



Quarterly Report
FORMER YUGOSLAV REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA:
POLITICAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION
USAID Cooperative Agreement No. EE-A-00-98-00028-00
October 1 to December 31, 2000

I. SUMMARY

The National Democratic Institute for International Affairs (NDI) has provided democratization assistance in Macedonia since 1993 in the areas of civic education, election monitoring, voter education, political party building and parliamentary development. Since 1999, NDI has conducted a program designed to increase the capacity of members of parliament (MPs) to play a substantive role in legislative development. In late 1999, at the request of parliamentary group leaders and MPs, the Institute expanded the scope of its work to include constituent liaison assistance, a parliamentary internship program and consultations on the implications of transitioning from a part-time to a full-time parliament.

Macedonia's recent local elections indicate that problems facing the democratization process in the country are more widespread and pervasive than previously thought. The elections significantly decreased the optimism of NDI and the international community regarding the progress of Macedonia's political evolution. The unexpected fraud and violence in the September elections, and the subsequent runoffs, largely influenced this quarter's activities and the Institute adjusted accordingly. Much attention was paid to NDI's domestic monitoring partner, as well as the efforts of political party pollwatchers. Also, despite the unexpected political situation, NDI made significant progress in its parliamentary development program in the areas of constituent relations, information technology and the internship program.

During this quarter NDI accomplished the following:

- Recruited, selected and oriented a second class of 30 parliamentary interns;
- Conducted an international study mission for four MPs to the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland;
- Conducted an assessment of the parliament's information technology (IT) program from November 13 to 17, 2000;
- Consulted with election monitors and political parties on lessons learned following the September local elections;
- Conducted basic computer training for parliamentary staff;
- Managed the installation of parliamentary computer hardware;

- Conducted trainings on political party pollwatching; and
- Formed the Coalition Citizens for Citizens, in cooperation with seven domestic NGOs, to conduct domestic monitoring efforts.

II. BACKGROUND

On July 31, Macedonian Assembly President Savo Klimovski called for municipal elections to be held on September 10, moving election day forward by more than 45 days from the original October 31 date. This abrupt change significantly diminished the amount of campaigning time left for the opposition and presaged an election day flawed by irregularities. Although voting on election day was calm and orderly in a majority of municipalities, election observers reported incidents of ballot stuffing, proxy voting, intimidation and violence at polling stations. Additionally, the State Electoral Commission (SEC) refused to release official results. This left the local Municipal Election Councils (MECs) with the task of releasing results.

Run-off elections were held on September 24. Six “re-run” rounds were held afterward for polling stations and municipalities where the voting was interrupted. Although the second round went more smoothly, widespread ballot stuffing, group voting, proxy voting, intimidation, denying voters the right to cast their ballot, and gunfire leading to at least three deaths loomed over the election. As of this writing, complete results of the municipal elections are still not available since each municipality is responsible for issuing its own results and the SEC has been unwilling to declare the results official.

On November 24, the Democratic Alternative (DA) announced that it would leave the governing coalition to join the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) in a bid to form a new government coalition. This move came after Prime Minister Ljubco Georgievski fired prominent DA cabinet minister Melodic as a final message that the DA was no longer a welcome nor necessary partner in the governing coalition with VMRO-DPMNE.

In a joint press conference with VRMO-VMRO, PDP and SDSM, DA announced its support of its new coalition partners. SDSM announced that it would be pursuing a vote of no confidence against the governing coalition. Shortly thereafter, Savo Klimovski, president of the parliament and a member of DA, was forced to resign. For SDSM to be successful in ousting the present government, all of DA and the majority of PDP would have to support it. During subsequent votes in parliament, more than half of the PDP members supported the governing coalition, causing SDSM’s bid for a change in government to fail.

The outcome of these political maneuverings has strengthened the position of the governing VMRO-DPMNE, as opposed to bringing the government down. The government now appears to have the support of 75 deputies, an increase of 8 from when VMRO-DPMNE was partnered with DA. By moving quickly to install the new cabinet ministers from the Liberals and the PDP, VMRO-DPMNE has ensured a stable government. The appointment of six Liberal Party (LP) deputy ministers has guaranteed the support of that party, and there does not seem to be an immediate threat of a vote of no confidence.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Local Elections Program

Political Party Pollwatching

In order to reduce fraudulent election activity and subsequently increase public confidence in the electoral process, NDI set out to develop political party pollwatching and an effective domestic election monitoring effort for the 2000 local elections. The Institute worked with all major political parties in the 2000 local elections. NDI facilitated or organized workshops with the Democratic Alliance, the Liberal Party, the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia and the Democratic Party of Albanians. These parties all mounted effective party pollwatching efforts.

