



Final Report
FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA:
POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EUR-A-00-94-00028-00
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I. SUMMARY

During the period covered by this report--April 1994 through June 1998--the National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) conducted programming in the Former Yugoslavia Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) designed to support the long-term development of a multiparty political system and an active civil society. Based in Skopje, the Institute worked to achieve these goals primarily through the provision of technical assistance to a nonpartisan, nongovernmental organization, the Association for Civic Initiative (ACI), and to political party leaders and activists in such areas as local branch development, voter outreach message development and media relations. In addition, at the request of government officials, NDI recruited a team of international legal experts to develop written commentary on several pieces of election-related legislation.

II. BACKGROUND

Since Macedonia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, its development into a democratic, economically viable state has been plagued by several obstacles. These have included a western trade embargo, which FYROM was compelled to support, against the country's leading commercial partner, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia; political conflict with Greece over FYROM's official name and the consequent ban on Macedonian access to the port of Thessaloniki; minimal trade with Bulgaria due to political conflict over the status of Macedonian as a distinct language; and the quest for greater political autonomy among ethnic Albanians in Macedonia.

The first multiparty elections for the Macedonian Assembly were held after the League of Communists of Yugoslavia approved the introduction of a multiparty election system in 1990. These elections engendered contentious debate from smaller parties which protested that the majoritarian electoral system prevented political organizations with significant but diffuse support from gaining parliamentary seats. Ethnic Albanians insisted that electoral districts had been established in a way that fractionalized the Albanian vote. From 1990 to 1994, the bulk of parliamentary power was shared between the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-

DPMNE) and the Social Democratic Alliance (SDS). Founded in 1990, the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), which garnered 23 of 120 seats, was the first forum for ethnic-Albanian political expression. In January 1991, a coalition government including VMRO-DPMNE, SDS and PDP, nominated SDS leader Kiro Gligorov as President.

By August 1994, it was apparent that the Macedonian political system was dysfunctional. Parliamentary sessions regularly failed to take place because, after walkouts by PDP and VMRO-DPMNE deputies frustrated with the slow pace of reform, the legislative body lacked a quorum. Parliament and the government steadily lost credibility due to their inability to legislate much needed social and economic reforms. New parliamentary and presidential elections were called for October 1994. These were FYROM's first multiparty elections since independence. Though irregularities such as incomplete voters lists and a lack of ballot secrecy did occur, international and domestic election monitors agreed that there had been no systematic pattern of disenfranchisement. Nevertheless, VMRO-DPMNE boycotted the second round of voting in protest of alleged ballot tampering and manipulation.

President Kiro Gligorov won the presidential race with 52.4 percent of the vote and his Social Democratic Alliance, opting to maintain its partnership with the ethnic Albanian PDP and the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), constructed a coalition that secured 95 out of 120 seats. As a result of its boycott, VMRO-DPMNE found itself without parliamentary representation. The new government was faced with the huge task of implementing extensive economic and political reforms. During its first year, legislation was passed that established an army to replace the Yugoslav forces; created a framework for an independent judicial system; clarified citizenship guidelines; and regulated the establishment of independent radio and television. Little, however, was achieved in the area of economic restructuring. Fortunately, having experienced several years of severe economic decline, Macedonia saw an upturn in trade when the 1995 Dayton Accords ended both the war in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina and the embargo against Serbia-Montenegro.

In February 1996, after months of bickering within the government, the LDP broke away from the coalition. Together with the Albanian parties, who were outraged by an incident in which four ethnic Albanians were killed by state police, LDP, VMRO-DPMNE and other small opposition parties introduced an unsuccessful petition for early parliamentary elections. In November 1996, Macedonia held its first round of local elections. Although the governing SDSM won the highest number of mayoral and city council seats--securing 500 of 1,903--opposition parties gained political ground in several important cities, including Skopje. The right-wing VMRO-DPMNE finished a strong second with 321 seats throughout the country. This increase in public support of the opposition reflected a growing frustration among citizens with the economic situation and political leaders. Opposition support had not yet eclipsed that of the SDSM, however, because opposition parties lacked platforms that represented inspiring policy alternatives directed toward voters' concerns.

