

# WHY AND HOW WE WON

CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES  
IN EAST CENTRAL EUROPE  
AND THEIR RETURN  
TO POWER IN THE 2000s



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Center-Right Parties in East Central Europe and Their Return to Power in the 2000s

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# OBSAH

PREFACE .....	V
DID WE EVER LOSE? THE BULGARIAN CENTER RIGHT REBORN .....	5
Roumen Iontchev	
THE CENTER RIGHT IN CROATIA – HOW TO WIN, AGAIN?.....	21
Davor Ivo Stier	
A LONG HARD ROAD OUT OF OPPOSITION: EXPLAINING THE SUCCESS OF FIDESZ–HUNGARIAN CIVIC UNION.....	31
Márk Szabó	
THE CONSERVATIVE COMEBACK IN LITHUANIA IN 2008: A PYRRHIC VICTORY?.....	49
Mantas Adomėnas	
FOUR VICTORIES: THE MACEDONIAN CASE.....	71
Jovan Ananiev	
WHY WE WON – THE POLISH CASE.....	85
Marek Matraszek	
THE CENTER RIGHT IN ROMANIA: BETWEEN COALITION CONFLICTS AND REFORM RESPONSIBILITIES	
Dragoș Paul Aligică and Vlad Tarko	
FROM CULTURE STRUGGLE TO DEVELOPMENTAL REFORMS: THE CASE OF SLOVENIA'S CENTER RIGHT.....	119
Matej Makarovič	
COMPARATIVE VICTORIES: HOW CENTER-RIGHT PARTIES LEARNED TO BE POPULAR, RELEVANT AND PREPARED TO GOVERN... THIS TIME.....	137
Peter Učeň	
NOTES ON AUTHORS.....	147

## PREFACE

In 2005, the International Republican Institute (IRI) published *Why We Lost: Explaining the Rise and Fall of the Center-Right Parties in Central Europe, 1996-2002*, which summarized the experience of center-right parties in Bulgaria, Hungary, Lithuania, Macedonia, Poland, Romania and Slovakia in the second half of the 1990s. These parties had defeated their leftist and nationalist rivals on the promise of implementation of political and economic reforms and acceleration of the accession processes to the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Association (NATO). By the time the next electoral cycle was complete, most of them had lost power and been ousted from governments by their leftist counterparts. *Why We Lost* attempted systematically to identify the major reasons behind these defeats and to highlight their importance for the learning cycle of center-right parties in the region.

Several years later, IRI believes the time is ripe for producing a similar analysis of the further evolution of the center right in the region. In the middle of the past decade, some of the center-right parties studied in *Why We Lost* returned to power. In some places, other center-right parties which did not exist yet at time of the writing of the first book moved into the political space they had occupied and succeeded in doing the same. IRI believes it is important to understand how and why the traditional center-right parties and those that succeeded them were capable of regaining popular support and positions in government, and therefore has decided to produce another set of case studies.

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This book aims to analyze how and why center-right parties in the region succeeded in regaining popular support and returning to power after a cycle out of power in the early 2000s. It strives to examine processes within the parties, as well as within the respective societies under study, that made such developments possible. A common observation is that in some countries a substantial organizational reconfiguration and distinguishable ideological shift of center-right parties – rather than just a reinvigoration of old messages – took place and enabled them to move forward. Thus it is possible to distinguish at least two successful strategies of recovery: 1) a successful resurrection and *reinvigoration* of the appeal of the traditional parties of the moderate right, and 2) a *replacement* of the traditional moderate center right by new – and in many aspects different – parties.

The “reinvigoration” strategy assumed a rejection (or, at least, a suppression) of certain questionable aspects of the previous term in office and, in some cases, the retirement of those who embodied them, but largely maintained continuity with the older incarnation of the party. It also included a deep reflection and adoption of new outlooks as a prerequisite for convincingly presenting new views and policy proposals and/or a new party image. A primary example of the successful reinvigoration strategy can be found in the Homeland Union–Lithuanian Christian Democrats.

The “replacement” scenario, on the contrary, inevitably involved also an organizational and ideological revamping of the appeals of the “old,” traditional right. This was typically accompanied by a process of putting distance between the newly formed incarnations of the center right and the traditional right, with emphasis placed on their newness in generational, organizational and other terms. In short, the new, successful center-right parties at issue did not spare their traditional predecessors from criticism as anti-establishment sentiment was an important element of their appeal to the general public, as the cases of Bulgaria and Romania remind us. Therefore, country chapter authors were encouraged to judge their cases also through the lenses of the aforementioned dichotomy, in addition to their own assessment of the factors leading to the successful resurgence of center-right parties and movements.

