

REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, LOCAL ELECTIONS 2013

UNSCRU-
PULOUS
STRUG-
GLE FOR
POWER

ANALYSIS, REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA, LOCAL ELECTIONS 2013

UNSCRUPULOUS STRUGGLE FOR POWER

ANALYSIS, REPORTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

authors:

reports and analysis

Xhabir Deralla, Harald Schenker, Albulena Karaga

media reports

Risto Popovski, Ilir Ajdini, Anushka Cvetkovska

CIVIL - Center for Freedom

www.civil.org.mk

Skopje, 2013

WWW.CIVIL.ORG.MK

impresum

publisher:

Civil - Center for Freedom

authors:**reports and analysis**

Xhabir Deralla
Harald Schenker
Albulena Karaga

media reports

Risto Popovski
Ilir Ajdini
Anushka Cvetkovska

assistents

Kate Hristovska
Sonja Eftovska
Marija Josifovska
Kristina Mitkovska
Semra Amet
Frosina Mitrusheva
Marko Spasovski
Arian Mehmeti
Stefan Urdjanovski
Mario Jankulovski

Printed by: TP Pечатnica "Dule 99"
Circulation of the English edition: 100 copies

Each copy of this book comes with a CD insert
with the title of the project.

Publisher's address: CIVIL, Mito Hadjivasilev
Jasmin 12/5, 1000 Skopje, R. Macedonia

This publication is part of
**FREE AND NONVIOLENT
ELECTIONS 2013 PROJECT**

financially supported by the Swiss Agency for
Development and Cooperation (SDC)

**The contents of this material represent the
standpoints of its authors and do not neces-
sarily reflect the opinion of SDC.**

ISBN-13 978-9989-2001-7-5

contents

Foreword	5
the POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT	9
the REPORTS	23
the ELECTION DAYS	46
the POSTELECTION	65
the MEDIA REPORTS	69
the RECOMMENDATIONS	107

Foreword

The project “Free and Nonviolent Elections 2013” is implemented by Civil – Center for Freedom, financially supported by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The project worked on national level and included two main components:

- A. Awareness-raising campaign on electoral culture and prevention from violence and gun violence;
- B. Fieldwork – the fieldwork was highly intensive and was aimed at prevention from electoral irregularities, violence and gun violence throughout the whole elections process and post-elections period.

Civil produced 8 TV campaign video clips and 20 radio jingles with messages in support of free and nonviolent elections. The team of Civil also produced numerous graphic designs for print and e-publishing. The campaign messages were disseminated through 6 TV, 9 radio stations, and 8 Internet portals. All campaign products are in Macedonian and Albanian language. The production team formed by Civil also produced documentary

films; there was a plan to produce one 30-minute documentary, four documentaries are produced instead. Additional to all these activities, Civil produced 16 video clips as an informal (para)campaign called "Let's get serious" in an attempt to raise awareness through humorous slogans.

The campaign included intensive online activism. The website of Civil and profiles on the social networks and platforms (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Pinterest, Soundcloud, etc.) were updated on hourly basis, day and night.

Civil entered cooperation and partnership with several organizations such as: Forum Civil Peace Service (Forum ZFD), Community Development Institute – Tetovo, Center for Community Development Kichevo, Foundation for Development of the Local Community of Shtip, and the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights of Macedonia.

The project was also supported by a number of other organizations, such as the Association of the Albanian Women, Kichevo, Youth Cultural Center, Bitola, etc. Coordination and cooperation was established also with the Citizen Association MOST and the National Democratic Institute (NDI). Regular contacts were maintained with the OSCE/ODIHR mission, as well as with a number of other domestic and international organizations and institutions.

This project turned out to be an exercise of close cooperation and partnership between people and civil society sector. Civil was recognized by citizens of the Republic of Macedonia as neutral, accurate and honest organization. We take this opportunity to thank the citizens for their support and the numerous calls and messages with information on the situation in their communities.

Civil formed Prevention Working Groups in nine regional centers (Skopje, Kumanovo, Tetovo, Kichevo, Ohrid, Bitola, Stru-

mica, Shtip, and Veles). The number of people engaged in the frame of the project reached 160 persons, out of which 128 were accredited by the State Elections Commission. These numbers included members of our partner organizations.

Observation of the elections process started on December 17 and lasted until the end of April. Some aspects of our observation include periods of time before and after the indicated dates. Civil was observing the overall political situation, practices of political parties and government institutions, interethnic relations, and media. The observation methodology included close contact and collection of information from the field divided in several categories, including one-to-one interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, etc. Every member of the personnel produced at least two reports per week, which were sent to the analytics team of Civil. Mobile teams were always under disposal to provide various types of support to the teams in the field, to disseminate awareness-raising materials, and to organize local media activities and events. Local events included community meetings, round tables, press conferences and interviews for local media, meetings with political parties and activists, NGOs, local authorities and police, informative stands, etc.

Over 400 statements and interviews were given to local and national media, and several international media. More than a thousand media features were published in the six months of project's implementation. Tens of thousands of copies of printed materials were disseminated to the most remote settlements, and hundreds of people were contacted every day. The visibility of the project was massive.

The project turned out to be in favor of calming ethnic tensions and violence that sparked during the elections project, as well as a tool to contribute to political dialogue in the circumstances of serious political crisis in the country. Civil organized the "Democratic Perspectives" conference on political culture

and dialogue, where politicians, NGOs and media met and discussed the perspectives of the country and proposed solutions to overcome challenges in the elections context.

Civil and partner organizations' personnel displayed great enthusiasm and commitment to the project goals. The core project team of Civil consisted of people with exemplary integrity and courage, high professional skills and ethics.

This book brings both analysis and reports on the elections process, the political and media situation, and a set of recommendations to the main societal, political and institutional actors in the country. It is important to note that this is only a selection of thousands of pages of reports collected during the project. The CD that comes with this book contains a selection of articles, reports and analysis that are already published on www.civil.org.mk. We hope that this reading will contribute to the development of political culture and free and nonviolent elections processes in the future.

The Team
CIVIL - Center for Freedom

the POLITICAL AND LEGAL CONTEXT

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

Macedonia has gone through a period of high levels of political tensions in 2012, which resulted in an outburst of structural, political and physical violence at the end of the year.

The tensions could be felt on various levels and were intra-ethnic as well as inter-ethnic. The ruling coalition was shaken more than once by inter-ethnic incidents and tensions. The killing of two youngsters by a policeman in his spare time in Gostivar triggered a series of violent incidents between youth. As such incidents rarely happen fully spontaneously, it was obvious that political players mainly of the two coalition partners VMRO-DPMNE and DUI had begun the mobilization process of their street troops in the event of early parliamentary elections, with each incident proving that ethnic policy making remains priority above the interests of all citizens.

A brutal incident, in which four youth and one middle-aged man were shot dead in the vicinity of Skopje triggered one of the typical police over-reactions, with special police raiding and arresting random persons, fabricating ludicrous accusations of Islamic terrorism, while being either incapable or unwilling to investigate the real background of the killings. Of the mass arrests, very few could be upheld. Harassment and false accusations have been afflicted onto innocent persons, while conspiracy theories bloomed. Be it as it may, the case re-opened collectively barely covered wounds and contributed to both widening the rift between the two main ethnic communities in Macedonia, and to the citizens' continuing loss of trust in the capacity of state institutions, especially the police force, to live up to their tasks.

Another event that politically shook up the Macedonian society was the visit and homage that the then Minister of Defense, Fatmir Besimi, paid to a monument of NLA martyrs in the village

of Slupcane. The gesture, conceived as a targeted provocation in order to “normalize” the status of former NLA combatants within the mainstream Macedonian discourse about the social status of combatants in the conflict in 2001, triggered violent reactions. The same street troops were mobilised again to produce incidents, indicating the existence of a standing hooligan force.

VMRO-DPNE’s started a procedure of the “defenders law”, which regulates special rights of the security forces members in the ethnic conflict of 2001. The government coalition partner of DUI answered with 15000 amendments in order to obstruct this process, stressing that UCK fighters need to be equally treated in the law. In the autumn of 2012, a series of acts of ill intent started to even further erode the credibility of the parliament in public, making it the laughing stock of media and the subject of popular jokes. In a marathon debate on the law on “defenders”, i.e. the status of combatants in the 2001 conflict, one MP chose to block the work of the relevant parliamentary commission by refusing to leave the floor, alternatively keeping silent and reading literature or lecturing the committee on random themes for more than ten days in a row.

During the preliminary parliament commission debate on the government budget for 2013 in December, the work of this same commission was marked by harsh verbal and sometimes even physical threats between MPs. When the government tried to pass the budget in plenary, blatantly ignoring that the work of the relevant commission was far from finished, events escalated, with the opposition SDSM trying to prevent the session from happening. Eventually they, as well as the journalists following parliament work were forced out by special police and parliament security. At the same time, massive clashes between supporters of the two political blocs could barely be prevented in front of the parliament building. In the wake of the events, SDSM began a boycott of parliament work that ended on 1 March 2013 with a compromise brokered by the EU.

The scenes of unprecedented brutality in parliament and of the tensions in the streets of Skopje were largely mediatized and marked an appropriate end to this year of tensions, underlining the trend to escalate the political competition to the level of an all-out war between leaders, leaderships and their supporters down to paid claqueurs.

The opposition decided to take their protest outside the institutions, staging a series of rather unsuccessful actions of what they called “civil disobedience”, meaning the blocking of crucial traffic points for 30 minutes, one different location per day. The protests were accompanied by the request for early parliamentary elections.

It comes as no surprise that the success of the actions around the New Year festivities was rather modest within Macedonia's society. However, it triggered international interest as the political crisis shed a negative light on the state of the political commitments that the government had made as part of the High Level Accession Dialogue (HLAD) and threatened to derail the process.

The involvement of high EU officials, including the commissioner for enlargement Štefan Füle, into a frenzy of shuttle diplomacy eventually brought about a compromise. Its contents was held vague enough, so that both sides could agree to it. It contained the return of the opposition to parliament, its participation in the local elections, the installment of an inquiry commission on the events in December 2012 and eventual talks about early parliamentary elections, as well as the obligation by the government to implement the remaining recommendations from the OSCE and the Venice Commission into the electoral legislation. One of SDSM's main requests during the protests, namely the resignation of those responsible for the events in December 2012, was not met.

The desired result was achieved, SDSM returned to parliament and participated in the elections. The core part of the agree-

ment, though, namely the inquiry commission, has hitherto not been set up, leaving the question of responsibility for the events in December in the air. The discussions about possible early parliamentary elections are still to take place.

It was particularly interesting to note that the Albanian parties – both the one in government and the ones in opposition – abstained from participating in this democratic travesty, considering it a Macedonian problem. It slowly transpires that talks did take place outside the public realm, but no public statement was made. The fact that the coalition held throughout the crisis implies a tacit agreement of DUI with the way their coalition partner decided to act.

LEGAL ISSUES

Amendments to the electoral law were passed on 2 March through which the deadline for applications of candidates both for mayors and council lists was extended until 8 March. This however was not translated onto the other parts of the electoral regulations, causing confusion and controversial behavior.

The government failed to implement a considerable part of the recommendations received from the OSCE/ODIHR and the Venice Commission in 2011, aiming at improving the electoral legislation.

While the mayors are elected directly, the councilors are elected through a pure proportional system with closed party lists, thus disenfranchising the voters from expressing a personal choice and forcing them to vote for a package, which they do not know the contents of. This system, in addition to the similarly organized parliamentary election system, promotes the longevity of the patronage and clientele relationships between all-powerful politicians and disenfranchised citizens.

CIVIL received many reports from citizens who were denied

the right to vote because they did not appear on the voters' register at all. Others complained that they "moved" from one polling station to another between the two rounds, especially in Skopje Centre. The legality of such moves deserves some attention, as allegations were expressed that this could have been done on purpose with voters known to be in favor of the opposition.

The financing of political party campaigning continues to lack transparency. Although candidates and parties are supposed to present a post-festum financial report, these rarely reflect reality. In these local elections, the ruling VMRO-DPMNE spent a sum higher than all other parties together, which at least open a series of questions about the provenience of those funds. Allegations of black funds from which voters are bought and the "voters' convincing operations" are financed, have been repeatedly expressed.

It is symptomatic that no political party was extremely acting in addressing these serious shortcomings, which indicates that there is broad interest to keep the possibility of "shady" funding available to all players.

ANALYSIS OF THE FINDINGS

The local elections 2013 were another illustration of the fact that Macedonian politics has in the last few years very often been reduced to a highly personalized dispute between the leaders of the two main ethnic Macedonian parties: VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM.

The way they and their machineries treated each other does reminiscence of the classic period of Balkan politicianism – the late 19th and early 20th centuries, where political opponents treated each other like personal enemies and their party machineries like personal property, or rather as mere instruments

to fulfill the leaders' personal ambitions.

This attitude marked the political rivalry between Nikola Gruevski and Branko Crvenkovski and has much contributed to the degradation of political parties as well as of state institutions. The events of 24 December 2012 were a culmination in this respect, as well as a signal that a limit of tolerance by the international community has been reached.

The events set a precedent, which is potentially dangerous if the ad-hoc commission does not have a fair chance or fails to fulfil its task, which is to shed light on the background to these events and to name culprits. The potential danger lies in the fact that if not even the highest institution of the state can be considered safe from violence, there will be no institutional way to prevent the above-mentioned erosion of democratic principles and procedures, thus opening the way to their demise.

Our interest in the lack of violence in the political arena demands that CIVIL will continue to follow events connected to the misuse of state institutions for personal or political purposes and to take this issue particularly seriously.

LONG-TERM FACTORS OF EROSION

A significant portion of irregularities and corruption of the political processes in the Republic of Macedonia derives from a number of systemic and societal impediments, which negatively affect the electoral processes in the country on a long run.

Elections per se do not induce conflict, but it is the ruthless race for power and the excessive exercise of this same power that feeds the existing deeply rooted social, political and ethnic divisions in the country and brings further polarization and deterioration of democracy.

The politicization of institutions is far-reaching and omnipresent, and undermines the overall level of democracy and rule of law. Institutions are an important instrument for the increasingly obvious rule of a small group of power holders who use the political party in power as a container. Their dysfunction leads to serious disruption of the electoral process, long before elections are called. Electoral irregularities and fraud have thus become a substantial part of policies and practices that corrupt the elections long before they actually happen.

Despite international recommendation for reforms and declarative commitment by domestic politicians, the judiciary becomes increasingly politicized and subdued to the will of party leaders in power. This additionally contributes to the sense of impunity for misconducts against democracy and lawful implementation of democratic processes such as the elections.

Journalists and media in general are put under strong political control for a number of years now, and independent journalists are harassed in many ways on a daily basis. Incitement to social isolation and even violence against critical thinkers, activists or ethnic groups is steered by pro-governmental journalists in a setting of continuous campaigning piloted by the government.

There are serious allegations that police and internal intelligence services are deeply politicized and turned into a service of the ruling power holders, targeting the opposition and critical thinking individuals and organizations.

