



## FYR Macedonia

Last update:	6 May 2009
Author:	Danijel Tadic
Population:	2,066,718 (July 2009 est.)
Prime minister:	Nikola Gruevski (VMRO-DPMNE)
President:	Gjorge Ivanov (VMRO-DPMNE)
Governemental type:	parliamentary democracy
Ruling coalition:	VMRO-DPMNE, BDI/DUI and several small parties
Last election:	Presidential and local March/April 2009
Next election:	Parliamentary July 2012
Sister parties:	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)



For a long time the Former Yugoslavian Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) is considered a relative success story in the region: no major conflicts, fairly successful state-building process and no territory issues. In addition, after years of showing dedication to implementing the Ohrid Agreement and carrying through reforms, the country received the status of EU candidate in December 2005 and awaits the start of accession negotiations. The promise of EU and NATO membership □ in 2008 the country fulfilled the criteria for entering NATO □ are important tools in uniting Macedonians and Albanians living in the country. The societal division between the two ethnic groups is also reflected in the political landscape. Despite the promises of a future EU and NATO membership, a long-standing name dispute with Greece, despite UN mediation, has been blocking the start of the negotiations, which stagnates the EU integration process. In addition, Macedonia failed to meet the benchmarks set by the European Commission and showed several shortcomings in meeting the democratic standards in the general elections in June of 2008. Therefore by holding peaceful, fair and free presidential and municipal elections in March and April (two rounds) of 2009 Macedonia has passed an important test.

### ELECTIONS AND POLITICAL SITUATION

The Assembly, or the Sobranja, is the only chamber of Parliament and comprises 120 members. The Assembly members are elected by proportional representation for a four-year term in office. In general elections, Macedonia is divided into six constituencies electing 20 MP's each.

#### 2009 presidential and municipal elections

The Speaker of the Macedonian parliament called the presidential and municipal election on the 10th of January, only half a year after the 2008 parliamentary elections which were not in accordance with democratic standards due to serious violence between parties and police during and after the elections and reports about fraud on several voting locations. Therefore, these elections were an important test for Macedonia in restoring democratic credibility and showing the European Union its readiness and ability to continue the EU integration process.

The official campaign began on the 2nd of March with strong and highly visible political activity in whole Macedonia. In this campaign the presidential elections overshadowed the municipal elections as the public debate and campaign mainly focused on the presidential candidates. In line with previous election campaigns, this campaign was characterized by negative campaigning in which the presidential candidates, political parties and they leaders continuously insulted each other. Furthermore, due to its resources the ruling conservative party VMRO-DPMNE dominated the campaign. In addition, the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions an Human Rights, who monitors the elections, received widespread allegations of pressure on or intimidation of public-sector employees to vote for



to ruling party. Nevertheless, the campaign has been considered as fair as an environment was created in which all parties and presidential candidates had an opportunity to present themselves to the voters. For example, the media offered a varied coverage of both the presidential and municipal elections. In this coverage VMRO–DPMNE and SDSM got the most air time.

The first round of the presidential and municipal elections was held on the 22nd of March. President candidate of the ruling VMRO–DPMNE, professor Gjorge Ivanov, won the first round by getting 33.95 per cent of the votes, whilst the candidate of the Social Democrats (SDSM) professor Ljubomir Frckovski got 19.81 per cent of the votes. As none of the candidates got the majority of the votes a second round of voting was needed to decide who will be the next president of Macedonia. Furthermore, in the first round 33 mayoral candidates were elected. VMRO–DPMNE got the majority of the votes in 23 municipalities, SDSM and ethnic–Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) four and the Democratic Party of Turks and the Movement for National Unity of Turks both won in one municipality. In 43 municipalities none of the mayoral candidates got the majority which, again, means a second round of voting is needed.

A rather low campaign activity was shown during the run up to the second round which took place on the 5th of April. There were only a few public events and most of the candidates and parties focused on the importance of holding peaceful elections according to international standards. In addition, compared with the run up to the first round there was more attention for the municipal elections. As many analysts expected and many polls predicted candidate of the conservative ruling party VMRO–DPMNE Gjorge Ivanov was elected the new president of Macedonia. Ivanov got 59.44 per cent of the votes while his opponent Ljubomir Frckovski of the SDSM got 34.69 per cent. The turnout threshold of 40 per cent was met as 42.69 per cent of the registered voter turned out. This threshold has been lowered from 50 to 40 per cent just recently ahead of the elections. The rather big win of VMRO–DPMNE was also reflected on the local level as the party won in 55 municipalities and the city of Skopje. DUI won in nine municipalities, SDSM in eight and Democratic Party of Turks and the Movement for National Unity of Turks both in one. In the table underneath full results of the elections can be seen.

