opposition oriented citizens.

INTIMIDATION AND DISCRIMINATION

CIVIL received numerous reports on cases of politically-motivated pressure and other forms of violations within the educational institutions in Bitola, Ohrid, Skopje, Gostivar, Veles, Kavadarci, Stip, Kumanovo, Sveti Nikole, Valandovo, Strumica, Kicevo and Gevgelija.

"You will see what happens when you are friends with commies!" is a regular communication between party soldiers and everyone else. All it takes is one click on "Like" to an "unsuitable" Facebook post for a "disciplining" procedure to be initiated, which can lead to demotion at the workplace and excommunication with the working staff.

The "mildest" form of pressure is noted in cases where directors find ways to subtly harass employees who are not supporters of the government, by giving them tasks for which they are not responsible, followed with threats and punishments for even the smallest mistakes in their work, and then deeming them "unfit" for their jobs.

An "unfit" history teacher in a secondary school in a municipality in the western part of the country was dismissed from work, and replaced by a forest engineer, whose only qualification for the role is being a party soldier of the ruling party.

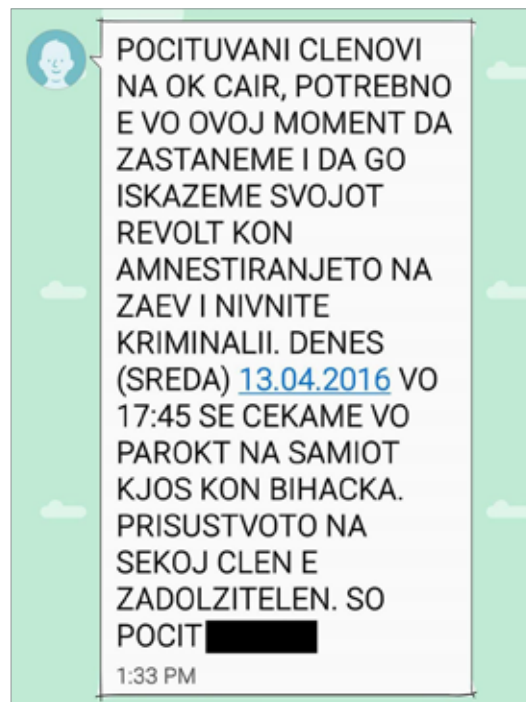
A person working as a manager of a state- owned funeral enterprise received threats against him and his family if he did not fulfill the orders to participate in the counter-protests and to engage in "door-to-door" party activism, namely that his house would be set on fire According to the testimony of the distressed citizen, the threats came from local party power figures, but he mostly suffered from the director of the local

office of the Employment Agency and from the Secretary of the municipal committee of VMRO-DPMNE. In order to avoid the pressure, CIVIL's source says he was forced to take sick leave, but the response to this was that a notice of employment termination had been already signed for him.

Employees of a public communal enterprise reported that they received penalties in the amount of 10% of their salaries for refusing to participate in a counter-protest in Skopje, in April 2016. According to a report of one of CIVIL's observers, in March 2016, the salary of another employee in the administration was also reduced in the amount of 10% of his salary, for not participating in an event for promoting the results (accountability) of the ruling party in his municipality.

The son of one of our observers was phoned by his classmate, otherwise an activist of the ruling party, who insulted and threatened him because of his online activity and because his mother cooperated with CIVIL.

The local party headquarters in Kicevo carried out mobilization for counter-protests in Skopje in May 2016. A citizen, employed in the public administration, asked to be spared from the obligation to participate in the counter-protest, and as a result was threatened: "A termination notice will be awaiting you if you dare not to go".



Mobilization message: "Respected members of the OK Cair, we need to stand up and show our revolt against abolishing ZaeV and their crimes. Today (Wednesday) 13.04.2016 at 17:45 we meet in the park opposite to Bihacka [headquarters of the opposition SDSM]. Presence of each member is mandatory."

ABUSE OF INSTITUTIONS FOR PARTY PURPOSES

The closing of private firms, mostly cafés and other catering facilities, along with small shops, is the most typical form of “settling political scores”, according to the testimonies of small business owners. They claim that the Public Revenue Office and other inspection services, along with the police, are continuously applying pressure, and enforcing or ignoring laws, on the basis of party affiliation.

According to over twenty small business owners, they are constantly visited by inspection services who harass them, even though they have proper documentation. CIVIL has noted such cases with small business owners in Skopje, Veles, Stip, Kumanovo, Struga, Gevgelija, Gostivar and many more municipalities.

According to sources of CIVIL, the only thing these shopkeepers are guilty of is that they are not supporters of the ruling parties. Often they are torn between the local authorities and the national services that diligently visit and fine them without any justification whatsoever.

“Once you see the inspection entering, you just know that you are going to be fined. Regardless if the fine is justified or not, you have to pay it, and afterwards you can file a complaint. If only there was someone who to complain to!” – testify two owners of a shop in one of the municipalities. Their words are echoed by a large number of shopkeepers throughout the country.

In the days when the Minister for Labor and Social Policy and the Minister of Interior, from along the lines of the opposition, were changed, in accordance to the Agreement for overcoming the political crisis (Przino), there were inconveniences for many employees in these ministries. CIVIL received numerous complaints from throughout the country (in over 40 cases), in which employees in the social welfare centers, as well as in the police, complained of political pressure and reprisal being conducted on them by supporters of the ruling party.

During those days, in several other cases, there was total chaos, because the decisions regarding employment of members of the police had been terminated and changed

twice in just a few days. On the one hand, the police received a telegram from newly-appointed Interior Minister Mitko Cavkov containing an order that decisions signed by him were to be respected. On the other, they received a telegram from outgoing Interior Minister Oliver Spasovski saying that failure to respect his decisions would result in sanctions.

POLITICAL DISCRIMINATION AND MOBBING

A group of employees in a public health institution addressed CIVIL after their situation had become unbearable. Some of the employees even have over 25 years of work experience in the health care of the patients in the facility. However, after the political crisis intensified and a new manager was appointed, the employee who brought this case to CIVIL's attention and her colleagues, have become exposed to strong political pressure.

Our source, along with others who are in the same situation, are afraid to speak about their problems. Some of them have already been sanctioned with cuts in their salaries, but now they fear of losing their jobs if they speak out about their problems. According to them, the working conditions in the institution are unbearable, because the institution has turned into a party headquarters, among other things.

"In the middle of the working day, half of the staff, party members and activists, hold meetings and discuss which steps need to be further taken, in favor of the party. This is how it was before the Annual Conference of the Union of Women was held, and also during the period when lists were drawn with secure voters of VMRO-DPMNE. The institution now, simply, functions as party headquarters", they said.

One of the employees of this institution has been given a special dispensation for partial disability, which she received after surviving a severe car accident. However, even though she is not to lift heavy weight, this demand is made of her on a daily basis, as she is told to bathe the patients, some of which can barely move.

"The decision I received from the Commission was not taken into consideration nei-

ther from the previous director, nor from this director. Not even my diploma for higher education is recognized. Also, each time I try to express my dissatisfaction, the director refuses to listen to me”, says our source.

*

A lawyer from a bigger municipality in Macedonia also testified for CIVIL, who, in his statement in December 2015, said that recently there had been an increased number of employees from the public sector seeking advice from him on how to protect themselves from political pressure carried out by their management staff.

According to our source, employees in the public enterprises state that their managers are calling them to party headquarters and to the municipality, and that there they receive orders to direct their subordinates to draw up lists of 5-6 or more politically neutral citizens. This “operation” has the purpose of influencing those who are politically neutral.

ABUSE OF ADMINISTRATION AND PUBLIC RESOURCES

The abuse of public resources, starting with the offices that are used for party goals, and ranging to uses of official vehicles for party purposes, as well as for personal needs, can be noticed everywhere and on a daily basis, and is something to which no one pays attention anymore. It is simply considered a common practice, so the issue of these abuses is not taken seriously.

*

An employee of a cultural institution was presented with a warning by her director, which was from the party headquarters, saying that she had not been active at all on the social networks and that she did not share any of the activities of the government, which the employees, according to this statement, had an obligation to do at their workplace and during working hours.

*

An employee in a higher medical school, with a contract from 2009, in a municipality in the southern Macedonia, was dismissed from work immediately after maternity leave. According to her words, the reason for this lies in her having a family member who is an official of the opposing party of SDSM.

*

During October 2015, in a village in eastern Macedonia, a president of the municipal committee of one of the ruling parties and the head nurse of the local health care institution, had been visiting families – which are considered to be inclined towards that party.

While these people most probably did have health problems, and according to information from the residents of the village, the nurse most probably did perform health examination, while her “accompanier”, a local party member, performed open party agitation at the same time.

*

On October 13, 2015, in a town in eastern Macedonia, a person who was employed in the municipal administration as an education inspector, accompanied with an unknown woman, was distributing party questionnaires during working hours.

In the morning around 10.00am, the person would circulate among houses and buildings, from door to door, insisting for the questionnaires to be filled out.

According to the testimony of CIVIL’s source, the older family members living in one of the homes that he visited, who were registered in the list of the “visitor” as members of VMRO-DPMNE, were not able to fill out the questionnaire, but the party interviewer asked instead for a younger member of the family to fill out the questionnaires. After this person also refused, the interviewer demanded for someone to fill out the questionnaires and to have them brought to his place of work in the Municipality.

Unsatisfied with the lack of response of the family, the same person went back in the afternoon and insisted once again for the questionnaires to be filled out.

*

Members of the Union of Women of VMRO-DPMNE, in a municipality in northern Macedonia, employed in the public administration, were paying visits to socially disadvantaged families and giving them packages with food, during working hours. They presented this assistance as one of the ruling party, and engaged in other forms of party agitation in the course of their visits.

Such cases were also noted in a municipality in the eastern Macedonia, where party activists were handing out packages with bananas.

PARTY EMPLOYMENTS IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR AND PUBLIC ENTERPRISES

Party employments are massive and sometimes can be even measured in hundreds. Employment is a “reward” for party engagement on social networks; agitation and pressure on other people; preparation of lists of “secure voters;” mobilization for participation in party meetings, celebrations and counter-protests; monitoring and reporting on activities of neighbors and colleagues, and even of members of the family who have an “inappropriate” political orientation.

Party employments are most evident in the public administration at the local and national level, and in public enterprises. The basic criterion for employment is having a party membership card, while the skills of the candidates are hardly taken into consideration. Nowadays, not even a friend or relative can be employed through connections, if there isn't a recommendation from the party.

Contracts for temporary employment are the most usual tool for keeping employees in the public sector uncertain, and constantly having to prove their loyalty. CIVIL received testimonies and reports on this type of abuse and toying with the expectations of people from hospitals, schools, kindergartens and other institutions and public enterprises.

A public enterprise within a municipality in eastern Macedonia, in agreement with a member of the Council of the Municipality, from along the lines of the Roma parties, made an agreement for joint distribution of funds from foreign donors, intended for maintaining the hygiene at a busy location.

The funds had been received for engaging 20 people through contracts for temporary employments.

According to the report of a long-term observer of CIVIL, the employments were conducted strictly along party lines, while most of the employed were Roma people.

After receiving their salaries, each one of the 20 employees were "obliged" to return 3,000 Denars back to the "boss", in particular, the Council Member of the Municipality. The explanation for this was that they had been paid more money "by mistake". Those, to whom this "mistake" in the signed agreement became clear, were blackmailed: "either you give 3,000 every month, or you go home".

But the "boss" didn't stop there. He yelled and insulted them every day, and threatened to terminate their contracts. The workers who were engaged kept silent and continued working, because after having waited for so long to be employed, they were afraid to lose the money they had left over after paying the "blackmail".

*

In a city in eastern Macedonia, upon an announcement, the Ministry of Interior (MOI), on July 10, 2015 employed two persons with university degrees and 10 police officers. According to an insider's information, all persons who got employed are members of the ruling parties. According to another MOI source, the exact number of hired candidates is unknown, and it is difficult to come across such information, but what is known is that they are people close to government officials (members of parliament, party chiefs, directors...).

Following the same pattern, politicization was conducted in another city in southern Macedonia, from where on October 1, 2015, we received information that four party

“soldiers” had been employed in the local police, and two of them (one of whom is the wife of one of the newly employed local policeman) were sent to work within the MOI in Skopje.

*

The Ministry of Interior intensified employments along party lines, immediately after the signing of the Przino Agreement, and especially during September and October 2015, before Oliver Spasovski from SDSM was appointed for Minister of Interior, which was a commitment stemming from the Agreement.

According to field information and reports of the monitoring teams of CIVIL - Center for Freedom, and based on relevant and reliable sources in three bigger municipalities in Republic of Macedonia, several dozens of people had been employed with party membership within the ruling party. CIVIL has received information on the employments in all three municipalities, but has chosen to omit details on this operation so as to protect its sources. Also, there are employments and increased pressure on administration employees, who in the past several months of 2015 have been put in the function of political propaganda of the ruling structures.

*

Around 100 volunteers in a hospital in northern Macedonia had received permanent employment, as part of the electoral promises of the coalition partner in the government, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) at the end of 2015. This coincides with the period the elections were supposed to be held on April 24, 2016. Many of these volunteers (cleaners, paramedics, nurses and doctors) had previously worked for an entire decade as volunteers, paid with minimum fees, without any social benefits and incentives. According to sources of CIVIL, the director of the hospital, among the lines of DUI, constantly “reminded” the employees and volunteers on how great the government is for engaging them in work.

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A report from the Bitola region serves as an illustration of the practices of party employment. In September 2015, around 1000 temporary contracts had been made in REK

Bitola [main fossil-fuel power plant in the country], through the Employment Agency, with a promise that they would receive permanent employment, but after the elections. Of course, provided they be loyal and obedient to the ruling party.

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According to a report from Ohrid in October 2015, the President of the local committee of VMRO-DPMNE, employed in the Health Fund, was filling out membership cards in front of his colleagues, while promising secure jobs for members of their families, if they became members of his party.

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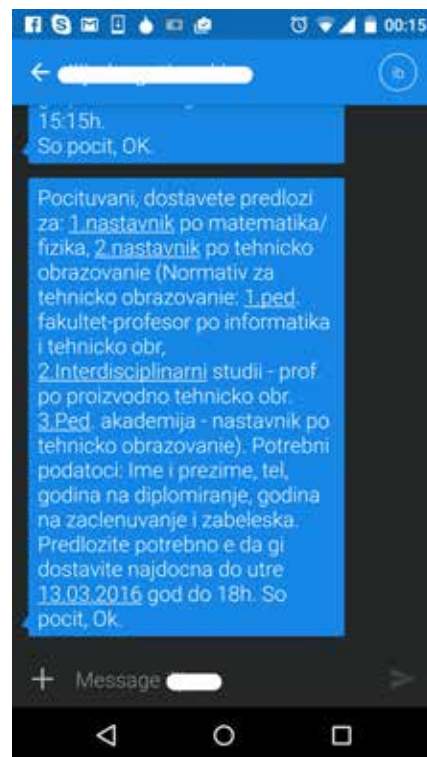
These practices sometimes have an absurd quality. For instance, a professor in a secondary school, at the very beginning of the school year, on September 1, 2015, had received full working hours of classes, having been presumably deemed qualified for permanent employment. The very next day, on September 2, all of her classes had been taken away from her and she was dismissed from work, due to suspicion expressed by the local party headquarters that she might be from "the other side".

*

A school psychologist in a municipality, during a staff meeting in August 2015, was told that his contract would not be extended, because there was another candidate for his job position, who had been a member of the party for a longer period of time.

*

In a report from Prilep, published on 29.03.2016, we learn about the SMS message (picture left) that was sent to party members to the local municipal committee, in which proposals were sought for employment in an edu-



cation institution, with the most important precondition – to have the number of party membership years stated for the proposed candidates.

Another SMS message sent to party members shows that even for seasonal work for harvesting tobacco, advantage would be given to members of the local committee of the ruling party.

PARTY EMPLOYMENTS IN THE PRIVATE SECTOR

In the past several years, our reports have indicated an increase in party employments in the private sector as well. According to reports of the long-term observers and testimonies of employees or private owners in the private sector, the governing structures at the local and national level, impose employments of the party faithful in private firms as well.

In these cases, the Public Revenue Office or the inspection services are very often used as a tool for blackmail and coercion against private business owners. Such cases have been noted in Bitola, Skopje, Kumanovo, Veles, Kavadarci, Strumica, Stip, Tetovo, Gostivar, Ohrid and Prilep.

PARTY PRESSURE ON CIVIL SOCIETY SECTOR

In a town in central Macedonia, a person with regular employment in a communal enterprise as a controller, was threatening NGO activists. Taking into consideration the nature of his work, which allows him to circulate around the town during working hours, it is clear that this person has the chance to monitor daily activities on the city streets. During the “guerilla action” of the activists – for placing monkeys on the palm trees that the current government had placed, this person came to the event with a scooter and started questioning (although not employed in the MOI) who placed the monkeys and who is behind the action. The next day, this same person, met one of the present activists of the action and threatened him with the following words: “You have all been recorded placing those monkeys, and now you will see what will happen!”.

According to the intimidated activist, this same person is regularly present at events organized by activists from NGO's, checking out and controlling their folders and materials they hand out, asking what their agenda is... In this way, this person has become a source of pressure on the local civil society sector to stop or modify their activities.

AGITATION, PROPAGANDA AND... FALSE PROMISES

The parties in power frequently promote the same projects several times. This report illustrates such practices, which also include mandatory participation of administration employees and of the general population to such events.

On August 30, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, and the Minister of Transport and Communications Vlado Misajlovski were visiting Dojran, on the occasion of the start of the construction works on the road Dojran – village of Nikolic. The Prime Minister had announced that the road would be completed in six months and that it would cost 1.4 million euros. Half an hour after his departure, the machines and workers had also left.

One of the residents of the village of Nikolic angrily turned to CIVIL's observer, who had followed the event, and requested that it be noted that party soldiers constantly insist for the residents to be present at such events. "This is not the first 'promotion' for the construction of the same road" – testified several others who were present there.

On November 12, in a city in western Macedonia, Nikola Gruevski in the capacity of Prime Minister was present at the start of construction works on a closed swimming pool. However, previously, the membership of VMRO-DPMNE was informed, through their Facebook profiles and email addresses, that they were to be present at the locations where the Prime Minister would be passing by – "so there could be a crowd", according to the original message. Such messages had been sent to employees in kindergartens and primary schools.

During the same visit, aggressive party propaganda had been carried out through the actions of the Prime Minister, hidden through the government advertising, along with devaluation of state institutions, through the commonly used PR model of "solving citi-

zens” problems on site, by phone and in front of TV cameras. Unfortunately, this specific case refers to two cases of people from vulnerable categories.

The first case of vulgar propaganda refers to the abuse of a person suffering from skin cancer, an unemployed father of two children, whose only request was to have his necessary medicine included on the positive list of medicines. Although the case was well known to the public, due to the multiple calls for help on the social networks and television shows, this person had been called to a meeting on the street, whereby Prime Minister Gruevski, in literally 2 minutes “fixed the problem”, in coordination with the Director of the Health Fund, Saso Stefanovski, in front of cameras.

The second case regards a meeting on the same street with a member of an eight-member family of Roma nationality, which a month before that, was supposed to be forcibly moved out of their home. Back then, the Director of the Agency for management of public space, Cvetko Grozdanov, had stated before the media that this family has no more right to use the barrack (which was in a very bad condition, but in a location that was planned for construction of a building) and that they would be moved out, without even mentioning a temporary housing solution for the family and their small children, which caused reactions of citizens.

This case was also solved in front of the TV cameras at a meeting with the Prime Minister, and for the irony to be even greater, Gruevski turned towards Grozdanov with the question: “Is it possible to find them one of ‘those’ apartments?”

With such vulgar abuses of official positions, a move is being carried out for gaining the votes of all those who use medicines that are not on the positive lists of medicines, and also of members of the Roma minority.

PROPAGANDA AND HATE SPEECH

All members of VMRO-DPMNE, without exception, have the obligation of posting links on Facebook that contain information on government activities, and they must do this several times a day. Precise records are kept for their activity on the social networks. In case someone fails to follow this dynamic on the social networks, there are phone calls and pressure by the local party headquarters.

Those who are employed along party lines in the administration or public enterprises, have the obligation, during working hours, of being maximally present on the online



Counter-protests, April 21, 2016

media, to use the tools for propaganda and mobilization of as many people as possible. The employees have an obligation to also send SMS messages and to make phone calls during working hours and also from company phones, in order to maintain the party activity at the highest possible level.

In the surrounding villages of Skopje, before the Easter holidays (April, 2016), activists of VMRO-DPMNE went from door to door and handed out eggs. At the same time, they carried out propaganda, convincing people

that elections would be held on June 5, and that there would be war if they weren't held then. According to them "war is the only solution". The people in the village were so intimidated by this rhetoric that they started to supply reserves of flour, sugar and other necessary household items.

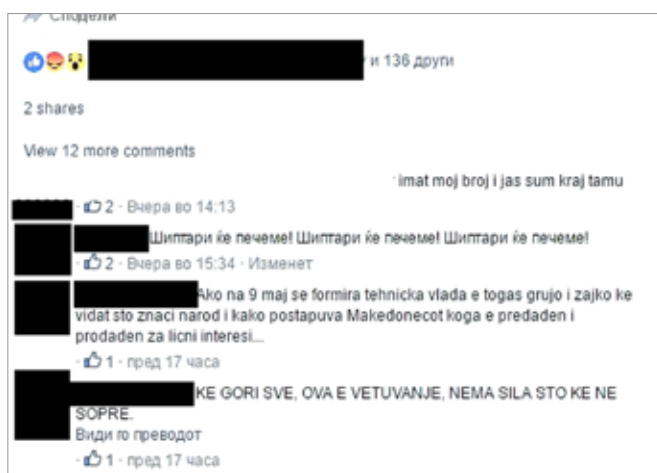
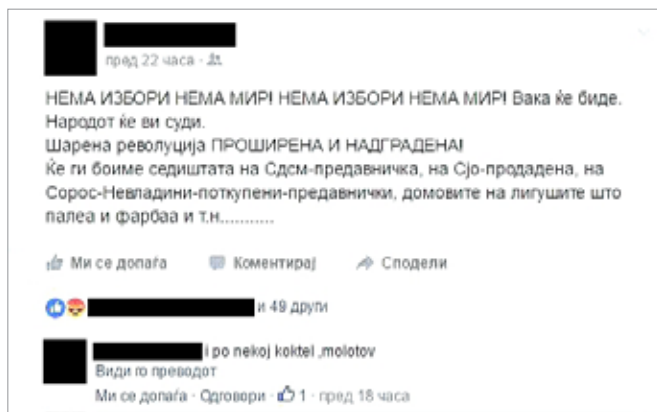
In the period when the Przino Agreement for overcoming the crisis was being signed, according to the reports of the observers from the Bitola region, mobilization of the

membership in all of the local communities intensified. Meetings were held almost every day, while their organization was performed during working hours of the administration, with meetings sometimes being scheduled even at midnight.

An identical situation has been noted in Kicevo as well, where administration workers, during working hours, diligently urge people to attend meetings in the afternoon and night hours, while not forgetting to outline details on the need of every individual, as an “argument” for persuading them to really attend the meetings.

According to our findings, party officials also keep meticulous records on their members and non-members, including information on their needs, problems, and any vulnerabilities they may have.

Many of the people who are on the lists for mobilization have employment needs, though often these lists also include people’s health needs, building permits, traffic offenses, debts, interests their children may have regarding travel, school enrolment and scholarships, and many other everyday problems and challenges ordinary people face.



Facebook posts and comments, 2016

All of this is used as a tool for persuading people to activate themselves even more, or if they are not members of the ruling party, to join it. Meetings, according to sources of CIVIL, are usually held in official and public areas, including offices of heads of schools and health care institutions.

Offices of heads of public institutions, as well as of local government officials are usually decorated in an aggressive manner, with party and religious symbols.

Regarding propaganda on the social networks, the contents that are placed there, are far from being limited to just sharing information and parroting the accomplishments of the parties in power. Actually, most obvious one is the continuous black campaign, filled with slander and hate speech. Apart from the opposition, civil society activists are also targets of hate speech, fierce insults and rudeness. On the social networks, hate speech is uncontrolled and deprived of any level of decency. There are pure outbursts of hate and threats against the lives of individuals.



"Freedom or Death", counter-protests, April 21, 2016

It is important to note that leading these hate speeches are individuals from the public life and media, along with editors and TV hosts of programs on national television stations. It is quite indicative that they often reflect, but also vulgarize to extreme limits, statements and views of top state officials. The leader of VMRO-DPMNE and recent Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, in his speeches, qualifies those who are not like-minded with the words "dark forces" and "traitors", among many other things, and threatens that the people will "boot them". Those expressions, combined with fierce threats and vulgarities are multiplied instantly on the social networks.

