

Macedonia. Presidential Election, First round: 31st October 1999

Background

Since the Macedonian Social Democratic Alliance (SDSM) was defeated in parliamentary elections last year Macedonia has been ruled by a coalition consisting of the nationalist VMRO-DPMNE (Macedonian Internal Revolutionary Organisation) and the radical Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA), led by Arben Xhaferi. Together, these two parties occupy half of the seats in the Macedonian parliament. The coalition was strengthened by the inclusion of the Democratic Alternative party led by Vasil Tupurkovski, who was appointed head of the country's privatisation agency.

VMRO won the parliamentary elections in 1998 promising change for Macedonia. Critics alleged that the SDSM government had left the country impoverished. The situation had not been helped by the international sanctions against Yugoslavia and a blockade of the country by Greece over the country's name and flag. In the minds of many the SDSM was a by-word for nepotism and corruption; VMRO played on these sentiments. Yet almost a year after taking power the VMRO government has lost most of its credibility with the electorate. If anything, the new rulers are perceived to be even more corrupt than the SDSM. Apart from a few sell-offs of state-owned enterprises to foreign investors - the country's oil-refinery has been sold to Greece, while the state-owned savings-bank Stopanska Banka was acquired by the EBRD and a Greek bank - the government has made little progress in introducing economic reform.

In response, the government maintains that the Kosovo crisis earlier in the year and the resulting flow of refugees interrupted its domestic economic policies. But Macedonians are aware that the crisis also opened up possibilities for illegal and semi-legal trade - for instance, cigarette smuggling. It is widely assumed that officials in the new administration pick up payments for awarding export-licenses. It is also alleged that the two main government parties funded their campaign coffers from such activities.

The ruling coalition was certainly resolute in replacing many state-employees with new cadres in both government-sponsored newspapers, *Nova Makedonia* and *Vecer*, for example. The former editor-in-chief of *Nova Makedonia*, Erol Rizaov, was fired and now runs a new newspaper *Utrinski Vesnik* which is closer to the SDSM opposition. The new editor of *Nova Makedonia* is a 25-year-old, student, Nikol Tasev, who was accused during the presidential election campaign of bias in favour of the VMRO candidate, Boris Trajkovski, whilst rubbishing the candidate of the SDSM, Tito Petkovski. On the other hand, the new editor-in-chief of *Vecer*, Goran Mihailovski, has had to resist various attempts by the authorities to influence his editorial policy. He says that ministers have phoned him during the election campaign demanding a more pro-government line from his paper.

Another factor which has made VMRO less popular during the last year is a suspicion that the party contains pro-Bulgarian elements. The Minister for Culture Dmitri Dimitrov quite openly declares his affinity with Bulgaria, while VMRO member Mladen Srbinovski who heads the University Library (a public appointment) describes himself as a Macedonain with Bulgarian blood.

The candidates

On Sunday 31st October the Macedonian electorate went to the polls for the first round of the presidential elections. According to the constitution after serving two terms as president Kiro Gligorov had to step down. Had he been able to run again few Macedonian observers doubted that he would have been re-elected.

As it was, six candidates contested the election in the first round. The two Albanian candidates, Muarem Nexhipi of the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) now in the government and Muhamed Halili of the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) which had participated in the previous governing coalition - knew they had no chance of winning in a country where only a quarter of the population is Albanian. Yet, the Albanian vote would prove to be decisive in the second round two weeks later.

Vasil Tupurkovski, a former Macedonian member of the collective leadership of the former Yugoslavia, attempted to make inroads in the Albanian vote by putting forward a non-ethnically based programme. Stojan Andov, a member of the Liberal Democratic Party and a former speaker of parliament, was the fourth candidate. The two main contenders were Boris Trajkovski of the ruling party VMRO and Tito Petkovski of the opposition Social-Democratic Union (SDSM).