Election result of 2009 presidential election in FYR Macedonia:

Presidential candidate	% of votes First round, 22 March (turnout 56.88%)	% of votes Second round 5 March (turnout 42,63%)
Gjorge Ivanov (VMRO–DPMNE)	33.93	59.37
Ljubomir Frckovski (SDSM)	19.89	34.66
Ljube Boskoski (independent)	14.41	--
Agron Buxhaku (DUI)	7.22	--
Imer Sulmani (Nova Demokratija)	14.48	--
Nano Ruzin (LDP)	3.93	--
Mirusche Hoxha (DPA)	2.97	--

Election result 2009 municipal election in FYR Macedonia:

Party	Number of municipalities the party has received a majority of the votes
VMRO–DPMNE	55
Demecratic Union for Integration (DUI)	13
SDSM	6
Democratic Party of Albanians	1
Turks Movement for National Unity of Turks	1
Roma Union of Macedonia	1
Party of New Democracy	1



SDSM in coalition with smaller parties	2
Independant candidates for mayor	3
Total	83

#### Parliamentary elections 2008

On 12 April 2008, the Macedonian parliament called for early elections on 1 June after legislators decided to dissolve the parliament in a bid to end months of political stagnation in the country. The ruling coalition, which came to power after elections in 2006, had been in turmoil for months over the country's reform path before Greece dealt the final blow by blocking an invitation for Macedonia to join NATO during the alliance's Bucharest summit on 2 April 2008. This prompted calls for early elections by the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which were subsequently supported by the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) and the ruling Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO–DPMNE). In a speech to parliament, president Branko Crvenkovski asked lawmakers to abandon the plan, insisting such a step would only slow Macedonia's NATO and EU integration. However, most parliamentarians agreed with prime minister Nikola Gruevski of the VMRO–DPMNE, who said that "Macedonia needs a new mandate for faster reforms." Some opposition lawmakers, though, alleged that the VMRO–DPMNE mainly called for early elections in order to increase its own success during the next ballot. The limited preparation time for the elections, combined with the ruling party's moderately nationalist platform, would be favorable in a time of crisis over the name–dispute with Greece.

On 11 May, the campaign for the 1 June parliamentary elections officially kicked off. At the start of the campaign, president Crvenkovski said that "fair and democratic elections are a key condition for Euro–Atlantic integration and the country's future." He furthermore said that "[w]e've had well–organized elections up to now, and we've shown that we can do it. So, it's not a question of if we can, but whether we sincerely want to, and whether the political will and a sense of responsibility for the future of our country exists." This indicates the high expectations of the elections, both within Macedonia and internationally. In general, fair conduct of the elections was seen as a way for Macedonia to show its readiness for further Euro–Atlantic integration, despite the obvious obstacle of the Greek–Macedonian name–dispute that continues to linger.

However, the campaign period took a violent turn, especially in the areas dominated by ethnic Albanians in the northwest of the country. Ethnic Albanians make up about a quarter of Macedonia's 2.1 million inhabitants. Tensions between Macedonia's two ethnic Albanian parties, the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) have been high since the 2006 elections, when Gruevski picked the DPA as a coalition partner, despite it won fewer votes than the DUI. On 12 May, a convoy of vehicles belonging to the ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), en route to a campaign rally, came under attack. During the shooting incident, a child was injured and one vehicle damaged. Speaking at a press conference after the incident, DUI leader Ali Ahmeti said he "survived an assassination attempt", and demanded the police discover who stood behind the attack. Meanwhile Menduh Thaci, leader of the DPA, said the DUI had "staged the incident." Furthermore, several attacks took place against the offices of both DPA and DUI, including an attack during which eight shots were fired at the office of the DUI in Tetovo.

Both the European Commission and the American Embassy condemned the campaign–related incidents that took place in Macedonia. However, these statements were unable to prevent further escalation. On election day, several shooting incidents took place, in which one man died and at least eight were injured. Shoot–outs took place both between the rival ethnic Albanian groups and in standoffs with the police. Twenty–one people were arrested. Meanwhile, both parties accused each other and the police of the violence. Ahmeti (DUI) held the DPA responsible for "provocations, violence and psychological terror." International observers have reacted in disappointment regarding the violent conduct during the election. Head of the EU mission in Macedonia Erwan Fouere stated that "[w]e are deeply concerned by the many...corroborated reports of not only acts of intimidation, but also blatant violence, shooting, injuries to innocent people." The OSCE commented that "expectations have not been met" when it comes to the vote, saying there were "massive violations." The OSCE observation mission furthermore concluded that media had been biased in favor of the ruling VMRO–DPMNE.



Due to the violence and reports about fraud, 22 polling stations (ca. 1 percent of the total) had to be closed. Conduct of the ballots was assessed negatively in 165 other polling stations. Repeat elections for these 187 polling stations were called for 15 June. These were assessed more positively by international election observers, with the OSCE stating that “[s]ignificant improvements in security for the re-run elections enabled most people to freely cast their vote.” However, the OSCE also maintained that “this does not alter the assessment that while well administered, certain key OSCE and [Council of Europe] CoE commitments were not met in the overall parliamentary election process.” Moreover, several instances of ‘intimidation by party activists in and around polling stations’ were still observed, as were a limited number of cases of ballot stuffing and four cases of “deliberate falsification” of the votes. The harsh rhetoric used by the leaders of the two ethnic Albanian parties was seen as an important reason for the ensuing violence during the elections, and was condemned by the OSCE as well as the US embassy. In total 2 electoral blocks and 15 parties competed in the elections. The electoral blocks were formed by the ruling VMRO-DPMNE in coalition with many smaller parties, including several parties of ethnic minorities, and the rival Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, which is the largest opposition party. They were centre-right conservative and centre-left progressive options. Both ethnic Albanian parties competed in the elections with their own list, as did thirteen other parties. However, 12 of those failed to gain representation, despite the absence of an election threshold. The ruling VMRO-DPMNE’s “For a Better Macedonia” coalition won the elections, gaining 63 out of 120 seats.