ABUSE OF CHILDREN AND MINORS

During the visit of Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Policy Spiro Ristovski in Gevgelija, in February 2016, abuse of minors was noted, and during school classes. Together with the Mayor of Gevgelija Ivan Frangov, Ristovski opened the renewed regional school in the Gevgelija village of Kovanec. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was held during classes, while officials took pictures with the students at the same time.

The Union of Youth Forces of VMRO-DPMNE constantly holds meetings and events at which minors have to be present, and during school classes. Teachers have the obligation to release the students from class, if they declare that they have an obligation towards the Union of Youth Forces.

During the counter-protests, teachers receive an obligation to cut classes and to direct their minor students to the counter-protests. Lists are kept on the participation to the counter-protests and other activities of the ruling parties.

Party symbols and collages of photographs of party and government officials are displayed in the halls of many schools across the country. One such example is the report of CIVIL's associate from Prilep, published on February 14, 2016, under the title Prilep: Political party propaganda and manipulation of minors.

POLITICAL PRESSURE ON UNIONS AND THEIR ABUSE IN THE ELECTORAL CONTEXT

In the period July, 2015 – June, 2016, as part of the Free Elections for Free Citizens project, CIVIL – Center for Freedom has undertaken a study of the Macedonian union sector, with special focus on its impact on the social and political freedom of Macedonian citizens. Through numerous interviews with union members, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, and through expert analysis of recent trends, we have also studied the relationships between the national Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia and the 18 smaller sectoral unions for which it operates as an umbrella and liaison with government institutions.

Through this work, we have detected that the national union structure, the sectoral unions, and the Macedonian citizens most of all have been impacted negatively by the general trend of institutional capture by the ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE.

Indeed, we have found that the aim of workers' protection has, in many places, been hijacked and redirected by union leaders who are themselves under pressure to deliver

a block of reliable votes, all in the service of helping the ruling party further consolidate its power.”

While some of the sector unions have sought to make strides in the area of worker representation and protection, their leaders and members who disagree with the politics of the “rose colored glasses” expressed by heads of the unions, or confederation to which most of the unions belong in Macedonia, are facing extremely fierce pressure. Many of these sectoral unions are founders or members of the Solidarity Charter of Trade Unions and Associations for Protection of Workers’ Rights, a groundbreaking agreement made April 30th (on the eve of Labor Day) 2013 with an aim to increase union cooperation in order to better defend and represent workers’ rights in the Republic of Macedonia.

Their work to this end, however, has been interrupted by punishments, insults and threats that are a daily practice in communications with government institutions, and also within private companies, in which union organizations of some of the sectoral unions that are not close to the government function.

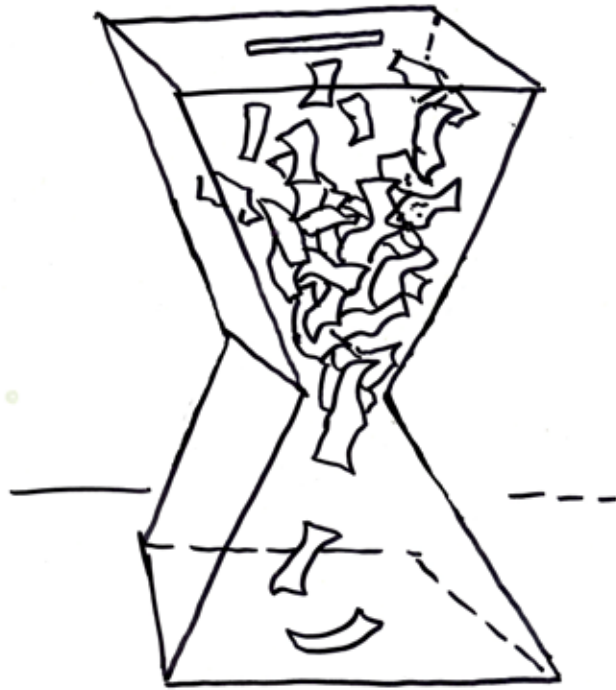
In its analysis *A union swamp*, published on December 25, 2015 on CIVIL’s website (www.civil.org.mk), the editor of CIVIL Media Sinisa Stankovic wrote: “The Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia has excluded and forcibly removed the Multiethnic Trade Union of Education of Macedonia from its premises, with which, after clearing the ‘problematic’ regional leadership of the Union of Education, Science and Culture (SONK), which threatened to channel the discontent of about 2500 members in Bitola against the novice role of the two central, union leaderships in Skopje, and after the enthronement of new, pro-VMRO leaders in Bitola, conditions were created for complete suppression of all forms of union protest”. This is just an illustration of the strong political pressure on unions that are deemed to be under insufficient government control.

Replacements of the union organizers and leaders are also done entirely along party directives and are directed especially towards “disciplining” workers in accordance with the party interests of the governing structures. This is particularly evident in the area of union organizing of the public administration.

CIVIL has monitored and published several reports on the events regarding the politicization of the Union of Education, Science and Culture. From among the scope of reports on the work of this union, a general conclusion is that this union manifests obedience to the ruling party and serves as a tool for party mobilization and control over its membership, instead of defending the workers' rights in these areas.

The Government, along with some of the big companies, "allows" workers to continue with union activity, but directly influences the selection of the managing structures in those union organizations. Hence, in the selection of the leaders of the largest union structure – the Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia, and other union organizations, through various manners, political pressure and twisting of procedures, rule-books and laws, people who are close to the ruling party are appointed to managing positions. These leaderships afterwards, instead of protecting the workers' rights, actually mobilize and bring electoral votes through the unions. "The Unions in Macedonia, regardless of which one it is, resemble party branches", concludes Monika Taleska from CIVIL in the analysis *The Infamous Role of the Macedonian Unions*, published on April 17, 2016, following several reports on irregularities in this area.

Among else, reports and testimonies that CIVIL has received in the last 12 months, state that the leaders of the union organizations enjoy luxury cars and many other privileges, and that there are many other indications of abuse of large amounts of money that are collected from membership fees of the workers.



**HOPES AND FAILURES:
VOTERS REGISTER,
PHANTOM VOTERS,
& THE STATE ELECTION COMMISSION**

Prepared by the monitoring teams and project staff of CIVIL



PHANTOM VOTERS REMAIN IN THE VOTERS REGISTER

The State Election Commission published the Voters Register on its web page www.izbirackispisok.gov.mk on March 3, 2016, where all interested citizens had the possibility to check data by address and by name and last name. Thousands of citizens used this tool to check and see if their names figured on the Voters Register, but also to check whether anyone else is also registered as a voter on their address. CIVIL and other organizations welcomed this move made by the SEC, as a good opportunity for citizen participation in the revision of this document that is vitally important for the credibility of the election process. In the first few hours on the social networks there were already hundreds of pieces of information on fantastic situations of the addresses of many citizens. They spoke that they had several dozen “guests” for which they were unaware of. Over 300 reports on inconsistencies and phantom voters arrived in CIVIL in the first seven days after the publication of the Voters Register. CIVIL published some of those reports on its website.

In the text below we have published only part of the reports that CIVIL received after

the application of the SEC was first published in the period from March 3 – March 28, 2016.

S.G from Struga reported that at the address of his residence, according to the Voters Register, there are five people who have never lived there before.

Lj.L from Skopje reported that according to the identity card he/she can be found on the Voters Register, but does not exist as a voter at the address where he/she lives.

In Bitola, on the street of “Boris Budzevski” no. 25, there are two persons registered living there. N.E and N.H have never lived at that address and nobody has ever heard of them. T.D, T.O and T.G live on that address.

T.D and N.O live on the street of “Boris Kidric” no.20 in Resen, after checking the list of voters, they noted that there are five people registered on the same address, all with the same last name. “It seems as if though a five-membered family is living with us, and we are not even aware of this”, states one of the reports submitted to CIVIL.

“I noticed several irregularities while checking to see if I was in the Voters Register. In my polling station no. 2806, more specifically on the street of “Kozara” no 64 in Skopje, there is problematic data for apartment no.2, which was sold five years ago, while the previous owners T.M and T.L are still on the list. In apartment 3, N.D and B.B, who according to the register live on this address, do not live in the same entrance at all. The tenants from no. 11, G.S and G.A have moved and live at a new address, and the same applies to apartment no.8, J.S and J.E, who have been living in Canada for more than 10 years”, states the report of K.B from Skopje.

“Immediately after I noticed, I called the SEC, they told me to report this in the MOI, where I was referred back to the SEC” – says a citizen from Skopje in his report to CIVIL – “On the street of “Luka Gerov” no.11, which is my address, there are 12 voters who have never lived in my house, on any basis.” According to the report there were others problem in the Voters Register for the same street. “Entrance 3, apartment 7. The house has two entrances with 9 voters living there, but 21 are registered!”.

A report from Kocani: "On the street of "Braka Stavrevi" no. 6, apart from the four-member family living there, according to the Voters Register, there are four more voters living there".

"On the address at which I have been living all my life, 'Cairska' no.3 in the Municipality of Cair, according to the Voters Register, B.E and B.S also live there. I reported the case in the offices of the SEC in Cair, where they told me that they would process this further", says a report from a citizen in Skopje.

"My brother Lj, K. moved to Canada in 1987 and is a Canadian citizen. However, he still figures as a voter on my address, on 'Aleksandar Mutalkov' Street, no.11. Also, N.K from the village of Brajcino, within the Municipality of Resen, who exercises the right to vote in Canada, is also registered as a voter in Macedonia", is stated in a report received from a citizen from the area of Prespa.

"I moved from Macedonia in 2001. On our documents for personal identification is our Canadian address. The problem is in that our names still figure in the Voters Register. Apart from my wife B.L and myself A.L, our son B.L is also on the list, who hasn't been living in Macedonia since he was 10 years old. According to the Voters Register, we are registered in the Municipality of Karpos, on the Blvd. "Partizanski Odredi" no. 149".

"On the street of Boris Kidric: no. 49 in Tetovo, in addition to the four-member family living on that address, according to the Voters Register, another five-member family lives on the same address", is stated in a report that CIVIL received from Tetovo.

"I checked several times in the Voters Register and the conclusion is that even though I am registered according to my identification number, I do not figure on the address at which I live" – reports a woman from Skopje.

"On the street of 'Krste Misirkov', no.111, six people are registered, but only four people live there. In addition to my family, the persons G.A and G.G also live there" – is stated in a report that CIVIL received.

“The persons with the initials J.T, B.S, A.L do not live and have never lived on the street of ‘Trst’ in Kumanovo. The person A.S has been living in Serbia for more than 20 years”, says a report from Kumanovo.

The person with the initials P.B, previously with a different last name, has not been registered in the Voters Register at all, not even at the address where this person is currently living at, which according to the ID card is on the Blvd. of ‘Jane Sandanski’, no.47. At the previous elections, there was an attempt to find the polling station where this person was supposed to vote, but, unfortunately, without any success.

On the street of ‘Struski Kepeci’ no.21, Struga, seven people do not live at the address anymore. Some of them are in Australia for over 30 years, and some in Canada for 10 years now”.

On the street of “Cvetan Dimov” no.47, Struga, in the Voters Register there is one person registered that does not live at that address at all, and two voters that have moved to Canada.

On “Dimitar Vlahov” street, no 34, Struga, the name of a person that is dead still figures in the Voters Register.

On “Franklin Ruzvelt” street, no. 64/3, Municipality of Center, Skopje, 14 people are registered in the Voters Register that do not live on that address at all. Actually, the apartment is empty, there is no one living there.

On “Pirinska” street in Prilep, in the residence under no. 21 – there are three people who do not live there, under 28 – one person, in no.30- two people, in no. 31 – one person and under 34 – one person does not live there, but all their names are registered in the Voters Register.

On the street of “Pere Tosev” no.8, in Prilep, in a building with apartments for social categories of people, and which has still not been finished for moving in, 23 voters have been registered there.

"The building on 'Sava Kovacevic' street, no. 18 in Skopje has 4 apartments, and the name of the street has changed to 'Hristo Tatarcev', no.18. According to the enclosed print screens, there are 9 apartments registered there with residents of whom I have never heard of, except for my husband's and mine. My name N.S. – P is on the first two print screens in apartment 003, but 4 more persons are registered with the last name of Ivanovski on the same address. According to the Voters Register, my husband is registered in another apartment on the same street 'Hristo Tatarcev', together with the unknown person Snezana Ivanovska. I confirm that in our building the families Ivanovski, Ackovski, Sazdanovski, Veljanovski, Nanevski, Ilijovski and Ilievski have never lived there", writes a citizen from Skopje, who along with her report submitted several print screens.

On the street of "Koco Racin" no. 11, Resen, the owner reports that on the same address there is another person registered with the initials H.J, who are in no relation with each other, nor do they know each other. He had gone to the police station in Resen and had been told there that N.J was born in 1988 in Melbourne, and had been referred to the regional office of the SEC in Resen to solve his problem. There he was told that they did not know what they should do, because they had no instructions on how to proceed in such cases.

On "Boris Kidric" street, no. 20, Resen, there are 5 non-existing people registered there. On the same street "Boris Kidric" no. 147 (an old construction with one entrance and one floor), in the inheritance of G.J, there is no one else living there. In the Voters Register there are 5 people registered there.

On "18 November "street, no. 21, Gostivar, in the Voters Register is the name of a non-existing person.

On "Mosa Pijade" street, no. 15, Strumica, according to the Voters Register there is only one person living there who nobody knows.

"On our address on the street of "4th Juli" no. 182, entrance 02, apartment 008, Kicevo,

polling station 0745/1, a person with the initials of P.Kj, has been added, who nobody knows. While filtering through the option “address” on the same address, but on the polling station 745, D.J and B.J also live there, while at the address registered for voting at polling station no, 0745/1 is also M.J from this family, which, according to the Voters Register lives with the non-existing P.Kj.

According to a report by a citizen from Skopje, a building in the Municipality of Center is registered four times in the Voters Register, as follows:

“On ‘Veljko Vlahovic’ street, no. 20, entrance 1, an old address which some of the tenants still have in their biometric documents. The same building is registered again, with the address: ‘Dimitrie Cupovski’ street, no. 20, entrance 1, which is a new address, according to the change in the name of the street. This building appears again in the Voters Register as: ‘Dimitrie Cupovski’ no. 0020, entrance 1, and as ‘Dimitrie Cupovski’, no. 0020, entrance 1”.

And that’s not all. This report revealed other problems with the Voters Register.

“The one-bedroom apartment no. 1, is also registered as apartment 001 on the fourth list. It is the same apartment, and if all four addresses are compared, there are a total of 31 voters. In addition, on the list are names of at least two deceased persons on the second address, in apartment 46, they are: M.J and in apartment 14, S.T. the person B.T in the same apartment, according to my knowledge, hasn’t been living in the apartment for at least 10-12 years”.

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The changing of the names of the streets in the past several years is an additional problem for the Voters Register. The old and new names of the streets can be found on the Voters Register, often with different data on them. Also, there are two different streets with the same name, and greater confusion is caused by giving the old name of a street to another street in a different part of the city.

STATE ELECTION COMMISSION... BESIEGED BY POLITICS

The optimism that CIVIL and many citizens expressed at the very beginning of the revision of the Voters Register, has been replaced with disappointment. Less than a month since its publication, the register was closed to the public, while the reports of the citizens were not taken into consideration. CIVIL has tried several times to offer its resources and expertise, in order to contribute towards activities for creating conditions for free elections, but the SEC has not shown interest, not even to the reports on the phantom voters, and not to mention to a more crucial cooperation. CIVIL was not given the opportunity to present the findings, analyses and recommendations, except through the online channels, where it presented clear and unambiguous assessments on the process, within which framework is the revision of the Voters Register. One such announcement is The Voters Register is not revised, conditions for free elections are not being created, published on April 27, after completion of the field checks of the SEC, when this institution came out with the view that the Voters Register is revised, which was far from the truth. CIVIL then stated:

The manner and the quality with which this process is being carried out, the suspicions raised due to the questionable work of the State Election Commission, and the actions of the political parties, indicate that citizens cannot trust the Voters Register, as it is now. A general conclusion is that, even if the Voters Register was entirely revised, which nevertheless did not happen, there would still be a lack of trust and a lack of credibility in the SEC, and the entire process.

Primarily, the field checks regarding the Voters Register were not conducted in a manner that can be assessed as entirely regular, something on which we informed the public previously on several occasions.

The administrative check that was supposed to include more than 70,000 people, exposed the fact that over 18,000 people had never applied for issuance of personal documents, yet their names show up in the Voters Register.

We have until now published findings on two cases, and we have many more by now (reports arrive every hour), from which we find out that the Voters Register still contains names of persons, deceased during the last year and even before.

For years, during previous election processes, there were persons who were marked with an asterisk, meaning they are voting abroad, and now their names figure in the Voters Register, as if they are voting in the country. This means, someone has made a decision to remove the asterisk, which leaves room for doubts that someone here could abuse their vote.

And all of this is not enough. The SEC has simply decided to impose this Voters Register as revised. Moreover, voting in the SEC is in the style of 6:0, while it is composed of nine members. Who can still trust the legitimacy and credibility of the State Election Commission and the Voters Register? And the international community, which the state itself has invited to help, presented similar assessments to the ones of CIVIL, but none of this was enough.

Apart from the devastating situation of the Voters Register, CIVIL has noted a huge

number of cases of intimidation and pressure, political corruption, discrimination based on political affiliation, harassments, full party control of the institutions and unchanged situation in the media, which are largely under government control.

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As a response to that, the SEC sent a letter to CIVIL on May 4, 2016, in which it states:

“The State Election Committee is completely rejecting and denying the speculations and qualifications that were presented by the non-government organization “CIVIL” concerning the work of the State Election Committee, which have the purpose of devaluating it. We urge non-government organizations to refrain from comments and writings that have the purpose of influencing the work and the decisions of the electoral bodies during the electoral process. The State Election Commission in this composition, since its election in December 2015, has been working professionally, fully transparent, through public sessions and other forms of communication with the public, and in accordance with the Electoral Code.

Therefore, we are pointing out to the non-governmental organization “CIVIL” to strictly adhere to the Electoral Code and the Code for election observation, as well as to their bylaws when giving any statements related to the work of the State Election Commission”.

*

The same day, the SEC issued a public statement with a similar content, which CIVIL published on its website. Following the meeting of the management structures and consultations with the expert team of CIVIL, the following statement was made We have no intention of refraining from our opinion on the work of the State Election Commission, published on mat 6, 2016:

CIVIL, as a non-governmental organization, is fully acting according to its mandate, within the framework of the legal regulations in general and in the area of elections observation in particular, which also includes monitoring and commenting on the work of

the State Elections Commission (SEC). We will continue doing this in the future, helping our country, Macedonia, to reach a situation in which free, fair and democratic elections can be conducted, as a paramount public interest of the Macedonian democracy.

The past years and the unpleasant experiences have shown that the work of SEC needs to be continuously, and in details, monitored by the civil society sector, which is specialized for this, in order to avoid situations in which the SEC is an extended hand of the ruling parties. Moreover, concerning the electoral irregularities and violations of the electoral legislation, currently in Republic of Macedonia there are highly justified investigative processes being led for serious criminal acts in the area of organized crime, which refer to several past electoral processes.

Therefore, we have no intention of refraining from our comments and warnings regarding the faults in the work of the current composition of the SEC as well.

CIVIL exists so as to protect the democratic interests of the citizens of Republic of Macedonia, and not for the members of SEC to like or dislike it.

*

All CIVIL wanted to do was to assist in this important and delicate process and thereby channel the messages and demands of its constituents and the general public. During the field checks, when on the website of the State Election Commission in a short period of time a list was published with controversial entries in the Voters Register, which prompted a debate on the legality of that procedure, CIVIL continuously received reports that testified to how this actions was being carried out.

*

We are publishing part of these reports from CIVIL' observers:

The person with initials A.Gj. from the Municipality of Bitola, has been living his entire life with his family in a house that was built by his father, and nobody has changed place of residence. Nevertheless, their address is part of the list with inconsistent entries.

Also, S.B from the Municipality of Gjorce Petrov, a citizen who has been regularly voting for 30 years, and has never changed his address, does not know according to which criteria he became "controversial", and how he ended up on the list of controversial voters that need to be checked.

*

The only citizen who is part of the list for field checks, and reported as a phantom voter in CIVIL, is the person under the initials B.S, who according to the Voters Register, lives on "Cairska" street, in the Municipality of Cair, an address at which he never lived. Other reports that have arrived in CIVIL recently, are not anticipated for field checks.

*

Such examples are:

Apart from the fact that the Municipality of Cair is a "recorder holder" with more than 17.000 inconsistent entries, the persons R.S and T.M, who according to the reports that have arrived to CIVIL are registered on addressed at which they have never lived at, but are not part of the list for checks.

P.I and M.I, for which we received reports that they have never lived in the village of Sloestica, are not part of the list of inconsistent entries that are to undergo field checks.

K.D and K.B, for which we received a report that according to the Voters Register they are registerd on the street of "Kuzman Josifovski" in Prilep, in an abandoned house, are not part of the list of entries that are to undergo field checks.

N.M for which CIVIL received information that despite the fact that she has been dead for several years, she is still registered in the Voters Register, at an address in the Municipality of Karpos. She is also not part of the field checks of the SEC.

On "Partizanska" street in Struga, according to the Voters Register, there are five people registered there, who have never lived there. Neither one of them is planned for the field checks.

This is just a small part of the reports that have arrived in CIVIL, but which are not part of the list with inconsistent entries that are checked on-site.

This shows that in the register that the SEC prepares, after the crossed checks, there are citizens that are not supposed to be in the register, and vice versa, controversial voters that were reported, but have not been planned for field checks.

CONCLUSION

At the very beginning of the process of revising and clearing the Voters Register, the State Election Commission issued an unanimously adopted figure of over 330.000 controversial voters, for later to have only 83.680 citizens subjected to field checks.

After the field checks were completed, the SEC presented two different reports, which point to the chaos in the data and work of this institution. From one of SEC's reports, we find out that in 6.366 questionnaires there is no response to the question on whether the interviewer personally met with the person that is the object of the field checks.

In the second report, the difference based on this question is drastic: 10.436 questionnaires do not have replies to the same question.

Furthermore, the SEC publishes in one of its reports that 282 questionnaires are missing, while according to the second report, 414 questionnaires are missing

According to the report of the SEC, there are 1.043 addresses at which nobody lives at, for 1.730 people there is no information at all, 2.945 people were not here during the checks, 8.878 people were abroad during the checks, 5093 people have moved to another address in Macedonia, 523 are dead, 36 do not have the right to vote, 8.351 are put under the item "other".

In carrying out the field checks of addresses, information was acquired that 26 of them were addresses of public institutions, 15 were addresses at which there was no building or it was destroyed, 13 buildings were in the stage of being demolished, and there were

also responses that certain addresses do not exist at all, or certain apartments in buildings did not exist.

Following all of this, the State Election Commission adopted a report, according to which the Voters register is revised and ready for elections.

In June 2016, the SEC, however, opened the Voters Register again, and announced that the revision of the Voters Register would continue.





"Dictatorial elections crime" - Colorful Revolution protests, May 4, 2016

POLITICAL ANALYSIS

**UNFOLDING
MACEDONIAN CRISIS:
RIGGING ELECTIONS
AT AN INDUSTRIAL
SCALE**

By Sašo ORDANOSKI, PhD



Since its independence in 1991, bending electoral rules and fixing elections in Macedonia has been a relatively widespread practice among all political parties, treated as a part of political folklore and as an inevitable and perhaps even acceptable democratic deficiency typical of a post-communist society.

However, after the eavesdropping mega-scandal of early 2015, it has become apparent that rigging elections in the last several years has become an illegal activity on an industrial scale, having in mind the range, scope, and thoroughness of the methods.

Usual intimidation of voters, occasional threats and blackmailing, various models of electoral corruption, hate speech and aggressive propaganda, abuse of power and of institutions, proxy voting or sporadic ballot falsifications – all of that was elevated at a significantly higher level, incorporated in a meticulously coordinated system of planned and executed actions. If once political parties were the main perpetrators of these illegal activities, now the unpleasant reality has shown that the very state, with its institutions and resources, was in the center of undermining the basic values and practices of representative democracy.

As part of its regular activities as a local pro-democracy NGO, CIVIL's elections observers, researchers and analysts investigated and reported numerous irregularities during the local elections in 2013, and parliamentary and presidential elections in 2014. However, these findings were consistently ignored by state institutions and disputed by the fiercely outspoken propaganda apparatus of the governing party, VMRO-DPMNE.

Even the well-evidenced and obvious abuses and breaching of electoral rules and laws were regularly negated by the responsible state authorities. Facts and evidence presented by CIVIL were ignored, indications were disregarded, notifications omitted, and proposals for improvements rejected. But, now we know why! Many of those who were supposed to react, ex-officio, were among the main perpetrators of the systematic and systemic chain of criminalities.