From 1995 to 1997, tensions between the country's Slav Macedonian majority and

ethnic Albanian minority became the focus of heated political debate. Ethnic Albanians demanded proportional political representation for minorities at both local and national levels; the use of the Albanian language in public education; the right to fly the Albanian flag; and greater access to public resources. Many ethnic Slavs believed these demands reflected separatist desires rather than a wish to participate more actively in public affairs.

In February 1997, a nationwide pyramid scheme collapsed leading to the loss of \$60 million among an estimated 30,000 people. The scheme's collapse was attributed to government corruption and an increase in organized crime. Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski calmed public protests and survived a vote of no-confidence by promising a war against corruption and compensation for citizens who had lost their savings.

Following an assessment mission in April 1993 during which NDI determined that FYROM's democratic development had not yet led to the growth of an informed, active civil society, the Institute launched a technical assistance program that sought to build on successful civic association models already supported by NDI in Romania, Bulgaria and Albania. The program was designed to support a network of citizens interested in forming a national, non-partisan organization devoted to civic education and citizen participation in political affairs. Initial funding for the program was provided by the National Endowment for Democracy. As NDI's program shifted to USAID funding in April 1994, the Association for Civic Initiatives (ACI) was created. In February 1997, having provided four years of assistance to ACI and other civic education NGOs, NDI shifted the focus of its work to political party building. Through the provision of training to party leaders and activists in such areas as organizational development, voter outreach and media relations, the Institute assisted parties across the political spectrum in reaching out to the public and transforming themselves into strong contenders in the 1998 parliamentary elections.

III. PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

NDI's programmatic goals in FYROM during this period were to: increase citizen participation in political processes; strengthen the capacity of democratic political parties in order to build a genuine multiparty system; and promote and protect the integrity of the electoral process such that the voters' will is respected.

To achieve these goals, NDI's achieved the following objectives to:

Citizen Education & Organizing

- C Broaden citizen awareness of governmental institutions and political processes**
- C Raise the level of citizen confidence in the election process**
- C Increase citizen participation in public affairs**

Electoral Framework

- Increase public debate on election-related issues
- C Expedite the adoption and application of democratic electoral laws that ensure the integrity of the election process

Political Party Development

- C Equip parties across the political spectrum to engage in regular exchange with the electorate and represent voters' interests in election and non-election periods

IV. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Civic Education & Organizing

In 1994, NDI sponsored a series of community meetings and lectures throughout FYROM to raise public awareness about political and ethnic tolerance. At these meetings, the Institute identified people of various ethnic and political backgrounds interested in creating a non-partisan, multi-ethnic organization to promote citizen political participation. With NDI's assistance, the group formed the Association for Civic Initiatives (ACI) in April 1994. ACI worked to accomplish the objectives listed above by organizing such local initiatives as candidate fora, public opinion polls, election monitoring efforts and voter education campaigns.

The first activity ACI spear-headed was an election monitoring program in connection with the October 1994 parliamentary elections. With NDI assistance, ACI recruited and trained 400 volunteers for the first round, and approximately 700 for the second round. ACI successfully obtained poll-watcher credentials from parliament and met with representatives of political parties and local government to promote the Association's role as a vehicle for nonpartisan civic and voter education prior to the elections. ACI monitors covered approximately 1,500 polling stations across the country and concurred with the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) assessment that the election process had been relatively free and fair by international standards.

Following the elections, with NDI's assistance, ACI devised a broader role for itself at the national and local levels between elections. This role involved engaging citizens in dialogue on a number of key political and economic reform issues. NDI began to focus its support on the institutional development of ACI through training on leadership and management strategies.

In January 1995, NDI and ACI organized a regional conference in Skopje entitled "Women in Politics," the goal of which was to support women who had achieved elected office

in Central and Eastern European countries through training in decision-making, leadership and communication skills. In addition, the conference served as a forum for these women to discuss their professional experiences. Forty women from 13 countries attended. By co-hosting this high-profile event, ACI established itself as an organization that promoted women's participation in politics as a key factor in the development of democratic institutions. A month later, ACI held another conference in Skopje for Macedonian women political and civic activists on the development of issue-based campaigns and events. Several press conferences were held to publicize the event.