Following the local elections in September, NDI held consultations with political parties in order to assess the effectiveness of their party pollwatching efforts. NDI engaged the participating parties in a lessons learned exercise and sought to identify how best to support party efforts in their future work.

Nonpartisan Election Monitoring

NDI worked to help seven domestic NGOs form the coalition, Citizens for Citizens, that deployed 1,400 observers in the first round of elections, 1,600 observers in the second round of elections, and 600 monitors in the third or first re-run round of elections. The coalition issued three preliminary reports, one after each round of elections. Citizens for Citizens will issue a final report after the elections are completely concluded. National media gave the coalition extensive national media coverage, and daily newspapers carried increasingly larger stories and pictures, which accurately reported on its activities. Both the media and the public viewed the coalition as a credible authority on the local elections.

In this quarter, NDI continued its work with Citizens for Citizens to monitor the third round of local elections. The Institute has been meeting individually with the coordinators to conduct a brief session on lessons learned to improve their capabilities for domestic monitoring in future elections.

Parliamentary Staff Development

Information Technology Assistance

During this quarter, NDI Director of Information Technology Stephen Jarrett, Brian Weberg, director of the legislative management program for the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and Pam Greenberg, program principal of NCSL's legislative information services program, conducted a five-day assessment of the parliament's information technology capacity. The assessment report notes that the current project to provide computers, networking and office automation software will clearly have a dramatic and positive impact on the parliament's institutional capacity. The computers and software will improve internal and

external communications, help decentralize political power, broaden institutional knowledge and representation, aid MPs with their research and help members make informed votes on legislation. Members and staff will have access to legislation and research online, Intranet, Internet and email service. Project work was divided into the following two phases:

Phase 1: Assist in planning, funding and deploying the necessary infrastructure; ensure adequate staff training; and advocate for parliament and the information department on the budget issue.

Phase 2: Assist in the planning and development of a legislative tracking system and provide technical training as needed.

The assessment team concluded that, although much has been done to complete the tasks for Phase 1, there is still much that needs to be done. Work should be completed on Phase 1 before Phase 2 begins. The assessment team recommended that Phase 2 be split into two distinct phases. Detailed work plans and budgets for what would now be three distinct phases are shown in the assessment.

NDI conducted basic computer training for parliamentary staff on MS Word, Excel and Outlook, and the Internet. The computer school trained 137 members of the parliamentary staff. A Request for Quote (RFQ) for network installation services was drafted and distributed to companies in Skopje to provide network setup assistance to the parliament's IT sector. Bids were received, but a contract will not be awarded until work from the previous contract with Neocom is completed.

The Embassy of Estonia was asked if it would sponsor an educational visit for two members of the IT sector so the Macedonians can see how network services can be best configured for parliament. NDI hopes to send the Macedonians to Estonia for a two-day visit in January or early February 2001. English will be the bridge language so NDI staff or translators will not be necessary.

Parliamentary Internship Program

In cooperation with the U.S. Association of Former Members of Congress (USAFMC), NDI instituted a parliamentary internship program that places 25 to 30 interns among parliamentary groups. During this quarter, NDI focused on the recruitment of the second class of interns. This year, NDI will place 30 interns within the seven main parliamentary groups (VMRO-DPMNE, DPA, DA, LDP, LP, SDSM, and PDP) and in the president's cabinet. Each group of MPs within parliament will have the number of interns proportional to the number of MPs representing the party.

Parliamentary Internship Selection

NDI placed an advertisement in every major newspaper, both in Macedonian and Albanian. NDI contacted local universities and public institutions to raise awareness among

professors and students. NDI received more than 200 applications from throughout the country, with approximately 25 percent from ethnic Albanians.

The top 100 candidates were interviewed. The collective criteria were the candidate's views about the work of parliament and the legislative process, experience in conducting research and analysis, personal motivation, opinion on the current state of Macedonia's democratic development, future professional plans, time availability and party affiliation.

Intern Orientation

At the first orientation meeting, the interns introduced themselves and briefly explained their reasons for wanting to join the program. The interns were given a brief introduction to the program and its history. Several interns from the previous session made short presentations about their experiences. NDI provided each intern with a binder and an internship manual, which includes information about parliament, political parties and elections, a short essay on a typical day for an intern, and a copy of the face book of all MPs. The interns learned about NDI's history, goals and the Institute's other ongoing programs with the Macedonian Parliament.

The interns had the opportunity to meet John Hart, former USAFMC representative who was visiting Macedonia. Hart's presence greatly enhanced the orientation for the interns, as he spoke about his experiences in the U.S. Congress as an intern and a current staff member. Hart also discussed how to approach managing a legislative project systematically.