THE WIRE-TAPPING SCANDAL AND ITS SOCIO-POLITICAL EFFECTS

The controversy of the ongoing wire-tapping scandal in the Macedonian politics may leave many unanswered questions related to the complicated political, legal and institutional circumstances of this disgraceful affair.

However, this detailed public reconstruction of the illegal operation of the Macedonian secret service's "telecommunication" department constitutes an unprecedented opportunity for a deep insight on how democracy in Macedonia was kidnapped and wasted by a relatively small circle of people in the highest echelon of the state power.

With over 400 published conversations, dominated by top officials in the government of VMRO-DPMNE leader Nikola Gruevski (including Gruevski himself!), the Macedonian public was offered a unique chance to observe, through the "original voices" of the main actors, the blatant corruption, abuse of power, and abandonment of public responsibility by those officials entrusted with the country's welfare over the better part of a decade. Legends that we thought we knew to be true; mismanagements that we suspected to be developing; relations that we guessed that occurred; and criminal masterminds we never truly realized existed – all of that is now part of the Macedonian collective political experience. The legal consequences are illustrated by the very busy schedule of the Special Prosecutor's Office – an ad hoc institution created as a result of a non-functioning and politically corrupt Public Prosecutor's Office – resulting in dozens of very serious criminal charges against the closest party and state coworkers of Gruevski and himself.

Everything taken into account, Macedonian politics will never be the same again.

Non-democratic systems are using secret police services not to manage political, business and social processes through dissemination of information and debates about values and ideas, but through control of people. In the current scandal, it has become apparent that the secret service operation for the control of people has been a very large-scale illegal endeavor indeed: communications of more than 26,000 people were under surveillance since 2009/2010, using the state-of-the-art electronic surveillance technology purchased from Israel.

Everyone was on the list, it seemed, including the full range of opposition officials, journalists, business people, as well as civil activists, people from the academia, and foreign diplomats. Some of the authors of this report and CIVIL's activists were under meticulous surveillance for quite a number of years, as well.

All of the government's coalition partners and even all of the highest (and lowest) VM-RO-DPMNE's party officials and ministers and their associates (and spouses) were under surveillance, too, with the exception of two top-relatives: the Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and his first cousin, the chief of the secret service Sašo Mijalkov.

Over one million private and official phone conversations between enormous numbers of people were eavesdropped – including those where targeted individuals were talking to Gruevski and Mijalkov – and archived in a meta-data digital library of the secret service. Hundreds of these were analyzed statistically and for content on a daily basis, resulting in continual operative actions directed to undermine political opposition in the country, as well as for blackmailing individuals, racketeering businesses, rigging elections, fine-tuning pro-government propaganda activities, and preempting or controlling any societal tendencies and ideas that could dispute the policy of the regime.

This resulted in the expansion of political and economic power of Gruevski's circle ("the Family") beyond any expectations. However, it also led to loosening of their normal political instincts and sense of reality. "The Family" grew more and more dependent on the methods of the secret police control and, inevitably, of its world of virtual reality.

SQUARING THE CIRCLE

No surprise, then, that public disclosure of this scandal in the early months of 2015 provoked probably the deepest political crisis in the country since its independence. From the early stages of these developments in 2015, the Gruevski regime tried to undermine the consequences of the scandal with various political and propaganda activities.

The regime even played the "security card" in May last year when, in entirely unclear circumstances, a messy police intervention against a militant group of ethnic Albanian

criminals fortified in a neighborhood of Kumanovo resulted in a tragic security debacle, after an extremely intensive exchange of deadly fire, with left 22 dead, including eight security officers, and several dozens of injured on both sides. Two of the closest aides to Gruevski, the Minister of Interior, Gordana Jankuloska, and his relative, the Chief of the Secret Service, Mijalkov, resigned hours after the disastrous closure of the incident.



Kumanovo, May, 2016

Nevertheless, a growing portion of the public was not to be confused or scared by the regime's tinkling with guns: a wave of civil dissatisfaction, encompassing broad swathes of Macedonian civil society, began building in strength in many Macedonian cities by the beginning of last year, culminating in one of the biggest, ever, protests in Skopje on May 17, 2015. It gathered a number of multi-ethnic civil society organizations and opposition parties, led by SDSM. On

that day only, over 60,000 people demanded resignation of the government, early elections and legal consequences for all involved in the eruption of scandals implicated in the wiretapped conversations. The crisis was not to be ignored any more.

The subsequent process of negotiations to overcome political crisis, held in the EU Ambassador's residence in the Skopje's neighborhood of Przino, resulted in a political agreement signed on June 2/July 15, 2015, envisaged as a platform for resolution of the crises. However, instead, it revealed that all three sides in the negotiations process – the governing Macedonian-Albanian coalition between VMRO-DPMNE and DUI; the opposition SDSM; and the Euro-American international moderators, led by the EC Commissioner Johannes Hahn – had different agendas and diverse time-frames in mind.

At the time, the governing coalition was interested in elections as quickly as possible, which would renew their political legitimacy, while minimizing any political reforms that would eventually result in somewhat greater rule of law and credible institutions, thereby threatening their stranglehold on power. The opposition was interested in comprehensive political reforms, needing a slower pace of development, in order to establish rule of law principles necessary to stop the country's worsening trend of rigged and contested elections. The international community wanting sufficient political reforms that would lead to elections establishing a government, as legitimate as possible, that would proceed with political reforms in the country in accordance to the rule of law, but did not want to commit the same time and resources as the opposition.

With this kind of unsynchronized approaches, a race between legal and political principles was firmly established and frustrations started to grow on all sides. Sprinting to the election target, the governing coalition, unwilling to risk the credible renewal of the electoral list, or to relax its grip over media and to reestablish independence of key state institutions from hefty party influence and control, had twice to cancel election dates (April 24 and June 5, 2016), faced with the election boycott from all opposition parties in the country and a strong disapproval by the civil society, including CIVIL's numerous public demands, based on field reports and comprehensive analysis. The opposition opted for constant, but peaceful resistance to the government, drawing on the support of thousands of ordinary Macedonian citizens who saw a chance to wrest control of their country back from a governing coalition they no longer trusted. That was taking a lot of time and nerves, and resources. It also led to occasional misunderstandings with international actors who insisted that this process was best undertaken by official institutions – the very institutions that had been exposed as corrupt and ineffective.

Everything is moving with the tempo of leisurely Macedonian folk dances: three steps forward, two steps back...

Somehow, the whole thing is circling around the work of the Special Prosecutor's office, which is the only institution in the country that soon after its establishment in late

2015 continually holds a higher public rating than any political party, any politician or other state authority. Its reputation was further strengthened by the political clumsiness of Macedonian President Gjorge Ivanov, who wasted two precious months from the time needed for possible resolution of the crisis by granting amnesty to 56 individuals, mostly government officials and their aids, who are under investigation of the Special Prosecutor (including Nikola Gruevski himself) – only, then, to withdraw that decision as unexpectedly as it was introduced! By his action, it seems, the president has diminished his already very modest legitimacy and support of some quarters of the Macedonian public, firmly entrenching himself as part of the political problem, not of the solution of the crisis. Additionally, this incident also entrenched, in the hearts and minds of Macedonians, the Special Prosecutor as a necessary check on the government's overweening power.

CIVIL SOCIETY REACTION

After the establishment of the nationalist-conservative government of VMRO-DPMNE and its ethnic Albanian coalition partners in July 2006, gradually, a decade of the most challenging period for the survival of politically independent and active civil society in Macedonia began. Conservative populist policies of this government have become increasingly authoritarian since 2009, dramatically suppressing freedom of speech and media, and infringing on the autonomy of any critically-minded political activities in the country, including most of the actions among the independent civil society sector.

However, protests against pervasive pressures by the state have also gained momentum, particularly after the disclosure of the wiretapping scandal. During 2015, a powerful mobilization emerged among the civil society sector in Macedonia. Student and high-school groups got organized, together with a number of their professors. These were joined by journalists and media organizations, various NGOs and think-tanks, fractions of official trade unions, a number of individuals from the art world and academia, and political activists, all converging on the streets in a season of smaller and

larger protests spreading in the capital Skopje and other bigger cities in the country - on a daily basis.

The once predominant fear and anxiety among citizens was increasingly replaced with civil defiance and open disapproval of government's policies and practices.

In the first half of 2016 those protests gained another organizational and ideological meaning, gathering around a movement calling itself Colorful Revolution. It was initiated by civil activists in support to the legal activities of the Special Public Prosecutor whose work was continually sabotaged by the regime. The movement is a horizontally organized gathering, coordinating its activities through social media, without obvious leadership or organizational structure. Calls for justice and legal responsibility for all involved in illegal activities in the society were in the center of gravity of the Colorful Revolution.



Colorful Revolution protest, June 6, 2016

The state propaganda apparatus has spared no time, efforts and resources to “prove” that this movement is the result of “Western conspiracy”, led by no other but George Soros, to topple down the “legitimate government” in Macedonia, claiming that this is a movement in the style of the Orange Revolution, typical for similar civil movements spreading in the last several years from Tunisia and Egypt to Ukraine.

Wildest conspiracy theories and speculations have been launched, and personal attacks

on most active members of the movement spread in order to discredit the Colorful Revolution. These civil activists, however, are not to be dissuaded by the regime's propaganda, nor are they discouraged by the massive special police forces on the streets, nor by numerous arrests and charges pressed by the authorities: every evening, since April 12, 2016, thousands of people have gathered in front of the Special Public Prosecutor's offices in Skopje starting an evening march around the city's center and spraying color on facades of the state institutions' buildings and dozens of statues, elevated within the so-called "Skopje 2014" project, symbolizing the political and propaganda power of corrupted Gruevski's regime.

What started as few hundreds of mostly young people protesting in Skopje, has rapidly grown into thousands of people marching every day strong everyday marches in the capital and in some twenty cities around the country. The opposition has gradually shown its stronger presence at demonstrations, although not interfering too much with Colorful Revolution protest agenda or their concrete activities. This season of spring civil protests in Macedonia culminated on June 20, with about 30,000-40,000 people taking the streets of Skopje, flooding cities' streets and squares in front of the government's and parliament's buildings.

People demanded fall of the regime, immediate cancelation of all obstacles to the Special Public Prosecutor's work and rule of law implemented for all implicated in criminal activities in the last decade of Gruevski's crooked government.

LASTING EFFECT ON THE CIVIL SOCIETY

These events are likely to make a very strong impact on many of the civil society organizations in the country for years to come. For the first time in the last two and the half decades, members of the civil society community in Macedonia have been literally pushed from their comfortable offices onto the street, in an explicit political action. They are openly confronting an aggressive regime and its intimidating political, police and propaganda machinery.

In regards to the civil society sector's developments in the country, the last annual Progress Report by the European Commission¹, published at the end of 2015, states that "civil society organizations have played a constructive role in the context of the crisis through demanding accountability from the political actors across ethnic lines. At the same time, organizations continue to express their concerns about a difficult climate in which they operate and the limited government commitment to dialogue, as well as about public attacks by politicians and pro-government media."

Macedonian civil society, consisting of some 4,000-5,000 active organizations, is moderately developed, following the "stop-and-go" process of Macedonian democratic and socio-economic transition in the last 25 years. Faced with strong anti-democratic tendencies of the current government in Skopje, many non-governmental organizations in the country have reacted with stamina and taking a strong pro-democratic political stand, expanding their networking activities in the areas of mutual support and collaboration. This has provoked a need for an increased understanding of the civil society's role in democratic consolidation and future reform of the political system in Macedonia, especially in the fields of free and fair elections, freedom of expression and free media, and the necessity of de-politicization of state institutions, and independent regulatory and monitoring bodies. As a result, this trend will require stronger ties between civil society and their respective constituencies, an increased sense of solidarity and networking in the civil sector, and stronger inter-ethnic cooperation.

This development, however, is coupled with the escalation in funding difficulties, as a result of fewer bilateral donors and an increased dependence to EU funds; while the latter may offer increased resources, most local civil society organizations unfortunately lack the capacity necessary to fulfill the complicated criteria for eligibility. There is a need for development of alternative models for fundraising, involving more citizens' participation, support from businesses and encouraging local community philanthropy.

Once the VMRO-DPMNE government leaves power, important initiatives will have to be undertaken for further "fine tuning" of taxing policy toward the civil sector, stimu-

lating tax deductions (especially for individual donations) and bigger donations from private companies. Parallel to that, a more transparent, fair and responsible system of state funding directed to the civil society sector in the country is a necessity.

INCREASED RELEVANCE

Relations between the state (both on a national and local self-governing level) and the civil society sector must also improve. After years of demonizing and targeting the civil society sector as its enemy, any new government must now be prepared to rebuild lost trust and to engage this sector as an ally and a necessary part of protecting Macedonia's fragile democracy.

The existing institutional framework for government-civil society dialogue is not functioning and is inconsistently implemented. Improvements to this framework should be made in keeping with the principal of horizontal cooperation instead of vertical hierarchy, in which the government and civil society actors complement each other's efforts in the fields of collaboration. This will advance democratic governance at central and local levels through constituency building in order to improve non-governmental organizations' legitimacy and credibility. This will also increase volunteering activities, strengthening the sense of values and solidarity among the citizens and the civil society sector, and will broaden the space for growth of social services provided by the NGOs and recognized by the authorities.

Organizational capacity is one of the weakest aspects of Macedonian civil society sector, including strategic planning, management, fundraising abilities, technical resources, staffing (still a lot of employment among NGOs is on by-project basis), constituency building etc. There is an obvious need for increased professionalization of civil society organizations.

Underpinning these improvements to the civil society sector must be the better civic education of the general population. Increased public knowledge and general aware-

ness on electoral rules and procedures will undermine ill-intended attempts for electoral frauds. This necessity makes non-governmental organizations like CIVIL an integral part of the process for reestablishment and further development of Macedonian democracy. CIVIL's track-record and rich portfolio of current activities, including all modern methods of election and democracy monitoring, reporting and civil society advancement demonstrates a model for constructive, relevant and meaningful civil engagement in Macedonia.

[1] http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf



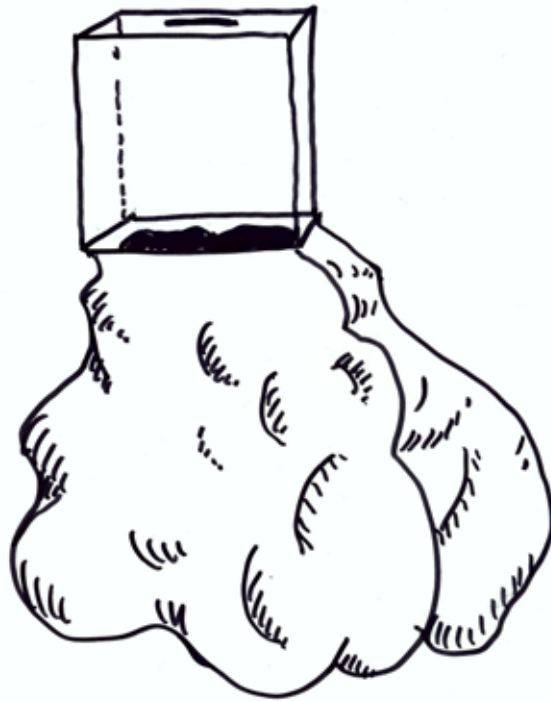
#Free elections - YES! Electoral theft - NO!
CIVIL press conference, in front of the Parliament, April 6, 2016

LEGAL ANALYSIS [1]

UNCOMPROMISING STRUGGLE FOR DEMOCRACY

By Sandra GAVRILOVSKA

This most serious political crisis in the country since 2001, which was defined as such in the Report of the European Commission for the Republic of Macedonia for 2015, began with the wiretapping scandal of the current government, in particular, which was initiated when the opposition published intercepted conversations involving top government officials, which, among else, suggested violation of fundamental human rights, interference in the independence of the judiciary, endangering freedom of the media and the elections, as well as well-developed networks of corruption.



In the past period, democracy in Macedonia (democracy acquired and inherited from 1944, and restored in 1991) has continuously faced many serious problems, which in 2015 finally resulted in an established and determined serious diagnosis for a non-developed democratic country – the most serious political crisis since 2001.

1. DIAGNOSIS

The autocratic rule that lasted for almost a decade, which threatened to snuff out Macedonia's fragile democracy entirely, seriously endangered and destabilized the political situation and the situation of human rights and freedoms in Republic of Macedonia, especially during the period of the local elections in 2013; during the presidential and early parliamentary elections in 2014,, and also during the political negotiations in 2015 and the current political crisis.

Among the many problems that were detected, which have undoubtedly influenced the Macedonian democratic setting and distorted it to a level of a twisted reality and illusion, were the following:

- party (instead of political) governance, in all spheres of social life and actions;
- party, more specifically politicized (instead of public) administration;
- corrupted (instead of independent) judiciary;
- electoral manipulations and irregularities (instead of fair, democratic elections);
- infringement and abuse (instead of respect) of human rights and freedoms;
- violation (instead of application) of laws;
- the rule of repression (instead of the rule of law);
- strictly controlled (instead of free, independent and objective) media informing.

An additional contribution to the weakening of the already fragile and anemic democracy was the domino effect of the wiretapped conversation which announced the Macedonian spring in 2015, awakening the Macedonian awareness with the protests of college students, freelancers, high school students, journalists, and citizens. These were

protests for justice, democracy and freedom; protests against police brutality; protests for clean air...or under one title – protests against the current government.

2. THERAPY

The idea and necessary need for overcoming the political crisis, caused, primarily, by the failure of the current government to govern and its irresponsible and reckless management of the state, led to a situation in which the international community forced the leaders of the four largest Macedonia political parties to sit at the negotiating table, and after long and difficult negotiations to conclude the Przino Agreement. This Agreement addresses issues upon which the fate and survival of Macedonia depended, and still depends. Nevertheless, with an assumed and expected intention of the signatories of the Agreement for its full implementation.

In the legal sense, the Przino Agreement entails an obligatory (committed) relationship in which the participants are, or should be, equal, conscious and honest and (as citizens' representatives) have a common interest in fulfilling the Agreement only in the interest of the citizens of Macedonia.

In addition, from a legal perspective, the Przino Agreement had, and still has, a goal to restore the lost democratic values in Macedonia; to ensure the rule of law, justice and fairness; to ensure respect for the law and respect for the fundamental human freedoms and rights; to cultivate an independent and objective media; and, finally, to ensure fair and free elections.

This (the goal of the Agreement) implies quality and timely changes to the electoral model, the Voters Register, the electoral legislation, lawful and transparent functioning of the political parties, state authorities and of the institutions (ordinary and special ones), individual and collective responsibility, freedom of the media... all with one purpose: to create conditions for holding early parliamentary elections, as well as freeing of all institutions and citizens from pressure and control (read: vices) of the government.

In that legal context, following below are the (more) significant preconditions for holding fair and democratic elections:

- reforms in the electoral model, which should ensure pluralism on the political scene, greater political and moral responsibility of the people's representatives /members of parliament, as well as establishing inner-party democracy. This model, according to the recommendations of the Venice Commission cannot undergo substantial changes in the last six months prior to elections;
- changes and updating to the Voters Register, in accordance with the updated data on residency, citizenship, and other official records obtained from the competent authorities;
- amendments to the Electoral Code with provisions for temporary registration of voters staying outside their place of residence in the Voters Register, in order to avoid the need for active voter registration;
- lawful and transparent financing of elections, without funds from the Budget of Republic of Macedonia, or from the budgets of the municipalities and of the City of Skopje, or from the budgets of public enterprises and institutions;
- public and transparent reports of broadcasters and of the press and media on the advertising space used by each participant in the election campaign along with the money that has been paid or have been requested for that purpose.

Without corrections to the electoral legislation, and without full respect and proper application of the latter, we can expect neither implementation of the Przino Agreement, nor democracy and freedom to be restored in Macedonia.

Hence, it remains uncertain, and most probably impossible to hold free early parliamentary elections.

3. CIVIL'S CONTRIBUTION

Among other relevant activities, CIVIL – Center for Freedom, has been in the past eight years continuously and patiently pointing out to the lack of political dialogue, the low level of political culture and inability to agree on key issues of interest for democracy and the rights and freedoms of citizens.

Through numerous activities, research, analyses and recommendations, CIVIL – Center for Freedom spoke (in a language understandable for everyone) on:

- the offensive violation of fundamental and constitutionally guaranteed human rights and freedoms (especially the freedom of speech, social justice and voting rights);
- discrimination on the basis of ethnicity and religion;
- structural violence;
- discrimination on the basis of political affiliation;
- functioning of the public/state institutions solely in the interest and needs of the government and the ruling party;
- criminal abuse of power;
- media corruption and lack of transparency;
- the erosive electoral process...

Expressed with CIVIL's language: "Free elections are the only chance for restoring the rule of law", "Europe demands a resignation from Gruevski and ensuring fair elections", "Cases of fierce political pressure", "Pressure on teachers", "Decisive fight against political corruption", "Gruevski continues with the abuses", "VMRO-DPMNE seizes history", "Macedonia fear and hope", "Democracy disqualified", "Unscrupulous struggle for power", "Criminals must not rule Macedonia", "Macedonia cannot afford electoral fraud"...

In its numerous and detailed conclusions and views presented to the domestic and international public, to numerous domestic and international institutions and organizations, CIVIL – Center for Freedom is constantly revealing the current situation and the problems in the country, and in many segments of social life, and at the same time is

finding and proposing modules for strengthening citizens' awareness, as a significant precondition for overcoming problems and social deviations.

Within the framework of its work, CIVIL – Center for Freedom supports all individual and/or collective actions and processes and shares its expertise with the public along with recommendations for protection and respect of human rights and freedoms, the rule of law and legal security, for increasing the degree of interethnic tolerance, political dialogue, ethical behavior, stability and democracy.

The work of CIVIL – Center for Freedom, in its essence, has always been and always will be with this sole purpose and objective: freedom and democracy, which implies an uncompromising struggle for respect of human rights and freedoms, which implies free election and nothing less than that.



TRANSCRIPTS

MACEDONIA LIVES IN A TWISTED REALITY AND ILLUSION!

Skopje, March 17, 2016

Sandra Gavrilovska, lawyer and legal expert, speaks on the legal-political aspects of the political crisis and on the dramatic consequences of the politicization of the state.

The general situation in Macedonia is based on the political crisis in the country as of 2001, which has already been determined in the report of the European Commission on Macedonia for 2015. The current political crisis undoubtedly has an influence on the Macedonian democratic setting, distorting it to a level of a twisted reality and an illusion. This dramatic situation of the political crisis in Macedonia, among else, also reflects an autocratic and strict party rule and a fragile and anemic democracy.

From a legal perspective, the lost democratic values have a domino effect on the overall functioning of the legal and judicial system that are not functioning properly for quite a long time. We are witnessing a total rule of repression, instead of a rule of law, mass disrespect and violations of laws, as well as a boldly corrupted instead of an independent judiciary, which has been confirmed by recent events with the decision of the institution of the Macedonian Constitutional Court, as a precedent with serious legal and political consequences, which is why I consider that, once again, in an extremely violent manner, it is manifested with the constitutional banning of the interference of the executive power in the affairs of the judiciary power.

In this context, without respect for the Constitution and the laws, and in the absence of legal protection and security in all spheres of social life and work, the offensive violation of human rights and freedoms along with the serious threats to the freedom of the media and the elections, as absurd as it may sound, are all a logical consequence of the poor governance of the current government and its reckless and irresponsible management of the country. Speaking only from a legal perspective, I believe that there are several preconditions for overcoming the political crisis and for freeing not only the institutions, but also the citizens themselves from the control of the government. In this context, one precondition for overcoming the political crisis are the changes and updating to the Voters Register, which were previously mentioned, and not only in accordance to the updated data from the citizenship records, but also in accordance with the data from the registers of residents, records of current residence of persons and all other official records that can be obtained from the competent authorities. Further-

more, amendments to the Electoral Code need to be made, with provisions for temporary registration of voters staying outside their place of residents in the Voters Register, in order to avoid the need for active registration.

Moreover, I consider that the Electoral Code should finally be amended with misdemeanor or penal provisions for all those who participate in the electoral process but do not respect all of the obligations stipulated in the Electoral Code.

Another precondition for overcoming the crisis are the reforms in the electoral model, which is now too late to talk about in this case, but would ensure pluralism on the political scene, as well as greater political and moral responsibility of the people's representatives, and ultimately establishing an interparty democratization, which is obviously lacking. A precondition and something that we need to insist on is the lawful and transparent functioning of the state institutions, including both the ordinary and special ones, and of the political parties, lawful and transparent functioning of the elections or the election campaigns, without funds from the Budget of Republic of Macedonia, without funds from the budgets of the municipalities and of the City of Skopje, as well as budgets from the public enterprises and institutions. Furthermore, freeing the media from government pressure and transparent reports of the press and media on advertising the participants in the political campaign.

