



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, 2001

I. SUMMARY

Although the violence that characterized the political conflict in Macedonia during 2001 diminished significantly this quarter, the crisis itself is far from over. Parliamentary work on the passage and implementation of the August 13, 2001, Ohrid Agreements, and the constitutional and legal changes contained therein, proceeded in fits and starts. The process has been characterized by political infighting, a marginalization of moderate voices within the political system, and an almost total lack of communication between political leaders and citizens regarding the important changes being discussed. Although the violence of previous months has more or less subsided, there are fears that renewed outbreaks of fighting could begin in the spring; NATO forces remain indefinitely stationed in the most volatile areas of the country. In addition, a lack of clarity and speculation over the date of parliamentary elections, as well as the required national census, contribute to an overall feeling of insecurity within Macedonia.

Against this backdrop, after a near five-month evacuation, NDI returned to Macedonia in late October 2001 and deployed a new country director in November. Given the new political environment, the Institute and USAID agreed to amend NDI's work plan with new objectives and activities to better address the crisis-related needs of Macedonia. Therefore, program activity in this quarter concentrated on conducting focus groups, preparing election-related activities, and the continuation of specific aspects of the parliamentary development program.

II. BACKGROUND

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 worked to increase the capacity of members of parliament (MPs) in their roles as legislators and elected political representatives. Such capacity building is achieved through training MPs and their staff on caucus operations, commission functions, and constituent relations. Considerable progress has been achieved in the transfer of political and legislative skills to individual members of parliament, and promising institutional developments have occurred. Still, inter-ethnic political conflict bordering on open and prolonged warfare has impeded NDI's program implementation and has laid bare important, persistent challenges to the country's stability and, therefore, its democratization.

The violence, which broke out at the beginning of 2001 between the ethnic-Albanian National Liberation Army (NLA) and Macedonian government forces has subsided, at least temporarily. In part, the cessation of open hostilities is a result of the Framework Agreement for Peace, also known as the Ohrid Peace Accord, signed on August 13. The Framework Agreement outlined constitutional amendments intended to improve the status of ethnic Albanians in Macedonia: an increase from 5 to 25 percent of ethnic Albanian representation in the police force; use of second language in official communication with government institutions for minorities (for minorities with 20 percent of local population); use of the Albanian language in parliament; equitable employment for minorities in state institutions; territorial integrity; and a devolution of power to local government. In the constitutional preamble, the state is now described as made up of citizens of Macedonia, which includes the Macedonian people, as well as Albanians, Turks, Vlachs and Serbs residing in Macedonia.

Ratification of the Agreement and the implementation of the required changes contained within have been fraught with obstacles. Politicians on both sides of the debate have engaged in stalling tactics and appeals to nationalist sentiment in what appear to be attempts at manipulating the process to gain political ground. Although it seems that moderates within the parliament would like to see the changes made and the peace process cemented, hard-liners on both sides continue to dominate the debate. Due to the tenuous nature of the cease-fire, in October President Trajkovski requested an extension of the current NATO troop presence of roughly 1,000 soldiers. The NATO mandate has since been extended, although it is still unclear exactly how long its presence will be required.

The cycle of stalling and returning to progress continued throughout this quarter, as Macedonian politicians addressed, or in some cases did not address, the changes required by the Agreement. Accordingly, pressure from the international community increased, resulting in the indefinite postponement of a proposed IMF Donors Conference for Macedonia due to an inability on the part of parliament to legislate reforms. On November 15, the parliament finally passed a package of constitutional amendments that had been agreed to in August. Out of a total of 120 MPs, 90 voted affirmatively for the changes. Since that time, other contentious issues have remained unresolved, such as a previously agreed-to general amnesty for former NLA combatants who are not accused of war crimes and the Law on Local Self-Government. Although the partial devolution of power to the local level is generally supported, hard-line Macedonians fear that it would lead to a federalization of the country. The month of December passed without any final resolution to this problem.

The timing of parliamentary elections has been another divisive issue. When a unity government was formed to address the crisis in April, one of the conditions laid down by the former opposition party, the Social Democratic Union (SDSM), was the holding of early elections. Parliamentary elections had been scheduled for November 2002, but an early date of January 27, 2002, was then named. However, the possibility of holding elections as early as January has been rejected due to the slow pace of progress on the ratification and implementation of the Framework Agreement and because of serious delays in re-establishing state authority over some volatile areas. Furthermore, with opinion polls showing a great decline in the popularity of many politicians and political leaders, the parties are reluctant to hold elections in

the immediate future. Although it is thought that elections may be called for April, there is still considerable doubt over whether they will indeed occur before the fall of 2002.

