

North Macedonia

Last update:	28 oktober 2020
Population:	2,083,459 (World Bank est.)
Prime minister:	Zoran Zaev
President:	Stevo Pendarovski
Governemental type:	Parliamentary democracy
Ruling coalition:	SDSM, Besa Movement, DUI
Last election:	2020 (parliamentary elections)
Next election:	2021 (local elections) 2024 (parliamentary elections and presidential elections)
Sister parties:	Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)

For a long time, North Macedonia has been considered a relative success story in the region: no major conflicts, a fairly successful state-building process, and no territory issues. After years of showing dedication to the Ohrid Agreement – the 2001 peace deal between the North Macedonian government and ethnic Albanians – and implementing reforms, the country received EU candidate status in December 2005. The promises of EU and NATO membership (by 2008 the criteria for entering NATO were fulfilled) are important tools in uniting Macedonians with Albanian minorities. However, despite UN mediation, the long-standing name dispute with Greece has been stagnating the EU integration process and NATO membership as Greece has been vetoing the opening of the accession negotiations. During the accession negotiations, the EU has most leverage and influence on structural and sustainable reforms – for example on the rule of law and fundamental rights – in a candidate state.

In addition, the ruling conservative VMRO-DPMNE party of Nikola Gruevski, in power between 2006 and 2016, misused the lack of progress on the European road to establish an authoritarian regime and to engage in a nationalist identity-building project. Defending their activities under the slogan ‘at least we built something’ the government invested hundreds of millions of euros in building marble Greek-style statues, fountains, and buildings, turning the capital in something close to a theme park.

In the context of nationalism, ethnic conflicts are influencing the political landscape. This is something that could be seen during the last presidential elections, as well as the most recent parliamentary elections. Each time, the VMRO-DPMNE and the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) ended up in an extremely close tie. The VMRO-DPMNE, known for their nationalistic stance, is mainly focused on ethnic Macedonians, while the SDSM is centre-left and has shown to be more accepting and accommodating towards the country’s ethnic minorities. The SDSM barely won the 2019 presidential elections and in the 2020 parliamentary elections, while running with the Besa Movement as the “We can” coalition, it got 46 seats, it became the largest faction. The VMRO-DPMNE obtained only two seats less. Therefore, the SDSM and Besa Movement had to form a coalition with the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), which represents the Albanian minority in North Macedonia. Coalition talks between the two factions were not easy since the DUI demanded an Albanian Prime Minister. However, the SDSM already rejected this call during the election campaign and would therefore not fully agree to it. Both parties eventually agreed on appointing a non-ethnic Albanian Prime Minister until the last 100 days before the next elections, making Zoran Zaev the leader until then. The coalition has 62 of the 120 seats in parliament. With the struggling economy, it will be challenging to implement left-wing socio-economic policies. Short term, progress can be made with regards to EU integration (blocked for years by Greece due to the name issue), human rights and press freedom. International actors should show strong support in achieving these goals.

Political Situation

North Macedonia is a parliamentary republic with the prime minister as the head of government. The political organisation of the country was determined in the 1991 Constitution.

The Assembly, or the [Sobranja](#), is the only chamber of parliament and comprises 123 members. The assembly members are elected by proportional representation for a four-year term in office. In general elections, North Macedonia is divided into six constituencies electing 120 MPs each. Three seats are elected by representatives of the Macedonian citizens living abroad: one from Europe, one from North America and one from Asia and Australia.

The combination of a lack of European perspective and nationalism has proved to be a serious threat to democracy and stability in North Macedonia: manipulation and fraud at the elections, control over the judiciary and weakening of the rule of law and media freedom, a non-functioning parliament and growing dissatisfaction among the Albanian minority.

The "Extortion Scandal"

The previous progressive government led by Zoran Zaev (Social Democratic Union, SDSM) made promising steps in the fight against corruption and restoring the rule of law. However, the alleged wrongdoing of the Special Prosecutor for organized crime cases herself has been a setback. It started when a well-known businessman, Bojan Jovanovski, was arrested on suspicion of extortion. Shortly after that La Verita, an Italian right-wing newspaper released videos and audio recordings which allegedly showed that the Special Prosecutor for Organized Crime Katica Janeva was offering leniency to Jovanovski and another businessman in exchange for cash. She was arrested on August 21 on suspicion of offering leniency to a businessman.