In terms of selection of cases, the collection contains eight country studies. Only the Hungarian, Lithuanian and Macedonian chapters deal with the same parties that were included in the *Why We Lost* analysis. Poland does this in part. Bulgaria and Romania are examples of the replacement approach, so these chapters focus on new party incarnations of the center right. The Slovak case has not been included in the current collection, and Croatia and Slovenia were added instead. The former fell out of the logic of the succession of power in 2006, and the latter two were out of tune with such logic in 1990s, which was the reason for their absence in *Why We Lost*. We have, however, decided to include Croatia and Slovenia to illustrate the way center-right parties in these two countries learned to be a true opposition and eventually the governing alternative to their ideological opponents. While these cases did not fit the paradigm in 2005 when the analysis was about learning from losing, they fit much better the objective of the current book, which deals with winning and complements the picture of the ascent of the mainstream right to power in the region in the middle of the previous decade.

This analysis covers periods preceding – and, in some cases, also following – the milestone elections for the countries and parties at issue: 2003 in the case of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), 2004 for the Slovenian Democratic Party (SDS), the 2005 and 2007 elections in case of the Polish right, 2006 for the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization – Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE), the 2008 elections in case of the Lithuanian and Romanian right, the 2009 elections marking the success of Citizens for the European Development of Bulgaria (GERB) and, finally, the period preceding the landslide victory of Fidesz in Hungary in 2010.

In general, the analysis involved in this project was meant to go beyond the “pendulum-swing” metaphor to identify the main factors in the resurrection of the center right’s capacity to win elections and govern. Can we discern a distinguishable learning curve of the center right in the region? If yes, what are its major characteristics? Have center-right par-

ties become effective power-seekers? If yes, has there been any price – in terms of ideology, policies or political conduct – they had to pay to become effective at seeking office? Have they retained their capacity to implement right-of-center reforms? If not, why?

These questions originate in a widely-held opinion that the center right's eagerness to implement a reform agenda in a second period in office often seems to pale when compared to the reformist commitment they showed in their first turn in government in the 1990s. If this is true at all, is the reason to be found within the parties or within the societies in which they operate? It might be the case that the parties at issue believed that their respective societies no longer need – let alone demand – extensive reforms. But it may also be useful to ask whether center-right parties, while in positions of power, rule based on an identifiable political philosophy of reform, or are simply overwhelmed by concerns of consolidation and retention of their position. This provokes another set of questions to be addressed by serious analysis of the contemporary center right in East-Central Europe: Having become relatively effective power-seekers, have center-right parties lost the interest or capacity – or both – to push through right-of-center policies in practice? Or is their (alleged) decrease of reform commitment the result of a learning process? Have they concluded that reforms might be counterproductive from the point of view of obtaining and retaining power? Have they become political pragmatists to the extent of shying away from too great an emphasis on ideological principles that put in danger their prospects of holding power? Or are they just waiting for the time their positions become more certain to take the risks related to reforms with a greater degree of security? Is constant reform, in fact, the essence of the center-right politics and good governance? Also, what might be the mid- to long-term future of these parties? And how are they likely to weather their next period out of office?

Finally, all manuscripts in this collection were finished in summer and fall 2010.<sup>1</sup> In the intervening time, many things have become clearer and some murkier. Some of the ideas or conjectures offered in individual chapters may have been overcome by events, and authors might want to formulate some arguments differently today. Still, the basic analysis of the reasons for center-right victories remains valid. While individual case studies differ in style, format, genre and degree of academic rigor (note that this was never meant to be an academic study), we hope they will be able to give political practitioners and center-right party activists a deeper understanding of key causes and factors leading to the renewal of political parties after defeats. Findings, recommendations and lessons learned should be able to be implemented by political parties and their leaders and representatives.

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<sup>1</sup> While this book was published by IRI, opinions expressed in it can not be considered official opinion of IRI. Chapters collected in this publication include political characteristics and evaluations of individual political parties that can be attributed solely to their authors.

# FOUR VICTORIES: THE MACEDONIAN CASE

JOVAN ANANIEV

CONTENTS:

- I. INTRODUCTION
- II. THE FALL OF THE RIGHT IN 2002
- III. FOUNDATIONS OF THE FUTURE VICTORY
- IV. RETURN OF THE RIGHT IN 2006
- V. SECOND BIG VICTORY
- VI. SIMULTANEOUS THIRD AND FOURTH VICTORIES
- VII. AFTER THE VICTORIES: CONTINUITY AND STRUGGLING WITH THE CHALLENGES

## I. INTRODUCTION

Political parties have been the most powerful policy-making actors – both on the national and local levels of Macedonian society – from the moment of inception of the multiparty system until today. Citizens are aware that a party agenda is the only agenda that it would be possible to implement. Therefore, the ability to influence the agenda of parties indirectly would also mean an opportunity to influence politics.

Results from survey research<sup>20</sup> show that the majority of citizens in Macedonia shares what would be conventionally called “leftist values.” As much as 70 percent of respondents favor diminishing social differences among people and retaining or increasing the state provision of public services (even if this requires higher taxes), believe that the social security of the citizens should be under the exclusive jurisdiction of the state (and that citizens should not take even partial responsibility for it), support the idea that state-provided health and educational services should be of better quality than private ones and think that socialism as a system took care of all people and was not repressive. By the same token, they disapprove of the freedom of owners of enterprises to make exclusive decisions about the development of their companies; they practically call for a co-decision-making system. And with regard to the distribution of these opinions among the voters of parties on the left and right, there is hardly any difference. Only in relation to two questions – out of 11 – do respondents show positions closer to the right: agreeing that private companies are more successful and that bankrupt companies should not be by rehabilitated by the state but by themselves.