Results of the elections:

Party / Coalition	% of votes	Seats in parliament
For a Better Macedonia (VMRO-DPMNE, Socialist Party of Macedonia, Democratic Union, Democratic Renewal of Macedonia, Democratic Party of Turks, Democratic Party of Serbs, Union of Roma in Macedonia)	48.80%	63
SUN - Coalition for Europe (Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, New Social Democratic Party, Liberal Democratic Party, Liberal Party of Macedonia)	23.65%	27
Democratic Union for Integration	12.77%	18



(DUI)		
Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA)	8.48%	11
Party for European Future	1.47%	1

Election turnout: 57%

#### New government

Despite its win of 63 out of 120 seats, giving the party coalition a majority in parliament, the “For a Better Macedonia” coalition led by prime minister Gruevski announced its intention to rule with the biggest ethnic Albanian party, the Democratic Union for Integration. The Democratic Party of Albanians will thus remain in opposition. According to the press service of the VMRO–DPMNE, the parties have agreed their priorities will be attaining NATO membership and EU candidate status, currently blocked by the name dispute with Greece.

#### The 2004 Presidential Election

The Presidential election was held on 14 (first round) and 28 (second round) April 2004 after the death of Boris Trajkovski of the VMRO–DPMNE in a plane crash on 26 February 2004. A consistent advocate of the 2001 Ohrid Agreement, European Integration and regional cooperation, the passing away of Mr Trajkovski was a great loss for Macedonian politics.

Thankfully, it appeared that the values promoted by Trajkovski had penetrated the public life of the FYROM. Branko Crvenkovski of the SDSM won the second round ballot with 60.5 percent of the votes. He campaigned on the same lines as the party he led since April 1991, emphasising western integration, and full implementation of the Ohrid agreement.

The main opposition VMRO–DPMNE candidate, Sasko Kedev, polled 36.2 percent of the vote. A VMRO–DPMNE moderate, he took a much less antagonistic stance to the Ohrid Agreement than the history of his party may have presupposed. Instead, Mr Kedev focussed heavily on the economic situation. Mr Ostreni of the DUI party campaigned particularly vigorously on the platform of inter–ethnic co–operation as a viable alternative to separatist extremism. The other Albanian candidate, Mr Xhelili, also openly supported the Ohrid Agreement.

Branko Crvenkovski’s victory corresponded with the political developments of 2002. He benefited from a solid base of Albanian support in the second round as a result of the SDSM – LDP – DUI government. In addition, Mr Crvenkovski had the advantage of name recognition and incumbency, having held the post of Prime Minister from 1992–1998 and 2002–2004. Mr Kedev, by comparison, had been an MP since only 2002. In the context of the Macedonian political scene, one might also consider a “negative” explanation for the victory of the SDMS candidate in 2004, and also the party in 2002: the electorate chose a previously discredited and mistrusted party for lack of a viable alternative to the increasingly divided VMRO–DPMNE, and the threat of interethnic confrontation their tenure would facilitate.

The turnout was 55.2 percent at the first election round and 53.6 percent at the second.

Candidate – Party	First Round % Vote	Second Round % Vote
Branko Crvenskovski – SDSM	41.2	
Sasko Kedev – VMRO–DMPNE	33.0	
Gzim Ostreni – DUI	14.3	
Zidi Xhelili – DPA	8.4	



In the aftermath of the Presidential elections the VMRO–DPMNE stated that the SDSM manipulated the electoral process to ensure that turnout exceeded 50 percent: Mr Kedev initially refused to recognise the “self-elected president”. The Supreme Court did annul results from 5 polling stations, yet this made little difference to the overall outcome. The OCSE, the EU, NATO and the US all reported that the elections were generally consistent with their international standards, although both election days were marred by localised incidents of proxy voting, ballot box stuffing and intimidation. Overall, the OCSE was encouraged by the moderate conduct of all the candidates.

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#### New law for local boundaries, March 2005 local elections

In August 2004, the Macedonian Parliament voted on the new Law for Local Boundaries. This law entailed the reduction of the amount of municipalities from 123 to 84. A very small majority of the parliamentarians (61 out of 120) voted in favour of this new law.

The introduction of the new law was sensitive. Because quite a few local communities had to redraw their boundaries as an effect of the new law, the ethnic balance would shift. Struga, Kichevo and Skopje, communities that initially were mainly Macedonian, had to unite with ethnic Albanian communities. This would influence local politics and decision-making. Skopje would become an official bilingual city, as the share of Albanian would amount to 27 percent.