Furthermore, in one of the audiotapes, Jovanovski mentioned he met Zaev and that he wouldn't "make any problems". Zaev stressed he had nothing to do with the scandal, but it had already caused a lot of commotion. The VMRO-PPMNE has pressed for Zaev's resignation, stating that the government has not done enough against corruption and one of the tops of that is involved in criminal activities. Even its European allies were concerned about the scandal in North Macedonia. European Enlargement Commissioner Johannes Hahn commented that the latest revelations showed it is important to establish legal accountability for all crimes. The EU has asked North Macedonia to establish judicial reforms before it wants to start accession talks.

Name Change in 2018

After an almost three-decade-long dispute, North Macedonia and Greece finally settled on a historic name change agreement. On June 17th 2018 Prime Minister Zaev and his Greek counterpart Tsipras signed a landmark agreement at the Lake Prespa. According to this agreement, Macedonia's name was officially changed to "Republic of North Macedonia." In exchange for this, North Macedonia expects accelerated NATO membership and EU-accession talks, and Athens promised not to block their initiatives anymore.

The language of the country will still be "Macedonian," and the citizens will be referred to as "Macedonians" or "Citizens of the Republic of North Macedonia." This was an important part of the agreement for the Macedonians who want to protect their identity. The agreement was answered with international and local praise, but also with protests from nationalist factions in both countries.

After the Prespa Agreement was ratified by both parliaments – which was a major challenge – the had to be supported by a majority of Macedonia's citizens. On September 30th 2018 a non-binding referendum was held, inquiring the public opinion on the name-change deal. The turn-out was below the 50% threshold, as only 36.8% of the Macedonians participated in the referendum. However, among those participants, 91% voted in favour of a name change, hopeful that it would remove a significant impediment to EU and NATO membership. Despite the low turn-out, the government saw the outcome as a green light to implement the name change.

On October 8th, the government adopted a motion to undertake the constitutional changes, and on January 11th the parliament agreed upon the change. On January 25th, the Greek parliament also approved by 153 votes to 146 on the name change, ending the diplomatic dispute between the countries. North Macedonia is the first country in modern times (except for Austria after World War I) that forcefully had to change its name.

Parliamentary elections of 2020 during COVID-19

Originally, the parliamentary elections were scheduled to be held on 12 April 2020. However, less than a month prior to this date, the President, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Prime Minister and representatives of seven political parties agreed to reschedule due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the time of this decision, North Macedonia had relatively few COVID-19 cases. Nonetheless, in order to avoid a national health crisis and to be able to put more effort into handling the pandemic, rather than into being reelected, all parties agreed that postponement would be the best option. On 15 July 2020, the elections were held at last.

Parliamentary elections of 2016

Following the resignation of PM Nikola Gruevski new elections took place on 11 December 2016. Gruevski had been in power since

2006 up to 18 January 2016, in a coalition with the Albanian party; Democratic Union for Integration (DUI).

Pressure on 2016 elections

In recent years, the opposition boycotted the parliament multiple times. They did this because the previous elections often lacked transparency and were rigged. Eventually, the opposition did not want to participate in the parliamentary process. The incumbent party repeatedly dismissed these claims, adding that the opposition is simply afraid to go to the ballot box. Following this, the State Electoral Commission decided to investigate if registered voters were deceased, lacked citizenship or did not have the right age. Eventually, the opposition also received the support of the EU and the US to their critique of democracy in Macedonia. On 21 February 2016, the EU and the US sent a joint letter pressuring the government to postpone the date of the elections. Initially, elections were set for 24 April 2016, but they were postponed to 5 June 2016. The letter further declared that not all conditions needed to organise credible elections had been met, such as the clean-up of the electoral roll, the creation of a level playing field for all political players, media reforms ensuring objective and unbiased election coverage and measures to separate state and party political activities. As such, the external interference arranged prerequisites for the elections. As the above mentioned main conditions were not met on time it was decided to postpone the elections again, this time to December 2016.