In February 1995, NDI assisted ACI's three clubs in identifying pressing issues in their respective cities-- Bitola, Stip and Gostivar-- and developing strategies to stimulate debate on these issues among citizens, elected officials and community leaders. NDI then trained club members on how to build coalitions with individuals and groups who had a stake in addressing the issues selected. NDI guided ACI's Executive Director through meetings with club leaders on financial management, the roles of everyone in the organization and national office-local branch coordination issues. The Institute also worked with club members in each city to develop schedules of activities that would involve citizens in developing solutions to local issues and advocating for their implementation. Meanwhile, ACI developed working relationships with local and international NGOs.

As the 1996 local elections approached, NDI helped ACI to use proposed local government legislation as a tool to stimulate discussion regarding local government functions and to mobilize citizens to help plan and participate in such election-related activities as public debates and candidate fora. ACI launched this effort by surveying citizens on what they hoped local government officials would accomplish in the four years that followed. This survey provided ACI with more information as to which issues most interested citizens in each city and confirmed the Association's hypothesis that few citizens understood the potential role and responsibilities of local government officials in a democracy.

In October 1995, NDI sent a delegation of ACI leaders to Bulgaria to observe civic and voter education events organized by the Bulgarian Association for Fair Elections and Civil Rights (BAFECR) in connection with the country's local elections. The delegation observed candidate forums, election monitoring, and the dissemination of voter information, and met with political candidates, party leaders, journalists, and members of municipal election commissions. Following the trip, ACI organized two public forums on pending legislation that would have increased government control over independent media. The forums, which were covered extensively by leading print and broadcast media, provided a unique opportunity for political leaders and journalists to debate the new law and resulted in the drafting of several amendments to the legislation which ACI submitted to Parliament, the Minister of Communications, and political parties. Some of the amendments were incorporated into the final draft.

Following the expiration of ACI's cooperative agreement on January 30, 1996, the

Institute modified its relationship with Association: in order to broaden the program's impact while continuing to ensure that activities were driven by grassroots concerns, NDI decided to suspend its support for a national ACI structure and instead cooperate with specific ACI branches and other indigenous NGOs to continue civic education and organizing initiatives. This new agreement included a memorandum of understanding between ACI and NDI which outlined guidelines for disbursement of micro-grants to ACI clubs and other NGOs working at the local level. The activities eligible to be funded were: voter education campaigns, public opinion polling, town meetings, candidate fora and election monitoring training.

During the period that these proposals were being developed, NDI conducted training for ACI club leaders in such areas as 1) defining a mandate for a new organization; 2) recruiting volunteers; 3) delineating roles and responsibilities of volunteers, staff, and board members; 4) developing workplans; 5) developing proposals and budgets; and 6) public opinion polling. NDI received eight proposals from a variety of NGOs to work on civic and voter education. The Gostivar club's proposal, to highlight one example, involved the distribution of 4,000 public opinion surveys, which the club then analyzed to determine which issues citizens cared most about in the pre-election period. The following month, the club organized a town meeting at which it distributed the findings to local government officials, media and citizens. Through this meeting, ACI-Gostivar assisted political candidates in targeting their local campaigns.

In early November 1996, NDI conducted 11 seminars to train more than 500 election observers from five cities in FYROM to monitor the local elections¹. Separate training sessions were held for political party observers and NGO observers on the role of an election observer, ways to develop an organizational structure to monitor the election, standard reporting procedures and important elements of the local election law. Following these seminars, NDI continued working with three regional NGOs to conduct a regional domestic observer effort. NDI negotiated a budget and basic guidelines with each group, but each NGO was responsible for registering and obtaining credentials, devising an observation strategy and recruiting the observers. More than 100 observers were deployed and each NGO submitted a final report detailing its observations. Following the elections, NDI assisted several NGOs, including ACI, in locating potential funding sources for post-election civic activities.

Electoral Framework

The 1994 presidential and parliamentary elections in FYROM took place within an outdated, Yugoslav electoral framework. At the request of the government, NDI had developed commentary on drafts of revised presidential and parliamentary election laws, but neither piece of legislation was passed before election day. Due to outdated voters lists and poor organization, more than 50 percent of the population did not receive an official invitation to vote, which included information on the location of polling sites. In addition, many of those

¹Local elections were held in November 1996.

who did receive an invitation were kept from voting because they lacked the necessary documentation (a new passport or a citizenship certificate). Though international and domestic election monitors concluded that no systematic election fraud had occurred during the 1994 votes, the above issues, together with the VRMO-DPMNE boycott of the second round, contributed to a low level of public confidence in the fairness of the election process. In an effort to increase voter confidence, and assist FYROM in developing electoral laws that guaranteed the integrity of the election process, NDI, with the help of a team of international legal experts, developed written commentaries on several key election-related laws during the period covered by this report.