In reaction to the acceptance of the new law, dissatisfied oppositions agreed to organise a referendum to try to revoke the parliament’s decision and return to the old law. With a sufficient amount of signatures collected, the date for the plebiscite was set on 7 November 2004. Local elections that were to be held that month were thereby postponed.

At the end of the referendum campaign the ethnic Albanian parties (DUI, DPA, PDP) reached a common agreement to boycott the referendum. They would refrain, however, from closing down the polling stations. Opposition parties on the contrary, called the public to the polling stations. Delegates of the EU went to Macedonia to usher the population to support the boycott since the referendum would “turn back the clock for Macedonia.”

But one real decisive step in international politics was taken by the USA alone. The USA declared on the 4th of November that the US recognised the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name. This gesture implied for the Macedonians fearing that the new Law would eventually split the country into two, that the US was accepting Macedonia as an official state in its current form. While the US was supporting extensive minority rights, they would not accept the breaking apart of the Republic. The extension of minority rights would not lead to a fractioning of the state.

This American gesture was undoubtedly an important reason behind the failure of the referendum to gain the necessary support of a 50 percent voter turnout. As the referendum was invalid, the new Law for Local Boundaries became official.

The Local Elections were held on the 13 March 2005. They were marred by "significant irregularities" in certain areas, while noting that in most areas, the elections complied with international standards.

In general, the SDSM won more municipalities than any other party. However, there was a clear advance of the oppositional VMRO–DPMNE. The Albanian vote was won by the DUI in these local elections.

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#### Women and Minority representation

The first real changes in women representation in Parliament were reached after the 2002 elections. The percentage of female deputies rose from 7.5 percent (1998) to 17.5 percent. After the 2006 parliamentary elections, this share went further up to 27.5 percent. The rise in women participation was facilitated by the successful lobbying campaign of different women rights NGO's to secure a constitutional amendment obligating parties to include at least 30 percent women candidates in their election lists.



After the reforms necessitated by the Ohrid Agreement minority representation has increased. From the 2006 until the 2008 parliamentary elections, the DPA was the main vehicle for Albanian representation in government, despite being the smaller of the two ethnic Albanian parties. This led to resentment with the DUI, and considerable tensions between supporters of the two parties which reached a high level during the 2008 elections, which were marred by violent incidents in the predominantly ethnic Albanian areas. After the 2008 elections, prime minister Nikola Gruevski announced that the ruling “For a better Macedonia” coalition would from now on govern in a coalition with the biggest ethnic Albanian party, which is the DUI with 18 seats. Several minority lists of smaller minorities were also part of the “For a better Macedonia” coalition, including lists of Macedonian Serbs and Turks.

## IMPORTANT POLITICAL ISSUES

The Republic of Macedonia was the first republic to secede from former Yugoslavia – and the only one to do so without causing armed conflict. The country was left with a rich ethnic diversity, and many issues, which cast doubt on the very existence of the tiny republic. The population consists of 64.2 percent Macedonians, 25.2 percent Albanians, 4 percent Turkish and 2.7 percent Roma, according to the last census of 2002.

### Implementing the Ohrid Agreement

Since international recognition in 1991 the political dialogue in the FYROM has been dominated by the question of minority rights for its ethnic-Albanians. In the 1990s Albanians in the FYROM – standing at around 25 percent of the total population – faced reduced constitutional status and entrenched institutional discrimination in public institutions at all levels. The failure of the initially promising 1998 compromise between the Macedonian and Albanian nationalist political parties further eroded the confidence of Albanians in the Macedonian state. These tensions were exacerbated by the withdrawal of UN monitors in 1999 and the spill over from the ethnic clashes in Kosovo that led to violent clashes initiated by the NLA. This was brought to an end by the signing of the Western-backed Ohrid Framework Agreement in 2001.

It is reiterated again and again by leading figures in Macedonian public life that the implementation of this Agreement is the axis upon which politics will turn, for better or for worse. The FYROM political leadership has been quite successful in implementing the Agreement’s terms. In March 2002 the then VRMO–DPMNE-led government of unity granted amnesty to all members of the NLA exempted from the accusation of grievous crimes by the UN Tribunal for ex-Yugoslavia in The Hague. Secondly, the change of the preamble of the Constitution from a “national state of Macedonians” to “citizens of the Republic of Macedonia” has been ratified, as has the inclusion of a guarantee of human rights, civil liberties and peaceful coexistence. Thirdly, a law has been implemented, that equal status is granted to the Albanian language where the proportion of ethnic Albanians exceeds in a given municipality 20 percent. Clauses relating to the increase of ethnic-Albanian representation in public institutions, in particular the police force, from 5 percent to 25 percent are also being incrementally implemented.

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### Sources of anxiety

One source of anxiety out of the remit of the Ohrid Framework concerns disarmament. A key clause of the Agreement was the disarming of the NLA rebels. After initial progress by NATO a further significant step was taken in this direction in 2003. Yet, by focussing on the rebels, even if the Ohrid Agreement’s terms are fulfilled, the wider problem of Macedonia’s highly militarised society will persist. It is believed there are between 150,00 – 250,000 small and medium sized weapons active amongst the state’s 2m population. Moreover, the deep entrenchment of this problem with organised crime, highly evolved in the FYROM, adds a more sinister dimension to the task of disarming the population.