The government is the largest employer in the country. The administration and all other government related or influenced employees in the country are under direct control and are required to carry out a continuous and aggressive propaganda, completing the picture of a highly controlled society and system. Those commercial entities that are not under direct control/influence by the government are subjected to continuous monitoring and pressure by the financial authorities and face serious difficulties in case they disobey political instructions to

employ party soldiers or support the ruling party in other ways.

Continuous political campaigning, in which a permanent electoral race is suggested to an otherwise rather uninformed audience, between has become a daily routine for a number of years now, and has particularly increased from the beginning of 2012. For no apparent reason other than political revenge, a negative campaign in the media against the opposition has never ceased since the last parliamentary elections.

EARLY START OF THE CAMPAIGN

Various types of extortion, from promises for employment to dismissals of “disobedient” workers have been a common practice for years and intensified in the last several weeks before the elections.

Party soldiers were cautiously monitoring the opinion and attitude of people in the communities and reacted to every detail. Every move of the opposition or independent candidates at local level was fiercely attacked in order to discredit and neutralize the opponents, often by use of hate speech.

Manipulation and threats with dismissals or with visits from the financial police, cutting of social and health assistance, misuse of children, particularly in the schools, etc. are practices that are noted way before the official electoral campaign started. This all increased in the several weeks before the official start of the elections campaign.

Civil’s monitors reported that hidden campaigning had an early start under the cover of phone surveys. These “surveys” in combination with field activities of party soldiers have detected undecided and disappointed voters. Surveys of this kind and field activities were massive and took place throughout the

whole country, which serious concerns about the security of personal data.

Sports halls, playgrounds, pensioners clubs, streets and pavements, and monuments, as well as other facilities for public consumption have been built in a frenzy and promoted in practically every corner of the country in an obvious electoral context. The size of these operations in which central government officials, state and local resources have been heavily engaged is strikingly massive and frequent. Several reports mention repeated inauguration events of the same venue, whilst monuments in large numbers popped up overnight.

Public gatherings and events, including free meals for attendants, have intensified in the last couple of months before the official start of the elections campaign.

Political parties used their offices for intensive campaigning continuously, since the beginning of the year

DOMINANT CAMPAIGN THEMES

The elections were centred on the political battle of the two main ethnic Macedonian parties, and, albeit to a lesser extent, the battle for supremacy of DUI in the ethnic Albanian sector of Macedonian society. With the exception of Skopje, where the issue of the “Skopje 2014” project has both local and national value, the main campaigning issues were national ones, including the levels of wages and pensions, the price of energy, etc.

It seems that the decentralisation, which has proceeded at a pace far too high for the Macedonian institutions to be able to cope with, has barely reached the minds of both political parties and voters. Its value has been relativized anyway in the last years, as a centralisation and concentration of decision-making in the hands of a small group has pushed political decentralisation onto the realm of fiction.

In the context of an unemployment rate of more than thirty percent, it comes as no surprise that people voted mostly in favour of those who were deemed to guarantee an income. This goes also for the few independent candidates, who ran for office.

Apart from this, the campaign was dominated by the duel of the two leaders, by the question whether or not the government has fulfilled its promises and by the question of early parliamentary elections. The disregard that the top leaderships of the main parties have for local problems and issues has materialised in a creeping re-centralisation of decision-making, i.e. the refusal to derogate real power of decision to the local levels.

Having in mind the participation of the administration, the local elections were just another step in consolidating the concentration of power in the hands of a group of select few, to the detriment of the plurality of opinions and concepts, also within one political party. For the group in power, the elections were partially a main-streaming exercise, a means to extend the dominating doctrine down to every single level of administration.

This goes hand in hand with the utterly exaggerated culture of micro-management and strict control by the central government/parties in power, thus producing a local administration and political representation that is docile and forthcoming in fulfilling the tasks foreseen for them by an almighty leadership. This includes the participation in rather sophisticated as well as very blunt instances of election fraud, as this report has shown. Many of the techniques applied to gain the ballot would be impossible without a large number of employees in the administration being instruments in the hands of their political leaders and perpetrators of fraudulent acts.

DEMOGRAPHIC INTERVENTION: PUSTEC

Demographic intervention is an old technique to try and change a given ethnic or social situation. The reality is that it practically never works. In this specific case, inhabitants of the Macedonian villages in the municipality of Pustec, Albania, were hired to massively vote in the Skopje municipality of Centre. The reason was that the opposition was very likely to win the municipality and threatened to stop the government's flagship project, the re-modeling of the city center that became known as "Skopje 2014".

The technique has been explained earlier in this report. It suffices to say that there were three main elements to this manipulation:

1. Pustec inhabitants, who presumably already had become Macedonian citizens during the last two decades, were given a fake Skopje address and ID cards in some cases well in advance of the elections, in many cases only days prior to voting day;
2. They were given logistical support, as they would not have known where to vote otherwise;
3. There are allegations that the price for their action was not so much the pecuniary subsistence fee they received, but much rather the access to free health insurance in Macedonia.

The three points above indicate the possibility of a well-planned and carried out operation, during the course of which laws were broken several times.

CIVIL has received reports about Pustec inhabitants, who have had long-term legal residence in Macedonia, which automatically includes ID cards in the municipality of residence, boasting about a second ID card from Skopje. If proven to be correct, this would constitute a major infringement, which could

only be carried out by the authorities in charge of personal identification documents, i.e. the Ministry of Interior and its branch offices. CIVIL will most certainly follow up on this issue.

In the end, this astonishingly well prepared operation did not prove to be sufficient to turn around the vote in the center of the capital. Actually it most likely had the opposite effect and contributed to mobilization of the high number of undecided voters in favor of the opposition. What makes it relevant, though, is its long-term dimension and the sophisticated logistics needed to carry it out. It speaks either of ingenuity or of high levels of criminal energy, or of both.

The degree to which state institutions have been misused for party purposes, to which the leadership of the ruling party appropriated state institutions, still has to be investigated in its full dimension. The allegations are quite serious and it should not be necessary to write in this kind of report that ex-officio action of the state prosecution is a legal requirement.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The other list of irregularities observed by CIVIL, such as proxy voting, family voting, various attempts to initiate the so-called "Bulgarian train" - some successfully, intimidation of electoral staff, unauthorized presence of political party personnel in and around polling stations, etc. can be seen as recurring elements of the Macedonian electoral folklore. While they are infringements, their appearance or rather their refusal to disappear can be interpreted as a direct result of the general level of political culture in the country.

What has however increased is the level of structural violence during these elections, a trend that could be observed over a few electoral cycles now. The pressure on employees in the administration and in state and private companies to provide voters was

higher than before, and the control mechanisms have been refined. The pressure on marginalized and vulnerable social groups was increased, and several instances of direct threats have been reported. The categorization of citizens into “loyal”, “indifferent” and “disloyal” has reached hitherto unknown dimensions. The presence of party loyalists in front of polling stations personally identifying voters and ticking them off their lists is a practice that has increased substantially. The signal is clear: you are not alone, we follow you, we control you, do not misbehave.

The use of such methods of intimidation and manipulation bears the signature of a political structure, which is merely interested in exercising power and control, if needed to the detriment of democracy. The misuse of state assets and the elimination of the distinction between party and state are characteristics of an anti-democratic behavior.

The reasons for which this behavior is tolerated are various: for one then political culture in the country is still at a low level, paralleling the level of education. Secondly, the education system and the traditional values of society favor a docile attitude, contrary to critical thinking. Thirdly and most prominently, the levels of dependence of people from the centers of power have increased in the context of economic stagnation. The power groups have refined the network of patronage and clientelism to levels unknown in the recent history of the country.

It has become more than obvious for a few electoral cycles in a row now that the traditional methods of voter education and prevention of electoral fraud have failed to bring about a more efficient electoral system. Maybe it would be the time to consider new approaches and a series of new legal initiatives.

the REPORTS

Aggressive and offensive campaigns

The official campaign period started on March 4, although, according to the political settlement, the date for submission of candidacy lists by the opposition was delayed to March 8. This is just one of many inconsistencies in the regulations due to hasty decisions and the lack of will and/or capacity to properly implement political decisions into the legal framework.

In the first days of the official campaign, Civil monitoring teams reported on the continuation of “a dirty underground campaign”. In the following, a short selection of events and practices will hopefully illustrate the campaign style during this electoral process, which can be qualified as highly aggressive and offensive.

On the night after the political settlement between the opposition and the ruling coalition, brokered by EU diplomats, “100 Biggest Failures of SDSM”, a shiny and expensive looking publication was disseminated throughout the whole country. The publication was obviously prepared well in advance, in case the SDSM-led opposition coalition decided to enter the election competition. Despite the legal obligation to mention the publication’s publisher it didn’t contain such data, although it obviously was a move orchestrated by the ruling party. This kind of dirty campaigning persisted throughout the whole process.

The peak of this style of campaigning was on the day of rerun of the elections in the municipality of Centar on April 21, when leaflets in large quantities wearing the logo of the opposition candidate appeared on the streets and mailboxes, claiming that the elections were to take place one week later and calling upon citizens not to go out on that day.

In the very beginning of March, the SDSM-led coalition par-

ties were still busy with inter-party quarrels about list placings. Meanwhile, parties of the ruling coalition and opposition parties of the Albanians were well advanced in campaigning. They organized massive party conventions and public gatherings to promote their candidates for mayor. The presence of the highest governmental officials and - on a number of occasions - high religious clerics was a daily occurrence.

No matter how small a municipality, the prime minister, all ministers and their deputies, police chiefs and other political and governmental figures, as well as orthodox bishops, came in support of local candidates on well-organized and expensive local gatherings.

Governmental projects were promoted in the midst of campaigning for local governments and were presented as successes of the political party in power.

The campaigning went quite personal on most of the occasions mainly by the ruling party against the personality and political career of the opposition leader Branko Crvenkovski. Attacks against the opposition leader were direct, personal and rude in a way unknown to Macedonian politics so far. Whilst directed against the opposition leader personally, they were in fact attempts to discredit the whole opposition. In the field, those who were not on the side of the ruling party were labeled as traitors and spies.

Civil organized a conference on political culture and dialogue on March 1, inviting all political parties. Only a few opposition parties contributed, along with a number of representatives of civil society and monitoring missions, local and international.

Vane Cvetanov, official from the opposition VMRO-NP, former official of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE and former Head of the state Agency for Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, exposed his former party employees on the methods used in elections processes in the past. He also assured the audience and the country's public that these practices were well es-

tablished and ongoing in the current elections process. Among other things, Cvetanov alleged that: "Three days before the elections, all debtors are approached with a proposal for debt clearing in exchange for their vote for DPMNE. At the very end, the agreement with the most destitute families is made rock solid by giving them money in the range of 10 to 100 EUR per vote.

Two days before the elections, DPMNE prepares a table of secured votes with an accuracy of 98%.

After all of the above-mentioned undemocratic and illegal operations, not even the entire OSCE organization will be able to detect problems on the polling day, because the ruling party has managed, long before the elections, to ensure the required votes by use of rigid methods of intimidation, blackmails and votes buying."

These reports of Civil monitoring teams and numerous calls and reports by citizens throughout the electoral process largely validated these warnings and allegations.

Elections related pressure

A large variety of different forms of pressure, threats, blackmailing, and intimidation took place throughout the whole electoral process, as recorded by Civil monitoring teams from the end of December 2012 to mid-May 2013.

Bailiffs / enforcement agents were engaged in the agitation and pressure towards citizens. According to allegations, bailiffs were selective in enforcing court orders for the payment of unpaid fines. One of the reports alleged that in the municipality of Shuto Orizari, Samka Ibraimovski, a party official of PCER (Party for Full Emancipation of Roma) and Member of Parliament, had property confiscated due to his political orientation as part of the opposition.

Citizens in a large number of municipalities alleged of various

forms of pressure and widespread fear. According to them, people were controlled in many ways, starting with their communications ending with being watched by party soldiers. Such allegations were recorded in most of the municipalities of the City of Skopje, municipalities of Prilep, Tetovo, Jegunovce, Gevgelija, Veles, and others.

Regardless of the fact that these fears could be groundless, the very idea of being under surveillance is symptomatic and speaks of the successful attempt at creating a general atmosphere of pressure and control.

In the municipality of Mavrovo and Rostushe, scholarship beneficiaries studying at the FON University were pressured to be active during the campaign to agitate for PEI (Party for European Integration) This party was in opposition at national level, but had an informal settlement with DUI at local level, in exchange for support in Struga.

The leading opposition party SDSM complained about mistreatment of their members who are employed by public institutions at both local and central level.

It was alleged that in Radovich, members of VMRO-DPMNE who held positions of heads of social welfare centers, pension fund, health insurance fund and employment bureau threatened beneficiaries of their services that they would be excluded from receiving the respective services in case they didn't vote for VMRO-DPMNE.

Civil monitoring teams received reports from citizens wanting to remain anonymous, saying that in the municipality of Veles, VMRO-DPMNE representatives created a list of "secured" companies and commercial entities that were promised not be "visited" by financial police in the next four years in exchange for their support and vote.

A Pizza restaurant in Gevgelija was shut down and fined with € 3,000 for being a host of opposition activists, according to the statement of one employee. In Jegunovce, the Jugohrom fac-

tory's buffet, owned by a member of SDSM, was shut down by inspection on March 19. Allegedly, a newly opened café in Jegunovce was fined with 1,000 Euro, because the owner was seen at an opposition rally. This grew into an incident which required the intervention of special police.

According to allegations, in the village of Trebishte (Mavrovo and Rostushe), local VMRO-DPMNE officials put pressure on a local business-person to bring them 50 votes, otherwise his business would be shut down and his commercial venues torn down as illegal buildings.

According to a DPA source, on March 21, DUI candidates for the municipal council put pressure on social cases in villages in the region of Tetovo to vote for DUI (socially vulnerable population is up to 80% in some of the villages).

According to allegations by citizens, VMRO-DPMNE candidates in Veles and Berovo municipalities went door to door and threatened people that they would lose social assistance if they didn't vote for their party.

Phone calls and allegations collected by Civil monitoring teams indicate that in Berovo VMRO-DPMNE activists threatened that water supply would be cut to Roma families if they didn't vote for their party.

Reports from the municipalities of Kratovo, Shtip, Radovish and Centar (Skopje), claim that centers for social welfare threatened that they would cut beneficiaries from social assistance if they didn't vote for the ruling party.

Vote buying

Generally, vote buying was present everywhere and in various forms and proportions. Civil possesses even more precise data and information on how vote buying was effected through various forms of misuse of institutions/institutional power. Allegations and reports have been registered by the monitoring teams of Civil in hundreds of reports. Vote buying had a variety of forms. Personal IDs were issued for free, delay of aid was deliberate, prison sentences were shortened, amnesty was offered for traffic and other contraventions, money, food, clothes, agricultural supplies and other goods were distributed, utility services and bills in local shops were paid for in exchange for votes.