Lead up to Gruevski's resignation: the wiretapping scandal

In 2015 opposition leader Zaev from the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM) accused Gruevski and the secret police of wiretapping over 20.000 people including ministers, opposition politicians, journalists, judges, foreign ambassadors and activists. The Special Prosecution Office (SJO) led the investigation into the wiretaps and pressed charges against high ranked government officials, including the prime minister and minister of interior. Nonetheless, President Ivanov pardoned all politicians facing criminal investigations in the wiretapping corruption scandal, leading to a peak in political instability in 2016. The mass street protests that followed this, united Macedonians and Albanians in their call for better living standards, the fight against corruption and end of the Gruevski rule. Pressured by the EU and US, Gruevski agreed to step down and call early elections. The EU mediated Przino Agreement between position and opposition determined that SDSM would take part in the transition government that would prepare free and fair elections. The main conditions were to establish an independent public broadcaster and to clean up the voting register.

The Ministry of Interior knows who are present to vote and can falsify the documents of those who are not present to give their identities to loyalists. The implementation of the Przino Agreement turned out being challenging, pushing the elections even further to 11 December 2016.

Political crisis of 2014-2015

The 2014 parliamentary elections led to a deep political crisis in North Macedonia. In disagreement with the election result, the SDSM party decided to block the parliament. This deadlock-situation exaggerated when the party started releasing wiretapped materials. The opposition accused government officials of electoral fraud, abuse of the legal system and the illegal surveillance of citizens. PM Gruevski and other government officials stated repeatedly that the tapes were "created by foreign secret services" and were attempts of the opposition to destabilize the country. Moreover, Gruevski publicly accused Zaev of "espionage" and "violence towards high-level officials". Right after this public statement, the public prosecutor charged Zaev with espionage and with making violent threats aimed at the government to undermine the goals of the constitutional order.

The situation escalated in May when audiotapes were published in which Nikola Gruevski, Interior Affairs Minister, Gordana Jankuloska, the Chief of Intelligence, and other officials can be heard discussing how to "cover-up" the killing of a man during protests in 2011 in order to prevent government responsibility. During protests that followed the 2011 general elections, a 22-year old man, Martin Neskovski, was beaten to death by a police officer. According to eyewitnesses, he was killed due to excessive police violence, which stirred huge demonstrations among Macedonians during the following days. Initially, governmental sources denied that the police officer in question was on duty that day, and issued a statement that the government could thus not be held responsible for the murder. Though, according to the wiretapped conversations, the Prime Minister's Chief of Security, Dejan Mitrevski Urko, contacted the police officer that night, which according to the opposition showed that the government could be held responsible.

These publications were followed by massive demonstrations on the streets of Skopje in May. As a reaction to the anti-government rally, government supporters also started their own pro-government rally. In June, the position and opposition reached an EU-brokered agreement to hold early elections in April 2016.

Political crisis December 2012 – March 2013

The political crisis started with a disagreement over the draft budget for 2013. On Christmas Eve 2012, during a session of the parliament, the budget was on the agenda, but the main opposition party SDSM stated that instead of following the principles and

rules commonly used during such a session, several violations took place. Draft versions were kept away from opposition MPs including the SDSM, which were not able to get voting cards, while media representatives could not work freely in the room. After opposing the constitutional and legal breaches, scuffles broke out between members of the ruling centre-right VMRO-DPMNE party and the SDSM MPs in which opposition members were forcibly evicted from the plenary room. Before this outburst of violence, all journalists had already been removed from the room, either on their own feet or dragged by policemen.

Following this event, the SDSM decided to boycott the parliament sessions, which ultimately lasted for more than two months and threatened to derail local elections that were supposed to be held on 24 March 2013. The SDSM stated that it would renounce the boycott only when the local elections were held together with early parliamentary elections.