Another pertinent source of tension is the fact that the Ohrid Framework has come under criticism over its neglect of the sensitive socio-economic consequences of its terms in the context of Macedonian politics. The competing



international demands of both the Ohrid's backers to increase the proportion of ethnic Albanians in the public administration and those of the IMF and World bank to reduce the number of state employees threatens to create a situation in which waves of Macedonians, including security forces, will lose their jobs as a "reward" for their Albanian counterparts. The fact that these Albanian rights were won in part via the ethnic violence of the NLA, plus the additional pressure of economic-based social unrest, plays into the hands of the dispossessed elite in control of the nationalist faction of the VMRO-DPMNE.

Thus, the fear of further ethnic conflict continues to cast a shadow over public life.

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#### Economic situation

Historically the FYROM is the least developed of the ex-Yugoslav republics. Prior to 1991 a mere 5 percent of the total federal output of goods and services were produced in this state. The collapse of Yugoslavia ended transfer payments from the Federal government and eliminated advantages from inclusion in a de facto free trade area.

Despite a subsequent year on year rise in GDP between 1996 and 2000 as a result of conciliation with Greece, regional integration, and leadership's commitment to economic reform and free trade, the ethnic Albanian insurgency of 2001 sent the economy spiralling down once again. Decreased trade, intermittent border closures, increased deficit spending on security needs, and investor uncertainty meant that GDP shrank 4.5 percent. Growth barely recovered in 2002 to 0.9 percent, yet it did rise to 2.8 percent in 2003 and was estimated at 3.7 percent in 2005. The GDP is expected to pick up, but only moderately, because of continued political uncertainty, stringent IMF-backed economic policies, and the weak external situation. The economy remains fragile.

The most fatal consequence of the FYROM's beleaguered economy is the resultant unemployment and extreme poverty. Unemployment levels reached 37.3 percent in 2005. It is further estimated that 29.6 percent of the population are living below the poverty line (2004 est.).

This has placed the FYROM, regarded by the CIA as a haven for criminal activity and economic corruption, at the centre of a vicious circle. It is seen as a major trans-shipment point for drugs. Money laundering is also a critical problem due to a mostly cash-based economy and weak enforcement.

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#### Corruption

According to many reports, corruption in the FYROM is endemic. Transparency International gave the FYROM in 2006 a ranking of 105th out of 163 countries surveyed in its corruption perception index.

The previous SDSM-led coalition started a comprehensive purge of public administration and financial institutions. Legislation was passed that obligates officials to declare property and plans to limit or abandon the immunity of state officials in all branches of government in cases of serious allegations of corruption. The government has established an independent State Commission of Combating Corruption under the Anticorruption law. Together with the Office of Public Prosecutor this body has brought charges against several members and associates of previous governments. However, Crvenkovski's public acknowledgments of endemic corruption rings hollow from a former PM whose government lost the 1998 elections primarily because of allegations of corruption.

The chairman of the Anti-Corruption Commission, Mihajlo Manevski, said in May 2006 that the government is attempting to pressure the panel. He criticised what he described as "orchestrated attacks from the ruling coalition", including "threats" to dismiss or replace commission members, and accusations of co-operation with the opposition.

In 2006, Macedonia came under increased pressure to demonstrate progress in tackling corruption in order to increase the likelihood of EU-accession in the future. The country has adopted a legal framework for anticorruption efforts, but implementation is lagging behind, according to the Group of States Against Corruption (GRECO). GRECO



has laid out a set of 14 recommendations, including a provision on additional training for the judiciary, the attorney's office and the police. GRECO also urges better control over the process of registering firms, in order to close loopholes that allow tax evasion.

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#### European Union

In April 2001 a Stabilisation and Association Agreement (SAA) was signed between the EU and the Macedonia, providing the country a status of potential member of the EU. Macedonia was the first country of the Western Balkans to sign such an agreement. In March 2004 the country submitted an application for membership and was granted the candidate status in December 2005. Until now however no date has been set to start the accession talks. While the government expressed its hope to start accession talks in 2007, the European Commission is reluctant to mention dates.

In a report on Macedonia's progress towards membership that was presented on 8 November 2006, the European Commission states that Macedonia "has made further efforts to improve its ability to assume the obligations of membership." However, the report said "the country still faces major challenges in implementation and effectively enforcing the legislation." "There was some progress in the fulfilment of the short-term priorities of the European Partnership," it said. The commission noted "some progress" in the legal system and the fight against corruption, but called for improving "the independence and the efficiency of the judiciary." EU special envoy Erwan Fuere urged the government to run an extra mile and show a strong determination in continuing reforms.

According to an opinion poll conducted in December 2005, 92 percent of Macedonia's citizens would vote positively if a referendum on Macedonia's entry in the EU would be held. In all, 57.2 percent said EU integration is of utmost importance for them.

However, EU membership is not yet obtained, despite considerable efforts made by Macedonia. Although the country has regularly been complimented by the pace of its reforms, the name dispute with Greece remains a looming obstacle, especially as Greece has vowed to block Macedonia's Euro-Atlantic integration as long as the name dispute is not solved.