NDI's long-term goal in Macedonia has been for the parliament to build and maintain ties with the electorate, draft and analyze legislation, and conduct legislative oversight. This goal falls under USAID's strategic objective 2.1.2 (strengthened parliamentary structures and operations and enhanced communications between citizens and legislators). However, these objectives have been greatly impeded by an inability to work with a parliament that throughout the year was rarely in session and was utterly distracted by the situation at hand. Furthermore, the year's events have overtaken the political reality in Macedonia, and in the current fluid and volatile political environment, long-term parliamentary institution building must be temporarily put aside. In order to respond to what the Institute sees as Macedonia's current challenges to democratization, NDI's priorities and activities have, in the short term, shifted to focus on more direct work with political parties including assisting those who seek resolution to the conflict and more open, transparent politics; helping create an environment for free and fair elections that will reduce the potential for fraud, intimidation and violence; and continuing to track and assess the opinions and attitudes of the electorate as a way to measure progress, positively influence the political dynamics, and provide salient information to key individuals and organizations involved in the process.

III. PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

NDI's Return to Macedonia and Deployment of Country Director

In October 2001, the temporary evacuation order issued by the U.S. Department of State was lifted, and on October 23 NDI's resident representative returned to Macedonia. In addition, the Institute deployed Sheila Fruman as country director on November 15. Fruman has more than 25 years of experience in legislative governance and politics, electoral and political campaigns, political communications, media relations, opinion research and civil society development. Her previous work for NDI involved working with members of parliament and political parties in Algeria, providing training on voter research, media relations and message development.

During the first six weeks of her presence in Macedonia, Fruman met with politicians from six major political parties, representatives of Polio Plus, Citizens for Citizens (C4C), the Nansen Dialogue Center, NDI's parliamentary interns, numerous women involved in politics, MPs, representatives of the International Republican Institute (IRI), the International Solidarity Center, the Local Government Reform Project, IREX, the International Foundation for Election Systems (IFES), the American Bar Association-Central and East European Law Initiative (ABA-CEELI) and the Canadian and American Embassies.

Staff Development

In response to a request from USAID that NDI Macedonia staff who participated in the September professional development training in Washington D.C. share their experiences with other in-country personnel of USAID implementers in Macedonia, the Institute's staff presented a refined presentation to staff from IRI, USAID and IFES. This successful group public speaking

effort was followed by a question and answer session in which they delivered a thorough analysis of the current political situation.

Parliamentary Internship Program

NDI restarted its Parliamentary Internship program in early October following consultations with the parliamentary group coordinators. 24 interns from the previous year agreed to continue their work, providing valuable assistance to the Macedonian MPs during the debate on the Framework Agreement.

However, in some cases, productive work by the interns was disrupted by the uncertainty of the broader political situation. For example, as the MPs waited for President Trajkovski to present the constitutional amendments to the parliament, committees met sporadically and plenary sessions were rare-leaving some interns with little substantive work. Since MPs were focused on passage of the Agreement's conditions, many were simply awaiting instructions from their political leaders. In spite of this, several interns were able to advance their own legislative drafting projects, along with providing MPs with a comparative analysis of electoral systems and foreign affairs laws in Slovenia, Croatia and Yugoslavia.

Recruitment for the next class of interns will begin in March 2002, with final selection completed by May 2002. The new group of interns will begin work either in fall 2002 or when a new parliament is elected, whichever comes first.

Non-partisan Election Monitoring

With the assistance of NDI, in November and December C4C finalized its budget, set organizational priorities, including a clear delineation of administrative and coordinative staff responsibilities, and established a timeline of activities. Several NDI staff members, including CEE Regional Director, Robert Benjamin, met with C4C's board members and regional coordinators to discuss C4C's activities for the 2002 parliamentary election: training of 3,000 monitors; conducting parallel vote tabulation on election day; creating a public awareness campaign aimed at volunteer recruitment; and monitoring media coverage of candidates and political parties during the election cycle.

Focus Groups

With the understanding that a peaceful and politically stable environment is a prerequisite to democratic development, NDI believed it was imperative to gain a better awareness of citizens' understanding of and views toward the current political situation in Macedonia. To assess the current views and attitudes of a variety of citizens, NDI conducted a series of focus groups.

Between December 15 and 19, NDI conducted seven focus groups with approximately 70 participants selected from Bitola, Tetovo and Skopje. These cities were selected in order to provide widespread and varied geographical representation of Macedonian citizens. Four groups consisted of Macedonian participants and three groups were constituted of ethnic-Albanians.