Vote buying is a well-established practice of political parties and has been present in all electoral processes in the country. These elections were no exception.

Civil's monitors reported that dissemination of food and other goods was widespread. Packages with flour (up to 25 kg), hygiene products, and clothes were disseminated to poor citizens in the country, particularly to Roma ghettos.

In many villages, food and agricultural repro materials were disseminated by activists of the ruling VMRO-DPMNE.

In Veles and Kratovo, firewood and cooking oil was distributed to Roma and poor families in the days before the first round of the elections.

In Gevgelija, three cargo trucks full of goods (food, flour, cooking oil) were disseminated to "undecided" voters in the last 72 hours before the elections day.

Specific forms of vote buying in combination with the use of state resources were registered in large numbers. Pensioners for example received free spa treatments. A more serious misuse was the case in which, according to a field report, prisoners were offered reduction of prison sentences in the Tetovo prison.

Certificates to serve as exemption from any form of payment for health care services were issued by social welfare centers, as reported by Civil Monitoring Teams in several municipalities in the eastern part of the country.

Institutions were used as means for vote buying in many other forms. A few more examples:

There are allegations that 35 Roma voters in Vinica were promised to receive valid personal IDs for free in exchange for their vote for VMRO-DPMNE.

The government used helicopters to visit Strumica region during the floods in February, but promises for compensation were only met days before the elections (one month later). Reportedly, compensation was offered selectively, to “secured” voters of VMRO-DPMNE, while letting others know the price for receiving aid. On March 21, the Veles Municipal Council has held an emergency meeting to settle compensations to families that suffered material loses during the floods, again, to “secured” voters of VMRO-DPMNE.

The opposition candidates, too, were no exception to this practice according to the field reports. Allegedly, Zoran Damjanovski, then current and mayor candidate for Kumanovo made a gesture of that kind, too. He granted “Nike” sports equipment to all football clubs in the municipality. In Kochani, the local branch of VRMO-DPMNE reported to the police that SDSM activists are offering money to voters. The case has been recorded by the police. No follow up was registered.

In the days before the election day, including the day of electoral silence, according to claims by citizens that contacted Civil’s monitors, the former mayor of Tetovo (DPA) made advance payments for technical needs of neighborhoods, requiring their votes in return. All bigger political parties in Gostivar distributed food and paid bills for public utilities (electricity, water, etc.) to poor families.

On election day, March 24, vote buying was widespread, too.

Distribution of money, food, and other goods were reported in Prilep (particularly in the neighborhood of Varosh). The price of one vote in Bitola was MKD 300-500 in the morning, but it had a tendency to grow as the day was passing. Cargo trucks with goods being disseminated to poor families were noticed in Kratovo.

In Resen, on March 23 and 24, during the electoral silence and the elections day, VMRO-DPMNE activists were offering money to members of smaller ethnic communities in the municipality (Albanians, Turks, Roma, Egyptians). The fee for votes ranged between 200 and 3000 MKD.

In Plasnica, the candidate of DUI was offering up to 6,000 MKD to voters on the night before the elections day. DUI was promising money and jobs to voters in the municipality of Chair on the day before the elections.

VMRO-DPMNE activists were paying debts in mini-market shops to Roma families on the elections day in Kichevo and several other municipalities, as reported by Civil's monitors. In the municipality of Lipkovo, allegedly, both DUI and DPA were offering money to voters on the elections day. Food was distributed in Kriva Palanka, on the elections day.

In Vevcani, near the municipal building where the voting was taking place, the brother of the VMRO-DPMNE mayor candidate set up a stand and gave away portions of grilled meat for free to voters. Later on, Civil learned that the construction company, which has built the Vevcani Arch during the elections campaign, also used as one of the campaign tools of "marking the territory, to demonstrate efficiency in construction building, and boosting tourism in the municipality, belongs to the family of the mayor candidate. The Arch was highly disputed by the Muslim population in the municipality.

According to information collected by Civil's monitors, in Peshyani, municipality of Ohrid, VMRO-DPMNE activists were collecting personal IDs from citizens in order to register them in

their lists of “secured” voters (and offered money to voters during the electoral silence). In the municipality of Dojran, sugar, flour and money were distributed to voters on the elections day. A similar situation is registered in Vinica: on the night before the elections, flour, food oil, food products, firewood, and money were distributed to voters. Vehicles of the state and local authorities were cruising at all times throughout Vinica.

In Shtip, Roma voters were advising each other “not to vote for those who don’t pay”. It was unclear who is paying and who doesn’t, but it became clear that vote buying is ongoing.

We also learned that in the village of Banica, municipality of Strumica, voters were offered MKD 1,200 to 6,000 by VRMO-DPMNE activists. In Tetovo, goods worth MKD 1,000-3,000 were distributed to Roma by DUI and DPA on election day. Allegedly, around 100 people accepted this offer.

In Kavadarci, electricity bills were paid, and up to 200 euro per family and firewood were distributed to voters during the elections silence. In the same town, MKD 30,000 were advanced to a local store for voters “to be dined and wined”, as it was said by the payer who is believed to be a VMRO-DPMNE activist.

Violent behavior

Unlike the widespread use of structural violence and blurring the borders between the state and parties, use of physical or armed violence was rather sporadic. Still, monitors of Civil and partner organizations registered a number of incidents; a selection of these events follows.

On January 19, the mayor of Karbinci physically attacked a young person, supporter of the opposition SDSM. When the victim reported the incident to the police, the mayor has publically sworn, in a church, that he never attacked that person. Media

have broadcasted this public denial. A police officer, allegedly, has put pressure on the victim to withdraw the accusations. No matter how ridiculous this episode is, it illustrates the level of political culture and the use of religion as a tool of persuasion.

Opposition activists were attacked by VMRO-DMNE activists and vice versa, as reported by citizens and Civil monitors in over 20 cases across the country, with no serious consequences. Most of these smaller incidents were not reported to the police.

In February, communal hygiene workers from opposite political parties had a physical encounter in Tetovo.

Several incidents were registered in March. Night club visitors had a fight in Resen, allegedly supporters of SDSM and those of the independent candidate Dimitar Buzlevski (ex-SDSM). One SDSM candidate for council in Kochani attacked a VMRO-DMNE supporter. In Gevgelija, a group of VMRO-DMNE supporters led by the chief of the municipal committee of the party attacked a single supporter of SDSM.

There was a fight in the Mystique night club in Shtip between supporters of VMRO-DMNE and SDSM, on March 16. Allegedly, the son of the opposition leader Crvenkovski and a local business person supporter of the opposition were involved in the fight. The buses of the National Democratic Revival were stoned in Skopje on the way back from the party's convention on March 2.

Campaign offices of practically all political parties were damaged or demolished in over 30 locations across the country, according to Civil monitors.

Noise and disturbance of public order were notorious during political parties' rallies everywhere, including parading and honking with cars. A number of citizens complained of the noise and dirt that parties were leaving behind during the campaign.

Use of weapons

Use of weapons was sporadic and mainly for the purpose of celebratory firing. Despite the fact that the Law on Weapons strictly prohibits celebratory firing, this is still a recurring habit. Celebratory firing was registered in over 50 occasions, including several municipalities of Skopje, Kumanovo, Kichevo, Resen, Tetovo, etc.

Allegedly, civilians, but also police officers in Resen used their official weapons for celebratory firing on the evening after the first round of the elections was concluded.

The issue of arms possession of private security agencies and the way they use weapons in an electoral campaigning context remains open. This is a particularly important question, having in mind the close relations between parties and private security agencies in the country.

Government investments as campaign tools

**“The whole country is turned into a construction site.” –
Common remark by citizens across the country.**

The prime minister and other high governmental representatives who backed the ruling party’s candidates everywhere made it clear in their public appearances and speeches that the government will continue construction works and investments in municipalities where their candidate will win power. In other words, if people want to see opening of jobs and investments in their municipality, the condition is to vote for the ruling party’s candidate, and if not, they should forget about it. This way of rea-

soning was present in the attitude of the ruling party's activists in the field, as well.

Construction works were conducted mainly on behalf of the government, more precisely ruling parties in close cooperation with local administrations of the same party/parties.

"Shovels" and "inauguration tapes" are widespread expressions for events to mark a start of (mainly) government-financed or co-financed construction operations for streets and pavements, sports halls, schools, roundabouts, and many other public venues and facilities.

This kind of events became more frequent as the date of the elections approached. In the course of the election process, despite the attempt to register the construction activity in its full proportion, Civil's observers and analysts complained of losing track of these events, due to their enormously high number.

There were comic situations, as well. We selected two cases for this report. A decade old project for construction of 86 cabins for Roma families in Shtip was re-promised by VMRO-DPMNE officials, backed by the public enterprise Stipion. In the village of Dolni Chelopek, construction of a primary school started in 2011 was interrupted right away, was re-started in the first half of March by the government coalition partner of DUI.

In the municipality of Aerodrom (Skopje), two kindergartens' reconstruction started mid-March and was ongoing to the day of the elections and after.

VMRO-DPMNE and a number of citizens complained about construction activities of the mayor of Tetovo (DPA) in the last few days before the elections day, whilst, according to allegations, he did nothing during his 4-years mandate.

Sidewalks were paved, streets and local roads were reconstructed everywhere in the country, from tiny villages to town and city centers. Construction was massive and often posed difficulties in traffic. Decoration of public spaces was mainly done by planting grass and flowers, and setting decorative fences.

The highly controversial and expensive project of Skopje 2014 was ongoing, day and night, during working days, weekends and national holidays. Only on the night after the election day of April 7, an amazing number of 36 monuments and other elements were placed in the Skopje city center.

Electoral employment

Employment or dismissals were massively used as a tool to convince people to vote for one or another option offered in the elections competition. Here, we bring a selection of reports and allegations collected by monitoring teams throughout the country. Jobs, whether as a promise to get them or lose them, were a frequent argument in the hands of power holders at local and even more so at central level.

Most of the people who were exposed to this type of manipulation and/or threat alleged that their employers (local or state institutions and party representatives, but also owners of private companies close to one of the power holders) demanded of them to bring a certain number of votes. They needed to prepare so-called “guarantee lists” of voters that they were supposed to secure for the benefit of the party in power.

The government and municipal authorities opened large numbers of jobs in the last couple of months in a clear attempt to raise their popularity and chances to win local elections. Such is the example of the municipality of Veles, where employment in public enterprises and administration took place from the beginning of March. In Kavadarci, persons over 55 years of age were promised employment in exchange for their votes.

There are allegations that the ruling party interfered in the commercial sector as well. Kriva Palanka’s mine Toranica received a list of ruling party’s activists that the mine’s management was supposed to employ as of March 1, as part of the electoral prom-

ises for jobs.

Dismissals or threats of dismissals for those who refused to vote for the ruling party at local or central level were noted in Ohrid, Struga, Karposh, Shtip, Resen, Kumanovo and others. One case was registered in Struga, where a member of DPA was summarily dismissed for not having voted for DUI. There were allegations that the mayor of Karposh municipality in Skopje, Stefcho Jakimovski, dismissed 2 lawyers and degraded others or deprived them of their official communication tools (phones, computers), after Jakimovski split from SDSM and decided to run as an independent mayor candidate.

On March 12, the MP Vesna Bendevska of SDSM accused (who?) of employment manipulations in Bitola's public institutions. Civil monitoring teams in Novaci and Mogila (municipality of Bitola) noted allegations of pressure towards workers in of REK Bitola to vote for VMRO-DPMNE, otherwise they would lose their jobs.

Citizens of the municipality of Jegunovce reported that huge pressure was put on employees of the Jugohrom factory. Their homes were visited by the factory's management and VMRO-DPMNE activists to make clear that they would lose their jobs in case the ruling option failed to keep local power.

More institutional failures

The electoral process manifested serious institutional failures, as a result of political and party pressures. The performance of the most relevant institutions - the State Electoral Commission and the Administrative Court was questionable. Decisions taken by these two institutions were obviously based on partisan and ethnic interests on a number of cases, while at the same time neglecting the rule of law. Almost all complaints on irregularities submitted by the opposition were overruled, whilst complaints

by the ruling party were approved in most of the cases, no matter of relevancy of the complaints of one or the other side. These two institutions are seen as having contributed to a winning position of the ruling party in municipalities where the opposition was advancing in the first round of the elections.

Similarly, the rulings of the SEC and the Administrative Court in the cases of the municipalities of Kichevo and Struga raised the already highly electrified ethnic tensions. Political maneuvers and unclear moves within the legal framework in order to obtain ethnic prevalence took place. SEC and the Administrative Court allowed abrupt ethnic Macedonian coalitions in Kichevo and Struga in an obvious attempt to prevail against the ethnic Albanian candidates, despite the ruling of the municipal election commissions. Driven by ethnic motives only, the ethnic Macedonian parties of SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE bridged their fierce political rivalry and agreed on joint candidates for mayors and joint lists for councils. In bending both legal framework and principles, the two abovementioned institutions contributed to further erosion of the political culture and the citizens' loss of confidence in the election institutions as well as in the judiciary. A sensitive precedent has been set, enforcing the perception of prevalence of the political over the legal realm, and thus adding an autocratic touch to an already underperforming electoral management system.

Misuse of public administration and resources

Misuse of public administration and resources was massive. It is impossible to list all cases and forms of this misuse. The following notes are a selection of the large material received by the observers of Civil across the country.

Since early February, VMRO-DMNE activists employed in the public administration at local level openly agitated in favor of their party, taking that as normal behavior [numerous reports from almost all municipalities in the country]. They weretasked to produce lists of “secured” voters (ten or more voters). They were coordinated, instructed and controlled by their managers in the institutions where they held a position.

Public administration employees were heavily engaged in online activism, and campaigning by phone.

As of March, part of the public administration personnel did not go to work, as alleged by reports from many municipalities. Instead, they worked in campaign offices during working hours. The rest of them used offices and their work posts to conduct campaigning activities in favor of the ruling party in their municipality or in favor of the ruling coalition at central level. They used official mobile phones to send text messages to voters, vehicles to disseminate party materials. Other public facilities and resources were also used in favor of the ruling party at local or central levels. Unauthorized persons also used these resources for party purposes.

Doctors agitated among their patients, teachers among pupils and their parents, social workers among users of social assistance.

The undecided voters were under particular pressure. We learned that some employees in public administration quarreled

over undecided voters, about who will get to their lists which they were obliged to present as “secured” voters to their superiors.

Web sites of municipalities where the mayors were running for a new mandate turned into campaign resources.

SDSM alleged that VMRO-DPMNE was using public facilities for party meetings.

There were several allegations that the government used public finances to pay for transport of large numbers of supporters to public gatherings across the country.

On the screens in public buses in Skopje speeches of the PM Gruevski were screened.

Chiefs of police and police officers openly campaigned in Zrnovci, Zelenikovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Ohrid, and many others.

The mayor and candidate of the municipality of Arachinovo reported that he and his supporters bore strong pressure by the government coalition partner DUI and the administration.