The attempt to find a solution to the issues from which the judiciary and the survival of the democracy depend on resulted in the Przino Agreement, which I will comment only from a legal perspective, as an agreement that entails an obligatory and committed relationship among the participants, and one that means that all participants in this agreement, all parties, are to be equal, conscientious and honest and have an interest in fulfilling the agreement only in the interests of the citizens of Macedonia. I believe that we will be able to see the way out of this political crisis if the implementation of the Przino Agreement is realized in a real legal sense. In terms of civil society, I believe that the influence and the role of civil society is very important in awakening the awareness and in overcoming the existing problems and social deviations. The civil society sector, both individually and together, points to the lack of political dialogue, a low level of

political culture in terms of the guaranteed fundamental human rights and freedoms, corruption, lack of transparency, abuse of power, functioning of the public and state institutions solely in the interest of the government and the ruling party, control over media informing, erosive electoral process and many other subjects that are constantly pointed out by the civil society sector, which I believe have had an impact on citizens.

Gavrilovska was part of the expert panel discussion on “Pluralism and the political crisis” that was held on March 17, 2016, which left a strong impression on the public as a result of the deep analysis of the election process and political crisis in Republic of Macedonia.

Financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, the event was part of the Free Elections for Free Citizens project, implemented by CIVIL – Center for Freedom, Macedonian pro-democracy NGO.



LEGAL ANALYSIS [2]

PREVENTING ELECTION MANIPULATIONS

By Aleksandra JOZIĆ - ILEKOVIĆ

Within the framework of the project for consultative assistance for Macedonian civil society organizations in regards to the electoral process, I was invited by the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia, and by the Centre of Excellence, as an expert in the field of electoral reforms, in the Republic of Macedonia.

Together with my colleague Dragan Zelic from GONG, we have had three expert missions (in the period August 28 – December 9, 2015) with the purpose of providing support to CIVIL in strengthening certain aspects of their work in regards to the electoral reforms in the Republic of Macedonia.

Working

on the project, I noticed a high level of professionalism and great interest among CIVIL's colleagues for improvement and acquiring new knowledge, and there was a high level of cooperation, which contributed to fully achieving the goals and results of the project that resulted in the will of CIVIL and other organizations for further networking and joint activities for improving the electoral legislation, for monitoring the electoral process and for preventing manipulations in the electoral context.

The Croatian Ambassador to the Republic of Macedonia, Mrs. Danijela Barisic, provided support to this project, and with her openness (despite being at the beginning of her mandate) and participation in public meetings, she further expressed Croatia's readiness, through the Centre of Excellence of the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs of Republic of Croatia, to provide professional assistance to the colleagues from Republic of Macedonia in all their future projects that include cooperation and support to the development of a democratic society. The colleagues from CIVIL especially respect the engagement of the Ambassador and expressed hope for further cooperation between the two countries.

The exchange of knowledge and experience with Croatian counterparts resulted in concrete proposals of CIVIL, such as revision of the Voters Register, appointing the State Election Commission of the Republic of Macedonia as an independent and professional body, and other aspects of electoral reforms in the country.

CIVIL has been already implementing unique methodologies for highly efficient, objective and nonpartisan observation, inviting a number of civil society organizations to a joint action in advocacy to obtain conditions for free elections in the country.

Furthermore, the need for regulation and supervision of the financing of the election campaigns was also emphasized, as an important element for ensuring a fair election race, and fight against corruption.

The experience of GONG in working with observers and monitoring of all phases of the electoral process, was especially useful and served as the basis for the plans on monitoring the electoral process and for the organizational structure of CIVIL, which will organize and conduct nonpartisan observation of the elections.

During the project, CIVIL held meetings and conducted interactive workshops and seminars, along with public meetings with its civil society counterparts, as well as with representatives of political parties, independent experts and the international community.

FIRST EXPERT MISSION (28 AUGUST TO 2 SEPTEMBER, 2015)

The subject of the first expert mission was the regulation of the Voters Register, monitoring of elections and the importance of independent work of the institutions in conducting the elections.

During our work, we were informed on the process of negotiations for overcoming the political crisis (behind closed doors), between representatives of the four largest political parties, moderated by the international community, and occasionally inviting domestic and international experts for amendments to the Electoral Code, with a focus on the methodology of revision and updating the Voters Register.

The idea was to come up with a model of updating the Voters Register until elections had been announced, whereby one of the proposals was active registration of voters prior to the elections, as we were informed by CIVIL and other participants.

The presentation of the Croatian Act on Election of Representatives to the Croatian Parliament [1], Law on Voters Lists [2] and the Law on the State Electoral Commission [3], provided an image on the Croatian electoral and legal frameworks, which showed great similarities with the Electoral Code [4] of Republic of Macedonia.

Namely, the Electoral Code regulates in one place all the elections in the Republic of Macedonia, as opposed to the Croatian example, where special laws regulate each elec-

tion cycle, which we assess as positive and support the adoption of a single Electoral law, which from the perspective of the system and the systematization of legislation is a better and more convenient solution.

Participants in the project expressed serious remarks regarding the work of the electoral administration in the area of the Voters Register and the institutions that are linked to the making of these public records, such as the State Election Commission (in the further text: SEC) and the Ministry of Interior (in the further text: MOI). In fact, as we were previously informed, regarding the issue of responsibility for the accuracy of the Voters Register, the SEC claims that the Ministry of Interior is responsible for the list of voters, while the Electoral Code provides that “the Voters Register is led by the State Election Commission”[5]. In order to apply for inclusion in the Voters Register a voter has to be 18 years of age, has to have permanent residence in Republic of Macedonia, and has to have a valid ID card or passport.

Regarding the competence, according to the given provision, it appears that the SEC, which is in charge of the Voters Register, should be responsible for the accuracy of the data. Still, there are different interpretations to this understanding, and we have been informed that the SEC considers that it is not a body that can confirm the accuracy of the Voters Register and that this is under the competence of the MOI, an organ that keeps records on residence and citizenship, which apart from records of registers and other official records, are the basis for the compilation of the Voters Register. The SEC can also check the accuracy and confirm it based on direct checks, but without having the manner in which this is performed prescribed – de facto – this is done (and whether it is done).

A clear distinction should be made between the responsibilities of the SEC and the MOI regarding the lists of voters, and it should be determined who is responsible for the accuracy of the Voters Register.

In Croatia, the Voters Register is under the competence of the Ministry of Public Administration, which manages the archiving of data on the electorate, whereby, the register

of voters is defined as a set of personal data of all voters, and the Voters Register is part of the Register of Voters, which is prepared after it is closed and is the base for voting.

Regarding the Macedonian legal regulations in the area of the Voters Register and the right to vote, a question is raised concerning citizens that do not have a valid document, an ID/passport, in terms of how they can exercise their right to vote. Here, we propose for the following possibility to be considered: to have these voters vote based on voting certificates, after having previously examined their voting rights by a competent organ.

This way there is greater possibility for voters to vote, who on Election Day will be (or are) outside their place of residence (especially for a certain category of voters, such as students, workers-migrants, etc.). In this context, we have presented the legal solutions within the Croatian Law on registration of voters, which provides the opportunity for previous registration of voters living in Republic of Croatia, who will be voting abroad or temporary registration in the register of voters outside the place of residence for those voters who will find themselves in another city / municipality in Republic of Croatia, and issuing certificates for voting outside the place of residence, based upon which voters will be able to vote at any voting place in the Republic of Croatia or abroad.

The main purpose of these items contained in the Croatian Law on registration of voters is to allow all voters free movement without hindering the realization of their right to vote.

In practice, often it turns out that the voters lists are inaccurate as a result of the inexperience of the authorities, the migration of the population and due to the fact that citizens do not check to see if their names figure in the Voters Register while it is available for checking, all of which make the compilation of the Voters Register more difficult.

Regarding the arrangement / updating of the Voters Register, the role of the electoral administration and of MOI are important. Both need to implement a strong media campaign and activate the citizens before the elections; fulfill their civic duties and update their personal documents; actively involve citizens as a form of a citizen supervisor, who

will report to the police all information on irregularities that have been detected (for example, fictional residence); and publicly inform on the number of voters at each address, which will be available to citizens for revision (via the website of the MOI and SEC) and will enable application and confirmation of this information.

A SOLUTION IS POSSIBLE, FEAR HAS TO DISAPPEAR!

How to achieve free elections: The experience of Croatia and Macedonia in a comparative perspective

[First expert mission, assessment, public event, Skopje, August 31, 2015]

The public media service needs to act more strongly and enable the provision of information to citizens, the public (publication of announcements, targeted programs on the elections with competent participants, with the purpose of informing the citizens on the electoral procedure), so that the citizens would be associates and would facilitate the competent authorities to provide information from their environment.

Nevertheless, all this assumes that the Voters Register is constant, which includes the obligation for its regular updating, stressing that if the registration of voters is not done automatically, then a sufficient period for registration has to be anticipated. Furthermore, it is important for the Voters Register to be published and for there to be an administration process subject to judicial control.

And finally, there is no doubt that the state through its apparatus needs to enable all voters to realize their constitutionally guaranteed right to vote, and that individuals should not bear the consequences of wrongful actions or inaction of the state. In this context, for the updating of the Voters Register it is very important for all voters to be able to obtain the right to register, to correct or modify data in the Voters Register under the same conditions.

The independence of the bodies for conducting elections is of great significance. There-

fore, the political actions should be clearly limited within the profession, in order to prevent electoral manipulations and the increase of distrust in the electoral process.

In this area, it is important to encourage the non-governmental organizations working in the field of independent monitoring of the electoral process and/or promotion of human and civil rights.

My colleague Zelic from GONG presented to the participants of the project, a methodology for non-partisan election observation during the pre-election period, on the day of the elections and in the post-election period. Based on the exchange of knowledge and experience, CIVIL gained new ideas, as well as what to advocate, with the objective – improvement of the electoral legislation and designing specific proposals and measures for action in order to prevent possible manipulations in the upcoming elections.

SECOND EXPERT MISSION (17 – 20 NOVEMBER 2015)

The topic of our second mission in Macedonia was financing of election campaigns, with emphasis on the scope and contents, and control within the legal framework for regulating the above-mentioned issues. CIVIL's members and associates gained further knowledge on the legal regulation concerning the financing of election campaigns and political parties in Croatia, as well as on international standards.

During the EU accession process, the Republic of Croatia adopted a qualitative legal framework for financing of election campaigns and political parties, which could also be useful in the Macedonian context. The exchange of experience and knowledge resulted in CIVIL's concrete proposals on organizing and supervising the financing of the pre-election campaign and on the role of the SEC.

The public meeting had significant media coverage, while at the closed meetings/workshops discussions were held with representatives of other civil society organizations, with representatives of political parties and experts dealing with the electoral process.

From the work with our colleagues and from the information we gathered during our visit, and the examination of the Voters Register, we believe that campaign spending limits need to be prescribed, and that this amount should be functionally, economically and ethically acceptable, having in consideration the social situation of the transition in which the Macedonian society and economy are in. Also, the need of having the control over the campaign financing entrusted to the SEC has to be considered, which it would conduct independently from the State Audit Office, with a clear demarcation in the competencies. It should be anticipated for the SEC to carry out the supervision in cooperation with other competent authorities (such as the Tax Administration, Ministry of Finance...).

According to the information we have received, the SEC has about 120 employees as technical staff, which compared to the 14 technical employees in the State Electoral Commission of Croatia (a body that performs supervision on the financing of the campaigns), is quite a large number, and this without a doubt shows that it has sufficient human resources to perform supervision on the financing of campaigns and political parties, if there were to be a legal obligation and a clearly expressed political will. Also, the possibility of passing the control to another independent body needs to be considered, something that requires an appropriate political and public debate.

We have concluded that the regulation on the role of money in politics is a central issue of political agendas all over the world. The monitoring of the financing of campaigns must not remain a dead letter on paper, and the obligations of the participants in the elections have to be clearly regulated, along with the content and deadlines for submission of reports on campaign expenditures, and in this sense to develop the obligations of the body responsible for the supervision. The reports have to be reviewed by an independent body, and sanctions need to be provided for non-fulfillment of the obligations, which in Croatia are administrative and criminal.

The regulation of the financing of political parties is a basic precondition for a fair political competition, so for the success of the regulation it is not enough just to adopt laws,

but there needs to be readiness to make these laws efficient, for which we believe Republic of Macedonia needs to make additional efforts. Nevertheless, this includes the adoption of high political standards of the leading political parties that will adopt them as their own views.

THIRD EXPERT MISSION (09 – 11 DECEMBER 2015)

Our visit to CIVIL was focused on observation of elections, as well as on activities for planning and for the methodology for the period of observing the campaign, the day of the elections and the post-election period of the upcoming elections in Macedonia. In this area of work, our colleague Marina Skrabalo from GONG joined us, who as an excellent expert in the field of advocating policies shared her knowledge with her colleagues from CIVIL.

As part of the methodology for election observation, other civil society organizations were mapped that could contribute, in joint activities with CIVIL through connectivity and networking. In relation to the above-mentioned activities, we discussed the need of establishing an organizational structure for monitoring of the elections.

CIVIL's members and associates have developed a plan of activities for observation of the pre-election period, the day of the elections and the post-election period. We analyzed the capacities of the organizations and developed a plan for cooperation with other civil society organizations in Republic of Macedonia to jointly observe the upcoming elections. According to the Macedonian political and legal context, a methodology has been developed for monitoring the electoral process and the awareness of the need for further training of all of CIVIL's members for the electoral process.

CIVIL's members have become familiar in detail with the rights and obligations of the observers in all phases of the electoral process, and have also gained knowledge necessary to analyse the participants. Based on the existing capacities of CIVIL, a plan for their strengthening has been worked out, with the purpose of establishing a new

structure that is necessary for the successful observation of all phases of the electoral process.

The experience of GONG with observers and observation of the electoral process in all of its phases represents a useful base for establishing plans for monitoring the elections and for the formation of CIVIL's organizational structure in the monitoring of the upcoming elections in Macedonia. Also, we would like to emphasize that CIVIL has begun cooperation with representatives of other civil society organizations working on human rights and on the electoral process for possible joint election observation.

In regards to the elections media coverage, our hosts were presented with the "new" rules for electronic media with the national concession in Republic of Croatia during the election campaign. The application of the "old" rules has led to situations where on campaign shows which according to existing rules last 50 minutes on Croatian television, a representative of a certain electoral list (if in the electoral unit there are 20 lists) is not allowed to speak for more than 2 minutes, and less than 1 minute in other shows on other media where rules provide a period of 20 minutes! Moreover, the obligations of the electronic media in the elections for members of the Croatian Parliament were too detailed, which prevents the expansion of space for free and creative mediation of journalists between the citizens and their interests and the candidates and their interests, and thus contributes to poor informing and educating of voters concerning the parties, their programs and candidates.

The new rules try to enable the best possible way of following the forms and time of monitoring the election propaganda. This, on the one hand, guarantees the participants in the elections equal treatment, and on the other, editors and journalists' freedom in creating the shows while determining the minimum terms that each election candidate or electoral list can have.

CONCLUSION

The application of the principle of equity between parties and candidates in the electoral process is important. Equity has to be guaranteed, and for this purpose, the state needs to have a neutral view in regards to the: electoral campaign, the media, especially the state media and the financing of the parties and campaigns from the budget.

Depending on the case, equity can be strict or proportional. If equity of the political parties is proportional, then they must be treated according to the results achieved in the elections. Equity especially applies to the representation on radio/TV, on the budget funds and on other types of support [4].

With the implementation of this project we have tried to provide our expert assistance to our colleagues from CIVIL, so that the organization may further establish itself as a relevant organization for protection of human rights, for promotion of transparency and for monitoring of the election process. We, most certainly, assess positively the will of CIVIL and of the other organizations for further networking and for joint activities on improving the electoral legislation, on monitoring the electoral process and on preventing manipulations in the electoral context. Based on the exchange of knowledge and experience, CIVIL has gained new ideas, on how and what to advocate for in order to improve the electoral process in Macedonia.

[1] Political Activity and Election Campaign Financing Act („Official Journal“, no. 24/11, 61/11, 27713 and 48/13-consolidated text)

[2] „Official Journal“, No 118/14

[3] „Official Journal“, No 165/03 and 105/07

[4] Code of good practice in electoral matters, guidelines and explanatory notes, Venice Commission, October 2002

[5] Article 42, paragraph 1, Electoral Code

NOTE (CIVIL):

The expert team of CIVIL – Center for Freedom, within its regular activities, has prepared new, extensive legal-political analyses on the political situation, the crisis and the electoral process in Republic of Macedonia.

CIVIL's associate, Aleksandra Jozic – Ilekovic (Republic of Croatia), a two-term Vice-President of the Croatian State Election Commission, has within the framework of the project "Support to CIVIL for raising its professional capacity and the development of the public-advocating policy in representing the electoral reforms in the Republic of Macedonia", in January 2016 prepared an analysis on the application of Croatian examples for improving the electoral legislation in Macedonia, for the purpose of – preventing manipulations in the electoral process, which we have published in two sequels.

The analyses and recommendations that CIVIL has prepared in this period are part of the activities of the project "Free elections for free citizens", financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Federal Republic of Germany.



Aleksandra Jozic - Ilekovic

TRANSCRIPTS

EVERYONE HAS TO BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!

Skopje, November 20, 2015

Dragan Zelić, an expert from the partner organization GONG, from Croatia, held numerous presentations at public events that were organized by CIVIL Media and other media in the country. We have selected transcripts from two statements given by him in the past period.

The topic is financing of political parties and campaigns, and I believe that, unfortunately, you all know the case with the financing of political parties. Croatia had a traumatic experience, which is still ongoing, regarding the non-transparent financing of the political campaigns of the then ruling party HDZ and, unfortunately, the former Prime Minister is still in custody and a juridical process has been initiated against a political party. And that is quite a serious matter. We had warned about this previously, but there was no reaction when it was needed. We can now criticize Ivo Sanader from this perspective, and condemn HDZ, but we need to see to it that these things do not happen again and we need to draw some lessons out of it. Not only HDZ, but also all other political parties, institutions, media and associations. Such things should not be repeated. In short, we went through all of that.

We all know how important the role of money is in politics. Without any funds, you cannot organize a campaign and inform the voters. Here, there is no need to be a demagogue and talk against the political parties. Parties are one of the topics of democracy and indeed they should be financed. They have to communicate with the voters, to convey their message. However, all of this needs to be transparent. It is perfectly fine for you to spend money and receive money, but you need to report who is financing you, because we need to know what is happening.

One of the conditions, among else, for closing the chapter on the judiciary in Croatia for the country's EU accession, was for us to sort out the financing of the political parties and campaigns. In particular, to resolve the issue so that money could not be drawn from public enterprises. It is not permissible to engage companies for work for the purpose of public procurements, which return the money to the parties or end up in private pockets

There is a need for institutional supervision, which has to be independent. It cannot be under political control. If you park incorrectly, you will receive a fine without any problem. The state will react quickly. However, I think it will be a bit more difficult if you perform bigger manipulations.

Therefore, if the institution can punish us for parking incorrectly, then it can also punish the party if it is manipulating with large amounts of money. I remember a statement that Sanader made saying that elections are won with one-third of the money on the table and with two-thirds under the table! If this is happening, then not all are equal in the competition, some have access to public money and are withdrawing them, and some do not, so then there are not even minimum conditions for fair elections.

We have to have institutional supervision, which unfortunately, did not function in Croatia. It was only after Jadranka Kosor took over that the state prosecution achieved excellent results, which was crucial.

As far as I know, you have a special public prosecutor and I believe she has a great responsibility. However, the responsibility is not just in the institutions, but also among the NGOs. Here, we have CIVIL, which is working outstandingly. You need to put that topic on the agenda, because it is of public interest - to force political parties to be transparent and show their accounts. In this respect, the media also play a major role. We in Croatia cannot do anything in regards to that matter without the media. With all the shortcomings, because nobody is perfect, the media recognized the importance of these topics and they are to be credited for strengthening the transparency regarding that issue. The media is interested and has eyes wide open in regards to the financing, as was the case with the last parliamentary elections in Croatia.

I think that the media in Macedonia will also recognize the importance of this topic and will reinforce their roles as observers. I wouldn't say that the media should only inform, entertain and educate; they also need to carry out control, because that is important for a healthy democracy. It is important for the media and the institutions to observe and to leave the institutions to independently do their job. I believe that when we have very transparent reports on the financing of campaigns, we will know in whose interest certain decisions are made, whether in the interest of the donor or in the interest of retaining power".

INTERVIEW

FEAR DOES NOT GO TOGETHER WITH DEMOCRACY

Dragan Zelić

Interviewed by Biljana Jordanovska, CIVIL Media
Skopje, September 3, 2015

Republic of Croatia went through different experiences in its EU accession process, not only because of the EU, but also because of the will to reach high democratic standards in all spheres. It would be a pity for Croatia not to share its experiences, especially with the countries in the region, because I think it is in the interest of Croatia and of the other countries, to have democratically developed countries in the region, so that they can be approximately, or at the same level and be able to cooperate, says Dragan Zelić of GONG, Croatia.

Furthermore, the exchange of experience is important so that the other countries do not make the same mistakes, and in that sense, it is good that the Ministry of Foreign

and European Affairs of Croatia recognized the importance of sharing the knowledge and experience. I hope that the Centre of Excellence will not stop functioning if a new government does come in power in Croatia.

CIVIL Media: What is your topic today?

Today I will speak on how to achieve free elections. In countries where there are free elections and high standards, this is something that is taken for granted, practically, there are free elections, nobody is stealing, so there is no need for observations.

However, the electoral process needs to be constantly promoted, in these countries as well. I was in an observer mission in Florida in the US in 2012, where in a mature and old democracy, there too are many issues. Let's talk about a country like Croatia or Macedonia.

In that sense, the electoral process needs to be constantly watered, or maintained, because they are fragile plants and standards can be reduced overnight, given they were ever lifted, though I think that they have been. There is always room for improvement of the process.

Now, briefly, my colleague Aleksandra mentioned some international documents and international standards. I would like to single out the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights that concerns free and fair elections, followed by the Copenhagen document of the Central Election Commission of 1990, the Code of Good Practice of the Venice Commission of the EP, which prescribes in detail how elections should be, followed with various professional analyses and many examples.

I will try to illustrate how we in Croatia managed to achieve certain progress in the electoral process, as well improvement of quality, although it was not easy at all. I have been in GONG since 2001, and have worked during several different governments, some had and others didn't have an understanding for the importance of the electoral process, and I always say it's not easy and nothing happens overnight. You need a lot of perseverance, nerves, searching for allies and support to finally achieve some kind of results.

In 1997 when it was established, GONG was not allowed to monitor the elections and our observers were expelled from the voting stations. Why? Because the law did not allow for non-partisan observation of elections. Why did I mention international standards and documents? Because GONG used precisely those legal arguments and with the then Croatian Helsinki Committee, which is no longer what it used to be due to the current political situation, we addressed the Constitutional Court and requested an assessment of the electoral laws that existed then. We believe that domestic election observation has to be allowed, and the Constitutional Court decided that domestic election observation also had to be included in the law. After this, we managed through the “orange” (GONG’s color) amendment, as we called it, submitted by several members of parliament, to change the electoral law and to include domestic election observation at elections. By this, we achieved some progress from the very beginning.

CIVIL Media: What are the main challenges that Croatia has been facing in the last 15 years in terms of elections?

We had problems with the census of voters, with “voting” of the dead, problems with the financing of campaigns and financing of parties... In 2007, we declared the elections in Croatia as non-transparent and publicly stated and warned that the Prime Minister and leader of HDZ allowed non-transparent financing. These were major cases of abuse of public money and in the end it turned out that we were right, and I believe that you are following the situation and know that the former Prime Minister is now in custody, for this case among else.

I hope that we really learned something from that and have adopted a Law on financing parties and election campaigns, which according to me, honestly, is one of the best in Europe today. And, if you are working on something similar, it could serve as a good base for adopting such a law.

My colleague also mentioned the State Election Commission. To illustrate the scandals of 2005, when we determined voting of the dead, in a case when a lady who had died in 2000 “appeared” at a voting station five years later. Such cases are not possible in

Croatia today, because we changed the law, we had certain criminal acts in the electoral process, but I don't want to burden you with that. For me it is important to highlight how we arrived to free elections. We can change the electoral law and establish all the necessary institutions, but if we don't have an appropriate political environment and developed democratic standards in other areas, I believe that it will be impossible to organize free elections.

CIVIL Media: How did GONG tackle the challenges in the times of reforms in the Republic of Macedonia?