These facts look like a remarkable paradox given the fact that from its inception, Macedonian party politics has been shaped by intense conflict between the two major “left” and “right” parties – the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (*Socijaldemokratski Sojuz na Makedonija*, SDSM) and the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization–Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (*Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija-Demokratska Partija za Makedonsko Nacionalno Edinstvo*, VMRO-DPMNE). What then accounts for the difference between these parties and their constituencies?

To start with, such opinions among the citizens are the result of several factors, namely their deteriorating socio-economic positions during the last two decades; hence the preference for state-run policies of a social nature. There is also a certain “ideological recidivism” from the previous socialist system, when Macedonia was part of Yugoslavia. In that period, the state took full responsibility and conducted a more interventionist and social policy that allowed most people to have a required minimum standard of living and completely free health and educational services.

In Macedonia the main ideological difference when it comes to the old socialist system does not concern its socio-economic aspects, but whether or not the system was repressive, and whether it allowed for affirmation of the national identity of all peoples in former Yugoslavia. Thus, today’s supporters of VMRO-DPMNE might have been then discerned as people believing that the former one-party system limited the freedom of the human personality, marginalized the role of the church and nationality and repressed the possibil-

<sup>20</sup> Scientific research project “Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia” undertaken by the Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius in Skopje. Research report in 2010



ity of private initiative in the economy. The same difference between the left and the right is present today in a modern context.

Socio-economic factors are also not a determining factor in the selection of a particular political party. In Macedonia the principle that the ideological orientation of the citizens would be predetermined by their socio-economic background has not applied for some time, with the exception of questions of ethnic and religious background. Other factors pertain more, including especially the voters' model of rational choice with regard to which party offers the best solutions for them and their families.

## II. THE FALL OF THE RIGHT IN 2002

In the September 15, 2002 elections, the SDSM and its coalition partners won the largest share of parliamentary seats, and along with the new, ethnic Albanian Democratic Union for Integration (*Bashkimi Demokratik për Integrim*, BDI), formed the new government. In these elections, the then ruling VMRO-DPMNE won 299,177 votes, failing to win the majority in the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia.

The VMRO-DPMNE election manifesto put an emphasis on the activities it had undertaken as a ruling party, in particular the resolution of the civil conflict a year before the elections, the preservation of security and the reforms undertaken in the field of economics, education, social policy and youth issues. During VMRO-DPMNE rule, the opposition, as well as a number of media, economic interest groups and civil society organizations criticized policies and measures undertaken by the government in certain sectors. In its manifesto, the party addressed these criticisms, while once again stressing its pro-reform orientation: "Certainly at times, over a short time interval, the reforms caused doubts regarding the necessity of their introduction. However, the citizen needs to rest assured that the reforms made will result in success in the future and are introduced for the good of all citizens."<sup>21</sup> In order to better explain its prior activities, the party published a "White Paper of VMRO-DPMNE." The program was dominated by right-of-center concepts, the most prominent of which was the party's commitment to the idea of an autonomous and independent Macedonia, especially due to the then-present danger of jeopardizing independence and territorial integrity during the civil conflict. The main slogan of the program and of the campaign was "(Keep your) Chin Up," as a call upon the pride which each citizen could now have, given that the 2001 conflict had been overcome and that one could expect a peaceful period ahead that would bring much greater success for everyone.

## III. FOUNDATIONS OF FUTURE VICTORY

After VMRO-DPMNE became an opposition party, major internal changes were launched. At the party congress in 2003, a change of the party leader and entire leadership took place. The president of the party thus far, Prime Minister Ljubčo Georgievski, left on his own initiative, and in a secret ballot of the delegates at the party congress, former Minister

<sup>21</sup> Manifesto of the VMRO-DPMNE for the General (Parliamentary) Election 2002, see: [www.vmro\\_dpmne.org.mk](http://www.vmro_dpmne.org.mk)

of Trade and Minister of Finance Nikola Gruevski was elected party president. Gruevski had been a close associate of Georgievski before and during the congress, and Georgievski publicly supported his ally for the post. Within the party and in public, Gruevski was considered a reform-oriented politician, moderate in his public appearance and in the actions he undertook. He was viewed as one who introduced a managerial approach in public policy-making during his time as minister. The change of the party leader led to changes in most of the members of the party leadership, and a process of reforms and revival of VMRO-DPMNE gradually started. Several structural changes followed:

*Change in the approach towards election of party officials.* The “bottom-up” approach was introduced as a practice, providing opportunities to party members to be actively involved in the process of proposing the party leadership on the municipal and central level. “An opportunity was presented for everyone, depending on their abilities, to advance in the party. Party functions were no longer reserved only for certain people, but were made available to everyone who had the capacity to do them. This created a new democratic climate within the party.”<sup>22</sup>

*Change in the way the party program was created.* The party opened itself to new ideas, both to the membership and to all citizens who had interest in submitting proposals on issues to which the party should pay more attention to and on how to overcome pending problems. “A professional approach was practiced in policy development and a scientific approach was introduced in offering solutions to problems.”<sup>23</sup>

*Organizational strengthening.* The process of consolidation of the party at the local level was started through enhanced activities of municipal chapters and strengthening their position in the process of decision-making within the party. A communications center of the party was established, which, as the first of its kind within any party in the country, had the task of professionalizing the approach of the party towards the media and the public. This meant continuous monitoring of the political processes in the country and effective reaction by the party.