Independent candidates

According to the reports from our observers, as well as from candidates themselves, strong pressure by both ruling and bigger opposition parties was put on independent candidates (e.g. Bastri Bajrami, Arachinovo).

Bajrami’s elections campaign team wrote and called Civil to complain about numerous forms of pressure and intimidation that they have experienced during the elections campaign, mainly from the ruling coalition partner of DUI.

The pressure was particularly hard towards candidates who abandoned the opposition and decided to run alone before the decision to boycott the elections was lifted (Stefco Jakimovski in Karposh, Dimitar Buzlevski in Resen).

Misuse of minors

Public administration personnel were obliged to attend VMRO-DPMNE rallies during their working hours and after. In case they were not able to attend, they were obliged to find a replacing person; otherwise they would face job dismissal. Both our monitors and a number of citizens reported to Civil such behavior by VMRO-DPMNE.

Participants to the party rallies received 500-1000 MKD in cash to attend these events. Financial sources for these payments remain unclear.

Minors were used indiscriminately during the campaigning. They disseminated party campaign materials, placed party flags in the schools and other public places, attended rallies, and assisted personnel in the campaign offices of political parties. Sub-standard conditions in many of party offices were noted; they were cold, with no air, people often smoked indoors – definitely no place for minors.

Pupils in primary and high schools from across the country were released from classes for several days in order to take organized bus tours to attend party rallies and conventions. Teachers and headmasters were in charge of these “excursions”.

Candidates of VMRO-DPMNE and government officials visited schools during classes to agitate amongst pupils. School buses were marked with ruling party posters. Phone numbers of pupils in the registration books were used to agitate among their parents.

Interethnic relations

Ethnic issues played an important role in this electoral process. Voting was again, like in previous elections, elevated to the level of national honor and duty on both sides, Macedonians and Albanians.

These were the first local elections in the newly re-designed municipality of Kicevo. In both rounds, thousands of Macedonian Albanians living abroad flew or drove in to ensure that Kicevo received an Albanian mayor. The government administration responded with numerous obstructions. According to a government administration source who spoke to Civil, flights of ethnic Albanians were stopped and their landings were not approved in a number of cases. Two false bomb threats to the Skopje airport at times of arrival of the “diaspora” airplanes were reported, according to the same source.

The elected mayor, a representative of the ruling DUI and a former senior NLA member, did everything to ride this wave of national exaltation. On the “other” side, VMRO-DPMNE with its leader and the Prime Minister of the country led a harsh campaign with strong nationalistic flavor.

In Struga, the issue for the Albanian national cause was to keep the municipality at any cost. For this reason, DUI and other smaller parties supported DPA, once they realized they are going to lose power in this municipality.

VMRO-DPMNE party leader and PM Gruevski's team forged a coalition with the arch-rival SDSM, running with one candidate and joint councillors' lists in both municipalities. Both parties, but especially the government one, tried to downplay the issue and sell it to the public as a matter of democratic maturity. The Macedonian ethnic coalition failed to secure the mayoral position in both municipalities.

This episode created another precedent and revealed once

more the shortcomings of the Macedonian, de facto bi-national political system, in which it is normal that ethnicity dictates political behavior more than ideology. If at all, ideological differences are disputed within the boundaries of the ethnic group and ethnic group discipline prevails in the rivalry with the "other". In other words, the postulated prevalence of the ethnic group overrules any ideological differences. This tendency, as much as it ensures group rights, is damaging the individual's freedom of choice and exposes him or her to massive group pressure.

Legally independent institutions have been put under massive political pressure and instrumentalized to reach the envisaged results. In this particular case, MECs in Kicevo and Struga initially ruled against the formation of ethnic lists, but these decisions were overruled both by the administrative court and SEC, thus contributing to legal confusion and the loss of independence of the judiciary.

Local elections should not be about ethnic prevalence, but about offering the best solution to local problems. In this context, like in the context of the failed census in 2011, having the ethnic dimension overshadow the political one does not contribute to solutions to real problems of local relevance, but much rather to blurring them behind a wall of "us" and "them". Ethnic mobilization will always contribute to deepening the rifts in society.

This situation affected all parts of the society and involved young people and minors. Students of "Mirko Mileski/Drita" high school in Kichevo got into a fight on February 4. Parents on both sides protested on the verge of violence, so that police had to intervene. The municipality of Kichevo was already troubled in regards to ethnic issues. Divisions and tensions continued to rise during the local elections process and after, continuing to the present day. Civil and partner organizations issued an appeal for ethnic peace in the municipality on a number of occasions, including the abovementioned incident in the high school.

Ramush Haradinaj was declared a citizen of honor of Tetovo, which triggered protests by ethnic Macedonians in the town and across the country in the beginning of February. Dostoinstvo, the party of the ex-military and police personnel that fought in the 2001 war in Macedonia, a coalition partner of the opposition SDSM, protested in Tetovo and Skopje. In the end, the decision was not enforced, and Ramush Haradinaj did not travel to Tetovo.

Ethnic issues and nationalist rhetoric were used everywhere. The independent candidate for the municipality of Chashka, reportedly, at a smaller gathering, stated: "I will buy the votes of Gorno and Dolno Jabolchishte [inhabited by ethnic Albanians], but if I become mayor, these villages will be nonexistent for me in the future".

Prime Minister Gruevski, accompanied by MPs and other government officials, as well as by opposition representatives, had two inflaming nationalist speeches in Struga on March 13 and in Kichevo on March 14. Pro-government media called these speeches "historic speeches". The ruling party brought a large number of busloads of people from across the country to boost attendance in these towns.

PM Gruevski said in Struga: "If the other side can bring people by airplanes, buses and trains to vote, if those people could cross thousands of kilometers, you could get out of your homes and vote for Kochovski and his list, which is supported by SDSM and other parties. Do this for yourselves and your children. You may not like one or another political party, that's your right. But, this is not about politics, this is about history!"

This rhetoric was repeated in Kichevo. PM Gruevski also commented on Fatmir Dehari: "We must show him [Fatmir Dehari] that Struga is Macedonia, Kichevo is Macedonia, and they will remain Macedonia! [...] If Fatmir Dehari wants to live in Albania, over there is Albania! Let him go there and have a life there! Here is Macedonia and this will remain Macedonia! Struga and

Kichevo, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Gostivar, all these municipalities were Macedonia and will remain Macedonia! [...] With the photos of [him wearing a] Kalashnikov he will not scare anybody. If he wanted to threaten us, we send him a message from here that he didn't frighten anyone, neither in 2001, nor now, nor ever!" PM Gruevski also appealed to ethnic Macedonian women to "give birth to many children" in order to outnumber ethnic Albanians.

Nationalist rhetoric and a photograph where DUI's mayor candidate Fatmir Dehari is in UCK combat uniform, armed with a Kalashnikov (from 2001) were used in February in an obvious attempt to gain voters' sympathies, based on nationalist and militant iconography. The AK 47 photograph remained on Dehari's personal Facebook profile to the day this report was concluded.

Top government officials used every opportunity to boost nationalist feelings amongst ethnic Macedonians and use them in an electoral context. By doing so, the government contributed to further deepening the ethnic divisions and tensions in the country.

Smaller ethnic communities

Roma were under pressure in Kichevo to vote for Fatmir Dehari of DUI, under the argument that "Muslims should vote for a Muslim". Use of religious identity as an argument to convince voters was only one of the many ways to put pressure on smaller ethnic communities. Promises were not enough

On March 17, police raided the house of a Roma person under suspicion that the alleged suspect had collected ID cards from Roma voters in order to manipulate them. It remained unclear what kind of manipulation would be withholding people's IDs, unless they were voters of the "other" side. The police had a court order for the search. The Roma person was openly supporting DUI. No ID cards were found in his house.

Depending on who is in charge in a particular institution at local or central level, government institutions, such as financial police, police, bailiffs, etc. have put pressure on members of smaller ethnic communities to vote for parties of either of the two largest communities. Obviously, the votes of members of smaller communities mattered in the close race for local power, but the people didn't.

the **ELECTION DAYS**

First round

Monitoring teams of Civil – Center for Freedom registered abundant irregularities and abuses on election day, first round on March 24. The general assessment of Civil for these elections is that the voting day was relatively calm, but marked by numerous irregularities, mainly resulting from misuse of institutions at both local and central level. Despite Civil’s appeals to the relevant institutions to react immediately and uncompromisingly, such action is missing to the present day.

Major incidents and violence have not been reported; however, these local elections have once again raised big and serious questions about the system and its abuse by the main election stakeholders. In fact, the largest part of the campaigns was carried out well in advance and did not allow voters to vote freely and according to their opinion. They were conditioned in different ways to vote in a way that would cause least damage to them, their professional career, and even safety.

Civil received allegations of massive violations of the election campaign silence. The behavior of political parties was inadmissible, for in their election campaigns they stopped at nothing to exert strong pressure on the electorate. Misuse of state and municipal resources was widely spread and so obvious that very few even tried to hide it from the public eye. Civil emphasized

time and time again that abnormal behavior and nondemocratic methods have gone beyond any limits and have become normality and everyday life.

Despite serious fears, voting in Kichevo and Struga went relatively calm. Nevertheless, the longer-term consequences of nationalist rhetoric originating from the election campaign, and which is likely to result in further escalation of interethnic tensions and conflicts in the country, still remain to be seen.

High ranking state officials and MPs were positioned as party observers in Kichevo. Irrespective of the legality of these actions, the question of their legitimacy remains.

Fights and quarrels on election day have been reported in the municipalities of Shuto Orizari, Mogila and Chair.

Shuto Orizari led in the number of incidents. Fights, bribe, transportation of voters, obstructions and threats to journalists, and preventing voters from voting have been noted.

Direct threats to several observers of Civil were voiced by party activists in several municipalities. There were cases where members of the election boards prevented Civil observers were prevented from monitoring . Such cases were noted in Kichevo (polling station 0731), Kumanovo (p.s. 1070), Gevgelija (p.s. 0347), Jegunovce, Veles, Kriva Palanka, and several municipalities in the City of Skopje.

The secrecy of personal data has been breached in many cases and in many different ways during the election campaign silence and on election day. A selective approach in identification of citizens by police has been noted in Tetovo, Zelenikovo, Jagunovce, Kichevo and etc. In many municipalities, party activists have been taking people from their homes in an organized fashion to the polling station where they voted. This included several cases in which voters were unwillingly pushed to the polling stations.

The observers of Civil have detected people trying to vote for the second time with different personal IDs on several occasions.

This comes in addition to a great number of cases where lamps and sprays did not work properly, or have not been used at all.

Fraud according to the technique called “Bulgarian Train” has been reported in a few municipalities, such as Veles and Bitola.

Minority communities have complained of pressure and blackmail that have occurred in a large number of municipalities nationwide. Huge pressure has been exerted during the first round of the elections, most of all, on Roma population, and on many other smaller ethnic communities, such as Turks, Serbs and others.

In this report, we will single out several other irregularities and violations, which represent only a small portion of the countless events showing the nondemocratic and illegal behavior at the first round of the local elections.

Violation of election campaign silence

Party activists and local officials were noticed agitating at the polling stations in Aerodrom, Bitola, Bogdanci, Brvenica, Butel, Chair, Chashka, Dojran, Dolneni, Gevgelija, Karposh, Kavadarci, Kichevo, Kichevo, Kratovo, Kriva Palanka, Kumanovo, Negotino, Prilep, Radovish, Resen, Shtip, Strumica, Sveti Nikole, Tearce, Tetovo, Veles, and Vinica.

Party activists were also calling people to “remind” them to vote and who to vote for (reports from Shtip, Skopje (all municipalities), Jegunovce, etc.). The number 17 (VMRO-DPMNE) was written and circled on the blackboard in a classroom that served as a polling station in Plasnica.

In Radovish cars loudly playing VMRO-DPMNE’s anthem paraded throughout the town during the day. Some activists set

their phone ringtone to the VMRO-DPMNE anthem and played it near and at polling stations.

VMRO-DPMNE activists disseminated campaign material and agitated openly during the electoral silence. A VMRO-DPMNE activist in Gevgelija, asked if he was aware of the law prohibiting this behavior, answered: "Don't you worry, we will certainly win, so there won't be anyone to make us responsible".

In Strumica, both main parties violated the electoral silence by disseminating large quantities of propagand material.

Violation of the electoral silence on social networks was noticeable everywhere in the country and was conducted by activists of all parties.

Particularly disturbing is the misuse of children who waved party and ethnic flags on election day. Abuse has been reported in several cases where teachers used social networks to agitate to their students to vote for the ruling party, or to convince their parents to do so.

Allegations of party activists entering the polling stations on the night before the elections have come from Arachinovo and Sveti Nikole.

Voters register

Civil has registered a number of cases in several municipalities where people have been removed/not found in the voters' register. Such cases were reported in many municipalities, including Dolneni, Debreshte, Kumanovo, Tearce, Kichevo, Skopje, etc. According to Civil's observers, the voters register had shortcomings in Dolneni, Prilep, Bitola, Kumanovo, Kichevo, Lipkovo, Struga, Ohrid, Shtip, Gazi Baba, Centar, Butel, Strumica, Dojran, Vasilevo/Konche, Gevgelija, Tearce, Tetovo, Brvenica, Gostivar, Jegunovce, Tearce, Zhelino, Kavadarci, Kriva Palanka, and other municipalities. In Gevgelija, problems with the voters register

were reported to Most and Civil observers by elections commissions, in the absence of knowledge on how to proceed with this kind of problems.

Many cases involve dislocation of voters to other polling stations. In one case, a married couple registered at the same address in Kichevo, has been forced to vote at two different polling units. So, first they had to go to the municipality offices to check at which polling stations they can vote, and only then go and cast their vote at those two different places. Cases have been also registered where voters, when arriving at the polling unit, have been told that they had already voted; somebody else obviously voted for them.

As an illustration, only one monitor of Civil in Tearce, has registered missing voters at 11 polling stations between 10.30h and 18h with a total of 45 voters missing from the register. This situation has been mentioned in most reports from our monitors throughout the country on election day, round one. Even the leader of DPA Menduh Thaci could not vote since his name was not found on the voters register in Tetovo.

Voting of disabled persons

In Kratovo (polling station 0933) the polling board brought a broken ballot box back to the municipality, explaining that it fell while they were “touring through the narrow streets of the town”. They had envelopes with votes in their hands. The voting at this polling station was declared regular.

Some of the disabled persons did not know that they were reported disabled, i.e. someone else reported those persons as disabled. Lots of them were “assisted” under suspicious circumstances.

In Gevgelija, members of election commissions complained that they were not trained enough to conduct voting of the disa-

bled. They also did not carry the ballot boxes, so the envelopes with votes were put in a larger envelope. The chairman of the polling board took the envelope home to bring it to the municipality the day after.

A high number of voters reported ill before the elections, so they could vote at home. The high number of ill persons raised suspicions on the validity of those votes.