As the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Trajkovski was little-known to most Macedonians. He only entered public life during the refugee-crisis earlier in the year when he stated publicly that Western countries should take in the Kosovo-Albanian refugees themselves if they continued with their criticism of Macedonia's treatment of them. More puzzlingly, he is a Protestant (according to some a Seventh-Day Adventist, while others claim he is a Methodist) in an overwhelmingly Orthodox and Muslim country. Although religion did not seem to play a part in the election many Macedonians found this aspect of his biography rather strange. By the time of the second round of posters for Trajkovski in Skopje were defaced by graffiti saying, in Macedonian, '*sektaj*' (sect). Whether rightly or wrongly, some people suspected that he had connections with the kinds of Protestant missionaries, usually based in the United States, who have penetrated Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union since the collapse of Communism.

The SDSM candidate, Tito Petkovski, was a former Speaker of the Macedonian parliament. He was also little-known. During his campaign rallies he relied on the party leader, Branko Crvenkovski to garner support. It is thought that Crvenkovski himself would have stood as a candidate for the presidency had he not been too young under the terms of the Macedonian constitution.

Campaign

Although some complaints were made, the opposition parties were generally satisfied with the conduct of the campaign prior to the first round of voting. Stojan Andov's party the LDP, for instance, claimed that VMRO had used the state-owned electricity company to display banners for Boris Trajkovski on power lines in the streets. Radmilla Shekerinska spokeswoman for the SDSM said that state media was heavily biased against Mr. Petkovski. *Nova Makedonia* was unashamedly pro-Trajkovski while Macedonian Television manipulated news reports of SDSM public meetings. Before the first round two observers spent much of the evening of 16th October watching Macedonian television when a succession of (paid-for) advertisements for Boris Trajkovski and Stojan Andov were played especially on commercial television.

The OSCE observer mission commended the fact that Macedonian television broadcasted election news in all the regions of the country. Yet, curiously, it went on to criticise the broadcasts for being far too biased towards the ruling party.

Election day (31st October, 1999)

On 31st October BHHRG observers visited several polling stations in Skopje and in the mainly Albanian-inhabited town of Tetovo in the west of the country. On the whole, voting proceeded in an orderly manner. At the parliamentary election in 1998 the introduction of compulsory voting cards created problems. Many people then said that they had either not received the card, others admitted that they had failed to collect it. There were far fewer problems during the 31st October poll. Only a few voters showed up at the polling stations without their cards when they were not allowed to cast their ballot by the local election commission.

Voting booths consisted of low pieces of cardboard set on a table in the polling station. There are no separate curtained-off cabins in Macedonian elections. Inevitably, the secrecy of the ballot is not adequately protected and it was always possible for people in the voting room to find out how someone had voted should they want to do so. In such circumstances pressure can easily be exerted on the voter. The introduction of transparent ballot boxes is also a mixed blessing. While they may present a deterrent to activities like ballot stuffing they are also a glaring reminder to possible mischief-makers that the turn-out in a particular polling station is low and recalcitrant voters should be urged to come out and vote.

It is important to note that the turn-out in Tetovo on 31st October was on the low side. For example, in polling station number 1956 only 33% had voted by 3:30 p.m. (the polls closed at 7 p.m.). According to the chairman the turn-out this time was much lower than that of the parliamentary elections in 1998. A similarly low turn-out was noted in other polling stations visited. If local Albanians were particularly anxious to make a statement of their political strength it might have been expected that they would have turned out in this first round to back one or other of the two ethnic Albanian candidates, rather than in the second round when their votes would have to go into the pool of a non-Albanian candidate with all his other votes.

In all the polling stations visited representatives of the various parties sat on the electoral commission. Also, observers for the various candidates were mostly present; none of them made any complaints about the voting on election day itself.

Results: Tito Petkovski (SDSM) 304,167
Boris Trajkovski (VMRO) 188,826
Vasil Tupurkovski (DA) 146,835
Muarem Nexhipi (DPA) 131,291
Stojan Andov (LDP) 102,550
Muhamed Halili (PDP) 38,705
Turn-out: 63.45%

Second Round: 14th November 1999

Pre election Period

The second round of voting was held on 14 November between the two candidates who had gained the largest number of votes on 31st October, Boris Trajkovski and Tito Petkovski. In the intervening fortnight there was speculation as to who the losing candidates would support. The turn-out would be crucial in the second round. In the event of less than 50% voting, the ballot would be invalid and a new full election would have to be called within 60 days. In the meantime the speaker of parliament, who is a member of the Democratic Alternative, would take on the role of interim-president.