You can see how much we had struggled to obtain a quality political structure, but even that is not enough; it is just a basic point from which to build free and fair elections in a democratic environment, in which the voter won't feel any fear on whether to go or not go to vote. The voter has to have the right not to vote, if he/she doesn't want to. Nobody can make me vote, or not vote. Those are the things that need to be normal, and we in Croatia do not have many such things neither at the national, nor at the local level, where tensions are slightly higher.

There has to be a clear political will for changing the Electoral Code, otherwise there is nothing that we can do. The Electoral Code, as such, is not politically potent. Therefore, the government has to be forced to replace it on time, to have pressure from experts, organizations...

For GONG alone it was difficult to initiate changes, therefore we associated and built platforms with other NGO's. When you associate with others it is easier and they take you more seriously and, of course, you cannot talk about changes to the Electoral Code if you do not offer any specific solutions. You have to educate yourselves and review comparative practices, and based on that, propose certain changes and solutions.

You need to agree whether you are going to fight through a parliamentary procedure or by lobbying within the competent ministry. And, if all that does not succeed, then you take the streets. And by this I do not mean demolition. We, for example, welcomed

our President of the Government on the street, and we gave him the material and at the end managed to have the changes to the law adopted. And not only because we welcomed him in front of the Government, but also because it was also a means of pressure. That is why it is important for the organizations in Macedonia to work together, to exchange experience and for everyone to see where their strength lies, and together like this they can put pressure for the Electoral Code, which for the ruling government is perhaps at the end of their list...

CIVIL Media: How do you see the role of the international community?

We see that even now it's not its main topic, and it is good that it is now being discussed, there are possible solutions on the horizon... The role of the EU and of the international community is important. GONG had the most help from the EU delegation, the US, the Netherlands, UK..., because with their assistance we made extra pressure and that was very useful. And now I use this opportunity to thank them.

I hope that in Macedonia too, the international community will play or is already playing its significant role, of being one of the main actors that will change the Law on Elections and will raise the democratic standards in other areas. That is why it is important to have a good interlocutor that can help you negotiate. We in Croatia, as part of the EU, do not have that support for lobbying anymore, but luckily you still do, and I hope that you will use it. It is important for the international community to recognize the problems and to take note of the significant role of the civil society organizations, in order to help them in reaching certain democratic standards.

In addition, it is important for the state to respect international commitments. Namely, if we have already signed an international document, we need to adhere as a state to that standard. In fact, the role of the domestic, but also of the foreign public, is to review whether a particular country is fulfilling the standards.

It is also important for citizens to be aware and not to be subjects, as we sometimes like to joke in Croatia. Which means you need to fight for your rights and be in, some way,

a corrective to the government, through self-organization and with argumentation to warn on weak points. And then you and the institutions will learn something. And, it is important that in every country we have depoliticized institutions.

When I mentioned the EU, in Croatia's Electoral Code, closing the chapter with the judiciary was not a condition and I think that for Macedonia it is also not a condition, but we must not forget – even though I believe that the EU does also not forget – because there are many other things that are important for the elections. For example, in terms of complaints and appeals, you need to have an independent judiciary, and that is it. If you do not have an independent judiciary, then there is no point in having an incredible electoral law. The protection of the electoral law will not be at a satisfactory level. In Croatia, cases with buying votes and intimidation of voters are criminal acts. GONG can alert, so can CIVIL and Most, but the state prosecution has to prosecute and sanction the perpetrators. The prosecution has to perform its job.

GONG was pointing out to such things in 2007 again, but nobody was paying attention. When the government changed and Prime Minister Kosor took over, the processing began. However, without mechanisms, without those little wheels that are all connected with the electoral process, we really won't have high standards. That is why GONG will prepare a set of requests for the government as well, for promoting the Electoral Law, because work is never finished.

I really do hope that you, here in Macedonia, will have much success with the Electoral Code, in achieving depoliticization of the institutions and an independent judiciary, and a prosecutor who will respond to reports and will process them in a way so that nobody is untouchable. Everyone has to be equal before the law.

And what is extremely important is of course freedom of the media! Without media and without journalists, not much progress can be made. For GONG, the media were great allies.

It is in the interest of both Macedonia and its citizens, not only to meet the require-

ments of the international community and of the EU, but to work on having quality and democracy in your country. I believe it is in the interest of Macedonia that you have the right to free media and free journalism.

CIVIL Media: What are your specific recommendations for Macedonia?

I will start by saying two words: observations and fear. Fear does not go together with democracy, because if citizens have fear, then there is a big problem and we need to ask ourselves why is this so? Hence, we have institutions in the country who are paying citizens to do that job: to educate, or to provide health care services, or to take care of the defense, finances.

And they must have responsibility for their work. Obviously, there is a problem with the institutions, but we have to have media that will warn on such things. On the other hand, neither are all citizens saints; there are those who violate the laws regardless of whether they are politicians, members of parliament, and there are institutions for these kind of people who need to process those violations. We pay them as well, so if the Prime Minister is stealing, the State Prosecutor needs to initiate a process against the Prime Minister. Or against me, if I am stealing..

Citizens often come to us, as if GONG were a policeman, saying “arrest this person or do this, initiate that...”. We say to the people, no, we are a citizen’s association. There are institutions that should be doing that work. That is why we need to encourage them to do their job.

CIVIL Media: What can civil society do?

You can make a lot of commotion, but with arguments. I can give you examples on how we did it. The Government of Sanader used money reserves for, God forbid, floods and earthquakes – to hand out over twenty million euros annually in closed sessions. The government can hand out, but what are the criteria and why is it a secret? Has money been handed out to the Red Cross, for example, or to someone else? After we insisted on this, the government started publishing daily reports on closed sessions. Because, if

Croatia wants to join the EU, if Macedonia and Serbia want to, then OK, go ahead and adopt the criteria. With us that is the mentality of the political elite, and it does pay attention to the recommendations of the international community.

We, for example, still do not know why our Prime Minister resigned. That is an enigma. Some speculate that it was done under the pressure of the international community. I do not know, but it's important for that monitoring process to continue. I also see the electoral process only as a part of that democratic process. Every country can come to a democratic crisis. Croatia can come to a democratic crisis overnight. Look what happened to Hungary...The monitoring is important; the citizens' courage is important. I understand those citizens who do not have the courage in some countries, I can understand, but fear is not acceptable in any form, citizens must not be afraid...In Croatia, there are citizens who do not go to local elections, saying that they are afraid of some local sheriff, not from the government or the ministry, but from the local sheriff... There are great mayors, but there are always exceptions, who threaten that someone will lose their job, or their concession for the beach...Little things, but important things for life... The system has to function, there has to be monitoring and fear must not exist...

CIVIL Media: How to have trust in the civil society sector when there are many fictitious NGO's, under the patronage of the government?

One fundamental right is the freedom of association. In Croatia, the right to freedom of association is guaranteed and free election observations are permitted. We consider that it is important to have a large number of actors self-organizing themselves. We in GONG do not want to be the only ones monitoring the elections. We want as many as possible organizations observing the elections, but under certain conditions: for them to be educated and to respect certain standards. And, nevertheless, if you speak out publically that you want to observe, and have educated observers, the first thing you need to tell is who is financing you! That is the minimum decency, those are some minimum measures for going publically and dealing with the public. If you say that you are going to observe the elections objectively, then you must know the electoral process

and know what you are observing, how you will be observing and how you will be reporting...Domestic observation is important in preventing manipulations and in revealing them, so that the citizens can have trust in the electoral processes. If you see that there are relevant citizens as observers, then you can hope that everything is OK at that polling station and that there is someone who can react.

Foreign observers are also important. Often they have a good infrastructure and can come prepared and in greater numbers in several places, but it is important for them to be educated.



Dragan Zelić

However, if there happens to be fictitious organizations, the public needs to examine their work and ask the following questions: who is financing you, how are you organized, just as it reviews the politicians.

In Croatia we had a case with the organization “Family”, which decided to observe the elections and asked us at a press conference whether we thought that we had competition. We replied – no, the more the observers, the better. I will repeat, the more observers, the better, but only if they observe under certain conditions and adhere to the international standards.

POLITICAL FINANCING

UNSCRUPULOUS ABUSE AND POLITICIZATION

By Goran NAUMOVSKI

From July, 2015 to June, 2015, as part of its Free Elections for Free Citizens project, CIVIL undertook to study the financing of elections in Republic of Macedonia. During this time, we engaged the help of numerous local legal experts to analyze the Macedonian Election Law, including amendments made to this code following the July 2015 Przino Agreement, with special attention given to the mechanisms of implementation of the law and oversight by relevant government bodies. Our team additionally conducted interviews with numerous experts and officials well-versed in the subject of campaign finance (who agreed to speak with to us on the condition of anonymity) and revealed serious abuses in the area defined as political financing.

The qualitative amendments to the Macedonian Electoral Code in regards to the financing of political parties' election campaigns, which were made following the July 2015 Przino Agreement, have inevitably raised the following questions: Are the amendments to the Electoral Code sufficient to prevent years of corrupt and unlawful financing of election campaigns? Are they comprehensive enough to drastically curb corruption and unlawful activities in the functioning of the parties in general, and to prevent the manipulation of political parties' financial reports? Are the government institutions that are tasked with oversight of the finances of political parties sufficiently empowered to conduct investigations and respond to allegations of financial impropriety?

Article 4 of the Law on Financing Political Parties clearly stipulates that the financing of the political parties shall be public and transparent, with the citizens and the competent body for control of the financial and material operations having complete insight thereof. Furthermore, the sources of financing the political parties must also be public and transparent, and are subject to the control of the state bodies competent for financial and material operations.

Article 5 of this Law allows for every citizen to be entitled to equal access to the insight into the financing of the political party. However, despite this legal obligation, the public is, with rare exception, not at all familiar with the sources of the funds for financing the parties and their expenses.

The websites of some political parties do not publish any annual financial reports at all. Legal and political experts have repeatedly raised concerns about the lack of implementation of meaningful oversight, primarily, due to the politicization of political institutions (in this case, the Ministry of Finance) and whether there is any control at all over the financing of the political parties.

Without going any further in the interpretation of the Law, the cooperation of CIVIL – Center for Freedom with top experts from Macedonia and Croatia has resulted in a general conclusion that the legislation that regulates this matter is, for the most part,



good and that the institutions that control the financing do have serious competencies, at least on paper.

However, we have also found that the political institutions responsible for controlling the financial operations of the political parties only respond to allegations of financial impropriety in certain situations, and rarely do they take the further measures needed to fully investigate and resolve the issues at hand, primarily due to the limited independence of these bodies, in particular, due to the complete politicization of the institutions.

Namely, in the summary of the authorized state auditor on the audit of the annual financial operations of the political parties, a reserved opinion is usually expressed, after the completion of the audit, regarding the truthfulness and objectivity of the financial statements and their compliance with the legislation, guidelines and established policies. Inertness, politicization of institutions and not acting after concerns about certain

illegal actions have been raised, are especially noticeable in the area of the financing of political parties in election campaigns.

The Electoral Code precisely stipulates that each party participating in elections is obliged to open a bank account, from which the party may finance its campaigns (membership fee and donations from natural and legal entities), and that it has a legal obligation to submit a report on the incomes and expenses for the first 10 days and the second 10 days of the election campaign to the State Election Commission, the State Audit Office, and the State Commission for the Prevention of Corruption, along with a final report no later than 15 days after the end of the election campaign.

If we look at the reports from the last early parliamentary elections and the presidential elections in 2014, we can conclude that there are serious manipulations, which are most evident precisely in the reports of the ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE.

In the first and second report, only the deadline and form have been respected, and neither show incomes from donations. However, the final report shows a substantial amount of donations, which is later corrected, so that the difference between the incomes (from membership fees and donations) and the expenses is negative, with an exact amount that the party needs to receive from the budget according to the number of its elected representatives in the Assembly.

These manipulations are just another confirmation of the corrupt financing of the ruling party, which transfers illegally acquired money from the bank accounts of its novices to its own account, when such a need arises. There have been several statements in the public given by people who are on the list of donors but have not donated any funds. Reports given by citizens to the monitoring teams of CIVIL during the past elections speak of such practices.

The inaccuracy of the reports stems also from the fact that they cover only the period of the election campaign and the bank accounts opened for that purpose, and we are

aware of the constant aggressive campaign of the ruling party, which runs continuously between election cycles.

In the period July 1, 2015 – June 30, 2016 , within the framework of the Project “Free Elections for Free Citizens”, CIVIL arrived to a conclusion that there was unscrupulous violation of laws and abuse of budget funds and public resources for the purpose of promoting the ruling party, with constant equalization of government activities with those of the party.

The continuous on-site activities and long-term monitoring of CIVIL’s monitoring teams, the meetings with citizens, businessmen, party representatives, as well the reports of the citizens, all reveal striking findings on the continuous unlawful financing of the ruling party, which intensifies especially during the pre-elections periods.

The ruling party has been for years collecting enormous amounts of funds mainly through corrupt practices, pressures, threats, blackmail and many other illegal methods.

Arranged tenders and mandatory high provisions from those tenders are a regular practice at all levels of the government, both at the central and local level.

A tendency has been noticed, where party officials and employees employed in the administration through party membership have the obligation of depositing part of their salaries into political party funds. Through party employments, the ruling parties increase their electorate and also their bank accounts.

Compounding these problems are the fact that the ruling party, VMRO-DPMNE, has consistently positioned itself in the public eye as a champion of efficient and professional administration, and has been mostly successful in this effort, owing to a local media that is also heavily politicized and unlikely to challenge these claims. However, in reality, the ruling party is working in quite the opposite direction from efficiency and professionalism, by hiring of hundreds of party members to important government positions when their main (and sometimes their only) qualification seems to be party loy-

ality. It should be no surprise, then, when such appointees are revealed to be ineffective in an oversight capacity.

Therefore, the ruling party needs to stop pretending to promote efforts for an efficient and professional administration, when in practice it works in an opposite direction with hiring of hundreds of party members daily. The spillover of huge amounts of public money to certain media is also more than evident.

We have also been troubled by widespread allegations of offshore companies used as clearinghouses for vast sums of money, which are then funneled to political parties. The names of those who deposit the money are still a matter of speculation, but this must be investigated, and investigated thoroughly.

CIVIL's experts agree that the political parties are the main source of corruption.

However, in order to reduce corrupt actions to a minimum and prevent criminal practices in financing political parties, there has to be separation of party and state, efficient functioning of the legal state, respect for laws, professionalization, and also strengthening of the capacities of the institutions responsible for controlling the regularity of the financing of the political parties and the election campaigns.

TRANSCRIPTS

THE PUBLIC HAS TO KNOW

Skopje, November 20, 2015

The Croatian expert team, **Aleksandra Jozic - Ilekovic** from the Centre of Excellence within the Croatian Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, shared the experiences of Croatia, which not too long ago had similar experiences and challenges as Macedonia.

Every cost and expense has to go through a special account. When we refer to the reports that are prescribed according to regulations by the Minister of Finance, we refer to several reports, and all of them need to be detailed, with much more content. Firstly, a report on donations, then a report on the costs and expenses. For GONG, the report on the prices and discounts realized in media advertising of campaigns was particularly interesting.

These are the three elements that must contain very thorough and detailed data. If you want to do some research, and I can see that you want to work and learn, then I would like to suggest for you to visit the website of the SEC of Croatia www.izbori.hr. The website has published the reports of the participants of the last parliamentary elections in Croatia, from which you can compare and see how big the difference is between the data that is required by your law and the data that we request. And, we are talking about very similar, and I emphasize, very similar legal regulations.

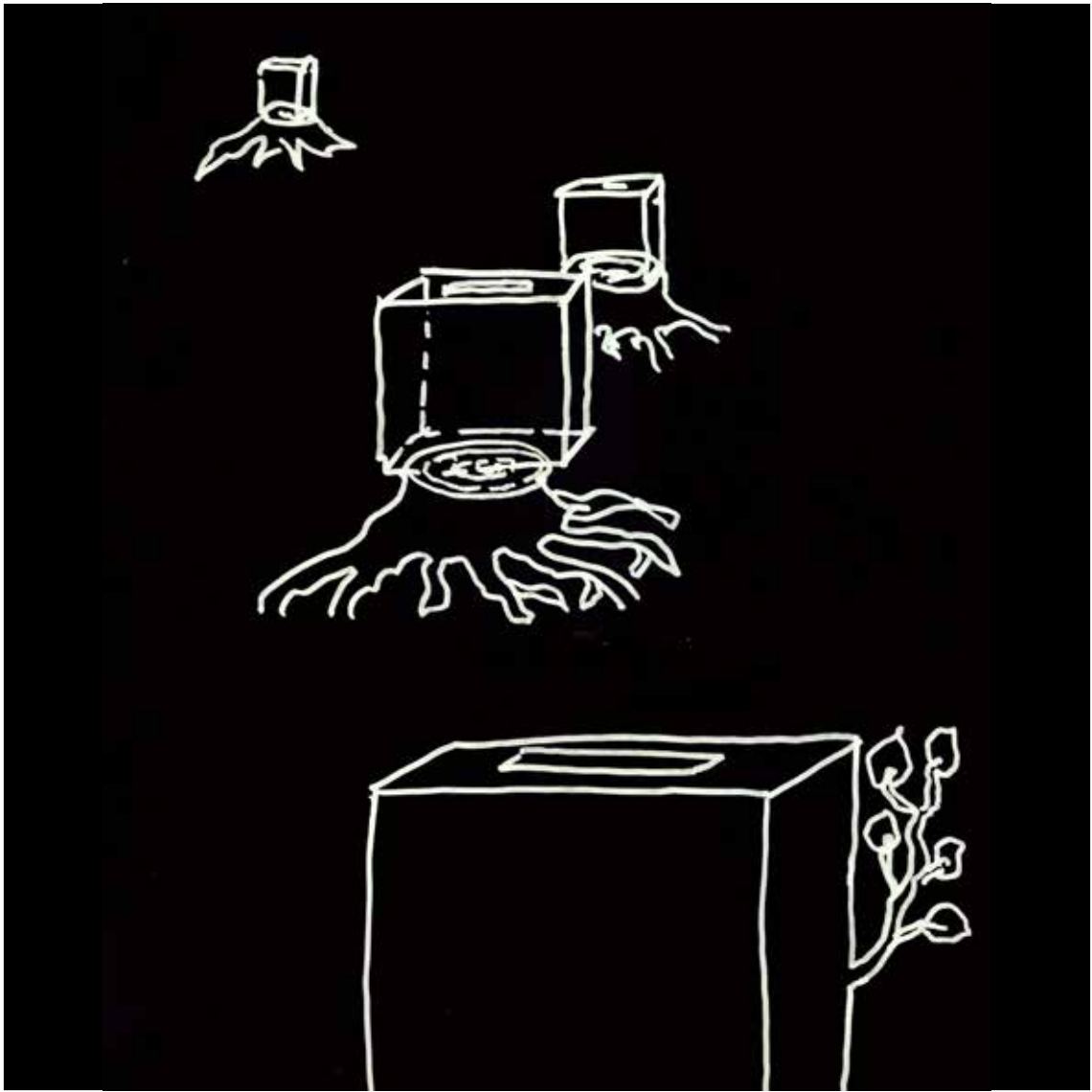
Some studies have shown that voters in our country punish expensive campaigns and arrogant politicians. That is why it is very important to know how much is actually spent and just how much is declared, and how big the difference is. You also need to know how to also recognize the "satellites" who are besides those participating in the elections ... For example, the various companies whose founder is precisely a certain political party, to see what their role is in the electoral process. That is something that is also very interesting.

If we compare the model of the content of the Macedonian electoral code in regards to the financing of campaigns with the Croatian law, we can see that they are absolutely very alike. The biggest difference that we detected is in that the Macedonian State Election Commission is in fact a body that collects and publishes the reports of the participants in the elections, but does not actually perform supervision on those reports. And, that is one of our recommendations, and our opinion is that for that body that provision of the law should be determined precisely.

ELECTIONS ANALYSIS

**FREE ELECTIONS:
SO CLOSE,
YET SO FAR
AWAY**

By Xhabir DERALLA



Neighbors

don't visit each other anymore, brothers don't talk to each other, parents are afraid to speak about politics in front of their children, afraid that they will tell their teacher at school... The reason: deeply rooted politicization of every aspect of people's lives, and a widespread fear. Fear from losing one's job, from retaliation, public humiliation... fear from poverty, from even deeper poverty... further, fear from the "others", whether they are from a different ethnicity or religion, country, sexual orientation or... political party! And hate...

This is not a beginning of a script for a historical movie. It is the reality of the lives of people in the Republic of Macedonia. Those who didn't believe it, being far away, or not convinced by other means than geographical or cultural distance – needed only a few days sojourn in the country, to realize it's even worse than in the beginning of this writing. And more grotesque.

We may view the history of Macedonian political diseases a long way back, we could analyze it from all sorts of angles and aspects, and in as many contexts, but one thing is inevitably clear: legitimacy of political power is nonexistent since the early parliamentary elections in 2008.

Year after year, this country went through electoral processes that kept the society and the system in an endless state of shock, revealing deeply rooted social, ethnic, religious, and political illnesses.

In less than eight years (2006-2014), the country has gone through four parliamentary elections, out of which three were pre-term ones. Elections in the country are held in circumstances of highly politicized institutions, controlled media and interethnic tensions. Every time, the same party has won, more or less the same ministers were in the key sectors, and the same person was the prime minister and the leader of the ruling party. And, the day after the elections, the new and expensive propaganda wave would

begin. The whole political landscape in the Republic of Macedonia is set and running in a tense electoral context.

The political crises have begun much earlier than most reports tend to reveal. Violent ousting of opposition MPs and journalists by the special police force, on December 24, 2012 was only one of culminations of the lasting political crisis. The opposition has revealed that about 26,000 citizens have been illegally wire-tapped in an operation ordered by Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski and Saso Mijalkov, the head of the State Security Service. It's a fact. The wiretapped conversations indicate serious crimes, abuses, corruption and electoral frauds conducted by the country's highest political and government officials. It's a fact.

The parliament was practically non-functional until September, 2015, due to several boycotts of the opposition since the crisis in 2012, and particularly after the parliamentary elections in April, 2014, denying the electoral results. It is, again, practically non-functional at the beginning of July 2016, as this report is being finalized.

Elections must be free. That the ultimate goal. This statement, however, must sound somewhat peculiar to an average European citizen, because there is no sense in having elections if they are not free. There is a dose of embarrassment in this continued outcry for free elections in the last several years in a country that has sunk into its deepest political crisis since it has gained independence from the socialist federation of Yugoslavia in 1991. Simply, elections are everything but free, particularly since 2008 onwards. That is, more or less, the year when debate was wiped away from the public sphere. Relentless, vulgar and aggressive propaganda was introduced, instead.

The Agreement for overcoming the political crisis (June 2) brokered by the international community and signed by four political leaders of the ruling coalition and the opposition (in almost the same setting as the Ohrid Framework Agreement was signed

in 2001) - introduced a complicated and turbulent political process filled with numerous drastic changes of the political situation, multiple postponements of the date for elections, obstructions of the political process, security challenges, and other political and societal distractions. Return of the opposition in the parliament and appointment of opposition ministers and deputy-ministers in some of the key government sectors was one of the agreed conditions for securing free elections. But...

Abuse of power, structural violence and political corruption have continued unabated, despite all efforts to reach a solution to the political crisis. Public humiliation and demonization, arrests and persecution of civil society activists, human rights defenders, intellectuals, political opposition leaders, and journalists continued, as well. On top of all this, we witness persistent and unhidden manipulations, hate speech, and serious threats public appearances of political officials.

It is not only the political power imposed over the core institutions of the state. It is the country as a whole that is being sickly controlled to the tiniest bit.

Health, education, culture, security, social services – all is put under strong control of party apparatchiks who twist or abuse laws and regulations in favor of the party bosses.

Fear and insecurity among citizens is widespread, as well as policies and practices of discrimination and violation of human rights, including voting rights. Voters lack knowledge or miss to recognize their voting rights. They rather give in to preconceptions, more precisely misconceptions of what democracy and elections actually mean. Afraid for so many things, manipulated and intimidated, a large portion of voters remain silent subjects to manipulative practices by political parties and politicized institutions.

Raising expectations by promising what cannot be promised seems to be the favorite tool of politicians in the country. Many of the promises are practically introducing political corruption at a large scale. Such are the promises that people will get more jobs, more benefits, higher pensions... Promises for jobs after the elections has one more

dimension, apart of being delivered in a corruptive manner. Particularly in this period of political crisis and postponements of elections. Those who were promised jobs after the elections are subjects to manipulations that the opposition, civil society organizations and “foreigners” are to blame for delaying their employment. Therefore, some of those who are promised jobs willingly participate to counter-protests and engage in fierce party propaganda and mobilization.