In August 1996, at the request of the Minister of Justice, NDI coordinated an international team of legal experts to issue commentary on the draft local election law. This Election Law Advisory Group evaluated the law according to international norms, then released a formal commentary to civic organizations, government, media, and political parties in FYROM. NDI's commentary became the focus of debate on the floor of parliament and received extensive coverage in local press. In September, NDI hosted a roundtable discussion to provide a forum for public debate on the law, and to enable opposition parties not represented in parliament to voice their opinions. NDI invited representatives of major political parties and the Minister of Justice to participate in the discussion as well. The following day, a revised election law, which incorporated 80 percent of NDI's suggestions and most of those put forth by opposition political parties, was passed by parliament. Public debate surrounding NDI's commentary on the 1996 draft local election law marked the first time in FYROM that organized public discourse had occurred on proposed election legislation.

In its ongoing effort to foster a more transparent and accountable electoral process, and with additional funding support from USAID, NDI conducted a pre-election assessment mission in October 1996, in anticipation of the local elections scheduled for the following month. The delegation met with political party leaders, government officials, civic activists and journalists to review the political process leading up to the local elections and identify key electoral issues that needed further clarification. NDI issued its findings in a formal report that was circulated to the government, media, political parties and NGOs.

Also in late 1996, at the request of the Justice Ministry, NDI provided comparative information on voter registration and election procedures to encourage adoption and application of election administration laws that met international standards.

In November 1997, the government denied political parties and journalists access to updated voters lists. In response, NDI issued a formal statement that outlined the importance of public access to voters' lists in a democracy. The statement was distributed to the media, political parties and the government. Following the statement's release, the government reversed its decision to permit political parties and journalists access to the lists.

As the 1998 parliamentary elections approached, FYROM was in a position to conduct

transparent national elections that would result in greater pluralism and public confidence in the political process. Accordingly, NDI's Election Law Advisory Group prepared commentary on two drafts of the Ministry of Justice's proposed parliamentary election law, again at the request of the Justice Minister. The proposed law contained several confidence-building provisions that incorporated the participation of political parties in election administration and made the system more open to public scrutiny. However, there were several technical provisions that did not conform to international standards. NDI circulated its commentary to the media, government and all political parties in January 1998. The document was reported upon extensively by television, radio and print media, thereby serving to educate the public on potentially problematic elements of the law. Government officials and party leaders thanked NDI for its comments, which were seen as unbiased and comprehensive. Most of NDI's recommendations were incorporated into the final draft of the legislation, including:

- C A reduction in the variation in voters per electoral district from plus/minus 15 percent to plus/minus 10 percent**
- C A change in the composition of the state electoral commission with a reduction in judges and an increase in political party representation**
- C A clear definition of which opposition parties can be nominated to electoral commissions**
- C Access to the voter lists granted to political parties**
- C A change in the second round of elections whereby only two top candidates advance to the second round instead of all that reach a seven percent threshold**

Political Party Development

By January 1997, when NDI shifted the focus of its work in FYROM to political party development, public confidence in government and elected officials had fallen dramatically due to unremitting economic hardship and increased tensions between the country's Slav Macedonian majority and ethnic Albanian minority. The weakness of FYROM's political institutions raised the possibility of violence to settle these difficult matters. Therefore, the Institute concluded that the most pressing political task in FYROM was to strengthen the country's emerging pluralistic political framework such that policy decisions were made peacefully through representative government, rather than violently by disenfranchised populations. As such, the Institute launched a program that equipped political parties to use the period between the first local elections in 1996 and the parliamentary elections planned for November 1998 to develop capacity in such areas as party branch development, strategic planning, voter outreach and targeting, media relations and platform development. During NDI's baseline assessment of FYROM's political parties, party leaders confirmed their interest in each of these areas. NDI provided training to party leaders and activists through multiparty sessions which were reinforced with single-party consultations to assist parties as they implemented newly-learned skills and strategies.