These events have triggered a succession of demonstrations in North Macedonia. On 19 February a former leader of the now-disbanded ethnic Albanian separatist armed group was chosen to become the new Minister of Defence. In a reaction to this appointment, clashes took place in Skopje against ethnic Albanians of Macedonians, which was followed days later by a violent demonstration of ethnic Albanians.

The political crisis was resolved at the beginning of March, after a mediation effort by EU Enlargement Commissioner at that time, Štefan Füle, and European Parliament Rapporteur for North Macedonia, Richard Howitt (S&D Group in the EP). The SDSM agreed on 1 March to return to parliament and to run in the local elections. These elections were held on 25 March and 7 April. The victory was declared by North Macedonia's ruling VMRO-DPMNE, under the lead of Nikola Gruevski.

Ethnic rivalries

The country, which had been relatively spared from inter-ethnic violence after the break-up of Yugoslavia, underwent great tensions from 2001 onwards when the Albanian minority started demanding more rights. The 1998-1999 war in Kosovo forced thousands of Albanians to flee to North Macedonia. Since then, the Ohrid Agreement, signed with the support of the European Union and NATO, had guaranteed a unitary Macedonian state, reinforced by its EU candidate status since 2005. Nonetheless, violence keeps on sparking regularly. In March 2013, riots started from the Macedonian side after Talat Xhaferi, a former Albanian guerrilla commander, was appointed as defence minister. In April that same year, Johan Tarculovski, the only Macedonian convicted of war crimes against Albanians by the International Criminal Court in The Hague, was granted a hero's welcome as he came back to Skopje, raising disagreement from the Albanian community. Winter 2013 saw the opposition of the two ethnic groups over the building of a new Orthodox Christian Church in a Muslim-dominated village.

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 per cent (1998) to 17.5 per cent. After the 2008 parliamentary elections, this share went further up to 32.5 per cent. 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 per cent women candidates in their election lists.

After the reforms necessitated by the Ohrid Agreement, minority representation has increased. From 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. 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 North Macedonian Serbs and Turks.

Despite their increasing representation, Albanians still claim unequal involvement in government ministries and public enterprises. The US Department of State's 2013 Country Report on Human Rights Practices underlined that out of the 123 seats in parliament, only 23 were obtained by Albanians, while other ethnic minorities accounted for 13 seats. These figures contradict the Ohrid Agreement principles, which stated that "the multi-ethnic character of Macedonia's society must be preserved and reflected in public life", notably in the public administration. Rural inhabitants, for their part, nourish resentment towards the State, blamed for hiding issues of corruption and absence of integration policies through destabilising the country.

During the elections of 2016, 41 per cent of the candidates were women, although only 4 topped the 58 lists. This high percentage is also due to the enhanced quota on women's participation. Eventually, 33 per cent of parliament is female.

Elections

Parliamentary Elections

Parliamentary elections of 2020

The 2020 parliamentary elections had a turnout rate of only 51% and was marked by many new smaller parties running against the established factions. However, despite this development, the outcome was to be expected. Just like the previous election results in 2016, the SDSM and the VMRO-DPMNE had an extremely close tie. The SDSM in coalition with the Besa Movement obtained 46 seats, while the runner-up won 44. The DUI won 11.8% of the votes this year, which gives them 16 seats. This is a good recovery for the party, since last elections they went from 19 to 10 seats. Alliance for Albanians in coalition with Alternative received 8.9% of the votes, equaling to 12 seats. Left got 4% (1 seat) of the votes, and Democratic Party of Albanians with 1.6% of the votes won 1 seat in the parliament. In order to have a majority, parties need 61 seats.

Election results

Party	%	Seats
Social Democratic Union Macedonia (SDSM) and Besa Movement - "We Can"	35.8 %	46
Internal macedonian Revolutionary Organization - Democratic Party for Macedonian National Unity (VMRO-DPMNE)	34.5 %	44
Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)	11.8 %	16
Alliance for Albanians and Alternative	8.9 %	12
Left	4 %	1
Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA)	1.6 %	1

Aftermath

Even though the "We can" coalition of the SDSM and the Besa Movement won the elections, they needed to form a coalition with DUI to have a majority in parliament. The coalition talks between these parties were difficult. "We can" stated during their campaign that they would not let an Albanian become Prime Minister if they secured the win. However, the DUI demanded during the talks that if they were to form a coalition with "We can", an Albanian should fill this position. Eventually, the different factions agreed that Zoran Zaev, leader of the SDSM would become Prime Minister until the last 100 days before the next elections, when an Albanian will be appointed. In addition, it was agreed that Talat Xhaferi, member of the DUI, will remain speaker of the parliament. The coalition has now 62 of the 120 seats in parliament.