*Ideological re-profiling and positioning on the political market.* The party started a process of distancing itself from the stigma ascribed to it by its opponents that it advocated hard-core nationalism, patriotism based only on national folklore and glorification of Macedonian history; that a part of the leadership had a “bulgarophilic” orientation;<sup>24</sup> and that, during its four-year mandate, it had initiated a practice of political alienation from the people. VMRO-DPMNE started to position itself among the political parties as a modern party that respects and practices the positive values of the “old” VMRO-DPMNE (i.e., tradition, patriotism and Christian Democracy), while adding a new identity as a reformed center-right party with greater internal democracy. It started to move from the “tradi-

22 From an interview with Ilija Dimovski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE (June 2010, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia)

23 From an interview with Aleksandar Spasenovski, MP from VMRO-DPMNE (June 2010, Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia)

24 This is shorthand for the position that the Macedonian language, culture and history have Bulgarian origins and dates back to late Nineteenth-Century divergences within the emancipation movement of the Macedonian Slavs within the Ottoman Empire, of which was VMRO a main political vehicle. In modern times, many considered Georgievski to be the leader of “bulgarophilic” wing within the party, as he kept both Macedonian and Bulgarian citizenship and as an adult changed the spelling of his first name from the Macedonian “Ljupčo” to the Bulgarian “Ljubčo.”

tional right” towards the center right. Retaining the “old,” right-wing proclamations, it launched a drive for a new concept of governance with responsibility and transparency, faith in God, conservation of tradition and history, respect for the family and advocacy for a number of conservative values. It also started to develop a party doctrine based on the real problems of real citizens.

### *Extracts of Some Right-of-Center Positions from VMRO-DPMNE Doctrine*

We don't talk about universal human nature in the context of interpretation of the former socialist regime, but we talk about the real person. That's why we focus on values related to the real person: personal and national freedom, religion as a framework in which faith and belief are embedded, the family as a foundation of society and tradition, which gives points of orientation for the real person facing the challenges of transition and globalization.<sup>25</sup>

#### *About the nation*

In times of globalization, the question of the nature and the future of the nation are equally important. The relationship of the citizen to the nation is a lively topic. All questions concerning the nation are questions concerning the lives of the ordinary people. The contemporary relationship between the state and nation and the individual defines the nation as a space for action by the individual.<sup>26</sup>

#### *About the market*

VMRO-DPMNE advocates for more markets, the reduction of the influence of the state on the market and for restricted public administration. The state has primarily a regulatory and supervisory function in economics and in the public sector. It sets the framework in which citizens, public institutions and the business sector respect procedures. It sets out, along with the other relevant political actors, the rules of action in politics, economics and public life.<sup>27</sup>

#### *About private ownership*

For VMRO-DPMNE it is imperative to complete the processes of privatization and denationalization and establish a comprehensive system of keeping records of ownership. VMRO-DPMNE's conservatism is based on the values of public responsibility of the private owner.

#### *About the family*

For VMRO-DPMNE, the family, as a community of one man and one woman who take care of their children, is a natural form of community. There is no real alternative to the family. The family turns a child into a decent person. There needs to be harmonization between work and the family. Even though it is difficult, it is possible to find a balance between work and family life. The protection of the mother and the children needs to come first.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Doctrine of VMRO-DPMNE, p.7

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p.8

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p.10

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p.16

*About tradition*

Historical memory enables the renaissance of tradition. It is necessary to find the old traditional values of the typical Macedonian way of life through the centuries.<sup>29</sup>

*About religion*

As a conservative party, VMRO-DPMNE sees the church as a crucial support of the state. Tolerance stems from faith in God. We consider religious tolerance essential to multicultural life in Macedonia. God is one, but we celebrate Him differently. Our churches, our mosques and our synagogues are our spiritual temples.<sup>30</sup>

***Elections between Election Cycles***

In 2004 an early presidential election was called due to the tragic death of President Boris Trajkovski. In this election, the VMRO-DPMNE candidate was Saško Kedev, a renowned cardiac surgeon from the University Clinic Center in Skopje. The party slogan was “Kedev - The New Face of Macedonia,” meaning to show voters that the party offered a candidate who had no political past, and thus gave hope for a new way of doing politics. VMRO-DPMNE argued that the SDSM’s Branko Crvenkovski was inappropriate as a candidate “due to his dark past as a prime minister” and could not lead the country. For its part, the SDSM focused on Kedev’s lack of political experience as a weakness rather than a strength, claiming that Macedonia needed a statesman. With the eponymous slogan “Crvenkovski-Statesman,” the SDSM won the election. VMRO-DPMNE, however, did not concede defeat, and – claiming a great number of election irregularities – did not recognize Crvenkovski as the legitimate president.