Vasil Tupurkovski, who came third in the first round, refused to give his voters any advice leaving it to themselves to decide. However, his absence abroad on election day and therefore his inability to vote (Macedonians cannot vote in embassies abroad) could have inspired his supporters to stay at home. A low turn-out could have potentially benefited him since it would have provided him with a second chance to stand for the presidency assuming that a defeated Trajkovski did not run again. On election day itself BHHRG observers met several DA-voters who had decided to abstain.

Stojan Andov called upon his supporters to vote for Petkovski in the second round, while the smaller of the two Albanian parties, the PDP of Muhamed Halili, advised his voters to abstain. Arben Xhaferi, leader of the DPA, is alleged to have said that the Albanian people would be brave to vote for the right candidate. It must have been clear to anyone whom he meant by that.

Mr. Trajkovski himself expressed confidence in his chances and anticipated a big turn-out in a brief conversation with a BHHRG observer during Liberation Day celebrations at the Partisan Monument in Skopje. However, on the day before polling his spokesman Ljuben Paunovski seemed much less up-beat in a long discussion with the Group's observers. Mr. Paunovski admitted that Trajkovski's candidacy would be damaged if the Albanians of Xhaferi's DPA openly supported him. Moreover, he claimed that the SDSM policy of portraying VMRO as too pro-Albanian during the Kosovo refugee crisis and the election campaign had been successful and had lost VMRO many votes in the first round.

Mr. Paunovski admitted that some aspects of the NATO/KFOR presence, particularly the issue of legal immunity for the perpetrators of traffic accidents was a negative factor for the VMRO. Although according to Jan Joosten, spokesman for KFOR, only 1% of car accidents in the country involved KFOR vehicles, it was clear that the NATO presence had lost support among the population and that this had damaged the government's popularity. Also, loud promises of economic assistance from Western leaders like Tony Blair during the Kosovo War had not been fulfilled, although they were not forgotten by many people in Macedonia. Neither does NATO yet pay for the use of facilities such as barracks and exercise areas

Neither had the de-recognition of the People's Republic of China and the accreditation of Taiwan as Macedonia's preferred Chinese partner produced the US\$ 1billion widely anticipated back in February 1999. Over the past 11 months only some US\$ 200 million seems to have been invested in the country, and not all of that came from Taiwan. The Kosovo refugee crisis and the related issues had consumed the new government's time so soon after its election. Mr. Paunovski said that "literally" whole working days had been consumed by meetings with foreigners on this issue alone leaving no time and energy for domestic issues.

Meanwhile, the economic hardship of the population increases daily as was demonstrated by a group of homeless people who camped outside an empty building in the centre of Skopje in tents which they had labelled 'Stenkovac No. 5' - a reference to the refugee-camps that housed Albanians during the Kosovo crisis. Despite the omnipresence of hundreds of international aid organisations in the city none of them seem to be able or willing to help them since all the aid is destined for Kosovo. Unemployment in Macedonia now stands at 300.000.

Mr. Paunovski thought that the coalition in Parliament would survive but he expressed regret at Tupurkovski's "personal decision" to abstain in the second round of the election and anticipated that this could cause problems in the future.

Election day

After visiting polling stations in Skopje where everything seemed correct, BHHRG observers travelled to the western part of Macedonia. Our observers had been told that the Albanian community there would not turn out to vote and it was important to see whether or not this turned out to be true.

In the mainly Gypsy district of Shutka in Skopje turnout was very low. In the first round it had been between 30 and 40% while in station number 2968 only six out of 746 people had voted at 9:15 in the morning of 14th November. Problems with the voting-cards remained in this district. The chairman of the commission estimated that on 31 October some 20% of people lacked the card. According to him, the price of a new card (100 denar) was too steep for many people. It seemed that in this district Petkovski and Tupurkovski had done well in the first round, while Trajkovski collected only a handful of votes.

At around 11:00 in the morning Macedonian radio announced that turn-out in the whole country had been 10% at 10 a.m. In other stations in Skopje voting proceeded without major problems;

most commission chairmen estimated that the turnout was between 10 and 20% lower than two weeks previously at the same time of the day.