Constituent Relations Program

From October 10 through 17, NDI conducted a study mission for four Macedonian MPs to Dublin and Belfast. The five-day mission provided the MPs with opportunities to meet with Irish MPs and political leaders working in the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. The study trip was designed to give Macedonian MPs an opportunity to develop a better understanding of the techniques that Irish MPs use in their work on behalf of their constituents. Plenty of time was built into the schedule to see firsthand the techniques used by MPs in Ireland to interact effectively with their constituents. Another goal of the trip was to promote discussion among the MPs regarding the role constituent relations plays in advancing democracy within political parties, parliament and society as a whole. The study mission included a brief opportunity to speak with MPs in Northern Ireland and to see how their society is moving from violence into peaceful co-existence.

In selecting MPs to participate in the study mission, NDI sought a multipartisan group with some gender balance (there are only eight women in the Macedonian Parliament). In addition, participants had to be engaged in one or more of the five constituent relations core activities: holding office hours; consulting with NGOs; drafting and distributing newsletters; performing constituent casework; and/or hosting public meetings.

When planning the study trip, NDI determined that two interpreters were required – one for the Macedonian speakers and one for the Albanian speakers – since that is how the program is conducted in Macedonia. Having translators speaking two languages simultaneously had an

unexpected effect during the trip. In every meeting, people immediately commented on the linguistic differences between the MPs. Two languages being spoken was not looked upon as a detriment, but it was certainly noticed and led to some important questions being asked of the Macedonians by the Irish politicians. Over and over, upon noticing the linguistic duality, public officials in Ireland commented on how Irish and English are both the official languages in Ireland. For Macedonia, however, the issue of which language can legally be spoken in public institutions has been contentious since the country broke away from Yugoslavia in 1991. Constitutionally, Macedonian is the only official language. For the past 10 years, the Macedonian Parliament has operated under the old Yugoslav Rules and Procedures because the various political parties cannot agree on the language issue. Ethnic Macedonians want only Macedonian spoken during a parliamentary debate, while ethnic Albanians want the option to speak Albanian. During the trip, whenever an Irish or Northern Irish official commented on the language issue, it prompted discussions among the Macedonian MPs later in the evening.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Local Elections Program

- As a result of NDI's work with the coalition, the Macedonian national media and the general public now view Citizens for Citizens as a credible authority on the local elections. The media has given the coalition extensive national coverage, and daily newspapers carried increasingly larger stories and pictures, which accurately reported coalition activities.
- The coalition is now embarking on a plan for 2001, organizing trainings for the coordinators and for the observers that monitored the 2000 local elections. This proposal has been met with interest from at least two diplomatic missions willing to fund election monitoring related activities in 2001. The coalition is proposing to hold a "Founding Congress" early in 2001 and to outline a new structure that would make the organization more palatable to new organizations joining it. The coalition plans to deploy 6,000 well-trained observers for the 2002 parliamentary elections.

Parliamentary Internship Program

- As a result of their previous positive experience with NDI's program, members of parliament now entrust greater responsibility to the parliamentary interns. In comparison to last year, interns have been called upon to make complex legislative and economic analysis at a much earlier stage in this year's program.

Constituent Relations

As a result of the study mission to Ireland, the following results have been noted:

- A select group of MPs have formed a solid professional and personal relationship that allows them to communicate even in an atmosphere of tension between their respective political parties in the parliament.

- MPs have begun to think that parliament should host mini-retreats within Macedonia for multipartisan groups of MPs in order to strengthen professionalism and reduce partisan bickering.
- When the Macedonian Assembly reviews legislation on the role of MPs, some MPs who participated in the study mission to Ireland will lobby for funding for constituency offices.
- The city of Bitola, with the help of Deputy Jovanov, has begun the process of becoming a sister city to Bray, Ireland.
- Deputy Jordanova now actively promotes the idea of constituent-MP contact and has secured office space for her constituent work.
- Deputy Jordanova visited the largest factory in her constituency (600 employees) in order to hear the employees' concerns regarding pension laws.

V. EVALUATION

Local Elections Program

NDI's initial workplan focused only on political party pollwatching, however, after several discussions with USAID, the Institute decided to conduct a domestic monitoring project that centered on a coalition of NGOs. The coalition, Citizens for Citizens, was the first of its kind in Macedonia. A multiethnic cadre of Macedonian and Albanian NGOs came together to conduct an election monitoring project, and roughly 1,600 monitors were deployed across the country.