With Crvenkovski now in the presidency, however, the SDSM began to suffer leadership issues, and the process of consolidation of VMRO-DPMNE and the strengthening of its rating in the public ran in parallel with the process of weakening of the SDSM. The following year, 2005, saw municipal elections. Traditionally, such elections in Macedonia are the best test of party popularity in the middle of the parliamentary election cycle. Through municipal elections, citizens can begin to identify potential winners for the next round of parliamentary elections. In 2005 VMRO-DPMNE, together with several smaller parties, formed a coalition called “For a Better Macedonia” and ran with the slogan “Results Now!” In the campaign, the opposition coalition emphasized what it argued were unfulfilled SDSM promises, as well as its own commitment to visible and quick results if it were to win mayoral seats or municipal council positions.

The Republic of Macedonia has a one-tier system of local self-government consisting of municipalities and the city of Skopje as a separate unit including several municipalities. Based upon the type of area where the seat of the municipality is located, these can be categorized as “rural” and “urban,” and, for the sake of better illustration, into small, medium and large municipalities. Altogether there are 83 municipalities in the country, and the “For a Better Macedonia” coalition won in the large, urban municipalities of Bitola and Prilep, in the smaller urban municipalities of Radoviš, Valandovo Pehčevo, Sveti Nikole and Kratovo, and in the eight rural municipalities. But it won almost all municipalities in

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid, p.19

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p.20

the city of Skopje and its independent candidate, businessman Trifun Kostovski, managed to take the mayor's seat of the capital city as a whole. Both major parties declared victory: VMRO-DPMNE because it had won in Skopje and the large, urban municipalities, and SDSM because it succeeded in a higher number of municipalities overall. Nevertheless, these elections were a sign of the gradual return of VMRO-DPMNE to positions of power and restoration of confidence in the party among the party supporters.

#### IV. RETURN OF THE RIGHT IN 2006

In the period between the two national election cycles, from 2002 to 2006, many changes occurred on both the political and economic planes. Many changes occurred on the party scene, as well as within the political parties. All this led to changes in political priorities and orientations among the voters. Several factors – both internal and external – contributed to the strengthening of VMRO-DPMNE's position. Below we will discuss the key reasons why the party won its victory in 2006.

##### ***The Poor Economic and Political Situation in the Country***

Traditionally, from the moment of its independence, the Republic of Macedonia has struggled with high unemployment, a large number of bankrupt companies (and thus a large number of redundant workers), low wages, a large percentage of the poor and people living on the edge of poverty and a low level of public services. These socio-economic factors have varied over time, but they have largely persisted through all governments of various compositions, and there has been little continuity or strong momentum in overcoming them. Most citizens are so-called rational voters; they make their decision based on their socio-economic position. They vote for the party which they believe offers greater opportunity for maintaining or improving their socio-economic position. And, of course, the motivation of many voters is not to choose a better political offer, but to punish the incumbent party for its poor performance. The SDSM government that ruled Macedonia from 2002-2006 was blamed by the opposition for the growing economic crisis in the country, rising unemployment, partisan employment in the state administration, a lack of sufficient democratic procedures in decision making, and an increase in corruption and crime.

##### ***Weakening and Rupture of the Competition***

At the same time, the SDSM was facing a process of splintering that resulted in the creation of the New Social Democratic Party (*Nova socijaldemokratska partija*, NSDP), whose leader was Tito Petkovski, a senior SDSM party official, former president of the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia and a respected leader of the party's moderate wing. He drew party officials and members of SDSM and undecided voters into NSDP and positioned the party in on the center-left of the ideological map of the country. The SDSM faced increasing problems with consolidation of the party, trying to establish a viable management mechanism and identifying a leader who would replace Crvenkovski. Almost all political parties in Macedonia are so called "leader-based parties," in which the leader has a dominant position and makes the largest number of important decisions

alone. With Crvenkovski in the presidency, the SDSM needed to come up with a leader who would lead it to victory but could also restore failing party discipline. The unsteady competitive position of SDSM only worked in favor of VMRO-DPMNE.

### ***The Process of Schism and Strengthening of VMRO-DPMNE***

In the period between the election cycles, VMRO-DPMNE also saw its own schisms, as the hard-core right wing of the party, led by former party Chairman Ljubčo Georgievski, established the VMRO–People’s Party (*Vnatrešna Makedonska Revolucionerna Organizacija–Narodna Partija*, VMRO-NP) in 2004. The main reasons for establishment of the new party were, according to its leaders, the departure of VMRO-DPMNE from the “fundamental values” of the party and the marginalization of long-serving party members at the expense of newly recruited ones. The split meant a loss of the part of the membership and supporters to the new party, on the one hand, but also contributed to the establishment of a clearer profile for the reformed VMRO-DPMNE, both ideologically and in terms of personnel. In practice, the departure of Georgievski and his followers facilitated the Gruevski leadership’s official distancing of the party from what it viewed as ideological views and political and personnel decisions that had cost VMRO-DPMNE significant public support.