The specific purpose of the groups was to assess awareness of and attitudes toward the Framework Agreement, explore the need for public information about the Agreement, assess the potential for MPs to communicate with their constituents about the Agreement, determine if there were shared values among Macedonians and Albanians, and situate the Agreement within the overall perceptions of the current political situation in Macedonia after the crisis. The groups were conducted using local moderators provided by BRIMA, a Macedonian research firm. BRIMA also provided simultaneous translation for each group. In attendance were NDI Macedonia Country Director Sheila Fruman and David Calef of New York-based Penn, Schoen and Berland, the firm contracted by NDI to oversee and analyze the research.

A full, detailed report of the research results will be available in January from Penn, Schoen, and Berland, although preliminary analysis on the results is currently being conducted by NDI Macedonia. The extent to which the results will be made public, as well as the exact determination of the audience(s) to whom the results will be presented, is being determined.

A preliminary analysis of the research suggests the following:

- The most pressing issues facing the country for both Macedonians and Albanians are unemployment, the poor state of the economy, political corruption, the unresolved crisis and resulting lack of security, government incompetence and mismanagement and political self-interest.
- Although both groups expressed a strong desire for the country to return to “normal,” many fear that the damage may be too big to repair. Nonetheless, they continue to express the hope that the fighting will not resume and that they will somehow be able to get on with their lives and put the past behind them.
- While some clearly feel betrayed by the way in which the Agreement was negotiated or, in the view of some, imposed by outsiders, by and large people seem eager for real information about what it contains and how it will be implemented. There is a desire, expressed in all the groups, for more information: “there is no opportunity to discuss the pros and cons; we need it for economic reasons but I fear what it will mean; it’s being implemented with no information; not getting any information except in the media.”
- People want politicians to start working together on finding solutions. Since the Agreement was signed by the four major parties, it provides an opportunity for politicians to show that they can work together. If this could be demonstrated, it would be a welcome change. One participant said, “Both sides should find honest leaders who will promote the idea of living together.”

Political Party Training

In preparation for the 2002 parliamentary elections, NDI is working in conjunction with the Nansen Dialogue Center (NDC), a conflict management skills-building organization, to conduct an intensive program for political party activists and candidates.

During this quarter, NDI conducted a series of consultations with Alek Petkovski, NDC's political director, to refine the terms and conditions of future cooperation. The first of four jointly held seminars is scheduled to begin in January 2002.

Other Consultations and Activities

Women in Politics

NDI hosted two informal events for women politicians and political leaders, the first in November and the second in December. These get-togethers allowed NDI to gather information on the current political climate and assess each political party's needs regarding women's development, as well as maintain existing relationships with women political leaders. Importantly, they are one of the only vehicles to encourage and facilitate inter-party communication and cooperation among the participants themselves. Women political leaders from different parties rarely, if ever, have the opportunity to gather and discuss issues of mutual concern. Therefore, the NDI-hosted gatherings provided a unique opportunity for dialogue.

The second gathering, held on December 11, was intended as an informal way to introduce Fruman and Benjamin to the women in attendance. Eleven women politicians were present, including the presidents of the women's sections of the Social Democratic Alliance of Macedonia (SDSM), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), Liberal Party (LP), Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–True Macedonian Reformist Option (VMRO-VMRO), New Democracy (ND) and Socialist Party (SP), the secretary of the first branch of the women's section of the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) Kicevo, a member of the PDP national presidency, the deputy coordinator of the VMRO-VMRO parliamentary group, and the president of the NGO "Women's Action."

All of the political party representatives emphasized the importance of increasing women's practical skills, especially in communications, and the need for greater confidence-building measures as a way to counter their parties' continued marginalization. The group also supported the introduction of a quota requiring parties to nominate women for one-third of all parliamentary candidates. Throughout this time, NDI continued to act in an advisory role for several women's political organizations, such as Women's Action, which aim to increase the number of women in public office.

Polio Plus

Polio Plus, a disability-rights NGO based in Skopje, has begun conducting an advocacy campaign directed at political parties. In order to increase awareness of disability issues, as well as to increase the representation of disabled individuals within the political system, Polio Plus has asked the largest political parties to commit to fielding at least one candidate with a disability in the upcoming parliamentary election. NDI agreed to offer advice as well as candidate-training if and when appropriate.

IV. RESULTS AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Information Technology: As a result of NDI's technical assistance, parliament listed on its web site the voting record of each MP for each constitutional amendment passed as required by the Framework Agreement.

Parliamentary Internship Program: As a result of NDI's training, parliamentary interns continued to provide legislative drafting support, including proposals for a new coat of arms and comparative analysis of electoral and foreign affairs laws.

V. EVALUATION

The temporary absence of an in-country representative and the severe political crisis significantly hindered program implementation throughout the previous two quarters. Throughout the conflict, NDI's local staff provided daily updates on political events and maintained contact with Macedonian political leaders and parliamentary staff as much as possible. However, the return of NDI's resident representative following the lifting of the evacuation order on October 23 marked a long-awaited return to normalcy and a renewed period of program activity for both the expatriate and local staff.