Having in consideration the failures and obstructions to the Agreement to overcome the political crisis, interruption of the negotiations to implement it, constant obstructions to the work of the Special Prosecutor’s Office, strong government control of media, and highly problematic work of the State Election Commission, particularly in the area of Voters Register revision, it becomes quite obvious that conditions for free elections are not created and they are not being created at all.

Furthermore, the decision of the Constitutional Court regarding the new power of the President to pardon persons who committed electoral fraud, and immediately after that the decision of President Ivanov to abolish highly ranked politicians, including the Prime Minister, suspected of, or charged for abuse, corruption, crime and electoral fraud – imposed a heavy setback in the efforts to restore democracy and rule of law in the country. After the abolition signed by President Ivanov on April 12, massive protests swept across the country. Ivanov withdrew, in two parts, his infamous abolition after two months of protests, in a speech where he almost openly threatened with a military coup in order to “resolve the political crisis”. All that poses obstacles for the time-limited processes and actions to obtain conditions for free elections and uninterrupted work of the Special Public Prosecutor.

CIVIL’s observers reported on numerous cases of abuses and political pressure, threats and intimidation. Abuse of vulnerable categories of citizens, primarily, of the socially vulnerable categories of citizens continues. Media are not reporting on any of these findings, and people are being kept in dark. All that needs to be taken into account in the coming period.

The country will probably need to go through a pre-term parliamentary elections in 2016, and the regular term of the local elections is yet to become another challenge in the spring of 2017. CIVIL had a comprehensive, and as much disturbing elections observation report on the local elections in 2013. Challenges mount.

Revision of the Electoral Code, changing the electoral system with which Macedonia would become one electoral district, introduction of open lists, thorough revision of the Voters register, reform of the State Election Commission, separation of the party from the state, media freedoms, establishing an institution for investigation based on the wiretapped conversations, investigation into the security crisis in Kumanovo, and conducting free elections at the end of that process – were the demands of CIVIL since the political crisis has culminated at the beginning of 2015, and earlier.

In a constructive manner, we tried to make proposals to the institutions and decision makers in the country, along with many other organizations' and experts' actions in the same direction. Some of the recommendations have been accepted, some steps have been taken, which gives hopes that the situation in the country can be improved.

But, we need to see more diligent work, more commitment, and more honesty by decision makers and politicians in the country to finally overcome these hard times.



Photo by Vančo Džambaski

MEDIA ANALYSIS [1]

THE MEDIA AFTER THE PRZINO AGREEMENT - A BURNING ISSUE THAT NOBODY WANTS TO RESOLVE

By Petrit SARAÇINI



"Freedom instead of fear" - one of the slogans of the Colorful Revolution

Why are we where we are? In the period following the signing of the Przino Agreement, which includes commitments of the signatory parties to undertake crucial media reform, unfortunately, we have faced the continuation of negative trends and further degradation of media freedom. The political crisis that escalated after the public learned of widespread government wiretapping and, through the release of recordings of hundreds of conversations, also learned of widespread abuse of power by top government officials, has also impacted the media negatively. Macedonia is declining in all relevant international reports. Violence and pressure on journalists and the media are increasing, and the relevant institutions tasked with their protection only intervene on a selective basis. In fact, the government continues to dominate the media discourse, holding most of the media in a clientelist embrace. Ethno-nationalism and hatred towards everything that does not belong to the “appropriate” group dominate the media narratives.

However, the numerous reasons for such conditions are not recent ones; they have been recognizable in all areas of media functioning for quite some time.

The facts indicate that Macedonia has a sufficient (even too many) number of media outlets (especially electronic ones), which is usually explained as “pluralism” in the media, when in fact it is not. In that little swamp filled with crocodiles fighting for a less than 2 million audience, there are simply not enough advertising dollars to go around. In such conditions, most of the media, instead of serving the public interests, serve the interests of the political and economic centers of power, mainly those close to the government that dispose with the biggest pile of money in the country – the Budget of the Republic of Macedonia.

Media regulation and self-regulation follows the European guidelines for development of media policies, but only formally. In practice, the media sector suffers from a chronic lack of consistent and comprehensive implementation of media reform laws and a widespread rejection of ethical norms.

The public broadcasting system needs to perform activities of public interest through

several television and radio channels, yet it continues to function as the propaganda arm of the ruling majority. In this system, in the past and now, each government appoints its own people to leading positions, despite rules that specify standards for their appointment. Hence, the public service continues to act as if it owes its very existence to the government, and tailors its editorial output accordingly (even though it is financed by the radio broadcasting fee and the budget- more specifically the citizens).

Journalists in Macedonia are well educated and organized in an association and union. However, they still find themselves under constant pressure to tailor the news in such a way that will please the ruling party. While professional media organizations have generally strengthened in recent years, their influence is still quite limited, primarily due the lack of solidarity in the "base." This, in turn, is the result of the pressure by the owners of the media outlets themselves, who often see greater risk in the journalistic associations than in their political and business opponents. Censorship rules, but also self – censorship.

Key editorial positions are held by novices who are easily swayed, while more seasoned professionals who show autonomy are marginalized and sanctioned. Moreover, editorial output is quite often not even produced by the editorial staff, but rather outside of it, in the communication centers of the political party, to be reproduced in the same form on several television and radio stations in the press and on the Internet channels.

The concentration of media ownership in the hands of few individuals endangers media diversity and pluralism, whereby the aspiration for profit that is in the most part acquired from state funds (government advertisements and other types of "supply" of public money) is directly reflected on the editorial policy. Indeed, the mainstream media are almost completely subordinated to the goals of politicians and businessmen, including on a local level.¹

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS: MEDIA FREEDOMS ARE IN FREE FALL

As in previous years, the situation of media freedom shows worrisome downward trends in all international reports and indexes. The respected organization “Freedom House” in this year’s index on the “Freedom of the Press” assessed Macedonia for the first time as “not-free.” The report of “Reporters Without Borders” likewise ranked Macedonia at the disgraceful 118th place in the world.

The EU’s latest progress report states that Macedonia now faces the most difficult crisis this country has faced since 2001, due to the wiretapping scandal, and the government’s interference in the freedom of media through this scandal. Additionally, despite the fact that the Macedonian legal framework in most part is in harmony with EU legislation and international standards, the EC concludes that freedom of expression and of media have deteriorated rather than improved in the past year.

To resolve the weaknesses presented in the Progress Report, the EC states that in the following year the country must particularly focus on providing full transparency of government advertising and on developing a mechanism for unpaid public announcements that really are of public interest. In addition, at the political level, it suggests that politicians and public servants restrain themselves from resorting to accusations, in accordance with the practices of the ECHR. As a third priority, the report suggests that the public have access to objective and accurate reporting and different views through the mainstream media, especially the public broadcasting service. The Report also states that access to public information is limited and that civil society continues to express concern over the extremely small commitment to dialogue by the authorities and the harsh attacks on the civil society sector by pro-government media.²

VIOLENCE, OBSTRUCTIONS AND ARROGANCE: A DAILY ROUTINE FOR JOURNALISTS

During the past years of political crisis, the journalistic community has also been one of the greatest victims of violence, intimidation, and obstruction. Physical attacks on journalists have continued even after the Przino Agreement, and almost none of them have been solved. Obstructions have continued by the police and other officials and individuals, including the deletion of key footage. Limits on freedom of movement have also continued.

On the day the annex of the Przino Agreement was signed on July 15, 2015, Deputy Prime Minister Vladimir Peshevski physically attacked the chief editor of the web portal "Maktel", Sasho Ivanovski – Politiko, who was asking questions about the Przino Agreement. The attack was recorded on video.

Last year, in July, several days after the signing of the Annex of the Przino Agreement, the owner of the portal "Dokaz" ("Evidence"), Marjan Stamenkovski, was brutally beaten in front of a café bar in Skopje. He sustained serious head injuries and a broken nose.

In March 2016, the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Macedonia, without any explanation, banned journalists from following the session on assessing the constitutionality of the Law on pardoning, even though this is contrary to the Rules of Procedure of the Constitutional Court, according to which, sessions may be closed to the public if it is in the interest of the security and defense of the country, the protection of the state, official or state secrets and the protection of public morals.

During the same month, the editor of the national cable television "TV Shenja", Muhamed Zekiri, received verbal threats from representatives of the ruling political party DUI.

April 2016 saw a drastic escalation in violence and pressure on journalists. Journalist and photo reporter Petar Stavrev, Bitola, was physically assaulted by K.B while reporting on the protests against Mayor Taleski, after which the police intervened. Camera-

man Vladimir Boskovski from Bitola TV Mega, was attacked by participants of the opposition protest in front of the Municipality of Bitola. The cameraman was pushed and insulted and was ordered to stop recording. A group of citizens at the anti-government protest demolished the working premises of Radio Slobodna Makedonija (Radio Free Macedonia) in Skopje. During this month, three journalists from the newspaper "24 Hours" from Bulgaria were barred from entering the country. In the beginning of April, journalist Jane Mamucevski from the portal "Malesovski Vesnik", by order of Mayor Dragi Nandziski, was expelled from the session of the Council of the Municipality of Berovo. Journalist Mamucevski claims that his private vehicle was damaged for the same motives.

On April 13, a group of journalists and reporters were physically attacked by the police while reporting on the protests against the abolition decision in front of President Gjorge Ivanov's Contact Office. Goran Naumovski from the portal "Plusinfo" was struck in the head with batons, after which he lost consciousness, while photo reporters Ognjen Teofilovski of "Vest" ("News"), Nakje Batev from "Vecer" ("Tonight") and Borce Popovski from "Sloboden Pecat" ("Free Press") were attacked by the police, despite having appropriate press credentials as professional journalists. CIVIL's cameraman Nikola Ugrinovski was also struck with a police shield.

In May, journalist Vanja Micevska from the national private radio station "Channel 77" was physically prevented from taking photos and monitoring the gathering of the Civil Movement for Defense of Macedonia (GDOM). The event took place in the presence of the police. Not only did the police not protect the journalist, but the police demanded for her to leave the gathering.

In June 2016, two members of the security detail of former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski entered the yard of TV 21 and deleted the photos from the mobile phone of journalist Kristijan Landov, who previously had taken photos of the former Prime Minister Gruevski walking on "Macedonia" Street. The same month, Journalist Tomislav Kezarovski was called in for questioning by the police for participating in the Colorful

Revolution. The Prosecution also rejected the charge for physical assault against the owner of the portal "Sky" from Ohrid, Sasho Denesoski.

As we previously pointed out in the above text, most of these cases have been reported to the police³, but until now, the public has no information on whether anyone who has threatened the safety of the journalists have faced any responsibility. On the contrary, the impunity of perpetrators and the inefficiency of the institutions are becoming increasingly more evident.

In addition to these cases, dozens of complaints of journalists have been registered for hindering freedom of movement and obstruction of professional work on several occasions, though journalists themselves do not consider these violations as serious anymore, and do not initiate any legal procedures in relation to them, due to their disappointment from the many examples of obvious bias of the courts when it concerns the media and journalists that are close to the government.

Meanwhile, open hate speech and calls for violence by government propagandists also goes unpunished. The latest such case is the rejection of the call to violence by Milenko Nedelkovski against numerous journalists and public figures, which was also rejected by the Higher Prosecution in June 2016 with the explanation that it concerns "personal" insults, even though from what was written, hatred that is built on group characteristics can clearly be seen.

MORATORIUM ON PUBLIC CAMPAIGNS; THE GOVERNMENT FINDS OTHER WAYS TO "SUPPLY" PUBLIC MONEY TO OBEDIENT MEDIA

Although the media were to be the first item of the negotiations following the signing of the Przino Agreement, those reforms have been constantly delayed, and those issues still remain unresolved.

The start seemed promising. The moratorium on government campaigns, which came into force in July 2015, immediately after the signing of the Agreement, was part the

package of reforms in the media that was supposed to be the first item on the agenda of the implementation of the Przino Agreement. Prior to the moratorium, there was information on payments of huge amounts of funds for government campaigns on several national television stations that were close to the government.

However, despite the moratorium, the government continued to find ways to "supply" the media with public funds, which, in return, placed contents that support government policies, and stigmatize the opposition and civil society.

Money from public announcements (for competitions, tenders, etc.) still remains a form of influence. For example, funds for producing film production programs were made available to the media, as a way of continuing financial support. This mechanism, introduced with the new media legislation, functions in a non-transparent manner, whereby funds are allocated by an inter-ministerial body, which does not possess the relevant expertise for assessing the needs for this type of program. Just to illustrate, three television channels received funds in one year to film the same type of program - Macedonian folk tales!⁴

Furthermore, one of the ways to supply funds is through commercial clients close to the ruling party, who direct and overpay for the ads to these media outlets. With these resources, it is obvious that in addition to the advertisements, other "service" is also being paid for.

ENRICHED TV OFFER: POLITICAL PLURALISM AND DEBATE, OR IS IT JUST MORE CROCODILES IN THE SWAMP?

Meanwhile, several new media outlets have emerged on the Macedonian market. In addition to the new TV station "Nova" ("New"), which broadcasts in Macedonian (with news also in Albanian language) the media setting has been enriched with two more TV channels in Albanian: TV 21, which has news, debates and other contents in Macedonian language as well and TV Shenja. All three television channels are operating under

a license for national coverage through a public telecommunications network. There is also a new newspaper on the market, in Albanian language titled “2+1”.

Also, in extraordinarily difficult conditions for commercial survival and with virtually no structural support, the trend of threats, endangering and closing of the local media and media for minority communities continued. The latest victim of this trend was the oldest privately owned media outlet in the Roma language, TV BTR, which recently stopped broadcasting. We say trend because of the little known fact that in the past decade over 20 television stations, radios, newspapers and magazines in the languages of the communities have diminished, despite the clear commitment for their assistance in the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001. As a result of these factors, the number of media outlets from which news consumers have to choose has increased greatly, but the quality of news has diminished.

As opposed to the years when there were almost no TV debates, now they are in abundance. Almost every television station that broadcasts on a national level, and even the ones on the local level, have debates on their shows. However, within the Macedonian language media (with few exceptions, such as a debate between parliamentary members Kunovska from SDSM and Rangelova from VMRO-DPMNE) there continues to be lack of direct confrontation of the government with the opposition.

Some of the media outlets camouflage the absence of substantive debate between the government and opposition by substituting this debate with a debate of experts, civil society representatives and other public figures, which does not solve the problem of the refusal of the government to sit down with its main political opponent for over a decade, and the failure of the media to press for such a confrontation.

Furthermore, it can also be noted that the choice of guests on those debate programs that do exist comes down to a hundred people, which certainly does not mean that the majority of them are not relevant interlocutors, but it does indicate a certain routine of the debates by the media.

In the fall and by the end of 2015, in the media close to the government, an attempt could be noticed among the media of "opening up" to the opposition, apparently, upon suggestions of the international community, which was indirectly admitted by the main editor of Channel 5 during a live interview in the main news of Channel 5 with the Vice President of SDSM Radmila Sekerinska⁵. This attempt for "democratic pluralism" in the pro-government media ended grotesquely, with several attacking interviews aimed at the leadership of SDSM and the ministers who entered the government for the implementation of elections anticipated with the Przino agreement.

In the Albanian media, however, televised debates brought additional quality in informing the citizens, although there are limits to this. For example, it can be noted that dialogue between DPA and DUI is conducted within media debates, however, these two most powerful parties of the Albanians usually refuse to participate in TV duels with "smaller" parties, and so far the media are respecting that wish. In addition, among some of the Albanian language media, there is a lack of relevant criticism towards political representatives and those representing the interests of the Albanian voters in the institutions.

LAWS AND COUNTER LAWS: ESSENCE ENTANGLED IN BUREAUCRATIC LABYRINTHS

In Priebe's report, several recommendations are given in the section regarding the media:

- All media must be freed from all political pressures, without interference and threats.
- The media should distance themselves from political party politics and should not be in the service of politicians and political parties.
- The national public broadcasting service should strive to be completely impartial and independent of political, commercial and other influences and ideologies, and contribute to an informed civil society.

- The media play an especially important role in situations of political crisis. It is in the public interest for them to reveal possible faults in the functioning of the state or society. Hence, public authorities should refrain from discouraging the media to fulfill their mandate.

- Actions relating to slander should not be used as a means to suppress the debate or to prevent responsibility of public figures. It is particularly worrying when politicians sue journalists for slander, and also when they sue other political figures, instead of resolving their differences through other means such as public debate.

- Courts need to deal with lawsuits for slander in a balanced manner, regardless of the possible political implications of the specific case. Courts should develop clear and predictable practices for the protection of freedom of expression in terms of the lawsuits for slander. Both mediation and self-regulation should play an important role in reducing the large number of cases that reach courts. Consideration should be given to expanding the scope of the current legal ceiling on the responsibility for slander of the media of different types of accused persons.

- "Buying" political support from the media through financial support of the media is unacceptable. Strict rules should be implemented on government advertising.

- Media ownership and financing of media should be transparent.

- Working conditions of journalists need to be improved in order to reduce self-censorship.⁶

Throughout this whole period, the negotiating groups for the media worked on agreeing to legislative solutions to implement these recommendations. However, as proposals circulated from one party to another, they were often incorrectly presented by the media, creating a fog from which only one thing could be read: the government lacks the will necessary to fundamentally resolve this issue, because it is precisely the media that are one of the main levers through which this government maintains its power. But other than the informal moratorium on government campaigns, and the amendments in the Electoral Code, from which the only essential thing was the inability of the me-

dia to be donors of political parties (which was made possible with the previous Code), there wasn't any substantial progress in this direction.

Even the "offer" from the ruling VMRO-DPMNE for the opposition to choose any European media law, which the government would immediately pass, is a message in itself. Especially when the existing laws, which were not that bad, did not function, because the government controls the bodies tasked with their enforcement, which can be noted in all international and domestic reports on media in Macedonia for years. On the other hand, the Albanian parties in the negotiations focused solely on the request for a special channel in the Albanian language on the public broadcaster MTV, with hardly any other contribution to the discussions and complaints.

In this sense, one cannot expect any substantial change in the strategy of the government towards media reforms, particularly regarding the control over the money and institutions that can sanction aggressively hateful behavior, which apparently is stimulated exactly by the government.

In this entire game with proposals and counter proposals, laws and counter-laws, it is worth to mention the proposal that was prepared with the assistance of Belgian diplomat Peter Vanhoutte by the Association of the Journalists of Macedonia together with Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers (SSNM), Macedonian Institute of Media (MIM), Center for Media Development (CRM), which won the support of the greater part of the independent media community and civil society sector.

The proposal anticipated the election of advisors to the Agency for Media and Audiovisual Media Services (AVMS) and a Program Council of the Macedonian Radio and Television (MRT) through competition, with the support of professional or academic organizations, and voting with a two-thirds majority in the Parliament.

The amendments anticipated a different mandate of the director of the Agency, obligations for political pluralism for informative programs, financing of the MRT with 1% of the budget, as well as provisions for greater financial and program accountability of the

public service and the return of sanctions for hate speech.

This proposal, which was submitted formally to the Parliament on the 4 April 2016, was rejected.

HOT TO REACH THE EXIT AND WHAT IF WE GET LOST IN THE TUNNEL AGAIN?

In such a constellation, it would be overly optimistic to expect the media to play any constructive role in the public and in the political processes in the country in the near future.

First and foremost, without first improving the political situation one cannot expect to have improvements in the situation with the media. The media are a mirror of society, and every society receives a government and media that it deserves. The ugly picture of Macedonian society must be repaired in several aspects, and this requires political will.

Currently, media outlets are usurped by the governing parties; operate in the absence of a judiciary that will sanction hatred speeches and public calls for lynching, violence and murder; and without consistent implementation of legislation for slander and insults. Without drastic changes to these conditions, a responsible and transparent media sector simply is not possible.

Without ensuring fair market conditions for the media, and fair working conditions for journalists, a free media sector is not possible.

Without respect for the standards of the profession and the code of ethics, there is no free media. If journalists themselves do not solve matters, they will always leave room for someone else from outside to solve them. Self-regulation is one of the pillars upon which independent journalism rests. It should be embraced and cherished, and not sabotaged and trivialized.

Without a true independent public service, which will set an example for standards and

quality for other media, the quality of the content in the private media, which nevertheless has private business interests, will not change.

If drastic changes are not made in the areas of regulation, self-regulation, and funding of the media sector, we can expect these problems not only to continue, but also to worsen and degrade further, which will adversely affect the chances for Macedonia to overcome this social crisis that could have far reaching and regional implications.

[1] "The media in Macedonia: protectors of the public or hostages of political interests?" Professor Dr. Vesna Sopar, Petrit Saracini, Institute of communication studies, February 2016 Skopje, available at http://respublica.edu.mk/attach/mediumite-i-javniot-interes-vo-mk_opt.pdf

[2] EC Progress Report on Macedonia, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/pdf/key_documents/2015/20151110_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf

[3] Cases of violation of journalists' rights and reactions of the institutions, June 2016, Skopje Association of journalists of Macedonia (AJM), available at http://znm.org.mk/?page_id=1357

[4] "The Media freedom curbed with public money", MA Vesna Nikodinovska, MIM 2015, available on <http://mim.org.mk/mk/mediumska-politika/859-mediumskite-slobodi-zauzdani-so-javni-pari>

[5] Channel 5 News, 11 February 2016, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7r2o7TzF-Pc6>

[6] "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: Recommendations of the Senior Experts' Group on systemic Rule of Law issues relating to the communications interception revealed in Spring 2015", Брисел, 8 јуни 2015, достапно на: http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/news_corner/news/news-files/20150619_recommendations_of_the_senior_experts_group.pdf



MEDIA ANALYSIS [2]

**MEDIA DARKNESS
AND ELECTIONS**

By Siniša STANKOVIĆ

Following the liberation of the public broadcaster Macedonian Radio and Television and the inevitable, opportunistic, mercenary conversion of the owners of the until now strictly controlled national media - "sponsors" of the governing parties, in parallel with the pressure over the few remaining pro-democratic media with an increasingly larger buffer-zone of encouraged and aware citizens, the width of the definition of "credible", perhaps, will cover some kind of elections... But, after a decade of organized and well planned massive poisoning of the public against real democratic elections, Macedonia will need a long period of democratic detoxification. A process of purifying, intended for healing and awakening of the people - to which extent has the country plunged, as well as for restoring the criteria of values and for fundamental changes for establishing moral and professional norms...

Macedonia has been a dark Vilayet for a whole decade, even in comparison with the rest of the unfortunate Balkans, and a deep black hole, which in media terms is light years away from the European standards and norms and which, to make things even more tragic, every day is further and further away from the civilized world. And because of that, the rational and freethinking people in the Vilayet don't need data on the striking falls of Macedonia on the lists of (non)free countries of Reporters without Borders, Freedom House or Amnesty International, because they, forced to live in a country with a government that is deaf and inconsiderate towards all the appeals and warnings from Macedonia - while for those abroad it hypocritically commits that it will change, only to play games with them afterwards - simply, can feel the consequences of the dense media darkness on their own skin. (All of those who were able to gather the money and courage, 600.000 educated and virtuous people, with diplomas and skills, ran away and never looked back, far away from "the oasis of peace", which, once awash in antiques and baroque, has now been degraded into a caricaturized "kitch-capital of Europe.

If in the first 10 years of sovereign Macedonia, the media monopoly of NIP "Nova Makedonija" (state's news company) and MRTV were able to easily suffocate the rare outbursts of journalistic courage to talk about the orchestrated praises of the government of SDSM at the time, whose ministers allowed themselves to openly and without

consequences threaten journalists by publicly presenting their dossier or ironically stating that the journalist who dared to ask questions about their arrogance should be fed with feces (a much harsher alternative to the Bulgarian version of “throwing a bone” to the reporters), with the arrival of the “yuppies-version” of VMRO-DPMNE (generously aided by the servant DUI, whose pacification was reduced to recitals for NATO and EU, with a few slaps for the disobedient journalists and with various statements adjusted to suit the international, the ethnic Macedonian, and the ethnic Albanian public), started the monstrous plan for suppressing the free thought and the public word in Macedonia, targeted at every attempt to present a different opinion or, God forbid, a slight critique for the mistakes of the obnoxious “people pleasing” government.....

The chaos resulting from the deliberate creation of hundreds of thousands of small-town media (“greetings and regards to our listeners”) and the gradual, but effective destruction of the written media with disloyal competition in the advertisement of the ruling party and state institutions (assisted by the ego-trips of the majority of owners of print media, that, unlike the situation in the other Balkan countries, were able to handle themselves in the new conditions, actually, with the basic idea-guide to become “Caliph instead of the Caliph”, all done in spite, lowered the value of their own media), paving the way for the current madness.