During NDI's baseline assessment of political parties in February 1997, party leaders

specifically requested the Institute's assistance on local party branch development. The country's new local government framework had increased its administrative divisions to 123 from 33. Thus, parties were faced with the organizational challenge of establishing branches in as many of these new districts as possible. Accordingly, NDI focused the first phase of its party building training on the structure and responsibilities of an effective local party branch; local branch-national office communication strategies; membership recruitment at the local level and grassroots fund-raising techniques. Due to limited time and resources, the Institute focused its efforts on party branches in four cities: Stip, Gostivar, Bitola and Strumica. The criteria for city selection included: diversity of political parties (based on local election results), willingness of local political parties to work with NDI, political party requests, geographic position and ethnic diversity. In each city, NDI conducted an assessment to determine which parties possessed the institutional capacity and commitment to participate in and benefit from regular training sessions. Four parties fit these criteria: the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization-Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE).

Following multiparty training sessions on the above-mentioned topics, NDI worked with party branches on such projects as organizing membership recruitment activities, constructing volunteer databases and planning grassroots fund-raising campaigns. In August 1997, NDI-Skopje created a Political Party and Democracy Library in the office which included materials on party organization, fundraising, communications, media relations, voter contact and volunteer recruitment. NDI extended an invitation to all political party contacts to use the library as a resource.

In September 1997, NDI brought two media experts to FYROM to lead training sessions on media relations, message development and communications tools. These experts were Tony Clement, a Member of the Provincial Parliament in Ontario, Canada, Parliamentary Assistant to the Premier, and former President of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario; and Laura Quinn, Director of the United States Senate Democratic Technology and Communications Committee. The seminars equipped party leaders and activists to develop an effective message by evaluating their own party's strengths and weaknesses as well as those of competing parties. Participants drafted sample press releases, which NDI critiqued, and were given on-camera experience through mock interviews.

In November 1997, NDI shifted the focus of its training from developing local branch organizational capacity to preparing parties for the 1998 parliamentary elections through single-party seminars on voter outreach, message development, candidate recruitment and party pollwatcher training. Following each training session, NDI worked with individual branches on voter outreach projects. Examples of successfully completed projects included a national newsletter published and distributed by the LDP which, at NDI's suggestion, contained a section dedicated to youth wing activities; a political issues survey distributed by VMRO-DPMNE to 3,000 citizens in Gostivar; a communications strategy and communications committee created by the PDP branch in Gostivar; and a national committee on party

reorganization created by the PDP.

In February 1998, NDI launched its women in politics program by hosting a regional conference in Stip. Forty women from the surrounding area, including political party members and NGO representatives, attended. The seminar covered the specific challenges facing women in politics. Participants identified barriers to women's participation in party activities, socio-cultural reasons for the lack of women's political participation, and ways these issues could be addressed. NDI asked participants to identify areas in which they would most appreciate further training. Areas suggested included media relations, candidate recruitment and the development of get-out-the-vote campaigns targeting women.

In early March 1998, NDI continued the election-preparedness phase of its program by conducting training sessions for party leaders and appointed campaign directors on the basic principles of organizing a national election team. NDI brought Leslie Noble, a political consultant from Toronto, to FYROM to discuss the role of each member of a campaign and conduct a S.W.O.T. (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) analysis of each party. This analysis, which helped the parties critically evaluate their election chances, was presented as a crucial first step to creating a strategic election plan. To maximize the impact of these election preparation workshops, the NDI representative had worked with each party beforehand to identify appropriate members for each election team position. Completion of a staffing chart was a pre-requisite to attending the workshops.

NDI then conducted a series of consultations with parties' youth wings to solicit input on the most helpful design and content of a youth in politics training program. In the ensuing months, NDI conducted *ad hoc* training sessions for more than 200 youth activists from DPA, LDP, PDP and VMRO on such topics as organizing targeted get-out-the-vote campaigns, door-to-door canvassing and message development. More than 70 youth activists attended the session held for VMRO-DPMNE.

In May 1998, as part of a week-long series of training sessions on voter contact, NDI organized a separate multiparty session for 30 women activists designed as a follow-up to the February women's conference. In this session, NDI discussed how parties could reach out to women voters using message targeting and door-to-door canvassing; how to recruit women volunteers; and how to present oneself positively and confidently during an election campaign. In addition, NDI conducted seminars for a women's NGO on organizing a campaign election team and media relations during a campaign. Also, NDI worked closely with the LDP on forming its Women's Group and later held two full training seminars for the Group on voter contact.