Public voting

Voters were voting publicly, i.e. they were showing the open ballots to party monitors. Such cases were noted in Plasnica, Chair, Radovish, Bogdanci, Brvenica, Aerodrom, Strumica, Jegunovce, Kavadarci. Mainly, public votes were given to ruling parties.

Violation of secrecy of voting

A party monitor was peeking over the fence at the polling station in Prilep. Reading voters' names out loud was noticed in Kratovo, Karposh, Aerodrom. In the Kratovo case, the VMRO-DPMNE party monitor said that he had been told that voters' names must be read out loud, as a rule.

Proxy voting

Proxy voting was noted in the municipalities of Dolneni, Bitola, Plasnica, Kumanovo, Shtip, Shuto Orizari, Saraj, Jegunovce, Strumica, Radovish, Bogdanci, Tearce, Arachinovo, Mavrovo i Rostushe, Kavadarci, Veles, Tetovo, Struga, Chair and others.

Record-keeping of voters

VMRO-DPMNE activists, but also observers from other parties (both opposition and ruling coalition) have been noticed close to the polling stations, making records of people who voted, which is also a form of pressure and inadmissible control over the electorate.

Party activists in front of the venues, in coordination with party monitors inside of polling stations were taking record of the voters, circling their names on previously prepared lists or writing their names down. In one case, one NGO's monitor was noticed to be in coordination with VMRO-DPMNE record-keepers.

Record-keeping was noted in Resen, Sveti Nikole, Kichevo, Chair, Karpopsh, Aerodrom, Strumica, Radovish, Bogdanci, Tearce, Zhelino, Chashka, Veles, Kriva Palanka, Kavadarci, Prilep.

This was a specific form of pressure towards voters, as part of an organized activity to influence voters.

Second round

The second round of the local elections (April 7) was – again – characterized by numerous irregularities, incidents, tensions and pressures. Although no major incidents and direct physical or armed violence were registered, the second round of the local elections once again showed that serious issues are still open as regards to the system as a whole and its abuse by the main players in the electoral process.

The conduct of political actors on this day was exceptionally poor. In their pre-election campaign, political parties did not spare any means to exert strong pressure upon the electorate.

A serious demographic intervention for ethnic and party objectives was openly carried out in the second round. The peoples' poverty was heavily abused in numerous manners only to satisfy the appetites for power.

The second round of the elections commenced in a particularly strained atmosphere in Kochani where presence of police was evident, especially after arrests that took place on the day before. There were allegations that persons under arrest were members of the opposition SDSM. Vote buying has been registered in this municipality in many cases. In addition, numerous cases of family voting were registered in the Roma settlements. It was noticed that allegedly illiterate persons asked for assistance,

and later the same people appeared as assistants to others, who also claimed they were illiterate.

In Veles, one of Civil's observers who was accredited by SEC and had a valid document from Civil was prevented to enter the polling station 2147. Observers of the Poverty Platform NGO were removed from polling stations by police, only to be allowed access later on, with no explanation. An attempt of taking a photograph was registered at the polling station no. 2164. VMRO_DPMNE party activists were noticed agitating in front of the polling stations. At the polling station no. 2172, party activists carrying lists of voters kept record of voters. There was grouping in front of polling stations by private security agents, owned by a member of the ruling party. The same agency organized and transported voters to their polling stations. In the villages of Ivankovci, Dolno and Gorno Orizari, party activists and employees in the administration were threatening some of the citizens with revoking subsidies.

Over ten cases of obstruction of the work of Civil's observers were registered in Skopje and several other municipalities in the country. Obstructions came mainly from election commissions at the polling stations.

An attempt of taking a photograph of the ballot was registered in Gjorche Petrov at the polling station no. 2556.

In the municipalities Gjorche Petrov, Aerodrom and Karposh in Skopje, and in Tetovo, the election silence was violated by distribution of leaflets by all parties.

In Strumica, our teams informed us of strong presence of police and strained atmosphere. In Strumica one ballot box was broken and shots from an air gun were fired.

In Karposh and Veles, cases of deceased persons appeared on the voters register.

In the municipality of Centar (settlement of Kapishtec), the voters' names were publicly read aloud.

In the municipality of Chair, party activists inside the polling

stations had lists and kept record of voters. There were also cases of public voting (polling station no. 2945). Organized transport of voters was noted, as well. Several cases of proxy voting were noticed, as well as an attempt to vote with someone else's personal ID. Such cases were also noticed in the village of Chayle, municipality of Gostivar.

We received information from Tetovo that party activists were offering money for votes in front of Cyril and Methodius Primary School.

In Resen, vehicles from Albania were noticed in the morning; there was an assumption that they transported voters from Pustec.

An increased number of electoral irregularities in many polling stations throughout the country were noticed in the afternoon.

Civil received complaints from citizens in one of the villages in Berovo, who reported that VMRO-DPMNE party activists were threatening them with their life and that they would burn their property unless they voted for their party.

Proxy voting was seen in Bitola, Staro Nagorichane, Gostivar, Chair, Tetovo, Tearce, Struga, Jegunovce and other places.

Pustec in Skopje

The atmosphere in the municipality of Centar was highly charged on the second round of the elections. According to the reports, voters from Pustec were deployed in several polling stations throughout the municipality and caused revolt among citizens. Civil received many phone calls and learned about the movements of "imported" voters.

Tensions rose in the Municipality of Center in the late afternoon hours, before closing of the polling stations. According to reports of the observers and many calls received from citizens,

citizens from Pustec (Albania) occupied several polling stations, out of which the following are singled out: “Dom na gradezhni rabotnici”, Football Federation of Macedonia, the settlement of Kapishtec and the “11 Oktomvri” school. This massive ballot cast has been registered by the independent media as well.

In addition to citizens coming from Pustec, another our monitors and citizens reported on the “brand new citizens” in Center, coming from the municipality Kavadarci, and possibly from other Macedonian municipalities.

Strong police presence, according to witnesses, was aimed at the protection of “imported” citizens.

Long list of irregularities

Agitation and breaching of the election silence; organized transportation; vote buying; threats; incomplete voting materials; increased number of allegedly illiterate; increased number of disabled and persons; members of electoral committees without identity documentations; huge police presence; disputable role of the senior state officials; proxy voting.

Pressures and obstruction of the work of both Civil and other organizations’ observers have been reported at several polling stations.

Tense intervals

The days between the elections rounds in the country were same as the last days before the start of the elections. Our observers reported on dirty campaigning on the field, aggressive media campaign, frequent door-to-door activities, electoral employment, threats, misuse of public administration and resources, and of minors, etc. Ethnic tensions were constantly high.

Citizens experienced most of the activities of the political parties as pressure. They frequently called or approached our working groups or our office in Skopje to report these many irregularities. Civil appealed for free elections several times and continued its awareness-raising campaign.

April 21, the Rerun

Irregularities, pressures, tensions, manipulations, demographic interventions and other types of structural violence are a distinguishing feature of this electoral cycle in general, and the rerun in several municipalities across the country on April 21 was no exception to this picture, especially in the municipality of Centar.

The rerun of the second round on April 21 finalized the picture of the local elections in Macedonia 2013 - a display of an unscrupulous struggle for power in which the citizens' dignity was trampled upon. Structural violence and social injustice left a strong mark.

The sick, disabled, unemployed, children and youth, social welfare beneficiaries and the poor were those who were largely abused, blackmailed and manipulated and who bore the burden of the undemocratic actions of the power centers. A striking example of that can be found in the manipulation of citizens from Pustec, Albania, who were abused and exposed to all sorts of humiliations and public stigmatization, while taking part in a major disruption of the elections process.

The employees in the public administration were blackmailed

and used for party purposes.

The elections rerun in Centar disclosed serious institutional shortcomings, resulting in a failure to observe the rule of law.

The largest number of irregularities and tensions occurred during the rerun in the municipality of Centar in Skopje. Irregularities and pressure were registered during the elections/rerun in the municipality of Struga and the second round of voting in the municipality of Dolneni.

The rerun was carried out in a tensed atmosphere, along with utmost use of the institutions to exert pressure on the voters. Strong police presence was evident in all municipalities where ballot was cast today. Many vehicles without registration plates have been reported in the close vicinity of the polling stations.

Civil noted that during the voting in Centar demographic intervention reoccured. As regards to the citizens who came to vote from Pustec, Albania, this time that phenomenon was stepped up with "new voters" from Veles, Strumica, Kavadarci, as well as from the municipalities of Aerodrom and Butel in Skopje. According to an anonymous source, among the "imported voters" there were also a number of Goranci from Kosovo, who allegedly came to vote in the municipality of Centar in an organised manner, same as the ones from Pustec.

There were also voters who did not have a place of birth in their personal IDs; instead of that "XXK" or nothing was written.

A series of quite inventive attempts to mislead voters were made in the municipality of Centar, aimed at preventing them from voting. Leaflets claiming that the elections rerun is re-scheduled for April 28 and letters with a forged signature of the opposition candidate for mayor, Andrej Zhernovski, were distributed in large numbers. During the voting, the same material was noticed in the hands of VMRO-DPMNE party activists who were persuading people that voting does not take place on that day or trying to redirect them from their polling station in order to confuse the voters and to reduce the turnout.

The elevators in several high buildings on the streets of “Naroden Front” and “Vasil Gjorgov” were sabotaged and did not work for most of the day, in an obvious attempt to prevent elderly voters from leaving their homes.

Our observers noted that many citizens got mobilized to tackle the misleading information distributed in the night before and on the election day, and contributed to a high turnout of voters. Journalists, citizens, civil society activists and the diplomatic core were on the streets and polling stations since early morning to the end of vote counting. This was probably the main reason why the demographic intervention attempt failed in the municipality of Centar, Skopje.

Obstruction of journalists and observers

In front of “Dom na gradezhni rabotnici”, police officers dressed as civilians have been identifying journalists. They neither provided explanation nor identified themselves.

VMRO-DPMNE party activists obstructed television crews and journalists from carrying out their tasks at several polling stations in the municipality.

A journalist from Nova TV news portal was harassed and punched by a member of the polling board in the “Dom na gradezhni rabotnici”.

Civil’s observers were obstructed by the polling boards at several polling stations.

the POSTELECTION

Further deterioration

During the night after the elections rerun in the municipality of Centar, the then outgoing mayor of Centar Vladimir Todorovic's administration erected over 30 new monuments. An enormous technical operation was conducted in a radius of only few hundred meters in an obvious attempt to display power and domination.

Cutting old trees and inaugurating new investments in the municipality of Centar is ongoing despite public protests and the moratorium of the new mayor Andrej Zernovski, who announced financial revision of the controversial Skopje 2014 project. In the days and weeks that followed the elections, the new administration of this municipality faced and still faces incredible pressure from the ruling party through a variety of methods. This pressure includes a variety of administrative obstructions, as well as violent rallies attacking the municipal offices in "defense" of a church, which is part of Skopje 2014.

Several newly elected members of municipal councils changed sides, i.e. they were elected as opposition candidates and joined the country's ruling party (Veles, Centar, Kumanovo, etc.).

A wave of allegations on job dismissals was raised across the country. Denials of these information followed, as well as explanations that dismissed persons were part of the "electoral em-

ployment" to buy votes.

Internal party quarrels started on who deserved the most to be employed now started right after the elections were over.

In Kichevo, the Albanian flag was raised for the first time in front of the municipal building. Approval and exaltation by Albanians, rage and worries by Macedonians followed.

Discrediting the political opponents through media and in the public appearances of the political leadership of the country continued after the elections process was over. No public discussion was organized about findings of observation missions, neither steps were taken in regards to the recommendations of ODIHR and other relevant institutions and organizations in order to improve electoral regulations and practices.

The main opposition party of SDSM went through a process of replacing the longstanding leadership of Branko Crvenkovski with Zoran Zaev, who won a third mayoral mandate in Strumica. The "renegade" SDSM party official Stefco Jakimovski, the old-new mayor of Karposh formed a party on his own, called Grom (Thunder), whilst the other former SDSM official Vlado Buckovski and few others are in process of formation of a new political party. Several smaller political parties have split from the opposition bloc and joined the ruling coalition or stand alone in the fragmented political scene in the country.

Meanwhile, the state of democracy, human rights and freedoms, particularly freedom of expression in the country are deteriorating.

the MEDIA REPORTS

Article 10

Journalists shall neither consciously create nor process information that jeopardize human rights and freedoms, shall not use hate speech and shall not encourage discrimination on any grounds (nationality, religion, race, sex, social class, language, sexual orientation, political orientation, etc.).

Article 14

Reporting on political processes, especially elections, shall be impartial and balanced.

Journalists shall maintain professional distance from political entities.

(The Code of Journalists of Macedonia)

The infamous role of media

It was nothing less than a mere miracle that the Local Election 2013 saw no physical violence and clashes. Unfortunately, that is the only consoling thing and barely a pass mark of the election.

The elections were neither fair, nor free; least of all democratic.

The campaign was as aggressive as it could get, whereas the elections were the dirtiest we have ever witnessed.

Amid conditions like these, the elections were "celebration of the democracy" solely for the governing party (VMRO-DPMNE). Foreign and domestic observers did not even make an implication to the categories fair, free, non-violent and democratic. The OSCE/ODIHR Mission assessed the election as calm, efficiently administered, competitive, but also unequal. According to the Mission, the main reason for that was "the biased and partisan media coverage and blurring of state and party activities".

The role of most of the media was shameful, above all, the role of the electronic media, which in turn had a direct effect to the

absence of the categories free and non-violent in the electoral process. As never before, these media outlets lent an aggressive and utterly open support to the governing coalition parties, similarly to the countries with most adamant one-party regimes. Briefly, the media took the role of the party-state broadcaster.

Despite being the public broadcaster that is supposed to work in the interest of all citizens, MRTV went the farthest in their bias, with Sitel TV, as well as the newspapers Večer and Dnevnik not far behind.

The remaining TV stations were also inclined to report in favor of the governing coalition, but slightly less, with the exception of Telma TV, which according to the data of BC, and the observations of Civil paid more attention to the opposition coalition.

Among the independent media, we specifically single out the weekly political magazine and daily newspaper Focus that stopped being published after the first round of the elections, because of the tragic and still unresolved death of the owner Nikola Mladenov.

Balanced reporting on the elections was conducted by 24 Vesti TV, TV Alsat-M, Alfa TV and Radio Canal 77, among the electronic media, Utrinski Vesnik, Koha and Lajm among the printed media, as well as www.mkd-news.com and www.portalb.mk among the Internet media.

Providing an open support to the governing coalition in that way, media was not just biased, but they rather acted as direct participants and stakeholders in the campaign in favor of the governing parties. In the same lines, there was hate speech, personal insults and humiliations on the account of the electoral stakeholders, especially those coming from the opposition block.

Particularly dangerous and unprofessional was the role of the media in the nationalistic outbursts related, above all, to

the elections in Kichevo and Struga. Instead of condemning the nationalistic outburst, and dissociating from them, part of the media incited the inter-ethnic bigotry and hatred with their underlined nationalistic rhetoric.