The new government will mainly tackle the country's corruption and crime, improve its justice system and make sure that North Macedonia is ready for EU integration. The latter is an important matter since the EU accession talks are expected to start at the end of 2020. Furthermore, creating more job opportunities, increasing salaries, helping low-income families and environmental improvement are part of the agenda.

After the elections, the Left Party filled around two thousand complaints regarding issues during the electoral process. The faction did not completely trust the results because the State Election Commission had been hacked, which they stated caused inconsistencies between the casted votes and the data that was entered into the software. However, none of these complaints were actually taken care of.

Name dispute

There has been a dispute going on over the country's use of the *Republic of Macedonia* as its official name. A region in Northern Greece shares the same name and is also closely connected to Alexander the Great and Philip of Macedon. Greece holds the opinion that by using 'Macedonia', the country implies claims on Greek territories. As a result, it has been using the label *Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM)* since joining the United Nations in 1993. Originally planned as a temporary solution, it remains in use until now. Because of the dispute, the accessions to the EU and NATO have been blocked by Greece.

To solve the issue, North Macedonia agreed to change its flag by removing the Vergina Sun and proceeded to add a passage to its constitution, which is supposed to make clear that the country does not claim any Greek territories. Furthermore, the main airport and a highway to Greece were renamed begin 2018 to disconnect it from Alexander the Great. The historical figure has been declared exclusively Greek concerning the country's Hellenic heritage. The Greek side accepted the use of 'FYROM' as an official name and agreed on a possibility of continuing EU accession talks. In January 2018, the two Prime Ministers Zohav Zev and Alexis Tsipras met and announced faster negotiations to resolve the years-long dispute. This is a clear break with the former conservative government that used the name dispute to raise nationalism, for example by engaging in nation-building projects such as the "Skopje 2014" project.

Presidential Elections

Presidential elections of 2014

As mentioned above, general elections were held in 2014 to elect a new president as well as a new parliament. The first round of the presidential elections was held on 13 April, in which incumbent president Gjorge Ivanov took the lead with 51.69 per cent of the votes. However, a second round was held on 27 April as Ivanov did not receive the support of 50 per cent of all the registered voters. Ivanov gained 55.27 per cent of the votes in this second round and therefore won the elections.

Presidential elections of 2019

First Round of elections

On April 21st, the voting polls for the first round of presidential elections opened in North Macedonia. Stevo Pendarovski, supported by the ruling Social Democratic coalition (SDSM), won this round with a small margin of a few thousand votes ahead of his rival Gordana Siljanovska, who is backed by the right-wing opposition party VMRO-DPMNE. It was a close call: as Pendarovski seized 42.8% of the votes and Siljanovska 42.2%. The third presidential candidate, Blerim Reka, obtained 10.6% of the votes. He's supported by two ethnic Albanian parties.

The voting turn-out was the lowest since the country's independence. Only 41% of the people cast their vote, just slightly above the required 40% threshold for a legitimate result.

Run-off elections

Although it was feared that the turn-out would be below 40% in the second round on May 5th, in the end, 46% of the eligible voters cast their vote. Pendarovski won the presidency with 51.7 per cent of the votes, surpassing Siljanovska who received 44.7%. The remaining 3.61% were void.