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#### NATO

The NATO presence in FYROM began in 1999. Several operations followed. Since 2003 no peacekeeping mission has been felt necessary. Currently, only the EU is engaged with its Proxima police mission, supporting, monitoring and providing membership for police reforms. The FYROM has striven to build up its own, independent, strategic alliance system. In particular, it has supported the US efforts in Iraq.

In November 2001 NATO heads of state declared the FYROM a potential member. At the Istanbul Summit in June 2004 it was agreed that if the FYROM meets its obligations, it should be invited to join NATO at the Summit in 2006 and become full-fledged member in 2007. However, in April 2008 during the NATO Summit in Bucharest, Macedonia was again not invited to join the alliance, as Greece blocked the proposal due to the ongoing name dispute between the two countries. This led to early elections in Macedonia, as the government dissolved over the case.

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#### Relations with Greece and other neighbours

One of Macedonia's neighbours, Greece, still disputes the constitutional name of the republic of Macedonia. Greece harbours its own province of Macedonia and fears the constitutional name of the state (Republic of Macedonia) implies a claim on the Greek territory. This fear led to the compromise that Macedonia, after gaining independence from Yugoslavia, was called the Former Yugoslavian Republic Of Macedonia (FYROM). Much to the dislike of the



Greek government, the US did recognise the constitutional name of the country in 2004.

Even though business and trade ties with Greece are developing, relations remain difficult. In November 2006 Greek Prime Minister Costas Karamanlis said the Greek parliament would block Macedonia's ambitions to join the EU and NATO if the country unless it would agree with a compromise official name. In 2008, Greece did indeed block Macedonia's NATO membership over the still ongoing name dispute. Greece has furthermore refused the Macedonian air carrier to land on its territory because it carries the Macedonian state symbol, which led president Crvenkovski to cancel his trip to Athens. Although statements on a looming end to the crisis are made frequently, a solution has not yet been found.

Another neighbouring country with a region called Macedonia within its borders is Bulgaria. Nevertheless, Bulgaria was the first country in the world to recognise the existence of a Macedonian state. It does not, however, recognise a Macedonian nation or a separate Macedonian language. It is historically Bulgarian. The other two neighbours, Serbia and Kosovo, have complex relationships with the country as well. Serbia does not recognise the autonomy of the Macedonian Orthodox Church.

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## SOCIAL DEMOCRATIC PARTIES

Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)

27 seats with the SUN-coalition for Europe Leader: Zoran Zaev

The social democratic SDSM was formed as a successor to the League of Communists in the FYROM soon after independence in 1991. From September 1992 to 1998 and from 2002 to 2006 the SDSM was the largest party in the Macedonian parliament and the main party in the government, and has shown a moderate and reconciliatory attitude towards ethnic minorities in Macedonia. Since the legislative elections of July 2006, the SDSM – embedded in the Together for Macedonia Coalition – is in opposition.

In the party's first period of incumbency, party leader Branko Crvenkovski held the post of Prime Minister until 1998. Another party founder, Kiro Gligorov, became the first president of FYROM, from 1990 to 1999. Three parties participated with the SDSM in the 1992 coalition: the Liberal Party, the Socialist Party (SP), and the PDP (first Albanian party in Macedonia). In the 1998 parliamentary elections the party only gathered 27 seats and lost its governing position to the VMRO–DPMNE.

The second period of incumbency began when the SDSM was included in the temporary 'government of national unity', which was formed in 2001 in response to international pressure to put in place a peace plan to end ethnic hostilities between the NLA and the FYROM government. The party capitalised on the difficulties faced by the VMRO–DPMNE-led government during the Albanian rebellion by presenting itself to the West as a compliant partner and consistent supporter of their demands for more rights to be accorded to the Albanians at both local and national levels.

The SDSM went on to form the "Together for Macedonia Coalition" with the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and several minority parties. The coalition's unique catchall multi-ethnic appeal and support of the Ohrid agreement contributed the successful 2002 elections. The SDSM's support-base is historically Macedonian and particularly strong in rural areas. The leadership of the "catch all" pre-electoral coalition – with members from Vlachs, Roma, Serbs, Bosniaks and Turks – provided the party with a unique, although limited and by no means permanent, cross-ethnicity appeal. The importance of this was demonstrated in the election victory of the coalition, which benefited from a solid base of Albanian support where the opposite VMRO–DPMNE could not.

In November 2004, Vlado Buckovski, former Defence Minister, became the leader of the SDSM. The parliament also elected him as Prime Minister, succeeding SDSM Hari Kostov, who resigned from his position after five months, following struggle within the governing coalition.



The July 2006 legislative elections constituted a disappointment for the SDSM. The “Together for Macedonia Coalition” only garnered 32 seats in the 120-seat parliament and lost its governing position to the VMRO–DPMNE. The country’s meagre economic results over the last four years can be seen as the main reason for the SDSM failure to stay in power. Besides that, the SDSM has some issues with its image as a social democratic party. It had suffered from the party’s cooperation with the Liberal Democratic Party in the “Together for Macedonia Coalition” and the painful reform measures that were needed in order to meet requirements for the EU negotiations.