Obvious bias in part of the media was also witnessed during the elections for mayor of the City of Skopje. Winning the elections in this municipality was absolute imperative for the governing party, most of all because of reaffirmation of the project Skopje 2014. Due to these reasons, the "partisan media" led a real smear campaign against the opposition candidate between the two election rounds and the re-vote. In all that time, he was publicly humiliated and accused of corruption.

These preliminary evaluations are based on the comprehensive media monitoring of Civil, the teams of which conducted everyday monitoring of the daily newspapers Focus, Dnevnik, Nova Makedonija, Utrinski vesnik, Večer, Koha and Lajm, as well as the weekly magazines Fokus and Republika, all within the project "Free and Non-violent Elections".

In addition, included in the monitoring were the most influential electronic media and most widely read internet portals. The report comprises data from the Broadcasting Council (BC) as well.

Within the public awareness raising campaign, Civil made great efforts to contribute for free and non-violent elections through appeals, pronouncements and video clips. Unfortunately, the continuous, almost daily appeals fell on deaf ears by most of the media, due to their bias and inclination towards the governing parties.

The pro-government oriented media offered selective and insufficient space for the appeals and reports of Civil. The public broadcaster closed the doors to the public awareness raising campaign, despite the proper request issued by Civil. In spite of

the fact that the campaign had high social interest, they decided to turn a deaf ear to our request for broadcasting Civil's video clips.

Understanding and support of the activities of Civil was received by the televisions:24 Vesti, Alfa TV, Era TV, Alsat-M, the portals Plus Info, Nova TV, Brif, Portalb, Libertas, Dardanija, the daily paper and magazine Focus, for which Civil is expressing great gratitude in this occasion.

Media control

The shameful role of the media in the electoral campaign, the bias by which they so openly stood in favor of the governing coalition, only reaffirmed the conclusions of the desperate, devastating situation of Macedonian journalism that has nearly hit the bottom in the recent years. It was reaffirmed in action that the governing coalition keeps almost the entire media space in Macedonia on a short leash. Just like in the times of the most hard-line, totalitarian, one-party regimes and isolation.

A substantial part of the media and journalists, engaged in irrational, shameful competition of who will get closer to the rulers, have brutally stepped on the professional norms, breached code of ethics, laws... The bias that made both the media and the journalists, active participants in the electoral campaign, will forever be remembered as a disgrace to Macedonian journalism.

Media freedom as one the uncompromising rights, guaranteed by the Constitution, was undoubtedly buried at these elections. Right along with journalism and media, the human freedoms and rights of an opinion, expression and information were buried, as well as the democracy and civil society. Freedoms are abolished.

Journalism crisis and media agony; they did not start yesterday. The situation has been worsening systematically in the past

few years. Therefore, it was certainly expected that part of the media will be biased, but hitting that low, to the level of becoming party agitators, no one could have even guessed that. The darkest forecasts have been surpassed.

Reasons why media have come to this situation of controlled media, why they keep on sinking in submission and dependency are different and multilayered. Most of those reasons are directly or indirectly related to the governing party's decision to arrange the entire media space to fit their needs and narrow party interests.

This is a well-designed and well-planned strategy that VMRO DPMNE, since they gained power in 2006, has been implementing continuously and concisely, along with their coalition partners, forcefully even, if the situation demands. In this way, the governing coalition has ensured total control, while media and journalist have become utterly dependant.

The strategy that has ensured complete control over the entire media space is no news to anyone. We will briefly mention the main traits.

Self-marketing. In the past seven years on power, VMRO DPMNE is running a continuous media campaign for self-marketing, both for the party and for the Government. Spending budget money, the Government and the party have become if not the largest, then certainly the most influential advertiser; and the money spent for these purposes, which remain secret, are buying media "obedience"

This is a win-win strategy. Both the Government and the party are incessantly present in the media, thus benefiting from self-marketing, building their rankings, and in the same time keeping media on a short leash.

In this way, they impose obedience and self-censorship, because if the broadcaster is too critically-oriented they lose the advertisements, i.e. a large source of funds.

Absence of market. Following the independence, Macedo-

nia has started establishing media market conditions, but it did not get any farther than that. Those few things that had been done are now completely erased by the Government's interventions, which directed funds to specific media, thus gaining their support and putting them in monopoly position. The self-marketing strategy only built on that, and entirely ruined the market. The broadcasters that were not or did not want to be under governmental control, lost their positions on the market, few were sold and few were simply withered.

Ownership structure. The ownership structure of media has a direct influence over their (in)dependence. There have been many different phases. In the beginning, owners and founders of media outlets were journalist. Nowadays, the media is mainly in the hands of businessmen close to the governing coalition. Some of them have political interests (members of the governing coalition), but majority has business interests. When the German company WAC withdrew from Macedonia and Alfa TV was sold, the ownership structure went almost entirely in the hands of people close to the government coalition. Hardly few oases are still standing outside the yoke.

Use of force. In the implementation of the control over media strategy, the governing coalition also resorts to use of force, when necessary. The most drastic example was the closing down of A1 TV and the three daily newspapers. It was a clear warning for all media outlets owners. Another form of the use of force is the defamation lawsuit against media and journalist who write critically about the government. Additionally, intimidation is the occasional personal "naming" of "unfavorable journalist" by the governing party. Intimidation and use of force was also the throwing of the journalists out of the Parliament's Gallery.

Divisions. An integral part of the control over media space strategy forms the creation of division between the journalists. Well-thought, if not initiated, then certainly supported by the governing party, is the division of journalist to "patriots" and

"traitors". Now, a journalist gets an exclusive right to be a "patriot" only if they blindly and servilely support and magnify the Government. Anyone who does not fit into those conditions is a "traitor". These imposed divisions have additionally devolved journalism as a profession, and by supporting their "patriots", the government is establishing new norms and criteria in the media space.

There is a long list of other reasons, but these are more than enough for Macedonia to keep hitting whirlingly the bottom of the world media freedom rank lists. In only four years, Macedonia has fallen 82 places at the Reporters Without Borders rank list to hit the infamous 116 place. That speaks enough of the utterly worrisome media control where Macedonian media and journalists live and work.

Serious concern as to the condition of media freedom in Macedonia has also been voiced by the US State Department in their annual report and by the European Union (EU) as well. Neither this observation, nor the sinking towards the bottom on the media freedom rank list has spurred any action to change things in this field.

There is not even an indication that things will get better. On the contrary, the new Media Law that is being forcefully imposed to the journalist, and which, in the opinions of many analysts, introduces open censorship, threatens to replace Macedonian this level of media control with total media darkness.

The conditions listed herein can perhaps explain, at least in part, the behavior of the journalist during the elections, but cannot justify it any case whatsoever.

Broadcasters

Macedonia has an incommensurately large number of electronic media taking into account its size and number of habitants:187 TV and radio stations are in legal operation.

The professional quality of broadcasters is in a constant decline. This is a consequence of continuous interference by the government and politics in general in the media sphere. Furthermore, the ownership structure, as well as political and business interests, and links between media owners and state institutions contribute to this situation.

These known shortcomings of the broadcasters surfaced during the local elections; most of them turned into propaganda machineries in favor of the political parties in power. In some media the proportion was 3 : 1 in favor of the ruling parties.

The reporting was highly disputable both in terms of quality and objectivity. There is a variety of reasons for this, including the fact that some TV stations are owned by persons who are directly involved in politics.

Equal approach and fair representation of all participants to the electoral competition were replaced by “rooting for” political parties in power in an appalling imbalance.

This has also been shown by the monitoring of the Broadcasting Council according to which the coalition “For a Better Mac-

edonia" led by VMRO-DPMNE and DUI was more represented in most media than the opposition coalition "Alliance for the Future" led by SDSM and DPA. The imbalance partially reflected the different intensity of activities.

The most evident imbalance and partiality was shown by the following: Macedonian Radio and Television (MRTV), and TV Sitel. Imbalance was also registered in many other media, to a lesser degree.

Television stations 24 Vesti and Alfa and the radio network Kanal 77 were those that provided fair representation and balanced reporting.

Macedonian Television, Channel 1

The public broadcasting service MRTV, dedicated a total of 16 hours to the local elections in 2013 in the Channel 1 news. This number also includes the time dedicated to "regular government and ministerial activities" as part of the elections.

The coalition "For a Better Macedonia" led by VMRO-DPMNE received a representation of 5 hours and 25 minutes in the two daily television newscasts.

The coalition "Alliance for the Future" led by SDSM obtained a representation of 2 hours and 44 minutes. The representation ratio between the ruling and the opposition parties is almost two to one.

However, the given ratio is far from being realistic since 3 hours and 26 minutes were dedicated to the "the regular government and ministerial activities".

In addition, they also obtained a representation of one hour 15 minutes during expert analysis related to the local elections.

All in all, 9 hours were devoted to the activities of the ruling coalition, the government and expert analysis, whereas the opposition coalition got only less than 3 hours of representation.

Other political parties obtained comparatively small representation; 29 minutes were assigned for the activities of DPA, a ruling coalition partner, whereas only 19 for DPA, an opposition party.

Macedonian Television, Channel 2

Monitoring showed that 15 hours and 53 minutes were devoted to the local elections by Makedonska televizija, a public broadcasting service, in the Channel 2 news in Albanian language with no significant imbalance as the one noted in Channel 1.

DUI's activities obtained the longest broadcast - 2 hours and 51 minutes. The opposition party DUI received 2 hours and 2 minutes.

The broadcast related to the coalition led by SDSM was identical - 2 hours and 2 minutes - whereas the coalition led by VM-RO-DPMNE received an hour and 54 minutes.

Nevertheless, the total coverage of "the regular government and ministerial activities" lasted for an hour and 22 minutes.

Macedonian Radio, Channel 1

Monitoring of the information program of the Macedonian Radio's Channel 1 has undoubtedly dedicated the longest amount of time on pre-election activities of parties, coalitions, independent candidates and ministries as part of the election campaign: 18 hours, 36 minutes and 19 seconds.

This time was devoted to 26 political entities being relevant in the pre-election process with a visible imbalance concerning the coverage of their activities.

Total coverage of the ruling coalition "For a Better Macedonia" lasted 6 hours, 35 minutes and 12 seconds. Coverage of the opposition coalition "Alliance for the Future" lasted 3 hours, 17 minutes and 38 seconds. The total daily coverage of pre-election activities of other political entities is insignificant - DUI got 28 minutes for its pre-election campaign, whereas DPA 17 minutes.

The total broadcast length of the government's activities is 3 hours, 52 minutes and 45 seconds.

TV Sitel

Over 13 hours were assigned for the local elections in newscasts of Sitel with a radical imbalance. Reporting was focused upon the activities of VMRDO-DPMNE's coalition "For a Better Macedonia" whose campaign obtained 5 hours and 49 minutes of coverage.

An hour and 52 minutes were devoted to SDSM's "Alliance for the Future" campaign.

The imbalance becomes even more visible if we take into consideration the amount of 2 hours and 42 minutes assigned for the government's activities.

Other political entities were provided with considerably less coverage. What is noticeable is that the Serbian Progressive Party was given 26 minutes of coverage, which is more than what DUI and DPA obtained - 13 and 5 minutes, respectively.

TV Kanal 5

A total of 11 hours and 10 minutes were allocated for the local elections in Kanal 5 newscasts. The imbalanced reporting was concentrated on the two biggest coalitions.

The coalition “For a Better Macedonia” led by VMRO-DPMNE got a representation of 3 hours, whereas the coalition “Alliance for the Future” led by SDSM received a representation of around 2 hours.

“Regular government and ministerial activities” were provided with a coverage of 2 hours and 30 minutes.

TV Telma

The two daily newscasts of television station Telma assigned a total of 11 hours, 18 minutes and 53 seconds for the local elections. In accordance with the Broadcasting Council’s data, political entities obtained a relatively equal treatment during the first ten days of the campaign. Nonetheless, an imbalance and a greater broadcasting representation become visible in the second part of the campaign.

A total of 3 hours and 5 minutes were devoted to the coalition led by SDSM, whereas an hour and 53 minutes were allocated for the ruling coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE.

Conversely, the coverage of the activities of the Albanian party DUI lasted 42 minutes, whereas the opposition party DPA received 24 minutes.

TV Alsat M

TV Alsat M, the only broadcaster with a national concession, which broadcasts bilingually (Albanian-Macedonian), was reporting on the local elections in a neutral manner.

It should be particularly stressed that in the informative programs TV Alsat M practically equally encompassed the electoral activities of the biggest ruling party and of the opposition. Both

the parties of the Albanians and those of the Macedonians were represented in an unbiased manner, with minor differences in the available time, which was not at all seen in the other electronic media.

In the two television news programmes, at 19 and 23 o'clock, TV Alsat M dedicated 10 hours and 33 minutes to the electoral activities. The duration of these programmes also included reports on the "regular" activities of the Government and ministers.

In view of the political parties, 1 hour and 44 minutes were dedicated to the activities of DUI, and 1 hour and 11 minutes to the opposition party – DPA. The same was noticed as regards the parties from the Macedonian bloc. A total of 1 hour and 10 minutes was provided for the coalition parties led by VMRO DPMNE, and 1 hour and 20 minutes was provided for the opposition coalition of SDSM. Around 50 minutes were provided for the campaign of the opposition party NDP of Rufe Osmani.

* * *

The assessments of the electronic media's conduct in the local elections' campaign are based on data from the monitoring of the Broadcasting Council. The precise data from this monitoring, accurate to the very second, show to what extent are the most popular electronic media influenced by politics.

The imbalance, illustrated by the data, only confirms the assessment that most of the electronic media are inclined to the parties of the ruling coalition. In other words, the electronic media are directly influenced and controlled by the government and ruling parties, above all by VMRO DPMNE. The electronic media's inclination, of course, had also an impact on the electoral results.

The Broadcasting Council, which following the change in its composition is influenced by the government and ruling parties, based on the data from its own monitoring, indicates the high imbalance in reporting. The assessments are mainly accurate, al-

though there is an attempt to at least partially justify the imbalance and unequal representation of the parties with the statements that the parties had different activities in the campaign.

The Broadcasting Council finds that there was also an imbalance in reporting in between the two electoral rounds, but only makes conclusions without taking any actions. The outcome is the same after the final report, there are no measures or sanctions for the electronic media which were reporting on the local elections in an especially biased manner.

Printed media

Hate speech, biased reporting and satanization of political opponents, ethnocentricity, national-chauvinism and discrimination not only in terms of ideological issues, but also in relation to even more sensitive inter-ethnic relations - those are the main, prevailing characteristics of the printed media reporting during the local elections.

The overall conclusion about media behavior in general, including printed media, during the entire electoral process, is that a great part of them have been just obedient instruments in the hands of the political stakeholders, thus only reaffirming the situation of a country where freedom of speech and media has hit terribly low.

The main events have been covered by almost each and every media; however, most of them have attributed somewhat greater attention to government's activities, particularly to the those "local" ones, such as "ribbon cutting" and "throwing shovels", undoubtedly aimed at creating positive promotion of the election candidates.