The elections were dominated by a deep division over the name-change agreement with Greece and reflected a split between the pro-Western and the nationalist camp. Pro-European voters supported Pendarovski and the adaption of "Republic of North Macedonia" as the new name of the state. Pendarovski is in favour of the name-change deal with Greece, as it removes the biggest impediment to EU and NATO integration. Nationalists, on the other side, oppose the agreement and support Siljanovska, who promised to never use the new name. Despite being pro-European, she is opposed to the name-change, arguing that North

Macedonia makes too many concessions and that the country will lose parts of its identity. In the run-off elections, both candidates aimed at appealing to the Albanian ethnic minority that voted for Reka in the first round, hoping that it would give them the decisive advantage.

The victory of Steveo Pendarovski is expected to fortify the Social Democrats' agenda and raises hopes to enter EU accession talks end 2019, and to become the 30th NATO member state by 2020.

Social Democratic Parties

Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM)

Party Leader: Zoran Zaev

Number of seats: 41

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

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 North Macedonian parliament and the main party in the government, and has shown a moderate and reconciliatory attitude towards ethnic minorities in North Macedonia. Since the legislative elections of July 2006, the SDSM – embedded in the Together for Macedonia Coalition – is in opposition.

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.

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 previous 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 as 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 about 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. In May 2009, after finishing the five-year term of President of the Republic of North Macedonia, Branko Crvenkovski returned to the SDSM and was re-elected leader of the party. He reorganised the party profoundly. On 21 April Crvenkovski announced that the Social Democrats had chosen Radmila Sekerinska as the party's candidate for prime minister if they win the elections on the 5th of June.

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

Other Parties

Democratic Party for Macedonian national unity - Internal Macedonian revolutionary organisation (VMRO-DPMNE)

Party Leader: Hristijan Mickoski

Number of seats: 44

<http://www.vmro-dpmne.org.mk>

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". The party was founded on 17 June 1990 in Skopje, and describes itself as a Christian Democratic party which supports the admission of North Macedonia to NATO and the European Union. It is ethnically based, claiming that "the party's goals and objectives express the tradition of the Macedonian people on whose political struggle and concepts it is based".

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. Ljubčo Georgievski was appointed Prime Minister and the party formed a coalition government with the Democratic Alternative (DA) and Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA). 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 North 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. 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 Ljubčo 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 faction split off from the VMRO-DPMNE to become the VMRO-People's Party.

The VMRO-DPMNE has overcome its internal struggles and became North 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. In 2009, the party had another two major successes. While the VMRO-DPMNE-led coalition 'For a better Macedonia' won in 56 out of 84 municipalities, the party's proposed presidential candidate Gjorge Ivanov also won the presidential election.

Democratic Union for Integration (DUI)

Party Leader: Ali Ahmeti

Number of seats: 16

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

The Democratic Union for Integration (DUI, or Bashkimi Demokratik per Integrim, BDI) was formed 3 months before the elections in June 2002. It is the successor to the Albanian 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 party leader Ali Ahmeti is sincere in his newfound commitment to the democratic process.

In 2004 the party reaffirmed its commitment to Albanian integration in a confident multi-ethnic North Macedonia, decentralisation of

power, eradication of corruption and organised crime, and for a stable FYROM integrated into Euro-Atlantic structures. 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 North 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 favour of the smaller Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA) also led to tensions between the two ethnic Albanian parties in North 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.

Alliance for Albanians and Alternative

Party Leader: Ziadin Sela
Number of seats: 12
<https://www.aleanca.eu>

The Alliance for Albanians is an ethnic Albanian party and founded in 2015. The party is in coalition with Alternative.

Besa

Party Leader: Bilal Kasami
Number of seats: 5

Lëvizja Besa was formed in November 2014, as an ethnic Albanian party, by Zeqirija Ibrahim, Bilal Kasami and the chief editor of 'Shenja' magazine, Afrim Gashi. The party aims to win more rights and respect for Ethnic Albanians in Macedonia and represent those who feel the 'establishment' Albanian parties are out of touch.

Left

Party Leader: Dimitar Apasiev
Number of seats: 1
<https://levica.mk>

The Left is a socialist party and founded on 14 November 2015.

Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA)

Party Leader: Menduh Thaci
Number of seats: 1
<http://www.pdsh.org>

The Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA, or Partia Demokratiane 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 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.