In June 1998, NDI led a study mission for 10 Macedonian political party activists to Dublin and Belfast. Each of the five largest parties (SDSM, PDP, LDP, DPA and VMRO-DPMNE) sent two representatives (one man and one woman), all of whom held election leadership roles within their party. NDI succeeded in ensuring that 50 percent of the study mission participants were women, despite objections from party leaders. The objectives of this mission were: to increase participants' understanding of conducting politics in a divided

society; to increase participants' campaign skills in such areas as voter contact, media relations and get-out-the-vote (GOTV) techniques; and to expose participants to the mechanics of a proportional representative election system. In order to meet these objectives, NDI organized a multi-faceted program that included meetings with party leaders and campaign organizers, and hands-on application of voter outreach techniques through participation in the election campaigns of several parties in Northern Ireland. Study mission participants also monitored the National Assembly elections.

The trip provided the delegation with a unique opportunity to witness a peaceful and democratic election campaign conducted in an ethnically divided society outside the Former Yugoslavia. Participants returned to their parties with a richer understanding of how democracy can flourish despite ethnic tensions. This understanding, together with a new confidence in the effectiveness of voter outreach techniques, helped them to prepare for FYROM's November 1998 parliamentary elections.

V. EVALUATION

Civic Organizing & Education

Objectives:

- C Broaden citizen awareness of governmental institutions and political processes
- C Raise the level of citizen confidence in the election process
- C Increase citizen participation in public affairs

With NDI's assistance, ACI played a central role in informing the electorate on the technical and political issues surrounding FYROM's October 1994 parliamentary and November 1996 local elections. In addition, through election monitoring training, ACI equipped roughly 1,200 citizens to determine the fairness of these two sets of elections for themselves, marking an important step in fostering citizen confidence in and ownership of the electoral processes.

The candidate debates which ACI clubs organized leading up to the local elections marked the first time in FYROM that there had been open, public dialogue between voters and candidates. These debates directly involved citizens in the pre-election process, heightened the accountability of the candidates and generated interest in the elections.

NDI focused much of its work with ACI on developing Association members' organizational planning and management skills. The Institute also assisted ACI in developing its broader role as vehicle for citizen involvement in local initiatives related to political and economic reform. Several successful ACI activities, such as the Women in Politics conference (January 1995) or the media law roundtables (October 1995), attracted widespread media coverage. As a result, the Association, and the NGOs which grew out of it, raised public

awareness of the potential role an active civil society can play in a democracy. High levels of participation in most ACI initiatives indicated citizens' interest in becoming involved in the political process.

Given the tense environment among ethnic groups, and the lack of significant dialogue among them beyond top-level political exchange, ACI's ability to create a nonpartisan, multi-ethnic civic association was a noteworthy accomplishment.

Electoral Framework

Objectives:

- C Increase public debate on election-related issues
- C Expedite the adoption and application of democratic election laws that ensure the integrity of the election process

The roundtable discussions on the 1996 local election law, which NDI sponsored, marked the first public debate ever held on pending electoral legislation. The open dialogue that took place among members of parties from across the political spectrum was presented to the public by both electronic and print media. More than 80 percent of NDI's commentary on the local election law and most of the concerns voiced by political parties during and after the roundtable were incorporated into the final version of the law passed by the Parliament.

NDI's pre-election assessment in October 1996 offered constructive commentary on the electoral environment and served as an affirmation of the international community's interest in FYROM's first local elections. The assessment delegation's findings were widely covered in the media. This coverage informed citizens across the country about technical and political issues affecting the elections. The State Electoral Commission adopted and implemented a number of the Institute's recommendations. Also, the contact NDI made with government and political party leaders during the pre-election assessment mission laid a solid foundation for NDI's political party building activities.

NDI's statement on public access to the voter's lists for the 1998 parliamentary elections was quoted by local media and used to support the political parties' advocacy on this issue. The statement helped to persuade the government to reverse its decision and to uphold the fundamental democratic principle of transparency.

NDI believes the 1997 parliamentary election law was drafted and released in a transparent manner: there was parliamentary debate on the Minister's initial draft in November 1997; the Minister personally met with all of the opposition party leaders to discuss the draft law prior to its release; and, the opinions of each party were reported in the media. Finally, the Minister of Justice announced that he would incorporate most of NDI's comments because they "contributed to the overall feeling of free and fair elections in the country." This

decision was a significant step forward in the promotion of transparency in the electoral processes of FYROM. The Minister of Justice and parties across the political spectrum stated that NDI contributed significantly to this improvement.