After the disappointing election results of 2006, Vlado Buckovski confirmed that he would not seek another term of party leadership. On the 5 November 2006 party congress, Radmila Sekerinska, former deputy Prime Minister and Minister of European Integration, was elected new party leader of the SDSM. On 1 August 2007, former party-leader Vlado Buckovski was charged by the country’s financial police with embezzling around 3 million euros. The offence took place in 2001, when Buckovski was still Defense minister of Croatia. According to the allegation, he abused his office in a deal to procure spare parts for tanks.

SDSM is a full member of the Socialist International and a PES associate member.

[www.sdsm.org.mk](http://www.sdsm.org.mk)

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New Social Democratic Party (NSDP) – part of the SUN-coalition for Europe

Leader: Tito Petkovski

Prominent SDSM member and MP Tito Petkovski founded the New Social Democratic Party (NSDP) in November 2005. The main reason for this was that according to Petkovski, the SDSM strayed from its Social Democratic ideology. In the 2008 elections, the New Social Democratic Party joined the left-oriented SUN-coalition for Europe. It does not hold the status of member of the Socialist International.

[www.nsdp.org.mk](http://www.nsdp.org.mk)

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## OTHER PARTIES

Democratic Party for Macedonian national unity – Internal Macedonian revolutionary organisation (VMRO–DPMNE) – 63 seats with ‘For a better Macedonia’ bloc

Leader: Nikola Gruevski

The present-day Christian Democrat and anti-Communist VMRO–DPMNE lies in the historical lineage of the 1893 Macedonian patriotic revolutionaries, whose sole aim was “liberating the Macedonian people from Ottoman yoke”. Nationalist Macedonian poet and writer Ljubco Georgievski resurrected the party in 1990. In the first Macedonian Assembly elections the VMRO–DPMNE polled the most votes, but thereafter it failed to form a viable governing coalition and the initiative passed to the SDSM.

After boycotting the 1994 Assembly elections, the VMRO–DPMNE came to power itself in November 1998 on the basis of a program of economic reform. Mr Georgievski was appointed Prime Minister and the party formed a coalition government with the Democratic Alternative (DA) and Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). The VMRO–DPMNE government was characterised by its support of both NATO and EU integration, and an emphasis on the importance of foreign investment. Also in this period the VMRO–DPMNE led a “government of national unity” that negotiated the ethnic crisis of 2001 by signing the Ohrid agreement. However, enduring ethnic tension and the failure/disinclination to shake off its grass roots hard-line Macedonian nationalism ultimately cost the party re-election in 2002.

It was during the negotiations for the Ohrid Agreement that the seeds of an inner-conflict were sown that, after the dismal 2002 parliamentary elections and subsequent defeat at the 2004 Presidential elections, have plunged the



VMRO–DPMNE into turmoil. Two competing factions emerged which tore the party apart. The supporters of present VMRO–DPMNE leader Nikolali Gruevski formed the first faction. He was a former finance minister at the time, untainted by charges of corruption and was received by party moderates as the Great White Hope. Mr Gruevski's tenure has seen the VMRO–DPMNE follow a generic pro–Europe, pro–“civil society” platform at the expense of its characteristic political nationalism.

Radical nationalist supporters of the previous VMRO–DPMNE leader Lubjo Georgievski dominated the second faction. This group strongly opposes the terms of the Ohrid Agreement, which Georgievski denounced in 2002 as an international conspiracy against ethnic Macedonians. Georgievski for a long time still managed to wield substantial influence because he took sole control over the party's finances before being forced out of the party headship in May 2004. In June 2004 his fraction split off from the VMRO – DPMNE to become the VMRO– People's Party.

The VMRO–DPMNE has overcome its internal struggles and became Macedonia's largest party after the 2006 elections. It managed to expand its support base during its years in power, and won 63 out of 120 seats in the 2008 elections, granting the party's election block an outright majority in parliament.

Party leader Nikolai Gruevski after the 2006 elections became Prime Minister, and remained so after the 2008 elections.

[www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk](http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk)

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Democratic Union for Integration (DUI / BDI) – 18 seats Leader: Ali Ahmeti

The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI, or Bashkimi Demokratik per Integrim, BDI) of was formed 3 months before the elections in June 2002. It is the successor to the Albanian NLA – National Liberation Army, which fought the FYROM security forces in 2001 in the battles preceding the Ohrid Agreement. Although once on the black list of the American State Department for terrorism, it appears that Ali Ahmeti is sincere in his newfound commitment to the democratic process. The DUI won 70 percent of the Albanian vote in the 2002 Assembly elections, which led to 16 seats in parliament. The party cooperated with the SDSM in the governing coalition.

In 2004 the party reaffirmed its commitment to Albanian integration in a confident multiethnic Macedonia, decentralisation of power, eradication of corruption and organised crime, and for a stable FYROM integrated into Euro–Atlantic structures. Overseeing the majority of the Ohrid reforms, the DUI has been successful partly because of the perception that in just a few months it has been able to achieve for the Albanian minority more than the alternative Albanian parties could in over a decade.