Once factional activities that divide a party and lead to the creation of a new party settle down, it is often possible for a more stable process of consolidation to begin. This was true for VMRO-DPMNE, whose leadership managed to contain the antagonisms within the party and create a full-fledged infrastructure capable of carrying out all the activities necessary in the pre-election period. And these pre-election-period actions came to differ from all previously known activities in Macedonia, as VMRO-DPMNE started to work with a new model of political marketing.

### ***A New Model of Political Marketing and Concept of Election Strategy***

Going into 2006, VMRO-DPMNE applied an electoral strategy that had not yet been applied by any party. Based on a sophisticated survey of the political market and voter behavior, the party obtained solid knowledge of the needs of the various strata of citizens in different regions of the country, as well as knowledge of the undecided voters and their expectations and needs. Based on this body of knowledge, the party doctrine and the competence of the expert team, VMRO-DPMNE created an electoral strategy and an election program. The strategy can be divided into general and population-segment-focused components. The general strategy included an appeal to the entire constituency, whereas the segmented parts addressed particular groups of voters such as pensioners, youth, the unemployed and women. This kind of appeal to specific segments was evident in the election program, but also in public appearances and meetings with specific target groups. In this way, VMRO-DPMNE’s campaign adapted its traditional right-of-center approach and moved closer to its own motto, as proclaimed in the party doctrine: to come closer to and take care of real people and to offer real solutions to real human problems, in practice to develop VMRO-DPMNE as a real “people’s party.” In practice, the emerging VMRO-DPMNE would be a people’s party “in that it tries to be closer to the people, to the people’s problems and offer solutions to their problems.”<sup>31</sup>

31 Interview with Mr Ilija Dimovski, MP and director of the Center for Communication of VMRO-DPMNE.

### *A New Concept of the Electoral Program*

VMRO-DPMNE also for the first time offered a lengthy electoral manifesto with a complex structure to the public. The manifesto contained 110 pages, which is approximately five times more than the previous program document had. It was divided into areas such as economic growth, agricultural development, industry, energy, social security and justice, good governance and combating corruption, education, sports, science, information technology and e-society, reliable, efficient and equitable health care, the political system, culture, population and demographic policy, tourism, and protection of the environment. The manifesto was titled “Rebirth in 100 Steps,” with the steps themselves symbolizing the specific activities that the party planned to take to achieve the objective – an economic and social renaissance. The program was specific in that it proposed concrete measures and specified the objective and activity that should take place, and then provided an accounting of cost, as exemplified below:

#### *Light at the End of the Tunnel*

Objective: to temporarily address unemployment in the 20 poorest municipalities, the objective over four years is to create approximately 2,000 temporary jobs.

Method: budget support for unemployed people for various projects: growing plants, mushrooms, horticultural products, poultry, community activities, environmental projects, repairs of schools and clinics, etc.

Means: 2 million Euros, budget of the Republic of Macedonia

The program was characterized as a concept for the economic development of the country. Measures and projects proposed in the area of industry, energy, agriculture and small and medium enterprises prevail in the program. The most frequently used terms and words, besides the name of the party and the country were: “EU,” “Europe,” “European,” words related to European integration and words that illustrated the party’s economic program, such as “economic investment,” “development,” “construction,” “foreign investment” (48 times), “projects” (84 times), the party slogan, and so on. Most-often-used words also included the terms “citizens,” “government” (99 times), and the “state” (53 times), which was referred to in the program most often in the context of reducing its influence in the sphere of economic activities.<sup>32</sup>

The process of drafting the electoral program was based on prior consultations with experts in specific areas, an approach which the party emphasized as an important feature. “Many renowned local experts from Macedonian universities participated in the drafting of the electoral program, as well as the Macedonian Arts and Science Academy (MANU), non-governmental organizations, businessmen and foreign economic experts. In addition, the chambers of commerce, the trade unions and most of the local self-government units were consulted.”<sup>33</sup>

From the party’s formation until the elections in 2006, the party’s trademark was the color red and a lion with two tails. During the elections in 2006, however, the party partially

32 A. Cekikj, *Political Identities in the Republic of Macedonia*, Institute for Sociological, Political and Juridical Research, p.134

33 Manifesto of the VMRO-DPMNE for the General (Parliamentary) Election 2006, part: Introduction.

rebranded itself by changing its color to orange. According to some, this was a sign of establishing a certain distance from all previous unsuccessful, failed and controversial acts and activities while VMRO-DPMNE was in power. It was meant to be a symbol of a new way – with new ideas, people and modes of operation. According to others, the party wanted to offer an association for the public with the Orange Revolution in Ukraine and to symbolize a true political rebirth.