Civil has been monitoring newspapers reporting as part of the project "Free and Non-violent Elections", according to a pre-determined methodology that involved quantity and quality monitoring on the manner in which these media reported on

the electoral competition. In terms of quantity, it's obvious that all monitored newspapers, and the same goes for the rest of the media, made a lot of room and time to the local elections.

What catches the eye in terms of quality is the fact that the readers or the public in general, could hardly ever get comprehensive and objective information about the overall electoral process from only one media. In other words, the number of media, including newspapers that provided unbiased, objective and comprehensive reporting on all main events within the elections was significantly low. Most of them have overtly stood in support of one of the election stakeholders, most frequently putting professional standards and ethics aside.

Comprehensive monitoring, analysis and recording of the articles related to the elections, starting the second half of January until the end of the election process, mid-April, included daily newspapers Focus (up until its shut down, end of March), Dnevnik, Utrinski Vesnik, Nova Makedonija, Večer, Koha and Lajm, as well the weekly magazines Focus, Gragjanski and Republika, with a note that the first two had stopped being published in the meantime.

Details about the exact figures of articles published in each newspaper separately, along with description on the contents and notes made by our analysts are archived in Civil for future reference.

The leader in tendentious reporting, with underlined hate speech towards the major opposition party SDSM, its leaders and candidates for mayors and glorification of the governing VMRO DPMNE was the daily newspaper Večer. That comes as no surprise, having in mind the way this newspaper has been "disseminating information" years back.

Complete neglect of all professional standards and ethics during the pre-electoral period and through the elections, particularly in respect of the events in and around the parties, has been the main feature of this newspaper. Večer, along with Sitel

TV in the electronic media, and Kurir in the internet space, have had the greatest effect on the ruining of media atmosphere, resulting in negative evaluations by the relevant international organizations and institutions in terms of freedom of speech and freedom of media in the country.

Articles of the type "Massive drain of SDSM's members", "The opposition front dwindles", "Makraduli from SDSM (...) held a rally with only handful of people", "Gruevski said: SDSM will see the power of the people", "The defeat of SDSM affirmed; Branko lost even in his native Debarca", "Only small violations registered", "Deluge of the politics of Branko and SDSM", "SEC has divided to traitors and patriots", "Zhernovski has acquired more as an unemployed than people do during their whole work life"; articles of the same kind were published in this newspaper almost every day. Another note is that journalists from Vecher attended Civil press-conferences almost regularly; however they reported only about one of them. We assume that is due to the assessment of numerous irregularities registered by the teams of Civil, which is absolutely contrary to the assessment of Vecher that the elections have been fair and democratic.

Furthermore, the newspaper Dnevnik supported the governing coalition rather openly. However, unlike Vecher, this newspaper also published reports about the opposition activities and statements of its leaders and candidates for mayor. Dnevnik invariably published articles, which, mildly put, had negative influence on the inter-ethnic relations. Just to illustrate that, we will mention few citations: "In spite of the agreement about the local elections that was made in the late afternoon hours yesterday, there is a possibility for incidents in several places. According to operational data and analysis, Dnevnik states that the most problematic places are Chair and Saraj in Skopje, Lipkovo, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Zajas" (March 2) (municipalities where the majority or a substantial number of the population is Albanian); or "On the second anniversary of the incident that involved phys-

ical clashes between Macedonian and Albanians at the Skopje Fortress (Kale), Artan Grubi, DUI's candidate for mayor of Skopje, confirmed that he is running for office. He was a direct participant in the events and received a suspended sentence, however he does not consider that a provocation" (February 14); "Katr di" - password for voting in Kumanovo; in most of the cases the first to vote was a man of the Albanian ethnic community; followed by a large crowd of people to whom he was loudly shouting "Katr di", i.e. (42)" (April 12)... The articles of the type "SDSM has been manipulating its own membership with the boycott" and "on the rally in Skopje, the Prime Minister said: the opponents just don't get it that the time has run them over", are all witnessing the pro-governmental orientation of Dnevnik.

Nova Makedonija was the newspaper with fairly well-balanced editorial policy, with occasional hints to a pro-governmental orientation. The newspaper published texts that clearly take the side of the governing VMRO-DPMNE, for instance the comment titled "Division to favorable and unfavorable voters," followed by "The opposition has discriminated and humiliated Macedonians from Pustec. The issue as to whether our people from Pustec have the right to vote went way out of control and turned into irrational opposition topic; What is behind the great defeat of SDSM; The people clearly showed they do not want an opposition of this kind". The newspaper has been informing on various topics related to the activities of all election stakeholders, while the pro-governmental orientation can be seen in the texts of the columnists and commentators. Therefore, one of the columns (February 19) reads "SDSM is 'working' for VMRO-DPMNE"! Because of their amateurism, they are doing their best to do as much harm to themselves as possible..."

Pro-opposition oriented, but making a point in observing the professional standards and ethic norms, was the daily newspaper Focus. The stances voiced regarding the main election stakeholders show prevailing criticism towards the governing

coalition, but the opposition parties have not been spared either. Unlike Večer for instance, the information section of this newspaper has not manipulated their readers by publishing selected information, but rather made great efforts to display a full picture of the main events happening at the elections. As to the critical approach towards the governing coalition, one could have read in Focus the kind of analysis and comments that can hardly be found in other media: "During the electoral campaign, the president of VMRO-DPMNE, Nikola Gruevski has unwaveringly stood from the position of a Prime Minister at the rallies where he is supposed to present the candidates for mayors from his party" (March 11)

Nevertheless, objective reporting has prevailed in Focus, unlike the other newspapers published in Macedonian language. The followings articles are only example of the writings in this paper. "Stern expert reactions followed the decision of joint presentation of VMRO_DPMNE and SDSM in Struga and Kichevo. How is it possible for the "fascists" and "communists" to form an alliance? - was the title of the article related to the coalition of the two largest and most opposed parties in the two cities where the chances were that Albanian candidate will win the elections, which after all, turned out to be exactly what happened in the end. In addition, when interviewing candidate for mayor from one party, the newspapers always left room for the comment of the opponent candidate (for instance: "Zdravko Kocev, candidate from SDSM for mayor of Shtip says for the newspaper that he will do everything in his power to stop the brain drain in this city. "Focus" has got in touch with the opponent of Kocev, Ilcho Zahariev, who, contrary to his promise, did not respond to the editorial staff questions."). Furthermore, an analysis of this newspaper writes the following: "the offer of programs has failed to attract, partly because of for the delayed ntering of SDSM in the election process, partly because of the weariness of ideas in VMRO-DPMNE".

Utrinski Vesnik can be singled out as the only objective daily newspaper published in Macedonian. This newspaper has been reporting regularly, comprehensively and professionally about the most important events on the Macedonian political scene. What sets this newspaper apart from the other newspapers published in Macedonian language (after the closing down of Focus) is the substantially big number of information about the events in the Albanian political bloc, taking into consideration, in the same time, to provide equal and balanced presentation of main stakeholders of all political parties. A sufficient amount of wariness is applied to the reporting about potential interethnic conflicts. Therefore, for instance, following the nationalistic speech of the Prime Minister Gruevski titled "Kichevo to remain Macedonian" related to the battle between the candidates for mayor of the two major ethnic communities in Kichevo, Untrinski wrote: "With his messages, the Prime Minister only fortified the ethnic clash for the mayor's office that threatens to shatter the coexistence in this city".

The following two examples additionally speak of this newspaper's neutrality : On April 9, while all other newspapers write that the mission of OSCE/ODIHR has assessed the elections as "calm and efficiently administered", "democratic", "without any remarks" and alike, Utrinski published an article titled "ODIHR has made a lot of remarks about the elections." Moreover, this has been the only newspapers that published an interview with the opposition candidate Andrej Zhernovski after he won the elections in Center.

"Koha" and "Lajm" were the two newspapers that have been monitored and analyzed on daily basis out of all printed media published in Albanian language. As it usually happens during the election processes, the largest coverage was related to the Albanian parties, namely to the Albanian candidates, the same as with all other media: radios, television stations and internet portals informing in Albanian. Nevertheless, information about

main events in the Macedonian political bloc has also been reported. Particularly intensive reporting related to the two main Macedonian parties has been done during the period when it was uncertain of whether the opposition will take part in the elections.

Following the victory of the Albanian candidate for mayor on the elections in Kichevo, Koha published statements of Albanian analysts calling on unity of the Albanian political bloc, so that the candidate of DPA wins the elections in Struga. ("The unity of the Albanian votes that resulted in successful outcome for Fatmir Dehari in Kichevo is, according to the Albanian political analysts, required in three other municipalities - Struga, Brvenica and Dolneni", Koha, April 1). Moreover, there have been articles writing that the "in battle for each and every vote in Struga; on the eve of the second round of the elections in Struga, the election battle between Sela and Kocoski has acquired a completely ethnical dimension" (Koha, April 3). This newspaper also published articles of the kind "Finding about the results, Vlatko Gjorchev who was an observer from the coalition VMRO-SDSM at the polling unit Zajas, he panicked and run off the polling unit without signing off the minutes." (March 29)

What is striking about these newspapers is the absence of negative campaign about any of the election stakeholders, neither from the Albanian, nor from the Macedonian political bloc. Moreover, there is no obvious side taking in favor of any of the candidates or the parties. An exception from that are couple of reports with mild inclination, or positive writing, toward NDP and its leader Rufi Osmani. For instance, Lajm, April 1, writes: "The Diaspora has organised a grand reception for Rufi Osmani who asked for their support on April 7, the second round of the elections. (page 4).

In general, both newspapers published in Albanian language, have made great efforts to perform objective and professional coverage to most of the events during the elections.

Internet media

Partiality was the main feature in the reporting of the Internet news portals on the campaign and the municipal elections whereby the division between the portals which were supporting the ruling parties on one side and those supporting the opposition on the other, was evident. Although not having such a big influence as the “classical” media, the Internet news portals were full of information and reports on the elections; however they were extremely biased and one-sided in their reporting.

Unlike printed media, where there was almost no newspaper that reported impartially and without bias after "Fokus" ceased to be printed, and unlike the realm of the electronic media, where apart from the stressed dominance of the pro-government media there were few that reported with impartiality, the Internet portals were obviously and strictly divided on media openly supporting the ruling parties on one side and others supporting the opposition on the other side.

Courtesy of the technology which enables quick reporting on the move, the Internet news portals were flooded with information about the developments in the campaign and the course of the elections, however they were mainly one-sided. It was almost impossible to get the whole picture of the elections from one single source of information. In other words, the pro-

government news portals were full of exclusively positive texts about the ruling party and exclusively negative opinions on the opposition, and vice versa. The opposition media were openly supportive of the opposition bloc, whilst heavily criticising the government and its exponents during these elections.

The Internet news portal www.kurir.mk, which refers to the opposition only in a negative context, leads the way in the open support of the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE, without having any intention to leave room for its opponents. The reports of this pro-VMRO portal were dominated by intensive promotional activities, including all mayoral candidates from this coalition, and an extensive coverage of their activities, programmes and promises. On the other hand, "Kurir" reported almost nothing on the campaign led by the opposition. Even if information about the opposition were aired, they were partial and tampered with when it comes to the number of people attending the opposition rallies, thus creating a misleading picture of the support it enjoyed among the electorate.

Hate speech towards the opposition was part of the editorial policy of this portal. The insults to members of SDSM made by the leaders of VMRO-DPMNE hit the prime time headlines in bombastic fashion. Moreover, they never left room for the leaders or representatives of the opposition to respond to the insults and accusations. In a nutshell, "Kurir" and several similar portals are characterised by a total lack of impartiality, professionalism and ethics. Just like TV Sitel (from the electronic media) and "Večer" (from the printed media), as regards reporting on the elections and political parties, "Kurir" as well generally cannot differentiate information from comment.

Apart from the several so-called "satellite portals" of Kurir, which serve the purpose of wider dispersion of the support for the ruling party, the reporting of the Internet news portal www.press24.mk was also highly biased. What is interesting about this portal is that there wasn't an explicit hate speech; however

it published and communicated speculations whose obvious aim was to mar the reputation of SDSM and its leaders. Similar to "Kurir", this portal provided no room for the opposition to respond to the speculations and accusations.

The partiality of this medium can most obviously be seen in the selection of persons who were interviewed and who were given the opportunity to express their opinions regarding the current political developments back then. These were mainly high officials of the ruling party, mayoral candidates from the ruling party and various politicians, journalists and analysts who have clearly defined and expressed critical opinions towards the opposition and its leaders. During the whole period, no interview was made with a member of the opposition and no column or analysis was published which criticises the government and the ruling party or supports the opposition.

It must be mentioned that before the election process began, this portal complied with the professional and ethic standards in the main; however it completely "forgot" about them during the elections. This "shift" in the editorial policy can probably be explained with the publications of the commercials of VMRO-DPMNE for the elections, as well as the government's media campaigns.

The portal plusinfo.mk can be singled out from the several internet media which were pro-opposition, so to speak. The opposition stance taken by this portal consists of openly critical attitude towards the government and the ruling party and accusations against them on grounds of irregularities and manipulations. However, it should be pointed out that unlike "Kurir", "Plusinfo" showed no hate speech, nor lack of professionalism, and there was almost no selective reporting of the campaign. The information section was marked by high level of professionalism and comprehensive and impartial coverage of all events in and around the elections. This medium's favourable inclination towards the opposition was evident in the columns in which the

ruling party was usually accused of electoral fraud, whilst the opposition candidates were directly supported.

The reporting of www.novatv.mk, www.a1.on.mk, www.libertas.mk, www.brif.mk was similar, if not completely identical, to Plusinfo's. The columns, interviews, analyses and partially the manner of reporting and selection of information provided by these and a few more news portals showed obvious inclination and bias in favour of the opposition camp and critically addressed the ruling party and its coalition partners.

Unlike the abovementioned portals, mkd-news.com covered the activities of all participants in the elections with an impartial, objective and professional approach and reported on the developments with the necessary amount of criticism. This news portal provided an opportunity for the opposition to respond to the accusations and speculations made by the government and the ruling party.

The portals in Albanian language, just like the other media in this language, dedicated most of their time to the electoral competition between the political parties of the Albanians - the ruling DUI and the opposition DPA and NDP.

The news portal www.zhurnal.mk can be singled out as clearly biased supporter of the ruling DUI in the course of the entire electoral process. This portal, which is similar to "Kurir" from the portals in Macedonian language, is perceived as a "tool" of DUI, that is, its party medium. This news portal showed a great disproportion as regards the number of articles supporting DUI. The portal "Zhurnal" often manipulated the facts and led a negative campaign towards the opposition from the Albanian political bloc. As an illustration: When asked whether he would hand in his resignation "after the heavy defeat suffered in all Albanian municipalities", the leader of DPA answered: "that is also possible, if requested by 90,000 activists of DPA and not by others who voted against this platform". "Zhurnal" published the article under the headline "Thaçi may resign?"