Slowly, the government shifted the thrust of the impact from the journalists to the media owners. A majority of them, however, lost in the media business, from fear, under brutal racketeering, or for filling the treasure chest, although mainly set towards politics and journalism, however, managed to find enough orchestrated editors to consistently fulfill the orders of the Head Office (the center for communications of VMRO-DPMNE, or in recent years, strictly the members of The Family....), and to cut the roots of the fewer attempts of the journalists to be able to conduct their profession and to defend their dignity and honor.

Hence, the media flood tossed a lot of odor and trash to the surface instead of producing quality from quantity ...Before the eyes of the startled as well as the resigned Macedonian public, a large number of intruders sprouted in journalism; bad journalists, selling their profession, rose in numbers.

Illiterates, marginalized, haters, empty personalities whose frustrations form their empty lives poured straight into the air, sowing hatred towards any with opinions who differed from theirs and polluted the media sphere, modeling virtual reality through transparent propaganda, whose thousands of lies, unfortunately, have been repeating as a mantra for over a decade - on the most successful government that builds and "accomplishes", stories of world conspiracies against the "biblical land" and of domestic traitors and spies for foreign services, which are taken as true by the better part of the insufficiently informed population. Especially for the rural and the older categories of citizens, bribed or bought with subsidies or benefits (with which the villages and the agriculture have become more devastated and future generations put in debt) ... And, what is even scarier, is that their lies have become a type of bulletproof glass bell for the hundreds of thousands of budget-paid-citizens (regardless of whether they are crowded at the offices with a party membership card of VMRO-DPMNE or DUI- for the satellite "carriage-parties", according to the motto "just show to work and receive paycheck", escalated into a fight for a seat for those that do go to work or those that stay at home but still receive wages, for equal representation, but not on a national, but on a coalition level), or are just ordinary people, who were professionals, but for over a decade, cramped with fear for existence are quiet and afraid and have to bear all of that.

The authorities have brutally punished the traditional pro-democracy media in Macedonia, while journalism has also been dying for quite some time.. It is struggling to survive, through new media, social networks, the screams of the civil journalists, activists and freedom fighters...But even that space, as in the time of the occupation of the media space at the local level with the network of municipal or regional TV stations under the umbrella of VMRO-DPMNE, is infected with hundreds of fake portals with unknown owners and sources of income, who's primary purpose is to spread lies and sow hatred.

While Macedonian media are silent about the death of 80 newborn babies and 40 patients in a psychiatric hospital, and news are being published on official promotions of pedestrian crossings by the acting prime minister, there is simply no way to resuscitate the media scene ... Unfortunately, with such media, free and fair elections in Macedonia are simply not possible in the near future...

PROJECT ACTIVITY REPORTS

**CIVIC EDUCATION
RESEARCH
AWARENESS-RAISING
PUBLIC EVENTS
FIELDWORK**

By the CIVIL Team



Public event "All for Free Elections", December 11, 2015

ACTIVITY REPORT [1]

PUBLIC EVENTS TO MAKE PEOPLE SEE

Reported by Marija TEGOVSKA

CIVIL held 25 public events throughout the whole country, during the implementation of the Free Elections for Free Citizens project. Over 30 political parties, over 50 CSOs at national and local level, hundreds of citizens attended the our public events that were organized both in and out doors. These reports represent only a short selection of this project component's activities.

Public discussions: Pluralism and political crisis

The absence of political debate has been evident in the last ten years in Republic of Macedonia. There was also lack of debate during the process of overcoming the political crisis in Republic of Macedonia, due to the exclusivity of the format of the negotiations. They almost completely excluded the parties that had fewer votes in the previous elections, and the non-parliamentary parties, and there was also no room in that process for civil society organizations, movements and initiatives, nor for the expert community.

CIVIL – Center for Freedom organized four public debates on the topic: “Pluralism and political crisis”, in order to contribute to the social debate, and through participation of political parties and the expert community, to offer solutions for overcoming the crisis in the country.

From the very beginning of the process, which coincided with the start of the implementation of the Project “Free Elections for Free Citizens”, CIVIL insisted on inclusion in the process, and in the meantime, made a serious and visible contribution to the so-

cial debate, by including many political parties, experts and civil society organizations, through public events at which many media outlets, diplomats and interested citizens participated.

All the materials and video recordings related to these events can be found on the online channels of CIVIL, and in many other media outlets that have downloaded the contents, or have accordingly produced their own informative contents. In this review, we are briefly presenting some of the public events within the project.

The public events were attended by leaders and high representatives of a large number of political parties that are not part of the negotiations for overcoming the political crisis. They gave a valuable contribution to opening the issues that are of key importance for the political processes that are taking place in the country. Their presentations contain valuable information and opinions on the situation, but even more importantly, they offered visions and solutions for overcoming the crisis. At the last public discussion of this type, we also invited representatives of the four political parties involved in the negotiations for overcoming the political crisis. Only the leader of the opposing SDSM, Zoran Zaev, responded to the invitation.

More than 30 leaders and high representatives of political parties have participated in the public discussions altogether, along with many experts, in the presence of the media and representatives of the civil society, the diplomatic corps and monitoring missions.

The starting point of the public discussion "Pluralism and political crisis", which was held on April 4, 2016, was: The Agreement for overcoming the political crisis (Przino, 2015) is partially implemented. The institutions that are obliged to ensure free elections and the rule of law, are facing political and media obstructions, as well as obstructions from other institutions. Can there be elections on June 5? What are the views and solutions for overcoming the political crisis that can be offered by the political parties not included in the Przino process?

Leaders and high representatives of 18 parties took part in the event, which sparked even greater interest in the public.

CIVIL also organized an expert panel discussion under the same title, on March 17, 2016. Renowned experts participated at the public discussion, who presented their expertise on the political crisis and on the electoral process in the country. The goal of this discussion was to contribute to developing a pluralistic setting and debate in society, by presenting different views of the expert community.



Pluralism and Political Crisis, expert panel discussion, March 17, 2016

The panel discussion was attended by Sandra Gavrilovska, lawyer and legal expert, Dr. Saso Ordanoski, political analyst and university professor, and Aleksandar Novakoski, lawyer, legal expert and former President of the SEC.

The discussion was opened by H.E Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany, Dr. Christine D. Althauzer. This expert panel discussion echoed widely in the public, and was a step towards

postponing the first date set for elections (April 24), something on which CIVIL insisted from the very beginning of the political process in June 2015.

CIVIL organized the fourth public discussion on the topic: "Pluralism and political crisis", May 10, 2016. This event has got a character of a national conference, both because of its size and the impact it had in the public.

It was attended by high representatives of 21 political parties in Macedonia. Represent-

atives of all political parties were invited to participate at this public event. In addition to the political parties, the public discussion was attended by over 50 representatives of civil society organizations, media, civic initiatives and diplomatic offices and monitoring missions in Republic of Macedonia.

Fierce criticism on the government, postponement of elections scheduled for June 5, withdrawal of Ivanov's abolition, depoliticization of the judiciary and many other measures and reforms for overcoming the political crisis in Macedonia, were just part of CIVIL's analysis, which was presented to the participants at the beginning of the public discussion.

This was followed with views of the highest representatives of the political parties that attended the discussion. A large number of media were also present, representatives of the civil society sector and of diplomatic offices and monitoring missions in the country.



Pluralism and Political Crisis, public discussion, April 4, 2016

Panel discussion: The right to vote and political financing

A panel discussion on the topic "Free Elections for Free Citizens", was held within the framework of the series of events, consultations, trainings and coordination meetings, under the joint title "Days of voting rights". The event was held on December 11, immediately after the International Human Rights Day on December 10, to outline the importance of the right to vote, as one of the fundamental human rights. The event was opened by H.E the Ambassador of the Republic of Croatia, Danijela Barisic.

The panelists were experts from Croatia, Marina Skrabalo and Dragan Zelic from the Croatian NGO – GONG, and Aleksandra Jozic – Ilekovic from the Centre of Excellence within the Ministry for Foreign and European Affairs of the Republic of Croatia. CIVIL's views were presented by Xhabir Deralla and Sinisa Stankovic.

CIVIL once again urged citizens to help in overcoming the difficult political crisis, and to contribute towards the creation of conditions for holding free elections: "We consider it possible, despite the short period of time, for conditions for holding free elections to be

created, but only if there is political will from the responsible decision-makers. Moreover, the participation of all citizens will be crucial in this process. We urge everyone, every individual, to help Republic of Macedonia to conduct quality, fair and democratic and free elections. Everyone needs to activate themselves and to contribute. Each irregularity and corruptive behavior, along with the slightest pressure and abuse, and any kind of violence should be reported. In this way, each of us has the opportunity to contribute to improving the situation in our country”.

On this occasion, and with the purpose of marking International Human Rights Day, CIVIL published an analysis in which the past year is reviewed, the manipulations with voting rights and the violations of human rights and freedoms. The analysis is titled “Macedonia: Fear and hope”.

Within the framework of the Project “Free Elections for Free Citizens”, the public event on the topic: “Financing of political parties and election campaigns” was also held with the expert team from Croatia, Aleksandra Jozic Ilekovic from the Centre of Excellence, within the Ministry of Foreign and European Affairs, and Dragan Zelic from GONG. Representatives of all political parties were invited, along with representatives of civil society, activists, media and interested citizens.



Skopje, December, 2015: Days of voting rights with GONG, Croatia

Direct contact with the citizens

CIVIL held public events in four cities (Stip, Bitola, Gevgelija and Kumanovo), which are included within the Project “Free Elections for Free Citizens”, at which, through the format of street media, information materials on the elections were distributed, and citizens had the opportunity to obtain information on their rights as voters, on the need of free, fair and democratic elections, as well as on the role of everyone in that process.

Due to the great interest and turnout at previous working meetings, a public discussion was held in Ohrid, January 30, 2016, with a considerable turnout of over 50 participants, including a majority of ruling party decision makers at local level. The heated discussion was followed by numerous reactions in the public and media at national level for several weeks beyond the event.

At the public event under the slogan “All for free elections” in Stip, CIVIL’s team spoke for ninety minutes with residents of Stip, on all issues that concern them in regards to human rights, especially in the electoral context. With music, and materials from

the audio production of CIVIL Media, jingles on free election and voter's rights, CIVIL's team handed out hundreds of flyers and various information materials on the upcoming elections, and spoke with residents of Stip who were interested, who expressed a wish for this. Despite the snow and the cold weather, the event was held in the spirit of CIVIL's maxim- that all whether conditions are good for activism. In the statements of the Stip media, the representatives for CIVIL once again urged citizens to join the efforts for providing free elections, but also the institutions and political parties for urgent depolitization of the institutions, for clearing the Voter's Register and for freeing the media and the public word in Macedonia.

Over 600 citizens of Bitola attended the public event "All for free elections". The event was organized with the support of the association "It's about us". At the same time, a photo-petition, was conducted, in which fifty visitors took part, and participants watched the audio and video materials



Ohrid, January 30, 2016

of CIVIL, which illustrate the reality in Macedonia "This isn't on the news of the national TV stations" - was the challenging teaser of CIVIL for this event, which the Bitola media announced a few days earlier as "news in the open".

The representatives of CIVIL and "It's about us", also held a press-conference for the Bitola media, which responded to the invitation of the event organizers, and together thanked the great support of the citizens of Bitola and the entire country

Over 600 citizens of Kumanovo attended the public event “All for free elections” Copies of the printed material regarding voter’s rights and the public demands for ensuring conditions for free elections were handed out at the event. A photo-petition was conducted and the participants watched audio and video materials of CIVIL, which illustrate the reality in the Republic of Macedonia. The representatives of CIVIL held a press-conference for the Kumanovo media.

The public event in Gevgelija was held with music, jingles, videos, photo petition All for #FreeElections, with flyers on rights of voters and discussions with the citizens of this city. The public event was marked with strengthening the public awareness on the rights of voters and contributing to creating conditions for free elections in Macedonia.

The public event “All for free elections” in Ohrid was opened by Angel Janev, the Deputy Mayor of Ohrid. He expressed support to the demands for free elections, and welcomed CIVIL’s work, and expressed accusations on the account of the opposition saying that it is running away from elections. A debate was held on the political crisis and on the conditions for holding free elections in the Republic of Macedonia. Even though at times the debate was fierce and antagonizing, with visible presence of Ohrid local government officials, who took part in the discussion with accusations towards CIVIL, it still continued generally in a democratic spirit.

The public events in Stip, Bitola, Kumanovo, Gevgelija and Ohrid were held in the period of December 2015 to February 2016.

ACTIVITY REPORT [2]

CIVIC EDUCATION FOR ACTIVE AND RESPONSIBLE CITIZENS

Reported by Dehran MURATOV

Training seminars for free elections

Within the Project “Free Elections for Free Citizens”, representatives of CIVIL – Center for Freedom held 6 seminars on free elections in Skopje, Kumanovo, Bitola, Ohrid, Stip and Gevgelija. The seminars were attended by members and supporters of CIVIL, local civil society organizations, initiatives, as well as interested citizens who registered for participation in the seminars. In total, seminars were attended by 162 participants, of which – 38 in Bitola, 23 in Ohrid, 26 in Stip, 30 in Kumanovo, 21 in Gevgelija, and 24 in Skopje. As always, CIVIL ensured gender balance and ethnic diversity at the seminars.

Participants in the seminars became familiar with all aspects of CIVIL’s work related to elections, voting rights and human rights and freedoms, in general. Furthermore, a process of establishing a network of active citizens was initiated, who contribute to the monitoring of the processes and events that are relevant to the project, as well as of establishing a wide network for support to the processes that should lead to free elections.

The seminars covered theoretical and empirical aspects of the electoral processes, electoral systems and system weaknesses, political campaigns and the role of the media, monitoring, reporting and education on electoral processes, voting rights and human rights and freedoms, in general, as well as practical guidelines for monitoring of electoral processes.

Most of the participants of the seminars remain active and occasionally submit information on the situation on the ground, and at the same time, are also educators and disseminate information and knowledge in their surrounding area.

At the seminars, CIVIL also established a Regional working group on free elections, at which representatives of political parties, municipalities, civil society organizations, the media, local institutions, business communities, leaders in communities and other interested citizens were invited.

Distinguished experts from Macedonia, but also from the Republic of Croatia (Centre of Excellence within the Croatia MOI and GONG, an organization widely known for its experience and expertise in election observation and electoral systems) were guests at the seminars.



Training seminar in Bitola, October 3, 2015

Free Elections for Free Citizens

1. Take a Free Elections Selfie
2. Free Elections Photo Petition
3. Public event in Bitola
4. Press conference in Skopje
5. Public event in Shtip



Info-stands and Free Zones

CIVIL organized over 60 info-stands throughout the country for the Project "Free Elections for Free Citizens", of which 19 were set at various locations in Skopje. Through this activity, CIVIL's teams made contact with nearly 20.000 citizens.

The info-stands were intended for citizens to be able to learn directly about the activities of the organization, its demands and proposals for reforms in the electoral system and measures that need to be taken for overcoming the political crisis and ensuring conditions for holding free elections, as well as for distribution of educational materials on voting rights and on human rights and freedoms in general.

The first info-stand within the framework of this project was set on September 17, 2015, in the center of Skopje.

At the info-stands, representatives and activists of CIVIL handed out copies of printed materials in Macedonian and Albanian, and in smaller quantities in Roma, Turkish, Vlach and in the Serbian language. Visitors were informed that all the materials, and many other relevant contents are available at www.civil.org.mk.

A photo petition with the message "I am for free elections" was also organized at the info-stands of CIVIL. Interested citizens had the opportunity to express their support and demand for free elections. Many of them, through communication with the organization's teams, directed a clear demand to the political elites for them to hear their voice and to contribute towards maximum respect for their voting right. Several hundred citizens were photographed with a message for free elections. Many of them can

be found on CIVIL's Facebook page (www.facebook.com/civil.mk).

In addition, at the info-stands, citizens were able to sign statements of support to CIVIL, while some did this on-line after they were informed on how to access and fill out the application form. By completing the application, they have the opportunity to be on CIVIL's mailing list and become part of the wider network of CIVIL's associates and citizen observers.

Also, citizens were informed that they could report irregularities, violation of voting rights and other endangerments of human rights and freedoms in the electoral context on the website www.slobodniizbori.info. The info-stands presented an excellent opportunity for people, particularly for those without



Free Elections for Free Citizens, CIVIL team at the info-stand in Skopje

Internet skills, to submit applications in person, in communication with the representatives of CIVIL's monitoring teams and activists. They had the opportunity to receive copies of printed application forms and send them by mail.

On December 29, 2015, CIVIL symbolically declared the info-stands and the headquarters of the organization as a "Free Zone", which once again emphasizes that these are places where citizens can freely express themselves, and also direct demands for free elections and activate themselves in the efforts for ensuring conditions for holding free elections in the country. For CIVIL it is important for those who are interested to feel invited to come to CIVIL at any time and share information and educate and activate themselves.

ACTIVITY REPORT [3]

FOCUS GROUPS: WIDESPREAD CORRUPTION

Reported by Biljana JORDANOVSKA

Research is one of the important components of the Free Elections for Free Citizens project. The focus groups of CIVIL are one of the formats for qualitative research that CIVIL applies.

The focus groups that were carried out within this project provided insight into the perceptions, views and feelings of representatives of various communities, or categories of citizens, on the phenomena related to the socio-political processes and events in the electoral context, on the level of knowledge on the voting rights, the situation of human rights and freedoms in general, as well as on the implementation of previous election processes.

The results of these focus groups do not differ from CIVIL's findings during the implementation and monitoring of various forms of research, online or on the field. Almost a year after the implementation of the focus groups, the findings of this research are surprisingly accurate and relevant.

Focus groups were implemented in Kumanovo, Bitola, Ohrid, Gevgelija and Stip in July 2015, within the first phase of the Project "Free Elections for Free Citizens". The total number of participants in the focus groups was 40 participants. According to their composition, they were attended by 21 men and 19 women, aged 18 to 65 years. The participants of the focus groups replied to 10 questions.

Results showed that participants in the focus groups agree to a large extent on certain issues, regardless of their place of residence, age, ethnic, political, gender or other affiliation. However, regarding the question directly related to the political processes and events, participants were either open, sharp and critical or were brief in their replies, afraid and confused. The research showed that the general opinion of the participants reflects fear of the expected changes, but also the negative sentiment and suspicion that something will change for the better.

1. PREVIOUS ELECTORAL PROCESSES

In regards to the question whether voting in elections is an expression of the free will of the citizens, from a total of 40 participants in the focus groups, 25 said that, unfortunately, in Macedonia the right to free and secret vote has been taken away from the citizens, 13 of the participants, starting, primarily, from their own experience, agreed that voting at elections is an expression of their free will, whereby two of the participants could not reply. According to the experience of some of the respondents, this question puts them in a situation to reconsider the time of voting during election day, if anyone was observing them, following them while voting, were they on anyone's list, while thinking that they had exercised their right to vote free and secretly.

Nevertheless, when it comes to the implementation of the electoral processes, participants had a clearer image of how elections are conducted in Macedonia and the kind of challenges citizens face.

When asked if in Macedonia free and fair elections are conducted, 37 of the participants, analyzing the electoral processes in the last ten years, decisively replied that we cannot speak of free and fair elections when each one of the electoral cycles has gone by with a large number of irregularities. In the text below are some of the responses:

The elections in Macedonia are not fair and democratic, primarily, because of the low standard that we have and the great economic dependence of the people from the parties”.

“Propaganda, bribery, threats, blackmail, that is all I can say about the last few election processes behind us”.

“How can there be free elections, when they threaten you that if you don’t vote, they will fire you from work, or they offer to hire you if you vote for them?!”

“They are neither free, nor fair, given how the pre-election campaigns are, election day is just a formality, during which they still conduct pressure on the ones they weren’t able to during the pre-election campaigns”.

For the remaining other three participants, from a total of 40 participants, the electoral processes in Macedonia are democratic and fair. Their replies were brief and they did not want to explain their opinion in regards to this question.

While the focus groups were being carried out, the political crisis in Macedonia was deepening, and the international community came as a mediator in the implementation of the recommendations of Priebe’s report.

2. REFORMS IN THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM

The reforms in the electoral system were a current topic, and according to CIVIL's recommendations, one of the changes was for Macedonia to become a one election unit and for open lists to be introduced. Therefore, the electoral reforms were part of the questions and topics of the focus groups of CIVIL.

As to the question on whether Macedonia should be as one election unit, from a total of 40 participants, 22 responded affirmatively, considering that this way the smaller political parties would have the possibility to come out of the shadow of the four political parties, signatories of the Przino Agreement. They strengthened their position also with the belief that this way, the political situation in the country would improve, which would foster leadership instead of rulership.

The other participants, 18, were not sure whether they understood the concept of one election unit, and how that would affect the improvement of the political situation in Macedonia. Of these, 15 believe that the citizens are not familiar enough with the Electoral Code and with the electoral models, in order for them to be able to assess what is good, and what is bad in such situations.

3. PROPAGANDA, POLITICAL CORRUPTION AND PRESSURE

The Agreement for overcoming the political crisis, which was signed by the leaders of the four major parties, in Przino, did not prevent the ruling party to continue with a continuous pre-election campaign.

As of 2006, Macedonia has gone through 8 electoral cycles. These frequent electoral cycles were often marked with pressure, blackmail and threat on the electorate, with discrimination based on political affiliation, abuse of public resources and complete control and politicization of the public administration.

When asked if a representative or activist of a political party had promised them a job

or other benefits directly to them or someone they knew, if they were to vote or draw up a list with secure voters for that party, from a total of 40 participants in the focus groups, 35 personally had never faced such pressure. From the 35 participants who had not personally experienced such pressure, 24 participants testified or had heard from close friends or relatives that they do have an obligation to draw up lists of secure voters or to vote for a certain party.

The price they have to pay if they disagree or do not fulfill the “task”, as the participants say, is always either dismissal from work, personally or to a member of the family. The “reward” is employment, promotion or salary increase. Only 5 participants in the focus groups had such personal experience.

One participant had refused to be a part of, as he calls it, the “machinery of the government”, despite all the promises for employment, while another participant had drawn up lists on several occasions on secure voters, but the promises were never fulfilled. After some time, this person stopped to believe and stopped to work as a party novice.

4. ABUSE OF SOCIALLY VULNERABLE CATEGORIES

19 unemployed persons participated in the focus groups. Taking into account that the poverty rate in Macedonia is 28,6%, of which 4,6% of the population is unemployed and poor, and 82,5% of the total number of unemployed have been unemployed for a long time, according to the research conducted by CIVIL within the framework of the Project “Social justice now!”, a conclusion can be made in that the greatest pressure and political manipulations are conducted precisely on socially vulnerable categories.

Therefore, one of the questions for the respondents in the focus groups was whether the poor and other vulnerable categories in society are blackmailed or abused in other ways, for the purpose of forcing them to vote for the parties in power. 39 participants were unanimous that the poor and other socially vulnerable categories are the easiest ones to manipulate and bribe, and that they are under constant pressure and threat

within the continuous election campaign. Following are some of the replies on this subject:

"I am absolutely positive that the greatest pressure is carried out on the poor, for them to think and act contrary to their beliefs".

"The ruling parties have destroyed the middle class".

"The socially vulnerable groups are most dependent from the government, primarily, the Roma population, but students as well, for scholarships, for accommodation in student dormitories, followed by the pensioners and many others".

"People are so impoverished that they are put in a situation to be bought with a bag of flour and cooking oil, and no matter how aware they are of this and no matter how much their intelligence has been insulted, they have no other choice!"

"The government had enough time to develop a mechanism for manipulating the people".

The only participant in the focus groups that believed that the parties in power do not blackmail and abuse the poor and other vulnerable categories as an electorate, elaborated his position in one sentence:

"No, because everyone has the same rights".

5. ABUSE OF THE ADMINISTRATION FOR PARTY PURPOSES

Regarding the question whether the administration is abused for party purposes, of the total number of participants, only 1 participants considers that the administration works professionally and that there is no reason for it to be abused for someone's political or party goals.

The other 39 participants are convinced that the easiest party manipulation and abuse, especially in the pre-election period, is performed on the administration. From among

the participants in the focus groups, four of them are employed in the administration and testified through personal experience about the abuses on the administration employees. The response of one of the participants in regards to his experience and testimony for an employment in one school, serves as an illustration for such situations:

"I paid one thousand euros for employment in a state music center, to the director of the school, through an intermediary, her spouse. That was the price for employment in that school. That is only one of the things. Moreover, once you are employed, you start paying membership fee to the party, which is collected in cash, and the same goes for all the employees in the school, from 600 to 1400 denars, depending on seniority and the position. The price for those who have less working years is lower, and you pay 1500 denars to the party if you have more years of work. In addition, you also receive a list with tasks, an instruction to attend all meetings and many other duties".