Fraud in Tetovo

In Tetovo BHHRG first visited four polling stations (which housed sub-stations) around the town centre. These were generally mixed neighbourhoods with both Albanians and Macedonians living in them. On 31st October, 1999, their results varied (including from sub-station to sub-station within the same building), but in only one overwhelmingly Albanian polling station (57/1943) had the DPA candidate scored a crushing victory: Nexhipi 275, Petkovski 22, Halili 20, Trajkovski 5, Andov 2, Tupurkovski 0. Elsewhere Mr. Petkovski had come first (57/1947 with 51% of the vote) or had a respectable second place (57/1935) with 91 votes to Nexhipi's 169, and Trajkovski's 32.

However, elsewhere in Tetovo there was serious cause for concern. In the set of polling stations housed in the Agricultural School at Recica on the outskirts of the town, observers witnessed serious irregularities. Voters were given ballot papers without producing the required voter's card or they produced two or more identity cards. In the presence of the observers voters without adequate identification or with more than one identity card were told to leave the polling sub-station. They drifted along the corridor to other sub-stations or waited in the large entrance lobby for the observers to leave.

Only two parties, the Albanian DPA and PDP, were represented on the election commission at this polling station. Mr Petkovski had an observer at 11.30a.m., who complained about the absence of a Social Democrat on the commission (though VMRO was lacking too). More importantly, she alleged that one person had been allowed to vote many times and that other voters had been given more than one ballot paper. The voting arrangement offered little or no privacy here.

A number of young men who said that they had not come to vote were hanging outside in the lobby. When asked why they were there they gathered around the observers to express their support for Mr. Trajkovski and hostility towards Mr. Petkovski. This hardly contributed to an atmosphere of neutrality in the polling station.

When other BHHRG observers visited the school later in the afternoon they were approached by an Albanian man who claimed to have been 'personated'. When he turned up to vote he discovered that he and all 10 members of his family had been registered as having voted. The man refused to say more or to address the problem with the electoral commission for fear of having 'problems' in the future.

Inside polling station number 1989 the president of the commission, Muzafer Kamberi, told observers that the Albanian people would all vote for Trajkovski. "Petkovski will not get one vote here" he said. This president was a representative of the DPA. It was clear that he had the ability to influence people in several ways as he had worked as a local council official charged with compiling local election registers and, after the parliamentary elections, he been promoted to Assistant General Manager of the Macedonian Post in charge of 'organisational and cadre matters'.

Several Macedonian SDSM observers were present in the polling stations and some sat on the commissions. However, one observer was so afraid that his hands shook when he tried to speak to BHHRG observers. He said that he had seen people voting without cards as well as many instances of multiple voting taking place without producing any ID or card. A BHHRG observer saw two women voting in one station and when he followed them into the next sub-station they were casting their ballots again. In one station all but two names on the register had been circled indicating that almost everyone had voted. Yet on the table a batch of some 40 ballot papers was still left over - which is strange given that commissions receive the exact amount of ballot papers as names on the register. The chairman was unable to explain this discrepancy.

Later in the afternoon a group of six SDSM observers and commission members decided to leave the agricultural school polling stations fearing for their safety . According to them, voting had proceeded satisfactorily on 31st October. At the time two Albanian candidates competed and their respective representatives on the commission kept each other in check. However, the SDSM representatives maintained that this time activists of the DPA had organized fraud. They alleged that they had been threatened physically by young men who carried weapons. One SDSM commission member left when he noticed that an Albanian had entered the polling station with a baseball-bat.

One of these observers had earlier in the day been assigned to observe in station 2054 in Kamenje. At the opening of the polls he had been refused entry. Allegedly, when he and a colleague managed to enter about 30 minutes later, they noticed that the ballot box was nearly full.

Ironically, although Tetovo has been in receipt of a large amount of Western funding to promote civil society and proper democratic structures it was in polling stations near the (unrecognised) University of Tetovo that the Group's observers found the most blatant examples of electoral fraud.