In the 2006 elections VMRO-DPMNE won the possibility to form a government, which it formed together with the NSDP, the Socialist Party of Macedonia (*Socijalistička Partija na Makedonija*, SPM), the Democratic Renewal of Macedonia (*Demokratska obnova na Makedonija*, DOM), the Party for a European Future (*Partija za Evropska Idnina*, PEI) and the Democratic Party of Albanians (*Partia Demokratike Shqiptare*, PDS). The coalition government program included many of the plans, projects and measures envisioned by the VMRO-DPMNE manifesto. The new government was also largely consistent in implementing these activities. It also monitored the results of implementation in terms of their congruence with the program, the degree to which objectives were met and whether implementation incurred additional costs compared to the government program. By Macedonian standards it was unprecedentedly easy for citizens to keep the government accountable for the implementation of its promises. This facilitated a process of a gradual building of trust towards political parties and electoral programs in general among the people. Accordingly, it supported the idea that parties ought to implement what they promise, and that the electoral manifesto is not a simple propaganda tool, but a record of all obligations of the parties made to the population.

## V. SECOND BIG VICTORY

But this government also proved the old wisdom of politics that all election programs are doomed to being compromised in coalition settings. In the process of implementation of some projects, VMRO-DPMNE did not receive complete support from its coalition partners. It was not possible to pass several laws that required a two-thirds majority or the “double majority.”<sup>34</sup> These disagreements appeared within the coalition in spite of the fact that the contentious issues were part of the mutually agreed government program.

From the results of the public opinion surveys done by several agencies and institutes, it was obvious that VMRO-DPMNE’s ratings were consistently growing, and that the ratings of Prime Minister (and party leader) Nikola Gruevski were growing, as well. This was the first time in the multiparty era in Macedonia in which such high ratings were recorded for any political party and politician. What was even more remarkable was that that rating did not decrease over a long period, but rather kept increasing. For the sake of an opportunity to secure another four-year term and to ensure implementation of the program promised to the voters, VMRO-DPMNE opted for early dissolution of the Assembly and thus, for the first time, for the calling of early parliamentary elections in June 2008.

The new election manifesto justified this decision as follows:

<sup>34</sup> In the Assembly of the Republic of Macedonia, some laws that touch upon the interests of the ethnic communities are, in addition to the standard parliamentary majority, required to obtain a majority of those MPs which have declared they belong to an ethnic community that is not a majority in the Republic of Macedonia.



Early elections are a strong democratic tool, a benefit of democracy and a basic way to face responsibility and a test whether the citizens are in favor of the ruling party's activities, whether it works and acts for the good of citizens, whether it fulfills what it promised or if it has betrayed the citizens and behaved contrary to the interests of citizens and of the state. Early elections are just that: taking responsibility, looking in the eyes of the citizens, testing whether politicians have worked responsibly, honestly, and with dedication, whether they have worked for the good of the citizens, in accordance with their programs, which provided them a mandate in the previous elections.<sup>35</sup>

In the elections of June 2008, VMRO-DPMNE won an absolute majority together with its pre-election coalition partners and the BDI entered the government as a partner from the Albanian block, replacing PDS in this role. The majority was conceived as a guarantee of easier implementation of the promises made to citizens by – among other things – eliminating the practice of ultimata from coalition partners threatening to leave the government when their demands remained unfulfilled.

In these elections, the party ran with the slogan “Macedonia Knows, the Rebirth Continues.” In fact, the 2006 “Rebirth in 100 Steps” manifesto was upgraded and extended, retaining the identical degree of structuring and specificity regarding the planned objectives: “This program is a program that will continue the rebirth of the Republic of Macedonia! This program is an upgraded and extended version of the Rebirth in 100 Steps, with many more projects, achievable measures and new steps that will bring about rebirth – reebirth of the spirit, rebirth of feeling for the state, economic rebirth, rebirth in all spheres of the society!”<sup>36</sup> What was particularly interesting about this manifesto was a review that gave a detailed report on the objectives accomplished and activities concluded during in the previous two-year period.

The reasons that caused the party's victory in 2006 apply to the 2008 elections, as well, but the following should be added: consistency in the implementation of the projects promised during the election campaign in 2006 and the palpable consolidation of the party. The main commitments of the party in 2008 included the following five strategic priorities of the VMRO-DPMNE government for the period 2008–2012:

- Increasing economic growth and competitiveness on a permanent basis, a higher employment rate, an increased living standard and quality of life;
- Integrating the Republic of Macedonia into the EU and NATO;
- Continuing the fight against crime and corruption and efficient enforcement of the law;
- Maintaining good inter-ethnic relations and coexistence on the principles of mutual tolerance and respect and equal law enforcement, as well as completion of the implementation of the Ohrid Framework Agreement; and
- Investing in education as the safest way for creating strong individuals and a strong state.
- The ten key objectives for 2008–2012 included:
- Increasing domestic and foreign investment on the basis of an improved business climate;

<sup>35</sup> Manifesto of the VMRO-DPMNE for the General (Parliamentary) Election 2008, part: Introduction

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

- Developing agriculture and a better standard of living for farmers;
- Developing economic infrastructure, including roads, railroads, airports, energy facilities, information and communication technologies, irrigation and environment in order to increase competitiveness and support economic growth;
- Improving prospects for youth and greater safety for adults and pensioners;
- Improving education for better prospects in life, with greater investments including information technology, sports and ethics;
- Promoting the Macedonian language, culture and identity in the world;
- Delivering a high degree of safety and security and a determined fight against corruption and crime;
- Creating an efficient and independent judiciary and efficient and non-selective enforcement of the law;
- Improving the health of the nation that respects the traditional Christian values, including family values and children; and
- Providing efficient and transparent government on both the central and local level, as well as public institutions with greater quality.