Given the events of the last two quarters, NDI revised its 2001 objectives to fit political realities. In October, the Institute submitted a revised description of program activities and in November received USAID approval. NDI anticipates focusing on new objectives before, during and shortly after the next parliamentary election cycle. Although anticipated in the first quarter of 2002, it is quite possible that elections will not be held until October or November of 2002, which has made program planning and implementation a more complicated exercise. NDI is conducting its activities with the expectation of elections on April 27, 2002, while simultaneously planning for the possibility of a sudden change in the date.

In consultation with USAID, NDI suspended the majority of its institutional building objectives until after the election period, with the following exceptions:

Objective: Members of parliament and parliamentary staff have skills with which to conduct legislative affairs through expanded information technology.

Objective: An expanded group of parliamentary interns increases legislative research skills and begins to work outside the party caucus groups in other parliamentary domains, such as commissions.

The following objectives were approved for the election period:

Objectives

- Orient Macedonian politicians toward constructive leadership and engagement with citizens in the peace process.

- Provide communications strategies so that MPs can approach constituents and foster dialogue about the impact of the Framework Agreement and the resulting constitutional amendments.
- Help create a pre-election environment that encourages fair and more transparent elections.
- Assist in reducing conflict among political parties before, during, and after the 2002 parliamentary elections.

VI. FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In response to the ongoing conflict and impending elections, currently anticipated for the end of April 2002, NDI expects to conduct the following activities in the next quarter:

Resident Representative Deployment

In January NDI will deploy a new resident representative, Johan Hamels, to run the political party program. During the next quarter, Hamels will take on the primary responsibility of organizing and conducting the candidate schools.

Information Technology

During this quarter, information technology assistance to the parliament was curtailed owing to the dissolution of the Assembly and the cessation of regular parliamentary business. Following the open hostilities in Skopje that culminated in violence directed at the parliament itself in the summer of 2001, NDI put on hold its package of material assistance, including servers, firewalls and software purchases. Following the restoration of NDI's parliamentary program, these installations and upgrades - important to the future operational efficiency of parliamentary communication and research - will be reordered and installed in the first or second quarter of 2002. Once the appropriate hardware and software have been reordered, NDI's Information Technology Director Stephen Jarrett will visit Skopje to oversee its installation and will remain to conduct follow-up training and consultations.

Focus Groups Presentations

Beginning in January, NDI will host a series of meetings to present the findings from the December focus groups. Preliminarily, NDI is planning to present the findings to members of parliament, political parties, local NGOs, NDI will also present the findings in Washington D.C. to USAID, international organizations and other interested parties.

Roundtables

In the weeks following the focus groups, a roundtable discussion will draw together Macedonian politicians with their counterparts from other societies in conflict (e.g. Northern Ireland, Lebanon, Belgium, S. Africa, Canada) to discuss the methods of managing conflict

attempted in these countries and their relative success or failure. Each roundtable will be accompanied by single-party consultations to provide Macedonian politicians with concrete examples of effective political and communications strategies. In January, NDI will explore Macedonian politicians' willingness to participate in such discussions.

Election Monitoring

In order to assist C4C in monitoring upcoming parliamentary elections in 2002, NDI will provide a sub grant to C4C as well as offer consultations and assistance in the coordination and implementation of its monitoring effort. In 2002, C4C intends to deepen its oversight of the electoral process through an expansion of its volunteer base, and implement a more organized and professional public relations and information campaign. Throughout the election cycle, C4C will analyze not only the relative treatment of candidates and political parties but also inter-ethnic tolerance.

Political Party Development/Candidate School

In conjunction with the Nansen Dialogue Center, NDI will conduct an intensive program for political party activists and candidates in order to foster attitudes that stimulate dialogue between individuals and groups with different stances and to provide practical advice on negotiation skills, risk assessment, and violence reduction. The goal of the program is to provide party activists and potential candidates with the techniques and skills to mount an effective campaign based on democratic election principles that are non-violent, non-racist, and inclusive. In addition, the program is intended to improve the overall quality of campaigns and thus the level of voter turnout. Alongside election preparation techniques, participants will learn about ways to support democratic participation, protection of human rights, and conflict management methods appropriate to the election environment.

Specific training topics will include the following:

- Office organization (choosing staff, recruiting volunteers, fundraising, and strategic planning);
- Communications (message creation and dissemination);
- Voter contact and identification;
- Get out the vote (GOTV) efforts
- Political party monitoring
- Conflict management skills (training provided with Nansen Dialogue Center)