Incidents in Gostivar

In electoral unit 54/411 in Gostivar a young Petkovski observer was knocked to the ground and kicked by a man whom he alleged had tried to stuff the ballot box. The Group's observers interviewed him at the main hospital in Gostivar where he had been taken for examination and X-rays. The doctor- an Albanian - confirmed that the man had been badly battered.

The chairman of the polling station (54/411) where the attack took place denied that any such violence but vaguely suggested that "maybe something had happened outside". In the observers' presence this chairman permitted a man to fill in at least one ballot paper which was then stored under the pile of blanks rather than being placed in the ballot box! As this procedure was under way it was obvious that other filled-in ballots (for Trajkovski) were already in the pile. When asked if the observers could look under the pile, the chairman refused with a curt "No" in English. Then he changed his line and said the reason for holding back the man's vote was because he had already voted!

Petkovski observers alleged that filled-out ballot papers were available and ready to be given to women, in particular, when they came to vote or to stuff into the box towards the end of the day in the name of people who had not voted

In Dona Banica (1122) BHHRG observers videotaped the handing out of multiple ballot papers to voters. This was also a place where women voters were supervised in the voting area by a man standing next to them or even filling out the ballot paper for some of them.

In two polling stations in the Albanian-majority village of Grcec near Skopje the observers were told contradictory things: on the one hand 100% of voters were expected (they had all voted on 31st October) yet many young men were away working as *Gastarbeiter* in Germany and Switzerland. In Grcec 79/24636, the observers were assured by the chairman (who had held the office since 1969) that no one had tried to vote without voters' cards and identity cards, yet in the space of a few minutes most of the voters who presented themselves (mainly young men) had neither one nor the other card! They were not allowed to vote in the presence of the observers. However, one young man returned with a voting card 20 seconds later. The chairman said it was a small village and he had just gone home to get it.

[N.B. It was in Grcec 79/2437 that BHHRG observers for the first and only time met an official OSCE observer, the American Robert Hand. Mr. Hand had been a vociferous critic of the 1996

Albanian parliamentary elections but seemed blasé about the flaws in Macedonia which seemed so similar to the ones alleged in 1996. That evening gunfire far worse than anything heard in Tirana in 1996 erupted in Skopje to celebrate Mr. Trajkovski's victory. As in Montenegro in 1998, Mr. Hand seemed less concerned by volleys of Kalashnikov fire than three years ago.]

Having witnessed such crude frauds in Western Macedonia, it was pointless to observe the count there since by any standards the elections there should have been disqualified already.

Mobile Box

When asked, commission chairmen said they had a mobile box for those too ill to attend at the polling station which would be taken around at the end of voting. However, we were unable to determine how many people might use the box- usually the commission has a list of local residents who have asked for the facility. After observing the numerous irregularities outlined above it might not be unreasonable to assume that in some places, at least, the mobile box provided another opportunity for augmenting the vote.

The count

The Group's observers observed the count at two polling stations in Skopje. In polling stations 56/2890 and 56/2604 the votes were counted in an orderly way and with little disagreement among the commission members. The only cause of argument (in 2890) was about whether ballots on which the name of Petkovski had been crossed out and the entry for Trajkovski had been circled should be declared invalid. Although the intention of the voter was clear the rules only allow the voter to circle his preference and thus the commission decided that the votes were invalid.

The station 2890 is situated in Gazi Baba, a mainly Albanian-inhabited part of the capital. Some 90% of the registered voters are Albanians. It is interesting to note that turn-out in this station was 42%, nowhere near the absurdly high turn-outs in other predominantly Albanian districts in the West of the country. As the DPA candidate had won here by a wide margin in the first round it was not surprising that Trajkovski collected most votes in the second round.

However, it is also clear that most Albanians did not bother to turn up to vote. A similar pattern could have been expected in other majority Albanian districts. This might have narrowed the gap between Trajkovski and Petkovski but could not have resulted in a victory for the former. The swing to Boris Trajkovski would have remained below the level needed for him to upset Tito Petkovski's lead.

Result

Boris Trajkovski 592,118

Tito Petkovski 514,735

The strikingly large number of 17, 367 ballot papers were deemed to be void.

Turn-out: 69.87%

Aftermath of the Election

Although certain newspapers in Macedonia came out with the results of Trajkovsky's victory during the evening of 14th November – they must have printed these editions before polling closed – Petkovski's supporters were surprised and devastated when they realised their candidate had lost.