In this quarter, NDI and the Citizens for Citizens coordinators discussed the successes and failures of the coalition in monitoring the elections in an effort to improve the deployment and organization of monitors in the 2002 parliamentary elections. The problems identified include a weak communications structure, poor management skills on the part of the coordinators and central committee, the failure to make the coalition truly multiethnic, and the coalition's perceived partisanship. In addition, the lack of money for the monitoring effort was raised as well as the insufficient amount of supplies (only 1,200 t-shirts were distributed to the 1600 plus monitors).

The political parties that met with NDI since the elections found the Institute's election manuals and workshops useful. They all mounted effective poll-watching efforts across the country, deploying thousands of party supporters. However, all political parties expressed the same concern that much of the information and assistance came late in the campaign. While this was due in part to the elections being moved up by six weeks, the parties indicated they would have had more time to organize and create a strategic plan had they worked with NDI in the spring or even as late as June 2000. All expressed interest in political party building as a means of overcoming some of the problems that occurred during the elections due to over enthusiastic supporters.

Constituent Relations

A week after the study mission to Ireland, NDI interviewed the participants to find out their impressions and to get an overall evaluation of the trip. Overwhelmingly, the MPs were impressed by the organization of the trip, the quality of the meetings, the smoothness of the logistics, and the way they were treated. They also appreciated the opportunity to get to know their colleagues outside of parliament in an atmosphere free of antagonism. Most of the group still gather for coffee once a day in an effort to stay in touch. Several brought up the idea that parliament should host mini-retreats within Macedonia for small groups of MPs so they can also get to know each other away from parliament's quarrelsome atmosphere.

Deputy Jonuz Abdullai shared his experiences with his party president, Arben Xhaferi. Deputy Abdullai is hopeful that the establishment of constituency offices can somehow be implemented before the end of his mandate (in 2002). Deputy Sulejmani, the only opposition MP able to attend, said that in just seven days he became "strangely connected" to his colleagues. Deputy Jovanov, a surgeon by profession, was fascinated with the idea of democratically electing the party leadership. In addition, Deputy Jovanov has begun the process of pairing Bitola (the city in his constituency) with Bray, Ireland, to create sister cities.

Deputy Jordanova shared her experiences with her party (VMRO-DPMNE) as well as with numerous women's groups. Since her return, she procured space for a future constituency office and hopes to hold office hours soon. Like many Macedonian MPs, she finds the idea of meeting constituents door-to-door unnerving, but she has begun to actively seek out groups of constituents. Recently, she visited the largest factory in her district (600 employees) in order to hear about their pension problems.

Quotes

"After the NDI-sponsored trip to Ireland, I think differently; I look at the world differently."
Jonuz Abdullai, DPA

"When I review the new legislation about the role of MPs, I will contribute what I saw and heard in Ireland."
Jonuz Abdullai, DPA

"This trip to Ireland helped me connect with other MPs. All we hear from each other in the Assembly is quarreling."
Oloman Sulejmani, PDP

"This trip allowed me to see the way that the full spectrum of politics – local government, Parliament, constituents – can function and work together."
Nikola Jovanov, DA

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

Political Party Development

In the first quarter of 2001, NDI will conduct an assessment of the Macedonian political parties in order design a program that would increase internal democratic operations and decentralize political power within the parties.

Parliamentary Development

NDI is conducting a candidate search for a new field representative to replace Rick Stoddard, who departed on December 15, 2000.

Parliamentary Internship Program

Topics for the weekly meetings will include constituent relations, survey techniques, research and analysis, and coalition building. Emphasis will be placed on providing the interns with practical, hands-on projects rather than lectures.

To date, NDI has not been able to place an intern in the office of the president of the Assembly. The previous president, Dr. Savo Klimovski, remained in a political crisis throughout the fall. Once his party (DA) withdrew from the governing coalition at the end of November, Klimovski resigned from office. Further contacts will be initiated after the situation calms down.

Constituent Relations

NDI will consult with the party coordinators in parliament for recommendations of participants for the third round of consultations.

As the Northern Irish MPs' efforts to help ease tensions in their communities and work toward a more unified society is exceptionally relevant for Macedonian MPs, who are still grappling with their own ethnic differences, a study mission to Northern Ireland, therefore, would give a new and expanded number of MPs an opportunity to examine the role of parliamentarians in a divided society. This study mission would focus on how MPs can conduct constituent relations in order to build connections, forge consensus and increase citizens' trust in their institution.

The political parties provide little in the way of training in voter or constituent outreach. Subsequently, MPs and candidates are unsure of precisely how to effectively conduct such outreach. While MPs do think it is a good idea, they cite a long list of reasons why it would not work in Macedonia. As most of the reasons point to an inability to handle the stress of such situations, the MPs need to practice – among their colleagues – and an afternoon training on door-to-door constituent outreach will be planned for the near future.