In February 2006, the DUI presented a bill on the status of former members of the now disbanded National Liberation Army (NLA). The draft does not use the reference "NLA", but instead refers to "participants in the 2001 armed conflict". It reportedly envisions treatment and benefits for former ethnic Albanian militants and their families equal to those provided to former members of the Macedonian security forces.

Before the 2006 elections, DUI formed an electoral coalition with the Party for Democratic Prosperity (PDP) and the Democratic League of Bosniaks. This election bloc won 17 seats in parliament and DUI again became the biggest party for Albanians in Macedonia. However, the party was not invited to join the government. In protest, the party boycotted the first sessions of the parliament and staged several road blockades in the summer of 2006.

Resentment over being left out of the coalition in favor of the smaller Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) also led to tensions between the two ethnic Albanian parties in Macedonia, which ultimately culminated into election violence during the 2008 parliamentary elections. In these elections, the DUI won 18 seats, again becoming the biggest ethnic Albanian party of the country. It will now become part of the new ruling coalition.

[www.bdi.org.mk](http://www.bdi.org.mk)

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Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) – 11 seats

Leader: Menduh Thaci

The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA, or Partia Demokristiane Shqipërisë, PDSH) was founded in 1995 when the youth generation of PDP politicians, led by Arben Xhaferi, who had arrived from Kosovo, broke away to form a separate party. Xhaferi's goals included recognition of Albanians as a constituent nation, rights to language and education, proportional representation in existing institutions and the demand for a separate university in Tetovo on the border with Kosovo.

In 1998 the DPA carried its popular, radical agenda into government after forming a surprise partnership with the rightist bloc dominated by VMRO–DPMNE and in 2002 along with its former government partner went into opposition to the SDSM and DUI. Prior to the 2006 elections the DPA campaigned alone and vowed to revenge on DUI. The party collected 11 parliamentary seats and, although smaller than DUI, formed again a coalition with VMRO–DPMNE.

This led to resentment with the DUI and considerable tensions between the two ethnic Albanian parties in the country, which ultimately culminated in the violent incidents marring the 2008 parliamentary vote. After this vote, the VMRO–DPMNE decided to govern with the biggest ethnic Albanian party, the DUI, and the DPA returned to opposition.

<http://www.pdsh.org>

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Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) – part of the SUN coalition for Europe

Leader: Jovan Manasievski

The Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) was launched in 1997 as a merger between the Liberal Party and the Democratic Party. The first leader of the LDP was Petar Goshev from the Democrats, who was also the last president of the League of Communists in Macedonia. After the local elections in 2000, the social liberal LDP for the first time entered the SDSM lead coalition "Together for Macedonia". The party participated within the same pre-elections coalition during the latest elections. The LDP is an affiliate member of the European Liberal Democrat and Reformist Party (ELDR) and a full member of the Liberal International.

[www.ldp.org.mk](http://www.ldp.org.mk)

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Liberal Party of Macedonia (LPM) – part of the SUN coalition for Europe

Leader: Stojan Andov

The Liberal Party was founded in 1990 under the nomenclature "Alliance of Reform Forces in Macedonia", i.e., a name and a symbol identical with the Alliance of Reform Forces of Yugoslavia, led by the then Prime Minister of Federal Yugoslavia, Ante Markovic. The LP participated in the 1992–1998 governing coalition, although contributed to its disintegration when it left in 1996 because of mounting evidence of corruption. It then merged with the Democratic Party in 1997 to form the Liberal Democratic Party.

The current incarnation of the LPM was formed in 2000 when traditional Liberal leaders Stojan Andov, Pajkovski and Danevski left the Liberal Democratic Party. Politicians such as these support a programme emphasising the economic development and market reforms of the country.

The LPM currently is a part of the VMRO–DPMNE–lead 'For a better Macedonia' bloc, which is currently in government, and holds 1 ministerial post.

<http://www.lp.org.mk/>



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Socialist Party of Macedonia (SPM) – part of the ‘For a better Macedonia’ bloc

Leader: Ljubislav Ivanov

The SPM was founded as a successor to the Socialist Alliance of the Working People that fell-apart in 1990. The party defines itself as a socialist party inspired by the tradition of the European Left-wing movement of the last century. In the FYROM political constellation the SPM has been a traditional pre-electoral coalition partner with the SDSM. This relationship broke down in September 2002 over the issue of the Ohrid Agreement. The SPM's political agenda consists of a programme of furthering equality, introducing workers self-management and democratisation. In terms of foreign policy it supports the annulling of the Ohrid agreement because it considered it harmful for the ethnic working-class Macedonians, from whom it draws upon for support.

Currently, the SPM is part of the VMRO-DPMNE-lead ‘For a better Macedonia’ bloc.

[www.spm.com.mk](http://www.spm.com.mk)

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New Alternative Leader: Gjorgji Orovcanec

Former VMRO-NP's deputy, Gjorgje Orovcanec on 12 March 2007 initiated procedures for registration of his new party "New Alternative". Former foreign minister Aleksandar Dimitrov and several officials of the Democratic Alternative party have announced joining New Alternative.

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**European Forum**  
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