Biographies

Stevo Pendarovski

President

Stevo Pendarovski was elected for president of North Macedonia on May 5th, 2019. His public career started as deputy minister for Public Relations in the Ministry of Internal Affairs between 1998-2001. Moreover, he was the head of the Analytical and Research Department of the ministry during the same period. He obtained his Bachelor of Law from Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, and then pursued a Master degree and a Ph.D in political science at the same university. From 2001 to 2004 Pendarovski was National Security and Chief Foreign Policy Adviser under President Boris Trajkovski, a position he occupied again from 2005 to 2009 under President Branko Crvenkovski. From 2004-2005 Pendarovski was the head of the State Election Commission. He has been Professor in International Security, Foreign Policy and Globalization at the University American College in Skopje since 2008. Pendarovski is a member of the Social Democratic Union (SDSM) and was also the party's candidate for the April 2014 presidential elections. Stevo Pendarovski was born on April 3, 1963.

Zoran Zaev

Prime Minister

Zoran Zaev was born on 8 October 1974 in Strumica, and is the leader of SDSM.

In the local elections of 2005, Zaev was chosen as mayor of the municipality of Strumica. In 2009 and 2013, he was re-elected in that position. Previously he served in parliament for several years. In 2008, he was elected to be the vice-president of SDSM, until he became the leader of the party after Branko Crvenkovski stepped down. After receiving a majority of votes on the congress of the party, he became president of SDSM in 2013. During 2015 he was in charge of the publication of the wiretapped conversations that deadlocked Macedonian politics. Macedonia's public prosecutor charged Zaev with espionage and with making violent threats aimed at the government to 'undermine the goals of the constitutional order'.

In the 2016 parliamentary elections, the VMRO-DPMNE obtained the highest number of seats. However, the party was accused of obstructing the government formations that followed, in order to circumvent prosecution for corruption. As the SDSM was the leading opposition party, President Gjorge Ivanov initially wanted to prevent Zaev from forming a government with parties representing North Macedonia's ethnic Albanians. He argued that such a coalition would undermine Macedonia's territorial integrity. He also assumed that this would give the minority expanded rights and power, even though Zaev promised to "guarantee the protection of the unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity of the independent and multi-ethnic Macedonia".

As a result of the dispute, the EU and NATO urged the president to allow government formations with the involvement of the opposition. Consequently, the North Macedonian president Gjorge Ivanov asked Zaev to form a government, in order to curb fears of ethnic violence in the country. Six months after the elections, in May 2017, a coalition was formed between the Social Democratic Union of Macedonia (SDSM), the Democratic Union for Integration (DUI), and the Democratic Party of Albanians (DPA).

Zaev pledges to boost economic growth, aims to bring corruption to a halt, and is an advocate for European integration. He is married and has two children.

Gjorge Ivanov

Former President

Gjorge Ivanov, born on 2 May 1960 in Valandovo, is the former President of the Republic of Macedonia. Ivanov finished primary and secondary school in his hometown Valandovo. At the age of 27 he moved to the Macedonian capital Skopje, which has since been his permanent residence. His professional career started in 1988, when he became an editor at Macedonian Radio and Television, the national broadcasting station. He later taught political theory and political philosophy at the Law Faculty in Skopje. In 1999, he became a visiting professor for the Southeast European programme at the University of Athens in Greece.

Ivanov became politically active in the Yugoslav era, when he pushed for political pluralism and a market economy. He is the founder and honorary president of the Macedonian Political Science Association and one of the founding members of the Institute for Democracy Societas Civilis, a leading analytical centre in Macedonia. On 25 January 2009, the strongest party in the Macedonian parliament, the conservative VMRO-DPMNE, appointed Ivanov as the party's presidential candidate for the 2009

presidential elections, which they won. On 16 April 2009, Ivanov received the presidential certificate from the State Election Commission. The main vision, which Ivanov promotes as president, is the Macedonian model of a multi-ethnic society and a Pax Europaea, a united Europe living in peace and respecting the diversity and identity of the nations of Europe.

Ivanov is married to Maja Ivanova. Together they have a son called Ivan.

Source

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