The reporting of Kurir's platform in Albanian language, www.sq.kurir.mk, was also in favour of the ruling party, but without so obvious manipulations and without a negative campaign. What was characteristic of this portal is that during the elections the prevailing articles were those translated from the main portal.

The other Macedonian Internet media in Albanian language, such as www.portalb.mk, www.almakos.mk, and www.tetova1.com had rather balanced and impartial reporting of the activities of all participants in the elections with a few articles critical of the parties from the governing coalition.

Agitators of nationalism

The disgraceful role played by most of the media during the local elections was performed and completely laid bare in a sublime and all-in-one-place manner in the Kichevo and Struga mayoral election campaign. Journalists and media were actively involved in the nationalistic rhetoric of the political parties, inciting inter-ethnic violence, what was the culmination of professional abuse and severe breach of the code of conduct and the professional norms and standards.

Some of the media were active participants (accomplices) in the abuse of nationalism by the political parties for the purpose of the elections which at times seemed to be teetering on the brink of a nationalistic hysteria. This type of attitude of the political parties, supported by some of the media, cannot go without leaving traces and having consequences on the inter-ethnic relations, and not only in Kichevo and Struga, but on a wider territory in the country.

The nationalistic rhetoric, or to be more precise, the abuse of nationalism in the local elections campaign, was imposed by the most influential political parties from the Macedonian and the

Albanian camp. "Unnatural" coalitions were made as the parties from the ruling coalition, as well as those from the opposition, disassociated on ethnic grounds. New ethnic/nationalistic "alliances" were established between the parties of the Macedonians (VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM) and the parties of the Albanians (DUI and DPA).

These were the conditions under which the media and the journalists reported on the activities and the rhetoric used by the leaders, candidates and activists of these temporary and purpose-made ethnic/nationalistic coalitions. In the main, the daily reports in the media properly conveyed the atmosphere in which the campaign took place. The citizens were regularly informed of the heated atmosphere that was present during the campaign and the elections in Kichevo and Struga.

However, only a small insignificant number of media in their editorial policies, comments and opinions have distanced themselves from the nationalistic rhetoric of the parties and have condemned the instigation of inter-ethnic intolerance. It was one more confirmation of media bias and connection between the media and the political parties.

Some of the journalists and media were not only biased, but went one step further and engaged in nationalistic rhetoric and instigation of inter-ethnic intolerance and hatred. These media acted as active participants and actors in the campaigns and have openly taken sides in the ethnic/nationalistic division for the purpose of winning the elections.

At the forefront were the media which during the whole campaign were clearly taking the side of the ruling parties, or of one of the national options. These media were also promoters of the campaign of the ruling party VMRO-DPMNE. Most of all, this refers to TV Sitel and the first channel of the national broadcaster MTV, the daily newspaper "Veche" and the Internet portal "Kurir", which were aggressive in the course of this campaign as never before.

In the Albanian language media, apart from being biased in favor of the ethnic Albanian candidates in Kichevo and Struga, hate speech and instigation of ethnic intolerance has not been registered during the elections campaigning.

After the electoral victory of the Albanian candidates in Kichevo and Struga, Albanian language media quoted politicians and analysts that called for unification of the Albanian political actors in the municipalities of Struga, Brvenica and Dolneni in order to outvote the Macedonian counter candidate.

After elections were over in Kichevo and Struga, Albanian language media displayed great satisfaction from the final outcome, which included messages such as "Kichevo is finally Albanian" or "Struga to Albanians".

In addition, hatred speech, personal offences and humiliation of the opponents by the ruling party, which were present during the whole campaign, have reflected in the field of inter-ethnic relations. The most remarkable example thereof was the reporting and comments made about the speeches of Nikola Gruevski, the leader of VMRO-DPMNE, held on the rallies in Kichevo and Struga. They were full of outbursts of nationalism, ethnic intolerance and were on the brink of hysteria. It didn't bother them and exactly because of their overtone and contents, the speeches of the Prime Minister were assessed as historic by the media controlled by this party.

How can there be something historic in inciting nationalism and inter-ethnic intolerance and hatred? The answer to this question can only be given by the leader of the ruling party and the media under his control which were literally taking part in an everyday competition of who would please him more and in a more servile fashion.

The "highest" achievements of the disgraceful role played by some of the media during the campaign were related to the events around the elections in Kichevo and Struga. The attitude of the political parties and the role of some of the media has, and

will have, consequences on the inter-ethnic relations, and not only in these two municipalities, but rather more far-reaching.

It became practice for the ruling parties, but also for those from the opposition, to keep open the issue of nationalism and inter-ethnic relations and to impose them where necessary for day-to-day political needs. It was confirmed with the statement of the leader of the ruling party, who after being booed off during his visit to Kichevo immediately after the elections, said that he declares solidarity with the fury of the people of Kichevo.

It remained unclear why the Prime Minister was furious. Was it because of the defeat of his ethnic/nationalistic option in Kichevo, or because of the citizens who dared to protest and boo him off, or was he furious at the media under his control?

Reporting on Kichevo and Struga

Selection

Here, we bring a selection from the daily monitoring of the print media. The full print media monitoring material on the period January 19 - April 22, 2013 can be downloaded from Civil's website: www.civil.org.mk

15.03.2013

Daily newspaper "Fokus"

The article titled "Ahmeti for ethnic Albania, Gruevski for Macedonia of the Macedonians" speaks about the rallies in Struga and Kichevo where VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM appear united and where Prime Minister Gruevski calls upon all Macedonians, regardless whether they are supporters of the ruling party, of the opposition or are undecided, to give their support to the joint candidate in order not to give any opportunity to the Albanian candidate, whilst at the same time DUI leads an aggressive campaign for soliciting the Albanian votes and promises fulfilment of the dream of "Greater Albania" (page 4).

Daily newspaper "Dnevnik"

In an interview given to the daily newspaper, Blagoja Despotovski - candidate for second term of office and current mayor of Kichevo from VMRO-DPMNE – said that the cooperation with SDSM was something that was demanded by the citizens of Kichevo and the politicians should listen to the voice of the people. He reckons that his victory on the 24th of March won't be a victory gained only from the votes of ethnic Macedonians, but also from the votes of Turkish and Roma people (page 2).

"Gruevski and Ahmeti in struggle over Struga and Kichevo"; The leader of DUI considers the cooperation between the Macedonian parties to look like a cat-and-mouse game and to be a result of panic and fear, whilst Gruevski reckons the voting in both towns is a historic opportunity to rectify the error that has been committed with the territorial organisation (page 2).

Daily newspaper “Nova Makedonija”

No political party iconography of the Macedonian political camp in Kichevo; for the first time in any municipal elections it was agreed for the rallies in Kichevo not to have party iconography, with only the Macedonian national flag and the flag of the town being flown. It was also decided for the Macedonian camp to have joint election headquarters (page 2).

Daily newspaper “Večer”

Ruling party rallies in western Macedonia; Gruevski: “These are historic elections for Struga. We have historic chance to show the radicals and nationalists that everybody recognises this country as is, Macedonia” (page 4).

Weekly magazine “Fokus”

“Ethnic struggle for Kichevo and Struga”; Curiosity on the forthcoming municipal elections would be the formal cooperation between the two biggest Macedonian political entities. After the unification of the powers of DUI and DPA, VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM decided to join their powers in two municipalities in order to have a Macedonian being voted as mayor. Is Gruevski going to annul the territorial reorganisation or is Ahmeti going to draw the map of ethnic Albania? (page 10).

Weekly magazine “Republika”

“Local elections for “Great states” – DUI said that if the NLA (UÇK) commander Dehari fails to win in Kichevo, the Albanians in this town would not be allowed to breathe freely (page 6).

16-17. 03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Fokus”

VMRO-DPMNE and DUI, rivals in Kichevo and Struga, whilst collaborators in the second round. Municipalities in which they need each other’s support are Chair, Bitola, Karposh, Skopje, Tetovo and Gostivar (page 6).

Daily newspaper “Dnevnik”

“Gruevski: Kichevo was, and will remain part of Macedonia” (page 6).

Daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik”

“Let Kichevo remain Macedonian”; in his statements, the Prime Minister fortified the ethnic battle for the mayor’s office which threatens to disrupt the peaceful coexistence in the town (page 8).

Daily newspaper “Nova Makedonija”

“Kichevo should remain property to all of its citizens” was the message sent by Gruevski on the rally for promotion of the candidate for mayor Blagoja Despotovski. “They want to artificially reshape the ethnic landscape of Kichevo, and with ethno-nationalism to gain power over these areas” (page 2).

Macedonia in the eve of elections – report from Struga; “The bridges should connect Struga”.

Three candidates will run for Struga mayor on these elections (page 4).

Daily newspaper “Večer”

Rally of the coalition “For better Macedonia”; Gruevski: Let’s show to whom Kichevo belongs (page 4).

18.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Dnevnik”

Modern patriotism of the political opponents; Igor Ivanovski and Antonio Miloshevski together in Struga and Kichevo; Here the political differences are overcome and there will be better life for everybody, regardless of their ethnic affiliation, it was promised by the representatives of VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM (page 2).

Daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik”

Kichevo and Struga, test for the government coalition; What impact would the instant-alliance on local level between VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM have on the communication between the partners in the government (page 6).

Daily newspaper “Večer”

On a joint convention VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM sent the following message to the people of Struga: “The victory in Struga can only be won if there is high turnout” (page 4).

19.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Dnevnik”

Arguments between Thaçi and Ahmeti over Struga; exchanging offers that would enable the Albanian political camp, apart from Kichevo, to establish cooperation for the elections in Struga as well (page 2).

Daily newspaper “Nova Makedonija”

Citizens on paper, nationalists on rallies; The program of Dehari and Labenishhta promise equal development of the whole municipality regardless of the ethnic background, however their words cannot reach Macedonian voters and others who don't understand the Albanian language since their speeches are not interpreted (page 4).

25.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Fokus”

Down to the wire; heavy election battle for Kichevo. More than 3.000 emigrants (Albanians) arrived to Kichevo, whilst 2 buses of Macedonians came from Italy and Serbia (page 6).

Daily newspaper “Dnevnik”

Calm atmosphere and high turnout in Kichevo. Unofficially, the counting of results began at 21:00 o'clock. Rumour has it [that] there have been quarrels and the lead was shifting between the two candidates depending on the polling station in which the votes were already counted.

Daily newspaper “Nova Makedonija”

There was voting and celebration in Struga and Kichevo; at 10:00 o'clock at night Struga looked like in the middle of a tourist attraction, “Nova Makedonija” reports (page 2).

26.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Fokus”

Dehari will stroll the streets of Kichevo on a white horse-drawn carriage; A carriage was painted white and decorated with an image of a double-headed eagle and the Albanian flag for celebrating the victory of DUI's candidate for mayor of Kichevo (page 8).

27.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Fokus”

Gruevski booed off by the VMRO supporters in Kichevo; A group of citizens of ethnic Macedonian did not allow him to leave the party headquarters until providing an answer to the question of how DUI managed to take the win in Kichevo (page 8).

Daily newspaper “Dnevnik”

VMRO-DPMNE and SDSM challenge the victory of F. Dehari at the elections in Kichevo. Yesterday the coalition in support of Blagoja Despotovski lodged complaints for 7 polling units which could put into question the victory of DUI’s candidate (page 2).

Daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik”

Gruevski calmed the people in Kichevo. Macedonians in Kichevo outraged because of the fact that the town will be managed by an Albanian for the first time (page 6).

Daily newspaper “Vecher”

The following message was sent yesterday in Kichevo by the Prime Minister: I understand the rage that the people of Kichevo feel, I feel that rage as well (page 3).

29.03. 2013

Daily newspaper “Utrinski vesnik”

Great expectations – great disappointment in Kichevo; “There are 28.000 Albanians and 16.000 Macedonians in the municipality. But we are a real figure and we live here, whilst the number of Albanians who really live here is 5.000”, were the comments of the association “People of Kichevo for Kichevo” (page 9).

01.04. 2013

Daily newspaper “Vecher”

How SDSM sold out Kichevo – Last Friday TV Sitel announced that SDSM has struck an agreement with DUI not to support the annulment of the results in two polling units in Kichevo whereby Crvenkovski in fact enabled Dehari to be elected as mayor in the first round (page 4).

the RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations

The following recommendations are condensed messages deriving from the analysis and field reports collected by the Civil monitoring teams and partner organizations. Each line of these recommendations is based on careful observation and selection of the most urgent issues in order to obtain both long and short term conditions for truly free and nonviolent elections in future, as well as improvement of the human rights situation and democracy in the country.

To the government, state institutions and administration

Legal

Solve problems with the voters register (e.g. moving persons from one polling station to another between electoral rounds)

Introduce measures to prevent demographic interventions. For example: require a period of minimum residence (e.g. 6 months), before being able to vote in a municipality

Change legislation to a system of open lists

Clarify the definition of “early campaigning” and introduce harsher sanctions

Strengthen legislation around party financing and introduce a serious sanction system for contraventions

Introduce an absentee voting system instead of diaspora voting to avoid further confusion on the role of diaspora voters

Reform the composition of the State Election Commission (SEC) and Municipal Election Commissions (MECs) to nonpartisan and non-administration bodies

Political

Start a debate on changing the system towards open lists

Start a political dialogue in the country

Introduce measures to strengthen respect for human rights and freedoms, and rule of law in context of elections

Institutional

SEC, prosecution and Mol should start working ex officio and initiate procedures upon allegations of fraud, including electoral pressure

SEC, prosecution and relevant authorities to investigate allegations of double IDs

Media

The government should ensure that conditions for freedom of expression and media are created

Apply existing standards, laws and regulations in order to ensure transparency of media ownership

Stop the procedure for creating a law on media, since it is superfluous

Create conditions to break the monopoly of print media distribution and allow for a professional distribution system

Fulfill the obligation resulting from the March 1st agreement with the EU on shedding light on the events from December 24th, 2012, including on the violence against journalists

To civil society and media

Make use of the legal system and pursue law suits where you see allegations of fraud

Form a coalition/platform against electoral fraud and seek international support

Monitor electoral activities also between elections

Regulate the social and professional status of journalists and media workers in accordance with the requests of the Independent Union of Journalists and Media Workers

Create a code of ethics/conduct for print and Internet media during election processes

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација

Национална и универзитетска библиотека "Св. Климент Охридски", Скопје

342.843(497.7)"2013"

REPUBLIC of Macedonia, local elections 2013 : unscrupulous
struggle for power_ : analysis, reports and recommendations / [authors
Xhabir Deralla ... и др.]. - Skopje : CIVIL - Center for freedom,
2013. - 111 стр. ; 21 см

ISBN 978-9989-2001-7-5

1. Deralla, Xhabir [автор]

а) Локални избори - Македонија - 2013

COBISS.MK-ID 94104074

WWW.CIVIL.ORG.MK

FREE AND NONVIOLENT
ELECTIONS 2013 PROJECT



financially supported by



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

**Swiss Agency for Development
and Cooperation SDC**

WWW.CIVIL.ORG.MK