Meanwhile several thousand supporters of Trajkovski celebrated victory in Skopje's central square. Numerous young men, mainly in black leather jackets, not only let off loud fireworks but also fired shot gun volleys above their heads and into the crowds. At one stage the sound was deafening. Young people on the fringe of the demonstration described it as "disgusting".

The following night (15th November) a much larger crowd, estimated at 30, 000 but probably much more, assembled peacefully in the same square to show their displeasure and disgust at what they perceived to have been a fraudulent poll. This audience, consisting of people of all ages, men as well as women and children, had no guns or loud fireworks. Nor did they march on the parliament (guarded by a phalanx of heavily-armed riot police) despite the frustration felt by many among them. Demonstrations have been held in Macedonia since and President Clinton cancelled his short visit to the country presumably wary of the level of anger and frustration felt by large part of the population.

For, the anger felt is also directed towards the international community. Despite overwhelming evidence of fraud all the important foreign missions in Macedonia have called upon Petkovski's supporters to accept the results of the election and refrain from destabilizing the country. The OSCE mission while acknowledging that some irregularities took place deemed the election, overall, to be satisfactory.

Re-runs

By 21st November the central election commission had scrutinized 308 complaints rejecting 277 as unfounded. 31 were accepted. Therefore, voting will be repeated at these 31 polling stations at an unspecified time in the future. As the mandate of Kiro Gligorov expired on 19th November the duties of the president will be undertaken by the Speaker of Parliament, Savo Klimovski until the specified elections have been taken place. The opposition can still appeal to the country's Supreme Court.

Conclusion

The severe irregularities witnessed by BHHRG observers in the western part of Macedonia, in particular, cast a shadow over the overall results of the poll. Boris Trajkovski had not only to achieve the same percentage of the poll he had garnered on 31st October he had also to win over the 100,000 plus votes from all the defeated candidates. As one of those candidates had advised his supporters to vote for Petkovski – which had obviously been heeded in the polling stations visited by BHHRG for the count – he had also to gain **all** the votes from the PDP, a party once in government as a coalition partner of the SDMS.

Until now, elections in Macedonia have reached a generally acceptable standard without accusations or evidence of widespread fraud being forthcoming. Only by treating Macedonia's Albanians as a herd incapable of independent decision-making is it possible for the OSCE and Macedonian authorities to believe the voting tallies from Tetovo, Gostivar and other places with incredibly high turnouts. This sort of condescending racism to mask complaisant acceptance of electoral fraud is sowing the seeds of the very inter-ethnic conflict Western diplomats claim they are trying to defuse.

For its own sake and as the strategic hinterland of NATO's KFOR operation, Macedonia deserves better than fraudulent elections which are set to turn one section of the population against the other. NATO governments and the OSCE may soon be counting the cost of their complacency about electoral fraud. Worse still, Macedonians of all ethnic origins may have to pay the cost of that fraud at the polls.

Statement on the partial re-run of the Macedonian presidential elections 5th December, 1999

On 5th December 1999 repeat elections for the Macedonian presidency were held after the Supreme Court of the country had ruled election results from the second round of voting held on 14th November were invalid in 230 polling stations. There had been numerous cases of family voting, multiple voting, voting without identification or voting-cards, ballot stuffing, as well as intimidation and violence towards some candidate-observers.

A total of 160,000 registered voters - mostly in predominantly Albanian-inhabited areas of the country – had to decide between the candidacies of Boris Trajkovski representing the ruling coalition and Tito Petkovski of the opposition SDSM for the presidency. Before the re-run, Mr. Petkovski was in the lead in these polling stations by 65,000 votes. The turnout in this round would be decisive; a low turn-out might save Petkovski's narrow lead, whereas a higher turn-out would benefit Trajkovski since the majority of the Albanian electorate were expected to vote for him.