Political Party Development

- C Equip parties across the political spectrum to engage in regular exchange with the electorate and represent voters' interests in election and non-election periods

NDI provided political organizing training to more than 350 party leaders and activists representing more than 20 party branches of five parties-- DPA, LDP, PDP, SDSM and VMRO-DPMNE. Consistently high levels of participation, an overall participant return rate of 80 percent and continual requests from parties for more NDI training indicated that they found the party building program useful. In addition, NDI distributed evaluation forms at each training session and responses were overwhelmingly positive. Local branch success in boosting membership through such outreach techniques as door-to-door canvassing made party leaders less resistant to trying new campaign and platform development tactics. Leaders of the PDP devised their own "training of trainers" strategy to disseminate the information presented at the NDI seminar to other branches of the party. The national leader of VMRO-DPMNE was so impressed with a local branch questionnaire initiative that he expanded the survey nationwide.

It is significant that, as the November 1998 parliamentary elections drew near, parties used the information gained in their outreach efforts to shape the policies they advocated. For example, VMRO-DPMNE's heightened emphasis on economic issues and integration into Euro-Atlantic structures represented a radical shift from the party's historic focus on ethnic issues between the country's Slav Macedonians and Albanians.

The participation of youth and women in NDI's party building program steadily increased during the period covered by this report. This increase represents party leaders' heightened awareness of the importance of women and youth involvement in broadening the base of their parties, and has contributed to these groups' confidence that political organizing skills will equip them to make significant contributions to their parties. At the beginning of NDI's first women in politics seminar in February 1998, NDI inquired how many participants had considered running for office or managing a campaign; five of 30 responded. Following NDI training in such areas as targeting women voters, media relations, volunteer recruitment and public speaking, roughly half of the women present at the original seminar indicated they would pursue becoming involved in the parliamentary elections as either a candidate or campaign manager.

The Northern Ireland study mission had an extremely positive impact on its participants. Not only did they make valuable international contacts, they were able to practice many of the campaign techniques they had learned during NDI training seminars. Following the trip, during the period leading up to the November 1998 parliamentary elections, VMRO-DPMNE sent many of its candidates out to accompany and learn from the VMRO-

DPMNE study mission participants as they canvassed door-to-door. After using their newly-learned campaign skills to mobilize support throughout the summer and fall, two of the ten study mission participants (DPA and VMRO-DPMNE) were elected to parliament for the first time in November 1998. Another participant (PDP) was re-elected to parliament; another was made a member of the State Electoral Commission and a third, one of the women in the group, was appointed VMRO-DPMNE spokesperson.

VI. CONCLUSION

While the transition to a genuine, multiparty democracy is a slow and arduous process, notable progress has been achieved in FYROM since 1994. NDI has played a role in the development of increasingly responsive political parties and a civil society willing and equipped to engage in political affairs.

NDI has been able to achieve its success by maintaining maximum programmatic flexibility and responding to needs as they were perceived and articulated by the Institute's program partners. One example of this approach was NDI's willingness to focus initially on the local level in political party building, rather than to insist on working with national level leaders. This program focus was established based on the parties' need for branch development, as expressed by party leaders, and the sincere interest in developing organizational and outreach skills expressed by local activists. Success stories resulting from training at the local level were later key in ensuring high turnout at NDI's pre-election training sessions for party leaders and campaign teams. Positive feedback and program results can also be attributed to the Institute's relentless focus on strengthening democratic processes, rather than supporting specific political outcomes. This philosophy has contributed to NDI's development of relationships with program partners from across the political spectrum, and will continue to inform the Institute's efforts in promoting a true democratic transition in FYROM.

The overall goal of NDI's programming initiatives in this period was to increase citizen participation and representation in the political process. Through NDI training, political parties have begun to grasp that consulting with voters during and between elections is the key, not only to promoting a positive political image, but also to presenting solid and relevant platforms. NDI's civic work equipped citizens to hold their elected leaders accountable; determine the extent to which elections are held according to international standards; create and sustain nongovernmental organizations; organize issue-based campaigns; and address issues of importance to them through the political processes.