## VI. SIMULTANEOUS THIRD AND FOURTH VICTORIES

In April 2009 the presidential elections were held simultaneously with the municipal elections. These elections were conducted in a period when VMRO-DPMNE was on the ascent and enjoyed high popularity. Several candidates ran in the presidential election, but Gjorge Ivanov, the candidate of the coalition led by VMRO-DPMNE, and Ljubomir Danailov Frčkoski, the candidate of the coalition led by SDSM, went to the second round. Both candidates were professors at the Faculty of Law, doctors of political science and intellectuals respected within the academic community. VMRO-DPMNE's candidate had never been active in politics and was never a member of a political party, while SDSM's candidate was cabinet member and adviser to late President Boris Trajkovski. Each considered his own political past an advantage and the opponent's past a disadvantage. Frčkoski observed that his rival candidate could not run the country without a single day of experience in politics, while the counter-argument was that Frčkoski experience proved only that he did not know how to provide leadership in politics and that it cannot be expected that he would change his way of working if he became president.<sup>37</sup>

During the campaign the candidates presented roughly similar views regarding the conduct of foreign policy in relation to Euro-Atlantic integration and security. However, even though neither had a concrete proposal for resolution of the dispute with Greece regarding the constitutional name of the Macedonian state, the SDSM candidate was more explicit in regard to the urgency for changing the name. In the second round of the elections Ivanov won 453,616 votes, while Frčkoski took 264,828. Voters thus awarded VMRO-

<sup>37</sup> Arguments and counter-arguments were presented during the TV debate broadcast by the national television.

-DPMNE a third consecutive victory with a second president of the Republic coming from within its ranks. For the first time no one questioned the legitimacy of the election, and the opposing candidate conceded defeat. But because the Albanian population largely abstained from the second round of the elections and did not express a preference for any candidate, some analysts suggested that the president-elect did not have full legitimacy sanctioned by all ethnic communities. Other analysts interpreted this as a true victory because VMRO-DPMNE was not put in a position to have to negotiate with the Albanian parties for their support and in return to have to meet requirements which could clash with the party's policy line. Ivanov's image as a moderate, non-partisan individual who would not divide the citizens, coupled with the congruence of his electoral program with the general principles of the government's foreign policy, contributed to Ivanov's victory, but the high rating VMRO-DPMNE had when the election took place helped him the most.

In the municipal elections in 2009, VMRO-DPMNE, together with the remaining coalition partners, ran with the slogan "Together We Can Do More." But the word "together" was used ambiguously; on the one hand, it symbolized the togetherness of the political parties and, on the other hand, a partnership with the citizens in terms of action on the local level.

In these elections, the party ran in the exact same way as it had in the two previous parliamentary cycles, offering concrete programs that contained precise projects in all municipalities, plus the city of Skopje. Where VMRO-DPMNE mayors sought reelection, in their programs they gave an account of their achievements, followed by an outline of objectives and commitments for the future period in government. This style of running a campaign and devising an electoral strategy, which were described as characteristic for the parliamentary elections in 2006, largely applied to these municipal elections, as well. In 2009, VMRO-DPMNE and its coalition partners won 56 mayoral seats and, importantly, the mayoral seat of the capital city Skopje. This was the broadest victory in a municipal election ever won by any political party in Macedonia. However, in these elections, besides the profile of the candidates, the electoral programs and the campaign, a large contribution to the success of the winning party came from the trust the voters invested in the party and its leader.

## VII. AFTER THE VICTORIES: CONTINUITY AND STRUGGLING WITH THE CHALLENGES

After four election victories, VMRO-DPMNE is firmly positioned as a party which has earned the citizens' trust for a longer period of time. All public opinion surveys continue to show high ratings for the party, but they also show a growing trend in support for the opposition party SDSM. After the election in 2009, SDSM had a party congress at which it reelected Branko Crvenkovski, former prime minister and former president of Macedonia, as its leader. A large portion of the membership felt that SDSM did not need reform that would include a change of the leader, as was the case with VMRO-DPMNE. They opted for partial reform and re-branding, but not for change of the party leader and

the leadership, believing that Crvenkovski was the only politician capable of restoring the strength of the party and accomplishing the necessary party consolidation.

As part of its attempt to come back, SDSM developed a very active campaign through which it accused the Gruevski government of passivity in resolution of the name dispute, uncontrolled budget spending, failure to resolve the status of the redundant work force, lack of foreign investment and inability to bring down the high unemployment rate. The ruling VMRO-DPMNE reciprocated by asking the opposition to provide its own solutions regarding the name dispute and blamed previous SDSM-led governments for causing laying the foundations of the country's long-term economic problems.