The candidate of the Albanian Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP), Muhamed Halili, which had been a partner of the SDSM in the previous government had garnered 38,000 in the first round of these elections. He had urged his supporters not to vote in the second round, yet the very high turnouts (for example, 99.7% in station number 2071) did not seem to reflect this advice. It was claimed that in the re-runs PDP supporters turned en masse to the DPA-favoured candidate Trajkovski after Petkovski had (allegedly) said that he 'did not need the Albanian vote'. Yet, SDSM spokesmen maintain that his words were taken out of context and that Mr. Petkovski had said that he did not need votes from Albanians who favoured secession but that all Albanians who desired to be citizens of Macedonia were to be welcomed as his supporters.

The British Helsinki Human Rights Group observed the voting in Tetovo and surrounding villages and witnessed the following:

- Many cases of family voting. Although more people seemed to vote in person than they had in on 14th November, a family member - usually the man – was often to be seen voting for a number of others.
- Electoral commission members allowed many people to cast their vote without showing either any identification or the personal voting-card or even both.
- They were examples of multiple voting. For instance, a BHHRG observer saw one man and two women voting in a polling station in the village of Stremenica and later witnessed the same people voting again in the village of Zelino.
- Although cases of intimidation were less in evidence than in the second round, some SDS observers were shouted down by members of the electoral commission when they tried to talk to BHHRG monitors. Also, groups of people who seemed to have no role to play in the electoral process were loitering in and around polling stations. This did not contribute to a free and relaxed voting atmosphere. Perhaps their presence was enough to remind voters and observers what had happened two weeks previously when observers were forced out by intimidation or even physical force. During the afternoon, for instance, the SDSM deemed it wise to withdraw its observers from stations in district 60 to avoid an escalation of tensions and because its observers did not feel able to do their work properly.
- The high turn-outs in many polling stations give cause for suspicion. In polling station 2056, for instance, 300 people (allegedly) had voted by 10:30 in the morning, i.e. in three and a half hours. This means that the commission had to 'process' voters at a rate of about one every 40 seconds, which would have been remarkably fast. Voting would have been even faster in polling station 2074 where 400 people were alleged to have cast their ballots in two and a half hours. The BHHRG observer present witnessed one man putting three votes into the ballot box, a practice which could explain the extraordinary speed of voting. Station number 2001 in the village of Poroj produced the extraordinary turnout of 90% with all votes going to Boris Trajkovski and none to Tito Petkovski

In polling station No. 61 in Orashije it was alleged that a group of 15 to 20 Albanian men had entered the building in the afternoon and 'voted' several times. After having thus raised the turn-

out from a lowly 270 to 606 they ordered the SDSM observer and commission chairman out of the station. When that polling station was visited later by BHHRG, both the chairman and an observer claimed to represent the SDSM. The observer introduced himself as Dragan Simonevski and denied that anything untoward had happened. He claimed that the reports were SDSM fabrications. The chairman agreed and the policemen outside the station also denied having witnessed any trouble. However, it was later confirmed that both the SDSM observer, Stoichko Giorgevski and the chairman, Tomislav Bosjkovski had indeed left No. 61 after the ballot stuffing. The new commission 'chairman' was the DPA representative and the SDSM 'observer' was in fact one of the group of Albanian men who had committed the fraud and had taken on a false Macedonian name.

Yet an OSCE observer gave an interview to a local TV station in station 61 praising the work of the commission and the good relations between representatives of both candidates. The result of the 'vote' was 651 to 1 for Trajkovski. It is difficult to assess how many more cases involving harassment of SDSM observers occurred: certainly many of the party's observers withdrew from polling stations during the afternoon on instructions of the regional party leadership. A BHHRG observer did note, however, that one Albanian man presented himself as a VMRO observer in the presence of the Italian ambassador and an EU envoy. Although many Albanians undoubtedly voted for the VMRO candidate it strains credibility for any Albanians to be actual a member as VMRO came to prominence as a fiercely Macedonian nationalist party which had not shied away from attacking the Albanian minority in the past.

In the end, the conduct of these re-runs proved to be marginally better than they had been in the second round. However, numerous irregularities and recurrent acts of intimidation undermine the legitimacy of the results. If these results are accepted it will be an insult to all the electoral commission members in Macedonia - of all nationalities - who did their work properly and according to the law. It may also increase the polarization of Macedonian society along ethnic lines which bodes ill for the country's future.