On December 24, 2012 the opposition was forcible removed from the Parliament of Republic of Macedonia, by members of special police forces, in the moment when the budget for 2013 was to be voted for. With heavy police security, MP's and journalists were expelled in a violent manner, thus, suspending democracy. From that turning point for the Macedonian democracy, according to all the reports and analyses of CIVIL, there has been no resolution and responsibility for the violation of human rights and freedoms and structural violence, even though until the moment the focus groups were carried out, the Parliament was till in a very bad situation, where hundreds of laws and amendments to laws were being passed in a shortened procedure and depending on the wishes and needs of the party in power, without public debate and without an opposition.

Hence, one of the questions for the participants in the focus groups of CIVIL was whether the Government controls the MP's in the Parliament of Republic of Macedonia. 36 of the participants were sure that the Parliament is strictly controlled by the Government. In the text below, we are conveying some of the views of the participants in the focus groups:

“Here, we have a situation where the Constitution guarantees one thing, while legislature implements another. Quite contrary to the Constitution, the MP’s in the Parliament are controlled”.

“Both the Parliament and the Government are controlled”.

“We have only one machinery of raising a hand”.

“Passing laws in our country is like changing socks – every day, from morning till night”.

“The Parliament does not reflect the needs of the citizens, but rather those of the certain businesses that are run by the main people. Everything comes down to elitism. There are two main people in this country, they are the prime minister and the leader of the opposition”.

The other participants that replied that the parliament cannot be controlled by the Government, explained in short that even if there was a wish to control, the MP’s represent the citizens, and not the Government.

6. CAMPAIGNING

Regarding the question whether the government continues with its campaign in the media, despite the moratorium on commercial campaigns of the Government, 38 of the participants responded affirmatively.

Only two considered that the government is not the only one with an intensive media campaign, that all other political entities do the same during the election period.

7. RESIGNATION OF NIKOLA GRUEVSKI

One of the conditions of the Przino Agreement was the resignation of the prime minister. With the release of the “bombs” by the opposition, the demand for Nikola Gruevski’s final dismissal strengthened even more. On January 15, 2016, Nikola Gruevski submitted his resignation to the President of Parliament, Trajko Veljanovski. With his departure from the position of prime minister, the question was whether he would withdraw from the political scene and whether there would be charges for the crime, corruption and electoral fraud.

Hence, given the uncertainty that prevailed during the implementation of the focus groups, the last two questions concerned precisely the resignation of Gruevski, as a step forward to overcoming the political crisis.

From a total number of 40 participants in the focus groups, 32 replied that the demands of the opposition for the resignation of Prime Minister Gruevski were justified. A smaller number of the participants did not agree that this is the way through which the political crisis should be resolved. According to them, the prime minister has been elected in a legitimate way and that if someone does not like his work, that they should voice their opinion by voting in elections.

As to the last question on whether you believe that the resignation of Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski will change the manner of governance in Republic of Macedonia, the participants went into detail, analyzing on why the change of the prime minister would not influence much in the direction of changes in the democratization of the country and in overcoming the political crisis. Everyone agreed with the fact that if there were changes, that they would be insignificant in regards to all the reforms in the political system, which need to be implemented urgently in order to restore democracy in Macedonia.

Below are some of the responses of the participants in the focus groups

“The resignation of the prime minister will change many things. However, nothing will

change if the same party stays in power, because he will again be orchestrating and everything will be under his influence. So, only with fair elections and with a change in the government there can be changes in the governance of Republic of Macedonia”.

“Even if there were a change in the government and Nikola Gruevski was also replaced, I believe that he would still rule from behind the scene. The only solution is for him to disappear or to end up in some prison”.

“The entire line-up needs to be replaced, and not just Nikola Gruevski. maybe there will be some improvements with his resignation, but I don’t think so, because they are all connected”.

“The resignation of Nikola Gruevski is the first step towards changes, while afterwards we need to go deeper. They have been destroying for nine years, and we will need 15 to fix that. The people have forgotten their rights and will to be educated on that again. They have forgotten their dignity, because it was destroyed. Yes, there will be changes, but they will be difficult to conduct”.

“I believe that nothing will change, because everyone sees things only for their own benefits, and not for the country”.

CIVIL continued with research activities to the very end of the project, continuously monitoring the pulse of the events. CIVIL publishes all of its findings on its online channels, and also at public events where it presents its reports and analyses.

ONLINE SURVEYS

MEASURING THE PUBLIC PULSE

Reported by Biljana JORDANOVSKA

The research component of the project “Free elections for free citizens” also included six online surveys, which continuously followed the progress of the political process, with up-to-date questions in the period when they were conducted.

Through the surveys we acquired information on the opinions, knowledge and understandings on the electoral processes, the electoral model, on election irregularities, pressures, manipulations, threats and blackmail, as well as on the role of the SEC, the SPO, the Przino Agreement and social movements.

The surveys were not anticipated to be relative indicators of the opinion of the general public, as they were addressing the internet public, but did provide insight into the mood of the wider public. The answers to the online questions given in the surveys are very important, especially due to the lack of public debate on the topics covered with them.

As part of the wider range of research activities and monitoring, these surveys are nevertheless a significant contribution to the project and beyond.

In the six surveys that were conducted online, a total of 4,472 respondents took part in the period of October 2015 to April 2016.

In the first online research, we came to quantitative data on the opinion and knowledge of the respondents on the electoral processes, the electoral model, on the irregularities and pressure they face. High 92.4% of the respondents consider that elections are not free and fair, whereby 95.1% of them believe that the poor and other socially vulnerable categories in society are blackmailed and are abused in other ways, in order to force them to vote for the parties in power.

According to the results of this survey, 92.4% of the respondents think that the MP's in the Parliament of Republic of Macedonia are controlled by the Government. Also, 96.7% believe that the media are also under the control of the government. However, 70% of the respondents are afraid to criticize the government.

The second online survey included questions concerning the current political processes in the country, on the role and responsibilities of the main participants in the political negotiations for overcoming the political crisis, as well as on issues that are directly related to the early elections, scheduled for April 2016.

The online survey lasted until November 9, before the new ministers and deputy ministers were appointed, from along the lines of the opposition in the Macedonian government, in accordance with the conditions of the Prizno Agreement.

In that context, in relation to the question regarding the negotiations, 60% of the respondents recognize the international community as a key factor in overcoming the political crisis in the country, while 84,25% of the respondents find the delay and non-fulfillment of the Agreement for overcoming the crisis to be the fault of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE.

We also included the question whether early parliamentary elections should be held together with early presidential elections, which is also part of the public efforts of CIVIL from the very start of the political process in the country. 70,38% of the respondents answered affirmatively to this question, which is also in favor of the public demands of CIVIL.

Despite the pressures to stop the political “bombs” of the opposition, 85,69% of the respondents believe that the opposition should continue publishing wiretapped conversations, which testify to the abuse and crime of the government.

Over 80% of the citizens who took part in the third online survey “The Przino Agreement and the elections” of CIVIL - Center for Freedom, consider that the government obstructs the fulfillment of the Przino Agreement, and almost all of the respondents (89%) replied that the institutions and administrations are abused for party purposes.

In the period when the questions were being prepared and the survey was in progress, the date of April 24, was still set as the date planned for the elections.

Regarding the question - Have conditions for implementing free and fair elections on April 24 been created? - 86% of the respondents, answered that conditions have not been fulfilled. The same percent of respondents answered affirmatively to the question - Do you believe that the elections should be postponed and held after the Voter's Register is revised and the reforms in the media implemented?

In terms of the online survey “SEC and the Voter's Register”, which CIVIL-Center for Freedom conducted in the period of March 23 to March 31, with a date of elections set

for 5 June, regarding the first question “Do you believe that the Voter’s Register is in order?” – 91,53% of the respondents believe that it is not. However, 86,30% of them believe that the publishing of the Voter’s Register for public review was a step in the right direction for the SEC.

In regards to the question “Have you personally noted any irregularities in the Voters Register”, 75,65% of the respondents answered affirmatively, while 91,75% of the respondents replied negatively to the question regarding the decision of the SEC to withdraw the application for reporting irregularities in the Voters Register.

Hence, the suspicion of 76,90% of the respondents in terms of the possibility for the Voters Register to be revised for holding credible elections on the June 5.

75,91% of the respondents approve the boycott of the elections in the online survey “Will there be elections on 5 June, and what will they be like?”, through which CIVIL-Center for freedom detected the opinions of the citizens on the determination of several opposition parties to boycott the elections on June 5.

86,64% of respondents believe that the elections on June 5 will not provide a way out of the political crisis that Macedonia is facing

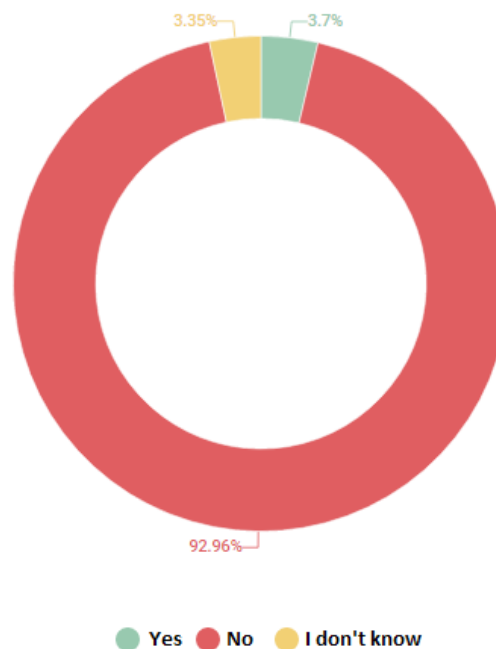
Even though according to the Przino Agreement a revised Voters Register is a precondition for free elections, 85,43% of the respondents were convinced that the Voters Register will remain unrevised for the elections on June 5.

90,28% of the respondents are sure that these elections will also be carried out with abuse of state resources for campaign purposes, and 90,18% believe that the entire election process will also be linked with pressure on public administration employees.

Regarding the first question of the online survey “Protests in Macedonia – a solution or deepening of the crisis” of CIVIL – Center for Freedom, 83,40% replied that they completely support the protests, while 9,31% of the respondents replied that they do not support the Colorful revolution at all.

85,70% of the respondents are familiar with the demands of the Colorful Revolution protesters, while 83,27% support them. The protesters achieved the colorful effects by throwing paint and eggs at the sculptors of the Project "Skopje 2014". 75,57% justify such action of the protesters, while 16,87% do not agree with this kind of anger expression.

The meetings or counter protests of GDOM are not supported at all by 82,59% of the total number of respondents, whereby, 53,17% of them are familiar with their demands and 81,31% do not support their demands for a temporary ban on parties and NGO's that support the Colorful Revolution.



Are elections free and democratic?

YES: 3.7%

NO: 92.96%

I DON'T KNOW: 3.35%

ACTIVITY REPORT [4]

INTERVIEWS THAT OPENED THE FLOOR TO THE "INVISIBLE"

Reported by Marija TEGOVSKA

CIVIL has published over 70 video interviews and more than 150 video statements from experts, politicians, officials, activists, leaders of organizations and civil society, diplomats and many other relevant figures. But, through this project, we opened the floor to individuals whose opinions are relevant, but invisible for the public, due to the political circumstances and the media situation. This report offers a short selection of individuals who were interviewed by the CIVIL Media crew. The whole material is on the YouTube channel of CIVIL (CivilMacedonia).

Video interviews with experts and representatives of civil society

In December 2015, CIVIL Media spoke with economic analyst Dzevdet Hajredini, with Dr. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova, Director of the European Policy Institute (EPI), with activist Bojan Marichik, Executive Director of the Macedonia Centre for European Training (MCET), Elida Zilbeari, Chief Editor of “Portalb” in Albanian language, Ida Protuger, journalist and economic analyst and Nikola Rilkovski, then, departing President of the State Election Commission.

The same questions were given to all the interlocutors concerning the development of the negotiations for overcoming the political crisis, the obstructions and violations to the Przino Agreement and the possibilities for creating real conditions for free elections in April 2016.

Xhevdet Hajredini considers that Macedonia will enter a much more dramatic phase of political crisis if the commitments that have been undertaken are not realized. He, among else, estimates that “It is possible that Gruevski might not leave government in a peaceful manner. Because we know that his alternative is to either remain in power, or to be sentenced to long imprisonment”.

Dr. Malinka Ristevska Jordanova, believes that the Government has a structural advantage, acquired with the ten years of ruling and that it will be very difficult to provide for the political opponents anything near to ideal conditions for free elections.

Bojan Maričić outlines that the three points that will continue to be problematic are the Special Prosecutors Office, the media package of laws and the parliamentary control over the secret services. He highlighted that the participation of the civil society organizations in conducting the elections is crucial.

Elida Zylbeari doesn’t believe that real conditions will be created for conducting free elections. “The elections will be conducted in an “efficient manner”, according to the EU requirements, meaning ‘without violence’, but that does not mean that they really will be free and democratic”.

Ida Protuger was decisive in that the elections must not be held on April 24, 2016, because not even one precondition has been fulfilled for them to be fair and democratic. She believes that if the elections were to be held on April 24, that Gruevski would win them, with the help of the “army” of corrupted supporters, with the help of the propaganda and manipulations it conducts and through the corruption with our money”.

Nikola Rilkovski, expressed concern that the prolongation of the Przino Agreement will have negative implications. “The process of implementing the Przino Agreement in this stage is going through a rather complex phase, everything that has been agreed is being prolonged”.

CIVIL was always open to publishing interviews with representative of various stakeholders, decision-makers, political parties, experts and civil society actors. CIVIL’s approach to present this in a video format is an attempt for conveying the messages and the information in an authentic manner. Transcripts of interviews were often made, or brief stories, which were later translated in Albanian and in English. This has made CIVIL’s websites, primarily, www.civil.org.mk, a dynamic and attractive online resource.

Interviews with Government Ministers

CIVIL introduced something new in its communication with the Government. With the purpose of contributing towards greater transparency in the processes, and being in direct communication with the Government on topics relevant for the electoral process and the efforts for overcoming the political crisis overall, the professional journalist team of CIVIL Media conducted a series of important interviews with several Government ministers. The goal was to make a parallel between the ministers from the opposition party of SDSM, who were appointed in accordance to the Agreement for overcoming the political crisis, with the ministers in the Government, appointed by the ruling parties. The plan was to conduct two interviews before the elections, and one interview following the elections.

CIVIL Media, in the period November 2015 –February 2016, addressed several ministers in the Government. The plan was to conduct three interviews with each minister, in the three months prior to the elections, and one interview after the completion of the election process. The purpose of the series of interviews was to monitor the work of the ministers that are relevant to the election process. We requested an interview from two ministers of the opposition party SDSM, in accordance with the Przino Agreement, and from ministers within the Government appointed by the ruling parties.

Invited for interviews were Oliver Spasovski, Minister of Interior, and Frosina Tasevska-Remenski, Minister of Labor and Social Policy, appointed by SDSM, according to the Przino Agreement, whereby, from the lines of the ruling parties the Minister for Foreign affairs, Nikola Poposki (VMRO-DPMNE) was invited, furthermore, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Mihail Cvetkov, the Minister of Justice, Adnan Jashari (DUI) and the Vice-President of the Government for European Affairs, Fatmir Besimi.

Unfortunately, with one exception, the representatives of the ruling parties, although duly invited and several times, did not respond to the invitations for having an interview at a time and place of their choice. Part of them, at first agreed to have an interview in front of the cameras of CIVIL Media, but afterwards ended the communication.

CIVIL published the following two interviews with Oliver Spasovski, in his capacity as Minister of the Interior: We will decriminalize the police!, published on December 15, 2015 and The police must not intimidate the citizens!, published on February 19, 2016. Spasovski spoke on the challenges in regards to the security, the depoliticization of the MOI, the (non)existence of parallel armed structures in MOI and the control over them, on the 35.000 fake identity cards that were made in the MOI, for which the Special Prosecutor's Office is leading an investigation, and on many other bitter topics of this Ministry. Spasovski shared the four priorities on which he would focus as a Minister of Interior: dealing with all security risks and challenges in Macedonia and the region, the refugee crisis that Macedonia is facing, the good cooperation with the Special Pros-

ecutor's Office and the maximum efforts for organizing a fair and democratic election process.

Minister Frosina Tasevska-Remenski, according to the plan, gave two interviews in which she shared with the public information on the chaos, abuses and crime of the government in the area of social justice. Those interviews are: Evidence of chaos, abuse and crime ведомство за хаосот, злоупотребите и криминалот, published on January 1, 2016 and In just 22 days in January, Pension Fund reaches deficit of 662 million Denars!, published on February 11, 2016. Tasevska-Remenski spoke on the chaos in the centers for social protection, on the virtual reduction of the unemployment and on the "difference" of 160.000 people in the "statistics" of the unemployment figures, on the catastrophic situation in which 50% of the funds for payment of pensions are from the budget, a devastating fact that even the minister of Finance Zoran Stavrevski has admitted, who once stated that "without credits there would neither be pensions, nor social welfare, nor expenditures associated with services for performed work"

Tasevska-Remenski also spoke on the manipulations with the beneficiaries of social welfare and with the socially vulnerable groups, in general, on the dismissal of 15 directors of the Centers for Social Work and on the reactions to her decision, on the lawsuits filed against her by Deputy Minister Dime Spasov (VMRO-DPMNE), as well as on the millions of debts of the Pension Fund - in just 22 days in January, the Pension Fund reached a deficit of 662 million Denars (11 million euros). The information that Tasevska-Remenski shared with the public only confirmed the findings of CIVIL's long-term monitoring in this area. Furthermore, the Minister of Agriculture, Forestry and Water Economy, Mihail Cvetkov, gave one interview for CIVIL Media: We do not time subsidies according to the elections!, published on February 18, 2016. CIVIL Media asked Minister Cvetkov about the affair regarding the connection between his Ministry and the owner of the newly opened pro-government TV NOVA, Sead Kocan. "I cannot forbid him from constructing just because he owns a television station. 'Transmet' received the tender for construction of the irrigation system Raven-Recica, which during the electronic auction was reduced to 8.5 million euros from 14 million euros, a reduction of over 5.5 mil-

lion euros, a reduction in the projected price! They agreed that they could do the job for that amount. When you say that money was given to him, well it hasn't been given, he has earned the money", replied Cvetkov.

CIVIL Media will continue with this form of communication with the Government and will publish interviews that will be provided within the framework of the Project "Forward!", financed with German Funds from the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

SEE [much] MORE AT:

www.civil.org.mk

www.youtube.com/c/CivilMacedonia

www.facebook.com/civil.mk

#CIVIL ONLINE

A CONTRIBUTION THAT MATTERS

Reported by Ermin KLIMENTA

Media

darkness in the country, which leads to continuous lack of relevant information on burning issues and events in the country, particularly those that are related to the political processes and elections, could only be countered by our online news and media outputs. This contribution in the overall news and media production in the country really matters.

The CIVIL Media team has worked round-the-clock on improving online visibility of our activities, and dissemination of information and knowledge on voters' rights, as well as providing an online forum for a societal debate on burning issues in the country. We did our best to help our audience distinguish propaganda from news, replace ignorance with knowledge, apathy with participation.

Unlike modern European states as well as Western progressive countries that go forward with the introduction of new technologies, unfortunately for us, this technology

is still used simply to spread propaganda and obtain as many of the most read websites as they can, and the use of unfair tactics for attacking the competition, especially the NGO space, as it is the case with our websites. CIVIL's websites were under enormous pressure. Approximately 31 million attacks on our main website were registered in only 6 months, average of 5.2 million attacks per month. April, 2016 marked the largest attack by an incredible 10 million attacks during that single month.

In spite of all challenges, CIVIL's website has grown into one of the largest NGO web portals at a regional level, covering specialized content on daily basis.

The visibility of CIVIL in the online space grows exponentially. The online outputs of CIVIL are also gaining followers on social networks that closely follow the work of the organization.

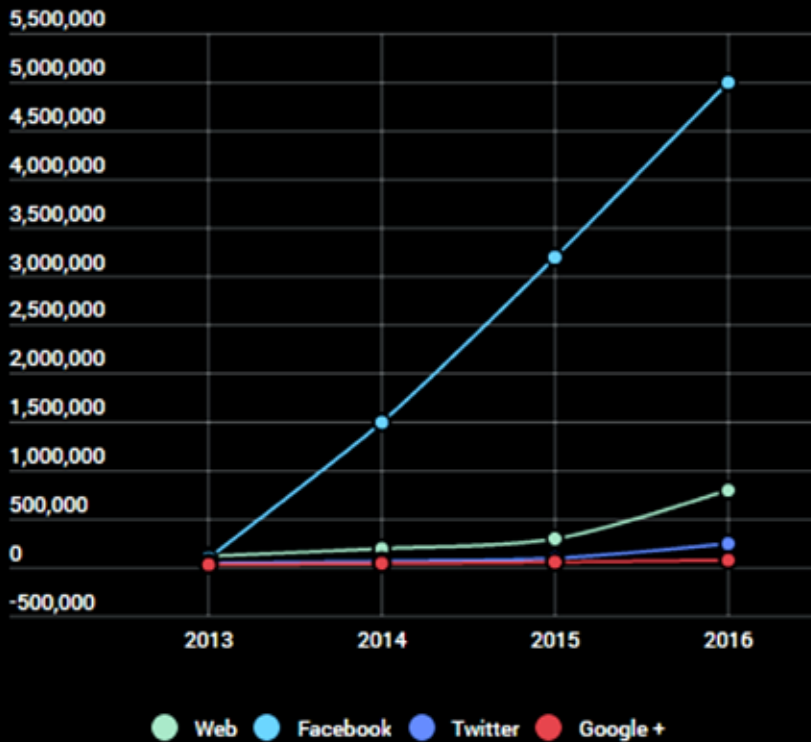
The main credo of our team is to serve the public. There is no other interest, commercial or political, but to make our contribution to the democratic processes visible and helpful to others who try to bring positive developments in the society.

CIVIL is also moderating open debates online, through Twitter and Facebook that directly influence the debates taking place live. So, whenever a public event takes place anywhere in the country, the online community has the opportunity to contribute to the event, through questions and comments that are regularly presented at the events. The audience could send a comment or a question to political leaders or experts speaking at events, through Twitter and Facebook.

The growth in readership doesn't go unnoticed. Based on the analytics that are carefully followed on daily basis, we can proudly state that CIVIL is considered as a relevant source, and is constantly quoted by major media in the country. It is also considered as a resource for foreign and domestic researchers, journalists, as well as political parties and CSOs.

CIVIL with over 3200 articles published in 3 languages on its Website has reached a huge response in the media, over 700 pieces of the website's outputs are re-published

CIVIL online reach



Any weather is good for activism

CIVIL - Center for Freedom

(in the period from July 1, 2015 - June 30, 2016).

According to Google Analytics, the most influential online engine for measuring online impact, the website of CIVIL reaches 112,000 in April, 2016, and a regular reach is over 80,000 visits per month. In the period of project implementation, the reach only of the main website of CIVIL is well over 700,000 visits.

CIVIL's Facebook profile had over 5,000,000 reach (and activity: 600,000+) in only 12 months of the project implementation period. The Twitter account of CIVIL records over

Summary by Month										
Month	Daily Avg				Monthly Totals					
	Hits	Files	Pages	Visits	Sites	KBytes	Visits	Pages	Files	Hits
Jul 2016	111875	102400	8311	512	1	4459982	1024	16622	204801	223751
Jun 2016	157008	146563	12755	864	1	88979047	25929	382665	4396916	4710265
May 2016	118942	109690	8580	536	1	67315366	16618	265992	3400413	3687214
Apr 2016	326385	292813	14700	1417	1	164966907	42535	441019	8784398	9791557
Mar 2016	174393	161310	12180	892	1	113164157	27663	377610	5000612	5406190
Feb 2016	254037	226297	14359	1480	1	130710081	41451	402057	6336327	7113049
Totals						569595540	155220	1885965	28123467	30932026

Overview of cyber attacks on CIVIL's website

200 thousand impressions, which is satisfactory, but certainly needs improvements in the coming period. However, the topic of elections and demands for free elections is obviously very popular, particularly CIVIL's tweets.

Alexa rank the website of CIVIL is among the top million websites online by readership worldwide.

CIVIL site is among the top one thousand (and climbing) in Macedonia the most read web pages (the first one thousand positions include foreign sites and networks like YouTube, Google, etc.).

CIVIL will remain open to participation of its constituents and the general public, who help us improve our online activity, leading to a continuous increase.

Within the project Free Elections for Free Citizens, CIVIL has produced a myriad of visual contents that circulated across social networks, making the organization highly visible and influential.



Public discussion: Pluralism and political crisis, May 10, 2016

Postponement of elections, revision of the Voters Register, free media, rule of law, democracy, de-politicization of institutions...

(21 political parties, 50+ representatives of CSOs, media, and international community)

FREE ELECTIONS: A NON-NEGOTIABLE CONDITION



Any weather is good for activism! CIVIL in Shtip, January 11, 2016, promoting Free Elections for Free Citizens